47. Between home and accommodation: migration and housing in the Arab region between circular ideals and diasporic lives

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INTRODUCTION

Based on a review of selected research on Egypt, Morocco, and the Gulf region in combination with my own ethnographic research in Egypt, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), I address in this chapter the conceptual, moral, and material contrast between home and accommodation that structures migrant homing trajectories in the Arab region.[1] Migratory movements in and from the region are structured by a tension between a circular ideal of migrant return, and the possibility of making a home in a new place. This tension, I argue, is grounded in the political economy of labour and visa regimes, and in moral expectations and ideals held by migrants and their families. As a productive dialectic, it generates long-term diasporas with strong homeland connections embodied by houses built for return and used for vacations.

A widespread feature that emerges in literature on migration and home-making in the region is a circular ideal of mobility and return, aligned with an ideal of a good life marked by 'stability' (*istiqrar*) in one's family home (*bayt* or *dar*) in one's native village or region (*balad* in Egypt, *blad* in the Maghreb region). In this framework, house-building is an element of a wider complex of patriarchal care, embodied by the figure of a male breadwinner willing to endure hardship and absence for the sake of the idealised family space of the home. While a circular ideal of migration as a journey that should end with a return home is hegemonic in many places (definitely so in Egypt), it does not establish a circular pattern; instead, it contributes to the formation of diasporas with strong homeland ties – unless return is obligatory, as it is for most migrants to the Gulf. Hage (2021) argues that Lebanese migrations share a diasporic condition of connectedness across distance since their onset in the nineteenth century. Also, while female domesticity is a dominant societal ideal, there are significant migrations of women, mainly within the framework of domesticity through family reunification and marriage, but also outside it in either highly skilled or highly gendered sectors of work.[2]

Hopeful home-making through migration in search of work in the region is paralleled and intersected by violent displacements in the region. Palestinians displaced near and far by the establishment and expansion of Israel, Saharans displaced to Algeria by the Moroccan conquest of West Sahara, Syrians displaced by the civil war across the region and beyond it, and others live in an extended state of transit, waiting either for a return or resettlement, creating dwellings that tend to be intentionally transient even while they may be very long-lasting (see e.g. Ferreri 2018; Järvi 2020; Suerbaum 2020; Schindler 2021). Winners of conquest, in their turn, have used public housing to enforce territorial control and to turn migrants into permanent settler-citizens. For example, Israel's public housing policy in the 1950s was designed to

settle Jewish immigrants from Arab countries in strategic locations (Kallus and Yone 2002). Egyptians evacuated from the Suez Canal region after the 1967 Six-Day War experienced a rare success story of refugee return, and yet their regained homes remain haunted by ghosts of the past (Soliman 2021).

As a composite of moral, gendered, financial, political, and other dynamics, a home in the Arab region is not restricted to the apartment in which a family permanently lives. A home tends to be a more expansive space that has female-marked living quarters as its centre, surrounded by mixed spaces of salons, entrances, alleys, and neighbourhoods, as well as male-marked spaces like cafés that act as home extensions for male socialisation (Loeckx 1998; Assaf 2020; Ghannam 2002; El-Shamy 2020). Also, the national space of the homeland as well as the decidedly non-home space of migrants' temporary dwelling abroad constitute parts of this gendered continuum of home-making. At the ends of the continuum, a home is ideally protected (*mastur*) while non-home spaces are exposed (*makshuf*) – a gendered division that is not the same as the public–private distinction (Drieskens 2008).

Research on migration in the Arab region has profited from early on from translocal perspectives, inspired by the foundational work of Abdelmalek Sayad (2004). Following migrants from rural Algeria to cities in France, Sayad argues that the 'double absence' of the migrant – marginalised in French mainstream society, physically separated from the home region – means that an understanding of migration as the total social fact it is must take place at both ends of the trajectory.

