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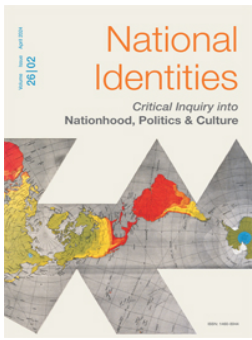
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# Conceptualising the identity of Third Culture Adults (TCAs) in the GCC: implications for labour markets and organisations

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## ABSTRACT

Although some studies have explored the phenomenon of Third Cultures, including TCKs and ATCKs, there is seemingly a category of identities that have not been clearly accounted for. Third Culture Adults (TCAs) have a distinct socio-psychological identity that emanates partly from migrants choosing a host nation as a long-term residence for themselves and their offspring. This paper espouses the concept of TCAs as a discrete identity that results from events and experiences among long-term settlers and provides the basis for future discourse and research to enable a more precise understanding of the TCA concept and its implications for labour markets.

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Third culture kids; third culture adults; GCC labour market; cultural identity; third culture; adult third culture kids

## Introduction

Since its coinage by Useem et al. (1963) in a study featuring the exclusive interaction of American expatriates with Indian nationals in the 1950s, the concept of Third Culture continues to be studied among sociologists and debated among several labour market practitioners and academics. Over time, the concept has grown to encompass different contestable identities of children living in Third Cultures, also known as Third Culture Kids (TCKs) (Pollock et al., 2017; Useem & Useem, 1967), yet decades of studies still noticeably omit new migration trends. As a dynamic concept, scholars have influenced variants of the original term over the years from their worldview. This includes reconceptualising the term as cross-cultural kids (CCKs) rather than Useem's initial 'binational' kids or the traditional and ubiquitous view of TCKs (Pollock et al., 2017). The often subtle differences magnify the pitfalls in earlier definitions, which tend to reflect the movement of kids across different locations rather than perceiving the phenomenon as an event or a process that leads to a unique cultural identity. Additionally, scholarly progress has not yielded a unified understanding of the phenomenon of TCKs, as each study tends to approach the concept from a slightly different angle. For example, while Useem and Useem (1967) defined the concept from a binational position, Pollock et al. (2017) expanded the concept to include diversity, gender and beliefs among 'worlds'; still,

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there continues to be a terminological deficit that relates to the circumstances of migrants in selected Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations and therefore the unique identity associated with the cultural categories in the region. We note specifically that, despite the evolution of the term to assume different neologisms over the decades, the phenomenon whereby expatriates or immigrants choose to settle for the long term in their host countries has not been clearly conceptualised within the human resource (HR) literature or the broader management and sociology contexts. Unlike earlier versions of the term Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) (Lauring et al., 2019; Tarique & Weisbord, 2013), which inadvertently confuses as it is an *oxymoron*, we attempt to introduce and define the concept of third culture adults (TCAs) as a social category comprising of ATCKs (i.e. adults who in their childhood were TCKs), long-term expatriates and adult immigrants, who despite living their developmental years in their first culture, are now experiencing the third culture phenomenon as they liaise between their first and second cultures (Pollock et al., 2017). We argue that any attempt to reconceptualise the term must focus on identities that were previously excluded from what qualifies as a TCK or CCK, and *ipso facto* ATCKs. We perceive the TCA identity as an evolving experience, a process and phenomenon that constantly improves on earlier ideas of Useem and Pollock.

