

## RESEARCH ARTICLES

### **A study of social interactions between Qatari citizens and the descendants of Arab migrants to Qatar. Will the Permanent Residency Card have an Impact on the Social Life of the Descendants of Arab Migrants Born in Qatar?**

**Musaab ALKHTIB**  
**Helena ONNUDOTTIR**  
**Irena C. VELJANOVA**

**Abstract.** This article focuses on the descendants of Arab migrants born in Qatar and the social interactions they have with Qatari citizens. Also, this article focuses on the political debates and public discourses after the *Permanent Residency law* was introduced by the Qatari government in 2018. Such debates bring to the fore questions about similarities and differences across the population of Qatar, as the nation moves into the future and natural resources diminish (McLachlan, 2015; Dargin, 2007). This article draws upon the first author's study on immigration in Qatar, utilising semi-structured interviews with non-citizen Arabs born in Qatar. This article will use the acronym (ABiQ) to refer to Arabs born in Qatar. Further, the article will gauge the extent of their social interactions with Qatari citizens and their sense of integration into society. The study found that, ABiQs tend to have greater opportunities to interact with Qatari citizens than non-Arab migrants due to their cultural closeness, related to shared language and history. As the descendants of Arab migrants born in Qatar, their cultural and religious background provides some 'privileges'.

**Keywords:** The descendants of Arab migrants born in Qatar (ABiQs); Migrants; Social Interaction' Citizenship rights; Permanent residency; *Permanent Residency Law* (2018); Selective state building; *Mawatin*(مواطنن) ; *Mawalid* (مواليد)

#### **Introduction**

Qatar is a Middle Eastern country situated on the northern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, sharing its only land border with Saudi Arabia and the rest of its territory surrounded by the Arabian Gulf Sea. Due to its richness in energy resources, especially Natural Gas, Qatar is a popular host destination for many international migrants (Morton, 2020). Qatar is a small country with a small population, but it plays significant roles worldwide and regionally due to its active diplomacy and the hosting of global events such as the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Qatar is a well-known destination of economic opportunities and is increasingly becoming a destination for students from neighbouring nations, seeking international education. For example, the city hosts

branch campuses from some of the top universities in the world, such as Weill Cornell and Georgetown (Romanowski et al, 2024).

The migrant population in Qatar is much higher in numbers than the local (Qatari) citizens (*Mawatinin* مواطنين) (Winckler, 2015). According to the Qatari Statistics Authority, the number of people in Qatar in August 2024 reached 3 million. The foreign migrants comprise around 90%, while only around 10% are Qatari citizens (Bel-Air, 2017). As shown in Table 1, the population of Qatar has increased dramatically since the 1990s, and, over the years, Qatari citizens have become a minority in their own country. As the ratio between citizens and migrants keeps widening, it becomes essential to explore the nuances of migrant experiences and their senses of place in Qatar. Further, considering the history and nature of migration and the demographics of the nations of the Gulf region, the importance of recognising and understanding migrant stories are evident; such stories provide insight into the societies, politics, and economies of the Gulf regions, as well as understanding of people's everyday lives (Kamrava, 2013).

### The Migrant Population of Qatar

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Migrant Total</b>	<b>National %</b>	<b>National Total</b>
<b>1990</b>	467,000	369,397	20.9	97,603
<b>1995</b>	526,000	406,072	22.8	119,928
<b>2000</b>	617,000	470,771	23.7	146,229
<b>2005</b>	885,000	717,425	19.5	172,575
<b>2010</b>	1,508,000	1,304,420	13.5	203,580

(Table 1) Source: (Bel-Air, 2017)

For decades, migrant communities, especially Arab migrants, have formed one of the largest components of the Qatari population<sup>1</sup> and have shaped the social fabric of society. Migrants in Qatar are classified into three categories: skilled labourers, mostly Westerners; low skilled labour, mostly of Asian background; and, medium to high professions, which are mostly filled with people of Arab background (Babar, 2017).

As Hazal Elberni (2018) outlines, many Arab migrants have children born in Qatar, many who consider Qatar their permanent country of residence. The focus of this article is on the descendants of Arab migrants born in Qatar.<sup>2</sup> Another concentration of this article is the *Iqama Daama* إقامة دائمة (Permanent Residency) a law introduced in 2018 by the Qatari government. The card can be given to eligible candidates who meet specific criteria, such as having been a resident in the country for at least 20 years and having sufficient knowledge of the Arabic language

<sup>1</sup> Historically, the Qatari population is composed of two groups, the Hadar (settled people) and the Bedouins (nomads), and both groups are tribally constructed and have distinct characteristics. Currently, these two groups constitute the Qatari citizens. All others are classified as migrants.

<sup>2</sup> Arab is an ethnic group formed by many races inhabiting the Arab world that includes 22 countries in Africa and Asia. The Arabic language and Islam are the main components of the Arabic culture. There are many definitions of Arabs, but, drawing on Shoup (2012), this research project focuses on the Arab people who embrace the Arabic language, Arabic culture, and Arab heritage, regardless of their country of origin.

(Ministry of Interior, 2018). The holders of the *Permanent Residency Card* have several privileges and rights, such as being able to open a business without a Qatari sponsor, owning property, and having access to free health care and free education (Ministry of Interior, 2018).