Sayad has also inspired attention to vernacular terminologies and theories which, rather than assuming political categories such as migrants and refugees, describe different positionings between home and abroad. In Moroccan Arabic, *l-brra* – 'the outside' – designates European countries. Those 'who are outside' (that is, emigrants) become attached with the complex qualities and possibilities of the outside that flow back into life 'here' (*hna*) or in 'the country/home region' (*blad*) (Elliot 2020: 7–10). In wider Arabic usage, *hijra* (the common academic and political term for migration) means abandoning one's homeplace and resettling in a new home. This is not how migrants usually describe their own trajectories, which they would rather describe as a *safar* (travel) that leads one to *ghurba*, the condition of being a stranger away from native village or town (*balad*) and family home (*bayt*) (Sayad 2004: 26; Schielke 2020: 6–7). One can live in *ghurba* in another town or in another country, and some migrants have told me that one *ghurba* is like the other, only the ticket abroad is more expensive. Some feel *ghurba* in the sense of being alienated and unrecognised in one's home and homeland. Some eventually acknowledge that what once was *ghurba* has become a new home. What makes a house a home is thus an emotional and moral sense of centredness, a quality that is often explicitly denied to temporary dwellings in the *ghurba* that migrants would usually call an 'accommodation' (*sakan*), not 'home' (*bayt*). But for a house to be a home, it must also be 'open', that is, actively inhabited. 'The opening of a home' (*fath bayt*) describes the totality of what Paolo Boccagni (2017) calls 'homing': from building to furnishing and provision, from moving in to socialisation and family life. The fact that so many migrant homes remain closed and empty for months, years, or even decades constitutes a key productive contradiction of the migrant process.

The moral binary of *balad*/*bayt* as opposed to *safar*/*ghurba* adds nuance to Sara Ahmed's argument about the impossibility of home as 'a place with boundaries that are fixed, such that the home becomes pure, safe and comfortable' (Ahmed 2000: 88). Ahmed argues that to understand home we must acknowledge that it may be a desire rather than a readily available

reality, and we need to pay attention to strangeness already involved in home. *Ghurba* and home can indeed be close to one another, even exist in the same place and moment; and yet the dominant moral ideal involves a powerful desire, dream, and striving to keep home and *ghurba* qualitatively apart, and to pass through the latter to arrive in the first. I agree with Ahmed that as critical social scientists, we ought to question 'the very opposition between "home" and "away"' (Ahmed 2000: 88). And yet we also need to recognise the hard work of so many migrants to construct that opposition. People around the world spend years of their lives and most of their savings to reproduce the possibility of a pure, safe, and comfortable home that is unlike *ghurba* – even while they often have to face the utter difficulty if not impossibility of that striving.

NON-HOME AND HOME-MAKING IN GULF CITIES

Arab Gulf states are the main site of Egyptian migrations (Tsourapas 2018), and also a growing goal of Moroccan migrations, albeit on a smaller scale (Berriane 2018). In the UAE, 10 per cent of the entire population were Egyptian nationals in 2016 (Elsheshtawy 2019: 109). They do not describe themselves as *muhajir*, which would imply permanent resettlement, but rather as *mughtarib*, 'living away from home'. *Mughtarib*/migrant dwelling in the Gulf states is structured by a distinctive political economy of expatriate contract labour with no prospect of citizenship or permanent residence for the vast majority of foreign nationals, and the requirement of a citizen sponsor (*kafil*) who is the legal guardian of a worker (Mednicoff 2012). With huge non-national populations that reach as much as 87.5 per cent in the UAE and Qatar (Berriane 2018), and a very low participation of citizens in the private-sector workforce (Elsheshtawy 2019: 254–255), Gulf states have a double face as welfare states that provide subsidised homes, jobs, and business opportunities to their citizens, and as exploitative yet also potentially lucrative sites of temporary residence and work for migrants. Visas depend on work contracts and end when contracts end. Residence after retirement is only possible in exceptional cases. Adult daughters of migrants can be sponsored by their parents, but sons must find a job or leave the country at the age of 18 (Naffis-Sahely 2018).

Most workers who temporarily reside in Gulf states in fact neither expect nor hope to stay for long. Their lives in the *ghurba* are generally very frugal, and their dwellings tend to be unhomelike (reflecting a wider pattern among migrants worldwide, see Boccagni and Miranda-Nieto 2022). However, a journey through different accommodations in Qatar and the UAE shows a more complex picture marked by gender, class, ethnicity, and personal preferences.