Although expatriation has become a common phenomenon in many regions of the world, the long-term expat population is more prominent among the GCC member countries (International Monetary Fund, 2022). Consequently, we focus on the phenomenon and process of expatriation trends in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain as this tends to define the unique nature of TCAs. Another important rationale for limiting our study to this region is that, despite having identical demographic patterns to other regions such as Europe and North America, the GCC countries do not currently offer citizenship to long-term settlers, therefore TCAs in the GCC countries are not the same as those in other regions where the majority of TCAs will progress to citizens of their host countries. Some TCAs are adults of any kind living and working in a second or host country (i.e. different from their home country) over a considerable amount of time such that the new culture influences their socio-cultural identity and attitude in the labour market (Berry, 1990; Sussman, 2002). As a distinct social category, the term TCA has a broad range of social and psychological implications (Rhodes & Baron, 2019), that goes beyond society and permeates the structures of organisations and labour markets. Whereas TCAs were less common in the past decades, particularly in emerging countries, nations in the GCC and the Far East have experienced higher incidences of TCA, yet the immigration policies in these countries are different from what is common in North America and Western Europe (Kwak & Wang, 2022; Walmsley et al., 2017). These new trends of social identity arguably have to be of interest to sociology theorists and Human Resource practitioners as the labour market in the GCC is pluralistic, comprising diverse participants from all over the world (Elbanna & Fatima, 2023; Malit & Tsourapas, 2021). Due to the complex nature of groups in the GCC labour market, social identity and group categorization are common among supply-side elements of the labour market, yet discourses surrounding the subject can be both controversial and sensitive. Interaction adjustment among supply-side operators in the labour markets of the GCC is a common phenomenon, due to labour competitiveness and the absence of labour unions (Dang et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2019). Despite intense competition in society and labour markets, especially for employees from Asia

and Africa, and the rarity of unions for individuals coming from North America and Western Europe, many still prefer to migrate to or live in the region. This preference is attributed, in part, to stable governance and higher salaries (Elbanna & Fatima, 2023; Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014), nonetheless, in some cases, it is also influenced by flexible visa regimes for visitors and migrants. According to Scurry et al. (2013) narratives of self are framed in relation to structural constraints and patterns of adaptation in the region, pointing to the interplay between identity, career and expatriation. The fact that most of the GCC nations do not offer citizenship means that the discourse around the subject of identity is different from what is common in North America and Europe, as residents in the GCC have to make adjustments both mentally and socially to operate in the labour market. These adjustments tend to shape a social identity, stemming from the dynamic variables defining the concept of third-culture kids (Lauring et al., 2019) and cross-cultural kids (Tan et al., 2021).

As socio-cultural identity theory is only sparsely studied in the GCC, it is not surprising that, since the inception of the TCK concept by Useem et al. (1963), only little progress has been made in studying TCK and identity in the region. An important semantic effort to highlight the identity of TCKs in the GCC is found in the work of Dillon and Ali (2019), who, like us, attempted to explore the concept from a contemporary United Arab Emirates perspective. Despite the concept's presence in sociological literature for around five decades, thanks to the work of Useem et al. (1963), its full comprehension has eluded both academics and practitioners who focus on the sociological context of the GCC. A less visible aspect of the phenomenon of TCKs and CCKs is the role of self-identity or categorisation, yet, in almost all group settings, the perception of the group and how society accepts such categories matters (i.e. the emic perspective). Both Hogg and Terry (2000), and later, Hogg (2001) indicate that 'group identification, as self-categorisation, constructs an intragroup prototypicality gradient that invests the most prototypical member with the appearance of having influence; the appearance arises because members cognitively and behaviourally conform to the prototype'. In the GCC, identity is a crucial demographical construct that defines how people access employment opportunities. This paper builds upon the concept of the Third Culture phenomenon (i.e. TCKs and ATCKs) and social identity theory to articulate the diverse cultural identities formed among foreigners in the GCC countries. Doing so is particularly relevant for rapidly growing regions in the GCC, where migration has surged due to the ripple effect of oil revenue on almost all sectors of their economies (Aarthi & Sahu, 2021). As such, the paper explores how these new developments contribute to the formulation and shaping of theory and practice within the HR management domain, as well as in sociological research in the selected countries. To address the current confusion among competing definitions (e.g. Tanu, 2015; Useem & Useem, 1967), we draw inferences from existing Euro-Americo viewpoints. However, we expand the phenomenon to account for diverse identities, especially in GCC countries, where unique approaches to citizenship and migration exist. To reflect the above context, we propose a working definition for TCAs as:

Third-culture adults (TCAs) are either adults living or working in a country other than the country of their passport or third-culture kids who have continued to live in a host country even after turning into adults (e.g. expatriates and adult immigrants seeking long-term residence in a second country or culture and ATCKs who do not seek repatriation)

**Table 1.** Description of TCA identity processes in the GCC labour market.

Identities in the GCC Labour market	Description
Permanent residents – non-citizens (PRNC)	<i>Residents perceive current country as permanent home although they are non-citizen.</i>
Born and bred non-citizens (BBNC)	<i>This group identifies as being born and raised in the country; however, they do not have citizenships of the country of their dwelling.</i>
Foreign-born long-term residents (FBLTR)	<i>Residents who were born overseas but have spent over 10 years in the host country.</i>
Foreign-born short-term residents (FBSTR)	<i>Residents who were born overseas and have spent over 5–9 years in the country.</i>
Student residents (SR)	<i>Residents who are currently studying in Higher/Further Education while working at the same time or hoping to find work in the near future.</i>
New arrivals (NA)	<i>Residents who have been in the labour market for under a year and are either looking for a job or a study opportunity yet hoping to stay for the long term.</i>
Returning residents (RR)	<i>Residents have previously lived in the country, went away and have now returned.</i>
Retirement Residents (RR)	<i>Residents who seek to retire in the country or have relocated to the region after retiring elsewhere.</i>
Permanent illegals (PI)	<i>A section of the labour force that operates in the underground economy but have no legal rights and do not plan to leave any time soon.</i>

This definition, which is further amplified in [Table 1](#), reflects earlier categorisation provided by Pollock et al. (2017) but is much more aligned with what Tanu (2015) described as ‘global nomads’ and strongly identical to what Dillon and Ali (2019) have described as cultural chameleons. The newly proposed definition characterises TCA as both a process and a phenomenon. It further emphasises long-term expatriation among job seekers and the absence of repatriation among settlers despite limited opportunities for citizenship.

### Nomenclature for TCAs in the GCC

Both the initial definition by Useem et al. (1963) and the later adjustments made to the term by Pollock et al. (2017) fail to take into account the circumstantial evidence surrounding migrant and expatriate work in the GCC, although direct evidence has shown that a large proportion of migrants are settling for the long term in selected countries (Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE). Due to the sparse nature of studies on TCAs and the fact that it is a fairly recent phenomenon in the GCC, we constructed a hypothetical spectrum of identities that enables the categorisation of different forms of social identities that operate in the labour markets and organisations. [Table 1](#) describes the emerging categories of settlers within the GCC and its labour markets. TCAs range across an identity spectrum, at the top are those who identify strongly with the country they are in, which we have termed permanent residents – non-citizens (PRNCs) – these individuals perceive the country as their permanent home, although they are non-nationals. They may be business owners whose home countries are going through political unrest and where the standard of living and income levels are much lower. For some individuals in this category, going back to their home country is not an option due to the high living standards in most of the GCC and the fact that, their country of origin is unsafe. The spectrum of identities is not exhaustive and includes born and bred non-citizens (BBNCs) who may be second – or third-generation immigrants settling in the country. Foreign-born long-term residents, (FBLTRs) include individuals born overseas and have spent 10 years or more in their host countries. There are also student residents (SR) who are in the host country for higher education and are simultaneously working or

looking for job opportunities within the host country. Next are the new arrivals (NAs) who have been in the country for under a year on a new job assignment or seeking a job or study opportunity. Another key category of residents in the region, particularly in the UAE and Qatar, is the Returning Residents (RR). RRs were either born in the host country or have migrated from other countries, settled in the GCC (for example, UAE or Qatar), and then made an outward journey to either North America or Europe, where they obtained citizenship and additional skills. Upon this accomplishment, they then return to the region to continue working, potentially assuming a very different identity both at work and in the wider societal context. Finally, at the end of the spectrum are the permanent illegals (PI), a portion of the labour force that operates in the underground economy but have no legal rights as they are unable to secure official residency status yet unwilling or unable to return home. The permanent illegals (PIs) are the migrant individuals who are unable to find jobs and do not have the official and proper documents to stay in the country.