The Qatari government in 2019, set up a committee named the Permanent Residence Card Granting Committee, which has the duties to set the requirements and suggest further development of the *Permanent Residency Law*. For example, the Ministry of Interior in Qatar set a limit for only 100 people to be given permanent residency annually. However, according to Article 4 of Law No. (10) of 2018 on Permanent Residency, this number can be increased. Ali Younes (2018) suggested that such legislation can provide hope to ABiQ to have a sense of security as they can now gain permanent residency in Qatar. Such development of a Permanent Residency law can be expected as the Qatari government is preparing the nation for a new era/dawn of nation-building (Beaugrand, 2023). Such measures are of particular importance as the country is acknowledging the challenges of having a limited number of *mawatinin* مواطنين (Qatari citizens) and the fossil energy wealth will likely come to an end in the near future. Therefore, policymakers are selecting individuals from the country's migrants to increase the number of local citizens who will partake in taking the country 'into the future' (Mitchell, 2017).

Following Younes's argument, this study argues that such changes in law will likely change the social interactions between ABiQ and *mawatinin* مواطنين (Qatari citizens). The permanent residency law favours the ABiQ and people who are similarly categorised, such as the children of Qatari mothers, who need only be residents in the country for ten years to apply for the *Permanent Residency Card*. Arabs born outside Qatar need to wait for twenty years to apply. Furthermore, the Arabic language is ABiQs' mother tongue which does not apply to the majority of other migrants. The Ministry of Interior in Qatar has activated the Permanent Residency law through the E-government portal. Candidates who meet the requirements can register, apply online, and then wait for the Ministry of Interior's selection.

Furthermore, this article explores aspects of social interactions in Qatar between Qatari citizens and *Mawalid* مواليد (born) of Arab migrants in Qatar and argues that the ABiQ are more likely than migrants of non-Arab background to have more interactions with Qatari citizens because ABiQ has similar cultural and linguistic skills and access to opportunities not available to other migrants in Qatar. For example, ABiQs have been favoured by the Qatari labour law for being hired if there are no Qatari citizens applying for the job. Such preference applies particularly to the government sector. Hence, our interests are driven by the following two objectives: first, to explore the social interactions between Qatari citizens and ABiQ, particular in educational and workplace context. Second, the effects of the new permanent residency law on the interactions between citizens and ABiQ.

The following sections focus on some of the existing literature on the various social, cultural, economic, and political situations faced by migrants to Qatar, as well as Qatari citizens.

### **Brief History of Arab Migration to Qatar**

To understand the political and social aspects associated with the Arab and non-Arab migration to Qatar it is important to understand the recent history of their migration. During the 1960s and 1970s, most of Qatar's migrants were Arabs (Babar, 2017). The main reason is the Qatari state had multiple agreements with Arab countries to help Qatar develop its newly built state. However, things changed dramatically in the late 1970s due to the Oil Boom and growing global discourses on, and the fear of, the spread of pan-Arabist ideology (De Bel-Air, 2014).

A figure released by the Ministry of Labour in Qatar in 2013 stated that around 13% of the workforce in Qatar are Arab migrants. However, almost half of the total Arab residents in Qatar are non-working dependants, such as students and housewives (Babar, 2017). One of the explanations for such a high number of non-working Arab residents is that Arabs tend to migrate to Qatar with their families, unlike Asian workers. The table below shows the top five Arab nationalities living in Qatar in 2017.

#### Arabs Living in Qatar (Per Percentage)

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
<b>Egyptian</b>	49%
<b>Syrian</b>	12%
<b>Sudanese</b>	10%
<b>Lebanese</b>	7%
<b>Jordanian</b>	6%

(Table 2) Source: (Snoj, 2019).

Based on the historical context of the Qatari migration, nationality and ethnicity play big role in Qatar's migration patterns, as does the temporality and/or permanency of peoples aims and hopes behind migration. As mentioned before, Arabs fill medium to high paid jobs such as in the government sector, while most non-Arabs and mainly Asian migrants fill roles in construction sector. Hence, we can easily argue that language capacity and cultural/religious similarity and sameness impacts strongly on the prospects and accomplishments of migrants to Qatar (Seshan, 2012).

#### 1- Social Interactions determined by similarity and affinity

One of the main objectives of this article is to explore the social interactions between *mawatinin* (مواطينين) (Qatari citizens) and ABiQs. The shared Arabic culture makes integration easy between ABiQ and Qataris in comparison to other migrants, especially non-Arabs. Elisabeth Longuenesse stresses this fact in her claim:

[T]he real links forged by a common language and history may permit the integration of personal dimensions into the relations of a migrant and his *kafil*, or sponsor, helping the former to become integrated into the local society (1988: 3).

Geoff Harkness (2020) expanded on this idea, stating that 'Arabs align themselves with Qataris implying shared ethnicity and distance themselves from non-Arab foreigners' (p. 209). Furthermore, most ABiQ have lived the majority of their lives in Qatar, which can strengthen their knowledge of local Qatari communities and make them more likely to establish relationships with Qatari nationals than other migrants. Further, El Berni (2018) argues that an important topic of study regarding the descendants of Arab migrants born in Qatar, is the development and nature of their identity and the similarities and differences between them and Qatari citizens; identity and belonging. According to (Soudy, 2017), there are big differences between migrants who come to Qatar through work contracts and the descendants of Arab migrants born in Qatar who are born in Qatar, study in the country, and share many social values with Qatari citizens. However, as

claimed by Malik (2017), even though the children of Arab migrants were born and raised in Qatar and share many beliefs and traditions with Qatari citizens, many of them do question their uncertain and “temporary” status in the country. This is where the introduction of the Permanent Residency Law comes to attention.