In her PhD thesis about Arab youth in Abu Dhabi, Laure Assaf (2017: 45–56) introduces readers to the city through a tour of the accommodations she lived in during her fieldwork. Apartments in the UAE are typically designed for an assumed Emirati family with many children, a live-in domestic worker, and a division of female space from the *majlis* where men socialise with guests. However, Emirati nationals do not live in apartment buildings, and only high-income migrants can afford the rent (to be paid annually with a cheque) of an entire large apartment. Subletting is illegal, and standard practice. Migrant families often sublet rooms, and many apartments are sublet in their entirety as dormitories. 'Living with strangers is thus a reality that characterises not only the public space of Emirati cities, but is just as often imposed in private space: from domestic workers for more affluent families, to forced cohab-

itation for the less fortunate – or even both at same time' (Assaf 2017: 55). Assaf's journey through Abu Dhabi was a gendered one that took her mostly to migrant families who let rooms to women. For men, 'families' and 'bachelors' form a key class divide that structures access to housing and public space alike. Only migrants with sufficient income levels are allowed by their visa category and salary (and able, due to the high cost of housing and schooling) to establish long-term family lives in their sites of residence.

Andrew Gardner (2011) and Behzad Sarmadi (2013) provide ethnographic accounts of this divide. 'Bachelors' are male migrants who do not have their families with them; many 'bachelors' are married, but during their migrancy live in an enforced condition of homosociality. In the early 2000s, Qatar and the UAE began zoning industrial areas for purpose-built labour camps (see also Elsheshtawy 2019: 110). This was justified by the need to prevent 'bachelors' from causing threat or discomfort to 'families' (meaning citizens as well as middle-class migrants who have their families with them). Sarmadi, who was doing fieldwork with Iranian workers in Dubai at the time of a campaign against the subletting of villas to 'bachelors', argues that rather than posing any real danger, bachelors are deemed dangerous 'matter out of place' to be kept apart from the ideal society of national families. And yet at the same time, those 'bachelors' are working towards the realisation of masculine household head roles – among them Talib, one of Sarmadi's interlocutors:

> Life away from one's family, journeying to a foreign country, manual labor, and the homo-social setting of a small apartment with other men were not incidental to the cultivation of a potential masculinity. These are some of what were expected to be endured. They comprised part of the criteria … of becoming one's 'own man' … Yet the configuration of structural processes, social practices and discourses that received Talib rendered him into another kind of morally recognizable subject: one allegedly inimical to the very institution of family, and requiring policing. (Sarmadi 2013: 210)

The masculine project of home-making through temporary migration thus structures extended lives in the tension between an idealised home one doesn't live in and accommodations that are marked as not home or even anti-home. The presence or absence of wives and female kin is crucial to this marking.

The majority of migrants to the Gulf come from South Asia and the Middle East, regions that stand out by masculine mobility and breadwinner roles (the important exception is the Philippines, with a predominantly female migration to the Gulf, reflecting female breadwinner roles). Combined with a gendered labour market demand (such as women as domestic workers and men in construction and industrial work), this has resulted in Gulf cities having some of the most unbalanced gender population ratios in the world. Only 30 per cent of Dubai's registered inhabitants were women in 2020 (Dubai Statistics Centre 2020).

The stereotypical site of 'bachelor' life is the company accommodation, also known as labour camp (Gardner 2011). In 2009, I shared a room in a labour camp for men in Doha, Qatar. Rooms held between five and ten persons and were allocated by nationality. The facilities were depleted and not clean, but they had hot and cold water, kitchens, and air-conditioning – amenities that some other accommodations lack. While wanting in many ways, the accommodation was more liveable than the image of inhumane suffering that is sometimes generated by scandalising reporting about labour camp conditions. The anthropologist Ahmed Kanna writes that on his first visit to a construction workers' accommodation in Dubai in 2007, he was surprised to see a television set (Kanna et al. 2020: 107). He reflects that there was nothing surprising of course about workers having a television; but media reports had

made him anticipate a hell deprived of all and any human agency. Both luxury and misery are realities of dwelling in the Gulf, but between them exists a vast spectrum of accommodations with different population densities and varying degrees of comfort and homeliness.