### **The GCC labour market factors and the phenomenon of TCA identity**

TCA identity is not limited to the social infrastructure of modern nations but is inextricably linked to how hiring and placement decisions are made in the labour market. A special feature of most of the GCC economies is the diversification away from oil, a process that started about two decades ago (Matsumoto, 2019). Although the intention was to create more jobs in other sectors of the economy, unemployment pressures among some GCC nations were reported as early as 2004 (Fasano-Filho & Goyal, 2004). After nearly two decades, the unemployment situation of member countries is even more pronounced, calling for more state intervention and policies such as Emiratisation in the UAE (Sarker & Rahman, 2020), Qatarisation in Qatar, Omanisation in Oman and other similar policies aimed at workforce nationalisation in the region (Elbanna & Fatima, 2022). While Saudi Arabia's large population of over 36 million puts more pressure on available employment opportunities, the other nations have slightly different circumstances as they have a much larger foreign population in their labour force (for example, Qatar and the UAE). The nationalisation efforts tend to reinforce the social identity categorisation and help both citizens and residents articulate narratives as cognitive efforts that restrict and expand the repertoire of identities in places such as Qatar (Scurry et al., 2013). There have been numerous initiatives amongst GCC countries to upskill their labour force and reduce dependence on expatriates. Contrary to earlier perceptions that TCKs are constantly on the move, a significant portion of settlers, as illustrated in Table 1, consider the chosen countries (e.g. Qatar and the UAE) as their 'home'. A substantial portion of the population has spent over 10 years in these locations, with some being born, attending school, and establishing businesses in their adopted countries. Recent media reports point to some considerable adjustments relating to immigration prospects for expatriates. Although the current picture is not clear, some countries in the region have considered age caps for expatriate job seekers in Bahrain and Kuwait, whilst speculations indicated that Saudi Arabia could consider a surcharge for family dependents (Khaleej Times, 2017). Despite these developments, job seekers still flock to the GCC to find job opportunities and to reside for long periods of time or indefinitely (CIPD, 2017). In countries such as

the UAE, there are reforms to encourage long-term settlement of TCAs, with some visa categories lasting ten years.

### Articulating the TCA process

According to a number of theorists, (Bonebright, 2010; Lam & Selmer, 2004) the term 'Third Culture Kids' describes the process whereby children who come from economically privileged backgrounds experience a high degree of international mobility during their significant developmental years, due to their parents' career choices or training. Traditionally, they were mainly the kids of diplomats, missionaries, businessmen and women who lived outside of their passport countries due to their parents' temporary life abroad. Living across cultures leads TCKs to embody parts of both the home and host cultures, building a third cultural identity based on all their experiences without having a sense of belonging to any single culture (Bonebright, 2010). Another key feature of TCKs in the literature is the emphasis on repatriating one day and going back to their home countries (Tan et al., 2021; Tanu, 2015). This poses many challenges, in particular for those who have spent many of their upbringing years abroad as they return to a 'foreign home' (de Waal, 2021). These challenges are further exacerbated by the fact that they may look and sound native, and hence they are given less support or understanding for the 'foreignness they feel internally' (Sussman, 2002; Tan et al., 2021). As a result of both opportunities and constraints that migrants and expatriates encounter, the TCA process can be seen as incidental for some, whilst for others, it is a conscious effort to live for the long term and identify as FBLTRs.

In the context of the GCC, some TCKs may not necessarily choose the repatriating route. As the TCKs grow and turn into ATCKs, they tend to have an extended experience of living in a foreign country during their adolescence' (Moore & Barker, 2012), and may wish to stay in their host countries indefinitely or for prolonged periods, despite the fact they remain non-citizens of these countries. Unlike these ATCKs who in their adulthood would have gained significant or relative competence in the host (second) cultures, the long-term expatriates and adult immigrants' exposure, connection and identity with the host country's cultural identity varies and is largely insubstantial as they seek to find job opportunities in their host countries. However, ATCKs may have not undergone a full acculturation and assimilation in the host culture (Berry, 1990), as such, as they continue to stay and work in the host country, the more they continue to experience the Third Culture phenomenon (Pollock et al., 2017).