## 2- Interaction, affinity, and the New Permanent Residency law

Most of the ABiQ in Qatar study, work, and live surrounded by family members and as revealed by the participants in this research consider Qatar as their permanent place of residency. However, a basic question remains: does the absence of citizenship prevent them from feeling that they belong in Qatar? As indicated by some authors (Longva, 2000; Fernandez, 2014; Mahdavi, 2011), migrants in the Gulf countries are surrounded by the sponsorship system, which can hinder them from feeling that they belong and to integrate into the host country.

In the case of ABiQ, their assimilation into Qatari culture can be labelled as *mawatinin* (مواطنين) (Qatari citizens) because their cultural similarities with Qatari citizens increase their possibilities of interaction with Qataris. However, state policies in some of the GCC countries have historically been geared towards preventing the granting of citizenship to Arabs because of political reasons, such as the fear of the spread of the Nasserist ideology<sup>3</sup> (Janiszewski, 2004). Therefore, the situation in Qatar is unique because it provides the option of Permanent Residency to selected residents, which means Qatar is following a different approach than most of the GCC countries (Karen, 2017). This process and approach – even if minor now – can impact the mutual interaction between Qatari citizens and ABiQ and influence the nation-building process.

Moreover, ABiQ and Qatari citizens in their mutual interaction can develop knowledge and interests in each other’s everyday lives, as there are usually no big cultural gaps between ABiQ and Qataris in comparison with other non-Arabs migrants. In general, the descendants of Arab migrants born in Qatar and Qataris often have deep mutual interactions. Examples of these interactions and the subjective and ontological meanings for individuals will be outlined in the research findings sections below, focusing on both positive (sense of belonging and at home) and problematic aspects (lacking legal citizenship rights), in the context of the Permanent Residency Laws

## 3- Born in Qatar *Mawalid* (مواليد)

The term *Mawalid* (مواليد) refers to people born in Qatar – referred to here as ABiQ - and is usually associated with specific characteristics such as knowledge of the country and priority of hiring in the government sector, especially in the police and army (Mohammed, 2017). The *Mawalid* (مواليد) capital knowledge comes from the shared culture such as language, traditions, and religion. However, the actual meaning of the term *Mawalid* is ‘born in a country’, but it is used in the Qatari context for Arabs born in Qatar. The *Mawalid* (مواليد) term is associated with particular knowledge and follows specific attitudes and practices of the members of Qatari society. All those characteristics reflect *Mawalid* (مواليد) social interaction with the Qatari citizens (Yousef and Khattab, 2023).

---

<sup>3</sup> Nasserism is an ideology influenced by socialist ideas and founded by the Egyptian president Jamal Abdul-Nasir. It focused on the ideas of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism, and it reached its peak during the 1960s.

## Methodology

This article draws on a number of semi-structured interviews, focusing on the social aspects of the relationship between Qatari citizens and Arabs born in Qatar. The objective of using a qualitative method is to examine and describe the Arabs born in Qatar, emphasizing the significance of their personal experiences in their mutual interaction with Qatari citizens.

This article is based on data obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with 14 participants of different Arab nationalities; all were born and live in Qatar and most live in the capital Doha. The nationalities of the participants are the following, three Egyptians, three Sudanese, two Palestinians, two Lebanese, two Syrian, and two Yemenis. The participants range in age from 20 to 50 years old. Twelve of the participants are male, two are female. The small number of female participants can be explained by the fact that the researcher is male and cannot easily gain permission to talk to females who are not family (cultural barriers) (see background nationalities in the table below). The participants' education levels vary; some attended government schools and universities, while others studied at private or community schools in Qatar, and some studied outside Qatar in their countries of origin. Two of the interviewees hold master's degrees and two are pursuing one; the rest of them have a bachelor's degree and one of the women has a high-school qualification. Two of the interviewees attended the Qatar campuses of American universities. The participants' social and economic statuses vary as well. Four of the interviewees are married, six of them are working in highly paid jobs, and one has his own company. The majority of the interviewees work in the government sector in medium- to high-income jobs, such as policemen, teachers and doctors.

The fieldwork for this research was heavily affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. Qatar, like many countries around the world, went through lockdowns, which made initiating communication with prospective interviewees difficult. Despite these challenges, fourteen interviewees from the six most prevalent nationalities in terms of ABiQs in Qatar were recruited. They come from different economic and educational backgrounds, which can be to some extent seen as a sign of a fair representative sample of ABiQs.

The interview questions addressed participants' daily social interactions, including interactions in their neighbourhoods, at work, at their places of study, and interactions and relationships with Qatari citizens. Participants were also asked about their perspectives on being an Arab born in Qatar and their opinions on the *iqama Daama* إقامة دائمة (Permanent Residency).