An Egyptian construction worker I met in Dubai in 2021 returned after three days from a job because the accommodation was so full that he could not sleep. Better company accommodations, in contrast, are designed to provide enough amenities and comfort that workers will not want to leave them (thus also making their control easier). A company accommodation for service and security workers that I visited in Dubai had four beds per room, regular cleaning, large and functional kitchens, and good and cheap shopping infrastructure across the street. A very large accommodation complex by a competing company had six persons in a room, a clean and good cafeteria, a barber shop and a supermarket, and both male and female inhabitants in different parts of the complex. However, workers I knew there complained about the absence of kitchens and about social mixing, that is, what they saw as uncivilised drunken behaviour of facility workers whom they as customer service workers considered less sophisticated. Many workers do not live in company accommodations, however, but in private apartments or villas, where dwellings vary – depending on the tenants' financial means – from bunk beds in a crowded room, to a neat room shared by two or three persons, to an individual room in an upscale apartment building (Ngeh 2022).

Social and ethnic mixing is a key and conflict-laden aspect of living with strangers, and an important constituent of the non-home character of shared accommodations. In 2021, I lived for one month in Ajman (in the metropolitan region of Dubai) in a private accommodation housing industrial, domestic, and service workers. Our Ethiopian landlady held the contract for the apartment from the Emirati owner of the housing project. She sublet the apartment room by room: the *majlis* (where I rented my bed from the Egyptian boss of the room) held up to eight mostly Egyptian men, the three bedrooms housed three Nigerian men in one room, and an unknown number of Sudanese men in the other two rooms. The maid's room and the closet designed to hold a washing machine were each occupied by a woman from Ethiopia. The mixed-gender aspect was counter-normative for most Egyptians but not exceptional for the UAE (Ngeh 2022). During my stay there, there was a distinct sense of community and mutual solidarity among inhabitants of the room I stayed in. But later, some of them left the accommodation in an unfriendly breakup. Relations between the rooms were tense. The older of the Ethiopian women enjoyed general respect and recognition by the male inhabitants (and knew how to impose it), but her relationship with her compatriot who lived in the closet became so strained that the latter had to leave. The Egyptians had regular conflicts with the Nigerians, which eventually resulted in the Nigerians being told to leave by the landlady. Some months after my departure, a fight between Egyptian and Sudanese inhabitants ended with eviction of the Egyptians in whose room I had lived.

The sometimes friendly and often conflicted cohabitation with an array of strangers who bring their food, customs, characters, smells and sounds, and sometimes also their work with them, establishes the accommodation in the *ghurba* as a moral exception to the idealised shape of homes. As such, the accommodation also allows for practices that might not fit well into an Egyptian Muslim home, such as Thursday night drinking gatherings. And as the drama-laden instability of the accommodation in Ajman shows, accommodations also lack the stability and durability of the idealised home: migrants regularly change accommodations, and companies move their employees to new accommodations. Men with whom I shared accommodations often consciously abstained from decorations that would make them home-like. They only

bought amenities that were absolutely needed, and those they had were often depleted, of low quality, and in short supply. Boccagni and Miranda-Nieto (2022) argue that the unhomelike character of many migrant accommodations is not only an external constraint by visa regimes that keep them in precarity, but also a choice wanted by many. I would add, however, that this choice is often not a free one, but rather grounded in a moral imperative of circularity: the socially and morally expected thing to do for migrant men in the Gulf more often than not is to invest and return home, in the *balad*, and thus not make themselves at home abroad. Consequently, most people I shared accommodations with spent a large part of their leisure time focussed on their phones, chatting or calling their wives, children, families, and friends at home. The 'double absence' of the migrant described by Sayad (2004) has in the online age gained a dimension of a 'double presence' with men trying to remain present as household heads, fathers, and spouses over distance.[3]

Tawfiq,[4] an Egyptian born and raised in a village, from a family without landed property but with higher education, has worked on various contracts as a security guard and a customer service agent in Qatar and the UAE for ten years in total. He told me in 2021 that in the many company accommodations he had lived, personal chemistry was a key factor for comfort and discomfort. Some rooms almost felt like a home, while in one room he visited the floor space was divided tile by tile into mutually hostile territories. 'One of the most tiring things about *ghurba* is moving accommodations,' he explained. 'You need to rearrange everything just when you've arranged yourself and found relative stability (*istiqrar*) within the *ghurba*.' But of course, he added, 'stability is an imaginary thing, it's not something that actually exists'.

Tawfiq's reckoning of stability – a quality usually associated with a good life at home (*bayt*) in one's hometown (*balad*) – as something that to a degree is also part of a good accommodation but is ultimately unattainable anyway, complicates the idealised division into home and accommodation. Homes may remain unfinished and uninhabited, while one may grow fond of an accommodation.