### Conceptualising the TCA identity

Two main categories of expatriates have been highlighted in the literature, namely, self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), defined as individuals who seek and find work overseas on their own initiatives (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Lee, 2005), and Organisation Expatriates (OEs) who are sent by their employer to an overseas subsidiary, and thus are not necessarily expatriates by choice (Froese, 2012). In both cases, expatriates may seek to reside in their host countries for an extended period of time (over 10 years), thus identifying as TCAs as they have spent a substantial length of time outside their home countries.

The other broader category of TCAs, who are usually the offspring of SIEs or OEs, may assume a distinct cultural identity from that of their parents. The construction of such an

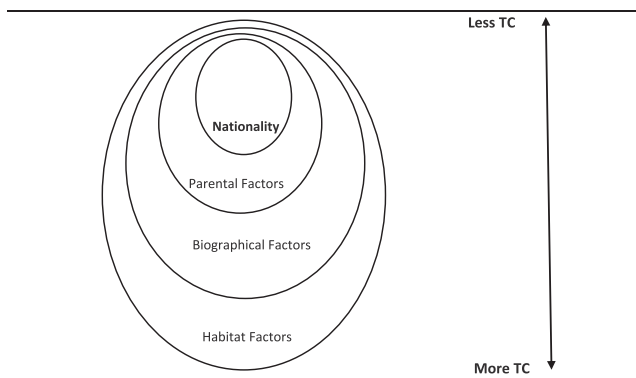


identity depends largely on the socio-political and technological variables of the host nation and may include parental culture and experience, and the individual's own autobiographical exposure (see [Figure 1](#)).

### The long-term paradox of TCAs

For both TCAs who will eventually leave their long-term settlement to return to their home country and those who may continue their stay, a paradox arises. The phenomenon of repatriation and its associated issues have been extensively discussed in the HR literature (Nowak & Linder, 2016; Perkins & Daste, 2007; Selmer & Luring, 2012; Takeuchi et al., 2005), although more recently the discourse centres around the benefits expatriates accumulate through longer overseas work (Mello et al., 2023). The TCA paradox as a more prevalent phenomenon is amplified as more foreign-borns mature into TCAs and their offspring become the second generation within the different attractive regions. First, the direction and orientation of work have evolved from a short-term stint abroad to more long-term work for TCAs in different geographical regions. This is largely because the only country some of the TCAs call 'home' is the place they have lived, schooled and worked for the past several years. As more nations in the GCC region introduce more long-term visas and residency programmes – for example, the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia (Aarthi & Sahu, 2021; Elbanna & Fatima, 2022), TCAs are likely to view the region as a home instead of an expatriate assignment destination. Secondly, if TCAs have a long-term view of the region, then their whole family life will revolve around settling in the country where they currently reside. Doing so requires a number of adjustments to be made to lifestyle and career choices that can be quite different from earlier expectations and what residents have qualified for. In some cases, residents may have to retrain to enable them to fit into available careers, as has previously been reported in a CIPD (2017) report.

Another important consideration relates to the promotion prospects of TCAs /Career development. An earlier study in Qatar reports misconception of the Qatarisation



**Figure 1.** Dimensions of identity within a Third Culture. Note: The non-concentric circles represent each layer of cultural identity. The further away to the top, the less likely an individual will identify as TCA, and the closer they are to the lower end of the model, the more likely they would identify as TCA.

process as a replacement exercise (Elsharnouby et al., 2023) whereby some participants perceive employment termination due to ineffectiveness as being equal to layoffs. Layoffs are imminent as GCC sparsely populated countries increase in their population therefore some TCAs might subconsciously experience work-related stress especially when they are up for contract renewal. Whereas a large majority of jobs in the GCC region may offer promotional opportunities, there are institutions and private sector organisations that may not offer promotions in the same ways as the TCAs country of origin. Due to the short-term nature of contracts (2-3 years in most cases), promotional opportunities can be rare or non-existent. An irregularity in career advancement can have direct implications for the income and living standards of affected TCAs. Historically, a fifteen-year employment with an organisation in the UAE could mean that visas have had to be renewed about seven times leading to potential job security issues even for BBLTR and other similar categories. While renewals are common, the biannual demands of medical examination, visa renewals and health insurance can take a toll on the psychological well-being of TCAs and their families, exacerbated by the unpredictable nature of promotional routes.