## Discussion

### Socio-economic Disparity and Differences.

As introduced above, the main objective of this article is to explore the social interactions between Qatari citizens and ABiQs. When asked about everyday social interaction with Qatari citizens, many interviewees brought up socio-economic disparity and lack of citizenship rights as obstacles when forming close social bonds with Qatari citizens. For example, some of the interviewees said economic differences create social barriers that make social interaction difficult.

*"There are social and economic gaps between us غير قطري [non-qataris] and them قطري [qataris]"* was one statement made by a 37-year-old egyptian male teacher.

Social classification and economic segregation - job options and geographical location/ing - of migrants based on nationality has evidently resulted in real and physical distancing and barrier making when it comes to social interaction across different groups in the GCC countries and in Qatar (Vora and Koch, 2015). Evidently, a migrant with a high income and professional/work status has more opportunities to interact with *Mawatinin* مواطن (citizen) than migrants who come from low-income/social status groups.

A 35-year-old male Palestinian research participant claimed that low-income migrants do not get the opportunity to interact with people of other nationalities, and especially not with Qatari citizens. This is not only because of cultural barriers but also due to financial reasons. He referred to the income disparity between low- and high-income migrants and Qataris. This research participant gave an example of 'going out', as to him socialising is all about going out rather than visiting people at home. In addition, following a similar argument, a 29-year-old Palestinian male IT engineer, said:

*If you as a migrant or Qatari citizens, both from [the] high-income group, want to go out [to] a restaurant or a cafe-shop in a hotel, the people you know from [a] low-income [group] would not be able to afford such a place, which makes socialising with them difficult.*

So, we can argue that socio-economic diversity and opportunities do impact on everyday social interaction. Furthermore, we need to consider interaction might be determined by space, location, mobility, and opportunities to 'advance', particularly to do with people's workplaces.

### **The Workplace**

This section is about the various professions of the research participants. Commonly, the original reason for migrating to Qatar is employment opportunities, therefore the nature of the work and workplace plays a significant role when determining a person's positions in Qatari society and the nature of their interaction with other members of society. When it comes to work-placed interactions, this research indicates that while interactions are undergoing some changes as Qatar – as a nation and society – meets environmental and economic challenges, the levels of social interactions might be undergoing change, while also being impacted by traditions and ancestry.

As indicated by Naithani and Jha (2009: 6) 'social interaction between *mawatinin* مواطنين (Qatari citizens) and expats in Qatar is limited to workplaces', and further that this social phenomenon is not only particular to Qatar but can be seen across all the GCC countries. Some participants in this research did agree to this claim, but some accounts challenge this statement. For example, a Sudanese female dentist with 48 years old stated:

*Most of my interaction with Qataris are within the workplace or for professional reasons.*

One of the interviewees, a 41-year-old Sudanese businessman, often interacts with Qatari citizens due to the nature of his work, and most of these citizens are either property owners or looking for a property to lease, sell or buy. He said, *most of my interaction with Qataris are*

within the workplace or for professional reasons. However, he elaborated on such interactions with Qatari citizens by saying that

*they are not really my friends compared with other friends from different nationalities because they do not come to my house and I do not go to their houses, so basically our relationships are shaped by business interests rather than social intimacy.*

A similar opinion was shared by a male Palestinian participant who said that he works as an IT engineer and most of his clients are Qataris, however, his relationship with them is limited mostly to the workplace; in other words, it is a professional, not a social relationship. He said that *they are clients, not my friends*. However, even if through professional interaction, he claims that through general conversations he has come to 'know' some Qatari citizens, and through them learnt some fundamental aspects of the local culture.

Still, the nature of the work of some of the interviewees has led them to have in-depth interactions with Qatari citizens. For example, some work in the police sector, and one of the interviewees, a 33-year-old Sudanese man, claimed that:

*Before my work I rarely had contact with Qatari citizens, especially since I studied in Sudanese community schools, which have no Qatari students, and I live in a neighbourhood which limits Qatari citizens living in the area. However, my current police department is mostly staffed by Qataris, with whom I have established strong friendships.*

The interviewees were asked if they thought being an ABiQ helped them in their career. One of the participants, a 34-year-old Lebanese male engineer said:

*I work in the energy sector in a company full of non-Arabs; when my company is dealing with another company full of Qatari citizens, they send me to do the talking.*

To this research participant, his employers selected him for this job because he is an Arab and can communicate better with other Arabs and especially *قطريين* Qataris. Further this fact is not only because of his knowledge of the Arabic language, it is also his knowledge of cultural etiquettes. Consequently, as an Arab employee among a company full of non-Arabs, he has been selected, something which he does feel as privilege. Furthermore, such 'privileges' can also be established through formal education.