The tendency to transience that is built into the Gulf migratory experience is counteracted by developments that encourage some migrants to think of the Gulf as a potential home of sorts. Michelle Buckley and Adam Hanieh (2014) argue that the diversification of Gulf economies towards less dependency on direct oil revenue works mainly through real estate. For real estate to be sold and leased, population is necessary, and Dubai in particular has experienced spectacular population growth in 45 years: from 138,000 in 1975 to 3.4 million in 2020 in Dubai alone, not counting the wider metropolitan area (Dubai Statistics Centre 2020). In countries like Qatar and the UAE where migrants vastly outnumber citizens, migrants regularly work for companies run by migrants that sell products and services to migrants, and in so doing participate in the bustling activity in real estate and trade that is the main source of wealth in Dubai.[5] Dubai's economy heavily relies on a constant growth of the city and its population to provide a continuous source of revenue. This highly volatile scheme[6] requires making the city attractive to live in for a long while, to spend one's money and to make one's investments there, which is reflected in new visa categories to attract high earners to live in the city, but also in public facilities and parks aimed at middle-class families with more moderate incomes.

During fieldwork in Dubai in 2020–2021, I encountered families who were working in middle-class professions (medical doctors, journalists, media) and who had decided to live their lives and raise their children in the Dubai metropolitan region if they could. This was also apparent in the furnishing and decoration of their dwellings, where more money and effort was spent to make them feel personalised and home-like. I also met Egyptians in their 20s and

30s who were born in the UAE and considered it their home, but at the onset of adulthood and search for work, had to deal with the institutional discrimination against non-nationals and the precariousness of their presence.

The ground-breaking ethnographies by Neha Vora (2013) and Ahmed Kanna (2010) focus on different sectors of this class of long-term migrant inhabitants of Dubai who, they argue, establish something resembling citizenship through consumption and long-term presence even while formal citizenship remains an impossibility. In her more recent ethnography of Arab youth in Abu Dhabi (2017, 2020), Laure Assaf speaks of belonging rather than citizenship. She cites a songline by Freek, an Abu Dhabi-born rap artist of Somali origin: 'For me Abu Dhabi is *my sweet home*' (Assaf 2020: 831.) It is a paradoxical home: additionally to being void of a legal right to stay, it is typically associated not with the family homes young people live in, but rather with their encounters in 'interstitial spaces' such as parking lots, unbuilt areas, and joyriding. These spaces are also often transient: formerly uncontrolled spaces have been recently brought under panoptic control of the state, and old apartment buildings and empty lots have been replaced by new high-rises. Claiming Abu Dhabi or Dubai as a home typically involves a degree of nostalgia in the wake of sweeping urban transformation during the past 20 years (Elsheshtawy 2019: 224–245; Assaf 2020).

I also encountered a few people who shared the desire to make the UAE their home although they could not afford it. Some male service workers appreciated the anonymity and freedom of lifestyles provided by Dubai, which they preferred to the heavy financial load and absence of emotional bonds that they associated with a conventional marriage arrangement in Egypt. Two Egyptian men I met had married Filipina women and no longer thought of Egypt as a home to return to. Each couple's marital home consisted of a 'partition', a very small room divided from a larger one in a shared accommodation. The simplicity of the arrangement makes it radical, opposed as it is to the dream of a large apartment or house full of furniture and decoration to show the status of a successful returning migrant. The potentially tragic twist of such alternative trajectories is that they are not allowed to be permanent: sooner or later, migrants or their children are forced to reckon with the transience behind 'the illusion of permanence' (Naffis-Sahely 2018) that moments of successful home-making in Gulf cities generate.

INCOMPLETE HOMES AND TRANSLOCAL LIVES IN MOROCCO AND EGYPT

In a review of Moroccan migration research, Mohamed Berriane and Mohammed Aderghal (2014) argue that while the migration of Moroccans to Europe is characterised by an initial ethos of return, few migrants do actually return. In Nador in the northern Rif region, the return rate averaged 22 per cent between 1954 and 1994. Most Moroccans who left for Europe in the twentieth century established permanent diasporas. Their children and grandchildren return, as it were, mostly for summer vacations. With as much as 71 per cent of Moroccan migrants' investments being spent on real estate in Morocco, the ideal of circularity lives on in housing practices but is transformed over generations.