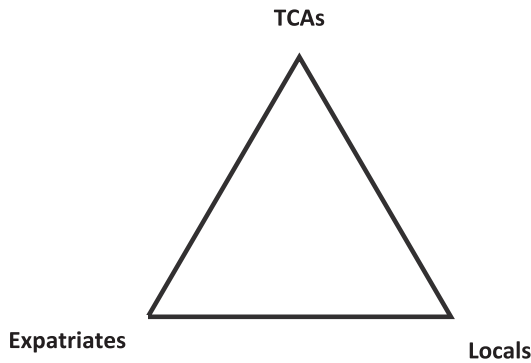
A further conundrum for families opting for a long-term stay in the GCC is the influence of society on their language. Socio-lingual implications for descendants of TCAs have characterised the narratives surrounding the socio-cognitive influences of foreign-born children (Siemund et al., 2021; Stevens, 1999). There is, however, little evidence for studies on how third or second languages influence behaviours and attitudes among labour market operators. Yet, through new languages, social values, norms and traditions can become diluted or strengthened as children interact more with others from other linguistic backgrounds. This phenomenon was previously observed in ex-Soviet Union, mainly among the Central Asian and South Caucasian states as well as along multi-religious lines among migrants in Western Europe (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2016). With a more intense acculturation (Bjornsdottir & Rule, 2016; Potter & Richardson, 2019), TCAs' descendants' linguistic skills can diverge from their parents and grandparents (Sáenz-Hernández et al., 2020) as has previously been observed among Western Catalonians, Moroccans and Romanian migrants. Whilst Arabic, Hindi and Tagalog have a strong presence in the region, English language appears to be a lingua franca for many labour market participants (Alharbi, 2017)

### **Theoretical implications/propositions**

First, the research on TCA, as an extension of earlier studies, is still in its infancy and has not been extensively explored. Although existing terminologies such as TCKs and ATCKs offer initial value to our understanding of the literature on overseas work, our proposed new version, TCAs, extends the concepts beyond culture and society into the labour market of the GCC. As a highly crucial antecedent for recruitment decisions and organisational team dynamics, TCA theory may offer guidance on important organisational decisions that help improve team effectiveness and limit cross-cultural conflict (Benuyenah, 2021). Whilst countries in the GCC continue to attract and retain foreign labour, the number of TCAs will continue to rise as more and more voluntary expats join the international labour force; this phenomenon means that the TCA identity has become, or will soon become, a core part of most countries in the GCC. Such development calls for

serious research efforts to further expatriate and explore the characteristics of TCAs and how they interact with other social groups (See [Figure 2](#))

Second, the new limits and extensions of political hegemony indicate that emerging economies are being recognised as viable destinations for economic migration. With the arrival of a diverse demography, new forms of interactions emerge among migrants from countries such as Russia, Somalia, China, and now in 2023, Sudan. Although new migrants will eventually become a vital part of the labour force in specific regions of the world (for example, the GCC, Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Vietnam), their distinct identity can attract envy as was reported in earlier research among Bolivian migrants in Spain (Tapias & Escandell, 2011) or admiration, as was reported in Finland (Bontenbal, 2023). As TCAs tend to be highly educated and speak fluently, especially the English language, other groups may find their presence as a threat, yet, on the other hand, some may perceive them as high achievers and role models (Bontenbal, 2023; Lijtmaer, 2022). By employing the new socio-cultural identities for the TCA, we hypothesise, as illustrated in [Figure 2](#), that new forms of struggle, competition, and conflict may arise to characterise events in the labour market and give rise to team-related issues not previously experienced within homogeneous work groups. The prospect of TCAs losing