### **Education**

Education can play an interesting part in interactions between Qatari citizens and ABiQ. As some of the interviewees have lived their entire lives in Qatar, but they had not had the chance to interact with Qatari citizens properly until they joined university. For example, a 27-year-old Egyptian male accountant, said:

*The university allowed me to encounter Qatari citizens closely for the first time [in] my life.*

Another example is that two of the interviewees did not have chance to interact with Qatari citizens when they were younger because they studied in community schools.<sup>4</sup>

The 29 years old Palestinian male engineer said, *studying in a community school is the reason my opportunities to interact with Qatari citizens have been hindered from an early age.* He explained further by saying:

*I am originally a Palestinian, but I studied at a Jordanian school which had no Qatari students. I established strong relationships with my colleagues from the Jordanian school and I still keep in touch with them to this day.*

Another example shared by a Lebanese male engineer he said that he spent his elementary school days in a Lebanese school, while for high school he attended a government school which enrolled a majority of Qatari students. He explained by saying that:

*This was a huge turn in my social life in Qatar and it was the first time I interacted with Qataris and established friendships with them. It also gave me a basic knowledge of Qatari local customs and norms.*

At a university level, one of the interviewees, a 31 Egyptian male, said:

*I live in the city centre of Doha, which has almost no Qataris, but I had the chance to interact with them and establish strong relationships with some of them during my study time at Qatar University<sup>5</sup>.*

He said that *the Business College was full of Qatari students with whom I established long-lasting friendships.* He added that *'the university allowed me to encounter Qataris closely for the first time [in] my life even though I was born and lived my entire life in Qatar'.* Another participant Egyptian male participant studied in the same college at Qatar University and later opened his own company. He said that *'I benefited from connections with my former university colleagues as they became my clients. Besides business interests, I strengthened my relationships with some of them'.* It became apparent from information from most of the research participants that formal education – past and present – has and does impact on social interaction. Further, these interactions do change as the Qatari population grows and Qatar keeps venturing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and increasingly multicultural population.

Nevertheless, some of the participants have limited contact with citizens, though they said they had chances to establish relationships with *قطريين* (Qataris) during their early years of education. As they said, during their studies in the government schools they had opportunities to interact with Qataris directly over a long period. For some of them, this was the time they learned about Qatari culture and found themselves engaging with Qatari local society.

---

<sup>4</sup> Community Schools are very common in Qatar and throughout the GCC countries. They are schools which teach the curricula of foreign countries in Qatar, such as Indian, Jordanian, and Sudanese schools.

<sup>5</sup> A government university, and for many years until [mention education, city etc] it was the only university in Qatar, and until now it is the main provider of higher education in the country.

### **General reflection: socio-economic factors, workplace, and formal education.**

For ABiQ who entered professional work, socio-economic aspects and issues such as the nature of the workplace, income differences and educational opportunities as outlined above, play significant roles in their social interactions with Qatari citizens. For example, workplaces can provide possibilities of mutual interaction among the two groups, especially when this involves white-collar expats and educated ABiQs. On the other hand, the income disparities are a clear example of social division, especially between Qataris and ABiQ from low-income backgrounds.

Still, as matters to do with education (qualification), workplace (relations), socio-economic factors, and place (space) of living, are of significant importance when it comes to studying and understanding the interactions between ABiQ and Qatari citizens, language, traditions, and culture is also of great importance.

### **Cultural Similarities: Language And Much More.**

Cultural similarities play a big role for bringing together *mawatinin* مواطنين (Qatari citizens) and ABiQ because of the shared language and culture. Also, it is one of the main distinctions between ABiQ and other non-Arab migrants when it comes to their closeness with Qatari citizens. As an acknowledgment of such reality, most of the participants in the interviews said that being an Arab born in Qatar gives them many advantages such as communication advantages; besides the shared language, they have good knowledge about the local dialect. Such knowledge facilitates their interaction with Qatari citizens.

As a response to the question 'do you think you are privileged for being an Arab living in Qatar?', most of the responses from the participants indicated that the Qataris preferred dealing with Arabs than non-Arabs, and that language – confidence and knowledge of the local dialect - was the main reason for such a preference. Not all Qataris have good knowledge of the English language, which is the common language among foreigners in Qatar. However, most of the participants said being an Arab born in Qatar provides more opportunities to interact with Qataris than being an Arab (not speaking the local dialect) not born in Qatar does. For example, a 34-year-old Lebanese male engineer said:

*'Language plays a strong role for me to feel privileged as an Arab in Qatar'.*

As a response to the question 'do you feel more Qatari or more [your ancestral nationality]?', most of the participants replied that they feel more loyal and attached to Qatar than to their country of origin and that they consider Qatar as their permanent country of residence. The main reason for such a feeling is that they have lived their entire lives in Qatar. A 37-year-old Egyptian male teacher explained this by saying 'I originally came from Egypt, but I was born in Qatar and my family immigrated over 40 years ago to Qatar, thus I consider Qatar as my home'.

It emerged from the interviews with Yemenis that they felt closer to interacting with Qatari citizens than other participants did. For example, two of the interviewees, a male and a female Yemeni, said that Qatari culture is closer to them than Yemeni culture, and they felt they were more like Qataris than Yemenis. They dealt with Qataris more easily than with Arabs. A 27-year-old man claimed the following:

*My surrounding environment played a major role for making me embrace the local culture. It started in childhood, as I was raised in a neighbourhood inhabited mostly by Qataris and I studied in schools populated by them, so such social aspects have shaped my life since an early age. The same lifestyle continued in the later stages of his life.*

A 25-year-old Yemeni woman gave similar responses, as she saw herself as interacting mainly with Qataris rather than with non-Qataris. She explained that by saying:

*I speak the local dialect, wear the same clothes, and share the same culture. I have maintained strong relationships with Qatari females since school, and at work I have made more friendships.*

The Yemeni woman works as a manager in a beauty salon and most of her customers are Qatari women, some of whom have become more than customers, as she has formed friendships with them. She said that *'I studied in schools dominated by Qatari females'* and in her work, she deals mostly with Qatari women *'so I have many Qatari friends rather than of other nationalities'*.

Hence, cultural similarities are much more than shared language and Arab identity. Many ABiQs, especially Yemenis look like Qataris, speak the same dialect and wear the national dress, which makes distinguishing them from the Qatari at a glance hard. This explains the special situation of ABiQ interviewees with a Yemeni background and their cultural proximity to Qatari citizens.

### **Citizenship Dilemma**

In the context of this article, citizenship has two distinct aspects. The first comes from the State recognising that ABiQ has a culture similar to that of the Qatari citizens. The other is that recognition comes from local citizens accepting that any ABiQ who assimilates with their local culture should be part of them (Clarke et al., 2014: 25). For example, the second strategic population policy made by the permanent population committee advised the government to give priority to naturalising Arabs. The justification for a policy tailored to Arabs was the fact that they share a similar culture and language, which makes it easier for them to interact with Qatari citizens and into the Qatari local society (Permanent Population Committee, 2017).

The interviewees were asked if they considered themselves Qataris or of their original nationality; the answers varied. For example, most of the ABiQs said they were both Qataris and their original nationality and they replied as follows. First, they had spent their entire lives in Qatar, thus they were attached to it, rather than to their countries of origin. A Lebanese male participant explained this by saying, *I cannot live as a Lebanese, and I cannot live as a Qatari. I am both.* Second response was that they consider themselves as Qataris more than their own citizenship, as for example in the answers of the two Yemeni interviewees. As the Yemeni male participant said, *to me I am more Qatari than Yemeni.* As mentioned earlier, for the Yemeni interviewees' the claim was that many ABiQ from Yemeni backgrounds act like Qatari in terms of dialect, clothes, and appearance. In addition, inter-marriage between Qataris from Yemeni backgrounds and Yemenis is very common, especially among those from the same tribe. In general, most of the interviewees responded that they are more attached to Qatar than to their home country, but they

still say their status in the country is not different from that of other residents. On the other hand, some ABiQ are consider themselves more privileged than others.

Regarding *Iqama Daama* إقامة دائمة (Permanent Residency), the participants praised the new arrangement of giving a permanent residency card, which can guarantee their stay in Qatar forever. A Lebanese male engineer shared his opinion by saying that now I hope that if I acquire the Permanent Residency, I will stay in Qatar without the fear of returning to my original country at any time. An Egyptian male teacher said:

My father came to Qatar half a century ago, but we need to renew our residency yearly as a *family*. However, if I have the PR, I will no longer need to do this process. A Sudanese lady said: I love Qatar, and I want to stay here forever; the PR can give me a sense of security for myself and my kids.

As indicated by Younes (2018), the permanent residency card provides a sense of security for Qatari residents, especially the second generation, because they can apply for it compared with other residents who do not meet the requirements set by the Qatari government.

### Concluding Remarks

This article is driven by the following question: do the descendants of Arab migrants born in Qatar (ABiQ) interact more closely with Qatari citizens than other non-Arab migrants. Also, will a revised legal status and rights of ABiQ residents of Qatar impact on social harmony and claims to material and resources rights. The answers to both questions are likely 'yes' as demonstrated in this article. The non-citizen people of Arab backgrounds born in Qatar (ABiQ), share cultural and religious similarities with Qatari citizens which can allow for mutual interaction between both groups. However, there are barriers to full social interaction with the Qatari citizens community. For example, citizenship dilemma, socio-economic status, and income disparities.

The Qatari government's policies could hinder mutual interaction between Qataris and ABiQ due to the legal framework of citizenship, though this challenge can be overcome by granting greater number of Permanent Residency Card to ABiQ. In addition, ABiQ who have spent their entire lives in Qatar have a better chance of embracing the local culture and knowing more about the local communities. However, despite their cultural similarities and social closeness with Qatari citizens, they still face some challenges, such as their temporary status and feelings of insecurity.

Qatar is one of the GCC countries with an extreme demographic imbalance dilemma, due to its small number of citizens compared to migrants. Such circumstances can lead a country to seek means to increase its number of citizens, and, in this case selectively. As this study has revealed ABiQ are closer culturally to Qatari citizens and share many of their social values, hence granting ABiQ permanent residency status can be a way of mitigating the low percentage of Qatari citizens, likely filling employment gaps at government and higher levels, and boost interactions between ABiQ and Qatari citizens. In addition, loyalty might be seen as a vital point as ABiQ can be perceived as having more loyalty than non-native population. This is because ABiQ have lived their entire lives in Qatar and may continue living there for generations to come (El Berni, 2018: 486). The social interactions between Qatari & non-Qatari remain a challenge, and it is at most times limited to the workplace & and in some instances formal educational contexts. The central tension remains, the one of indefinite temporariness. More inclusive permanent residency policy may mean re-distribution of resources to include new residents. This article indicates that the Arab

culture is the common denominator for greater, and of higher quality, social interactions between the Qataris and the ABiQ, but also points to the need for awareness of the ABiQ temporary status, despite their construction of their Qatari identity at will.

To conclude, this topic needs further research, and more studies could reveal more of the situations ABiQ face in regard to government policies, especially those targeted at future generations in Qatar.