<i>Category</i>	<i>Identity</i>
<i>Expatriates</i>	<i>Expatriates assume the traditional form of international assignment, whether voluntary or involuntary.</i>
<i>Locals</i>	<i>These are citizens of the country and, in cases such as the UAE and Qatar, constitute a small proportion of the labour force.</i>
<i>TCAs</i>	<i>TCAs are either previous TCKs who have now grown into adults (and have chosen not to seek repatriation) or long-term expatriates who have decided to continue living abroad for the long term.</i>

**Figure 2.** Identity Model in Heterogeneous Labour Markets and Organisations.

their first cultural identity or cultural affiliation (Berry, 1990) may, in the long run, present socio-psychological issues, as they might still be perceived as aliens although their new group identity is still valid and distinct (Sussman, 2002).

Third, as a new and prominent category in the labour market, two main implications exist; (1) the recalibration of recruitment policy and practice for TCAs and (2) the choice of policies relating to TCA remuneration vis-à-vis other labour market participants. Historically, country of origin was one of the key factors in determining expatriate recruitment and remuneration (Hamza, 2015), yet this trend might dissipate with TCAs who are not entirely expatriates except for the passports they carry. There are both complications and opportunities for human resources development (HRD) as despite being a heterogeneous demography, TCKs tend to have more in common with each other compared with their peers raised in the host nation or home nation (Bonebright, 2010). This unique identity is not based on consanguinity or heritage or race but on cultural intelligence and assimilation and the autobiographical experiences of young adults who live in these emerging and distinct societies. We propose that TCAs might soon become a favourable element of the employee pool in complex labour markets that hitherto favoured traditional expatriates. Therefore, more empirical studies might explore skills, attitudes and levels of loyalty among this unique and emerging social grouping. Such studies might attempt to explore the relationship between organisational attitudes towards TCAs and external labour market information, demographical dynamics and social policy. As groups self-categorise and create constructs that define their identity (Hogg, 2001) tensions and opportunities can arise across different groups. In cases where tensions arise, a direct by-product can be inter-group conflict, which may form along identity lines. Identity here may go beyond just the physical but may include how the group perceives the treatments they receive in the labour market or the workplace.

Fourth, we envisage increasing discourse surrounding the dimensions of TCA that impact organisational leadership in the modern workplace. Whilst leadership theory has historically been influenced by personality and traits (Yukl, 2004, 2012), current leadership discourse and its taxonomical extensions need to include TCA theory; that is, how TCAs evolve into leaders and what leadership styles can be assigned to such employees, if any. In accordance with Figure 2, leadership roles may be influenced by TCAs, expatriates or locals, each with their own assumptions and worldview. TCAs, however, possess a unique quality as they carry cultural attributes from both the host country and their country of origin as well as social peers. Such a distinctive and novel characteristic of TCAs serves as a reminder of the evolving nature of leadership as demonstrated in previous studies on leadership dimensions, such as ubuntu in higher education (Akanji et al., 2020), authentic leadership during drastic times in the Middle East and North Africa (Akhras, 2016), and leadership and global ambition (Frantz & Jain, 2017).

## Conclusion

This research note provides novel insight into the concept of Third Culture Adults (TCAs) and social categories of long-term dwellers in the GCC area. Compared to TCKs and contemporary ATCKs, Third Culture Adults are a more unique social group whose identity is defined by heterogeneous nationality yet a unifying new culture, technological savviness

and specific ideologies of life. TCA identity varies along four dimensions, including parental, biographical, and habitat factors, which operate at a more macro level to define the scale of the cultural identity assignable to an individual. The concept of TCAs offers an essential foundation for the study of migrant work, human resources management and labour market sociology, however, assumptions made in this paper remain falsifiable and will require empirical studies to investigate the lived experiences of TCAs wherever they may be.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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