## References

- Al-Meezan (2005) *Qatar citizenship law number (38) for the year of 2005* [online] (30 October 2005). Available at: <https://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=2591&language=ar>. [Accessed 1 July 2020].
- Al-Meezan (2016) *Civil Human Resources Law Number (15) for the year of 2016* [online] (6 November 2016). Available at: <https://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawArticleID=72670&LawID=7102&language=ar>. [Accessed 1 July 2020].
- Ataullah, S. (2018) New law allows permanent residency for expats, *The Peninsula*, 5<sup>th</sup> September. Available at: <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/05/09/2018/New-law-allows-permanent-residency-for-expats>. [Accessed 13 July 2020].
- Babar, Z. (2014) The cost of belonging: citizenship construction in the state of Qatar, *The Middle East Journal*, 68(3): 403-420.
- Babar, Z. (2017) Working for the neighbours: Arab migrants in Qatar, in Babar, Z. eds. (2017) *Arab migrant communities in the GCC*, London, Hurst Publishers: 1-19.
- Babar, Z. Ewers, M. and Khattab, N. (2019) Im/mobile highly skilled migrants in Qatar, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(9): 1553-1570.
- Beaugrand, C. (2023) Long-term Residency Rights, Citizenship Schemes and the Attraction of Talents: Transnational Presence over Generations in the Face of Investment Migration. *In Transnational Generations in the Arab Gulf States and Beyond*: 21-38. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Bel-Air, F. (2014). Demography, migration, and labour market in Qatar, Migration Policy Centre, *GLMM*, Explanatory Note, 8, 2014: 1-19.
- Clarke, J. Coll, K. Dagnino, E. and Neveu, C. (2014) Recentring citizenship, in Clarke, J. Coll, K. Dagnino, E. and Neveu, C. eds. (2014) *Disputing citizenship*, Bristol, Policy Press at the University of Bristol: 9-49.
- Dargin, J. (2007) Qatar's natural gas: the foreign-policy driver, *Middle East Policy*, 14(3): 136-142.
- Diop, A. Le, K. Johnston, J. and Ewers, M. (2017) Citizens' attitudes towards migrant workers in Qatar, *Migration and Development*. 6(1): 144-160.
- Diop, A. Li, Y. Al-Ansari, M. and Le, K. (2017) Social capital and citizens' attitudes towards migrant workers, *Social Inclusion*, 5 (1): 66- 79.
- El Berni, H.M. (2018) Labor migration in Qatar: a study on the identity of second-generation migrants, *Border Crossing*, 8(2S1): 479-497.
- Fernandez, B. (2014) Essential yet invisible: migrant domestic workers in the GCC, *Gulf Labour Markets and Migration: Explanatory Note*, 4: 1-12.
- Fromherz, A. (2012) *Qatar: a modern history*, Georgetown, Georgetown University Press: 1-10.

- Gulf Times (2020) Qatar's population reaches all-time high, *Gulf Times*, 1<sup>st</sup> June. Available at: <<https://www.gulf-times.com/story/664578/Qatar-s-population-reaches-all-time-high>> [Accessed 25 June 2020].
- Harkness, G. (2020) *Changing Qatar: culture citizenship and rapid modernization*, New York: NYU Press: 190-224.
- Ibnouf, A. Dou, L. & Knight, J. (2013) The Evolution of Qatar as an Education Hub: Moving to a Knowledge Based Economy. In *International education hubs: Student, talent, knowledge-innovation models*: 43-61. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Kamrava, M. (2013) *Qatar: small state: big politics*, London, Cornell University Press: 1-139.
- Kapizewski, A. (2004) Arab labour migration to the GCC states. (2004) *Arab migration in a Globalized World*, Geneva: United Nations Publications: 115-33.
- Karen, E. (2017) How Egypt wound up in the centre of a Gulf Cooperation Council dispute on Qatar, *Project on Middle East Political Science: POMEPS Brief*, 31: 18-19.
- Longuenesse, E. (1988) *Class relations, communal solidarities and national identity in the Gulf states: the case of migrant workers*, Presentation at the Franco-German Workshop on labour migration and the process of social and political change in the Middle East, Berlin, June 2-3: 23-133.
- Longva, A. (2000) Citizenship in the Gulf States: conceptualization and practice, in Butenschøn, N. Davis, U. and Hassassian, M. eds. (2000) *Citizenship and the state in the Middle East: approaches and applications*, New York, Syracuse University Press: 179-197.
- Malik, S. (2017) Identity, citizenship and home through the transnational perspective(s) of second-generation Sudanese migrants in Qatar, *Diaspora Studies*, 10(2): 175-192.
- McLachlan, K. (2015) Natural Resources and Development in the Gulf States, *Social and Economic Development in the Arab Gulf, (RLE Economy of Middle East)*: 80-94, Routledge.
- Mitchell, J. (2017) Why did Qatar just change its residency laws: The Qatar crisis, (2017) *The Qatar Crisis, Project on Middle East Political Science: POMEPS Brief* 31: 24-26.
- Mohammed, Y. (2017) The Opening for Recruitment in Military Police, *Alarab*, 10<sup>th</sup> April. Available at: <https://m.alarab.qa/story/1140212/التجنيد-بالشرطة-العسكرية-فتح-باب-التجنيد-بالشرطة-العسكرية>. [Accessed 26 July 2020].
- Morton, M. (2020) *Masters of the pearl: A history of Qatar*, Reaktion Books.
- Naithani, P. and Jha, A. (2009) Challenges faced by expatriate workers in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, *International Journal of Business and Management*, 5 (1): 98-104.
- Permanent population committee (2017) *population policy of the state of Qatar* [online] (31 June 2017). Available at: <<https://www.ppc.gov.qa/Admin/ReportsAndStudies/Population-Strategy-Leaflet.pdf>> [Accessed 5 July 2020].
- Permanent Residency* (no date) *Ministry of Interior*. Available at: [https://portal.moi.gov.qa/wps/portal/MOIIInternet/departmentcommittees/permanentresidency!ut/p/a1/hc\\_LboNADAXQb-mCLb4whl6ym9lqPNtESRWYTUUqOkECBgEtvx-CsqmUh3e2zrVlkpSSbPK\\_UuVDqZu8OvfS\\_QpEEsB2EK9YxLEJosUb3tfs89mdQDYD7vgWrlj74BDbXbh7-fBswHqU35OcSei\\_BmBbRKvYZdOGOPFsbwPwxQXcOzED3CgBCkmaqSh\\_mfzLRHBhXJLvip-iKzvztpvFxFGNp-acDAOI6m0lpVhfmtawPXIkfdD5T-I9TWKcp1vee9eDoBe9aX-g!!/?1dmy&pswid=Z7\\_IAMI0240LG3K80QIK5E0N P3UF0&uril=wcm%3apat%3a%2Fwcmli-internet-en%2Fsa-](https://portal.moi.gov.qa/wps/portal/MOIIInternet/departmentcommittees/permanentresidency!ut/p/a1/hc_LboNADAXQb-mCLb4whl6ym9lqPNtESRWYTUUqOkECBgEtvx-CsqmUh3e2zrVlkpSSbPK_UuVDqZu8OvfS_QpEEsB2EK9YxLEJosUb3tfs89mdQDYD7vgWrlj74BDbXbh7-fBswHqU35OcSei_BmBbRKvYZdOGOPFsbwPwxQXcOzED3CgBCkmaqSh_mfzLRHBhXJLvip-iKzvztpvFxFGNp-acDAOI6m0lpVhfmtawPXIkfdD5T-I9TWKcp1vee9eDoBe9aX-g!!/?1dmy&pswid=Z7_IAMI0240LG3K80QIK5E0N P3UF0&uril=wcm%3apat%3a%2Fwcmli-internet-en%2Fsa-)

- departmentcommittee%2Fsa-permanentresidency%2Fc7824bdc-1b85-4d87-b805-08b7a548638d (Accessed: 31 August 2023).
- Planning and Statistics Authority (2020) *Qatar monthly statistics* [online] (June 2020). Available at: <<https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/Pages/default.aspx>> [Accessed 11 June 2020].
- Planning and Statistics Authority (2023) *Qatar monthly statistics* [online] (July 2023). Qatari Statistics Authority. [Accessed 28 July 2023].
- Romanowski, M.H., Tok, E., Amatullah, T., Amin, H. and Sellami, A. (2024) Globalisation, policy transferring and indigenisation in higher education: the case of Qatar's education city. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 46(4), pp.347-361.
- Seshan, G. (2012) Migrants in Qatar: a socio-economic profile, *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 2(2): 157-171.
- Shah, N. (2004) Arab migration patterns in the Gulf, in International Organization for Migration and League of Arab States eds. (2004) *Arab migration in a globalized world*, Geneva, International Organization for Migration: 91-114.
- Shah, N. (2015) Second-generation high school students in Kuwait: Aspirations and future plans, *Migration and Development*, 4(1): 108-124.
- Snoj, J. (2019) *Population of Qatar by nationality – 2019 report* [online], 15 August. Available at: <<https://priyadsouza.com/population-of-qatar-by-nationality-in-2017/>> [Accessed 30 June 2020].
- Soudy, N. (2017) Home and Belonging: A Comparative Study of 1.5 and Second-generation Egyptian Expatriates in Qatar and Immigrants, *US Journal of Ethics and Migration Studies*, 43(9): 1544-1561.
- The World Factbook (2020) *Middle East: Qatar, the world factbook* [online] (25<sup>th</sup> June 2020). Available at: <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html>> [Accessed 25 June 2020].
- Vora, N. and Koch, N. (2015) Everyday inclusions: rethinking ethnocracy, kafala and belonging in the Arabian Peninsula, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 15: 540-552.
- Winckler, O. (2015) Gulf economies: how many Qatari nationals are there, *Middle East Quarterly*, 1-16. Available at: <<https://www.meforum.org/middle-east-quarterly/pdfs/5081.pdf>> [Accessed 28 June 2020].
- Younes, A. (2018) Qatar first Gulf nations to grant permanent residency for expats, *Aljazeera*, 5<sup>th</sup> September. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/09/qatar-gulf-nation-grant-permanent-residency-expats-180905132806905.html>. [Accessed 25 July 2020].
- Yousef, O and Khattab, N. (2023) The contingent home: how second-generation Arab migrants negotiate belonging in Qatar? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49(17), pp.4372-4389.