In an ethnography of migrants and smugglers in Nador of the 1980s, David A. Macmurray (2001) describes a transformation of home decorations and amenities driven by the purchasing power and tastes of migrants. Housing conditions and consumer objects such as carpets, kitchens, and decorative images were key sites of a competition for status. Migrant men whose

wives and children remained in Nador often expressed heightened anxieties about a women's movement, and a few men enforced a lockdown upon their wives and daughters in their homes – a practice that is neither uniform nor dominant in Morocco, while the mobile male breadwinner ideal is. Alice Elliot (2020: 81) argues that family arrangements with absent husbands are prone to reproduce traditional patriarchal home arrangements where wives stay with the husband's extended family in their village of origin, in contrast to tendencies towards family nuclearisation and urbanisation that evolve when family reunification is available for migrants (Gardner 2011).

Elliot's (2020) ethnography describes a peculiar state of homing in a small town in central Morocco where a large part of men live in Europe while their wives wait to join them through family reunification, and in the meantime meet their husbands when they return for vacations (if they have legal residence status abroad). It can be a long wait, and sometimes the desired resettlement never happens. Elliot cites Fatima, who lived in a village with the family of her husband who lived in Italy: 'I have a husband and I don't. I have a house and I don't. I'm a wife and I'm not. I'm a woman and I'm not … My life isn't *'adiya* [simple/normal] like the life of other women' (Elliot 2020: 87).

'Sitting at home' (although in practice involving a lot of short-range movement and activities) thus becomes for women an abnormal experience of being stuck and only half at home that confuses the ideal comfort of the native home. For men who return to their families on holiday, 'sitting at home' is even more stigmatising, expected as they are to be busy during their vacation with home-building. In a way that is characteristic for privately built homes across North Africa and the Levant, migrant homes are ever unfinished:

> The fact that the building process never really comes to a halt confirms that the process of construction and related multiple doings is as essential as the final built house itself. Houses are continually expanded, embellished, and changed every time migrants return … Indeed, I would say that this process can't stop: if this movement ever does cease, the ability of a migrant man to 'move' rapidly begins to be questioned. (Elliot 2020: 133)

Many wives and children eventually do join their husbands abroad, and a few Moroccan women migrate on their own, resulting in a large diaspora. Similar to diasporic migrant families worldwide, children and grandchildren of Moroccan migrants in Europe return to their regions of origin on summer vacations, typically to stay in a family home built by the father. Lauren Wagner's (2008, 2014) ethnography of European-Moroccan 'diasporic visitors' tells of a gradual shift of those second homes: originally built to comprise several floors (one for the parents to return for retirement, and one each for sons for their future marriage), they function as holiday homes instead. As such, they contribute to the peculiar rhythm of cities like Al Hoceima on the Mediterranean coast that attract diasporic visitors on their vacations: bustling and full during the summer months and calm for the rest of the year, with some quarters practically empty while owners of homes are back in France, Belgium, or the Netherlands (Swarowsky 2014). However, new generations of Moroccans abroad increasingly combine their family visits with more touristic modes of touring and exploring Morocco. They do not plan for ultimate return like their parents did, yet remain committed to the maintenance of homeland-bound circularity. Some of them buy purpose-built vacation homes preferably near the sea that are designed for a nuclear rather than extended family occupancy, and with caretaker arrangements that are commodified rather than delegated to relatives (Wagner 2014; see also Wagner, Chapter 27, this volume).

These dynamics complicate the idealised simplicity of home as the place of unproblematic safety, moral, and material comfort. Similar processes are under way in Egypt, however, these are differently structured due to the dominant Gulf trajectory (meaning that more people actually return). Research on migration and home-making in Egypt has paid systematic attention to the link between housing, construction, and home design, which I highlight in the following.

A triangular pattern of migratory movement observed by Berriane and Aderghal (2014) in Morocco is also valid for Egypt: economically successful migrants tend to invest in return or holiday homes in cities and shift towards higher-status neighbourhoods within a city. This is further reinforced by the centralism of Cairo, and by the inclusion of practically all classes in the migratory movement to the Gulf and back, whereby not only industrial and service workers but also managers, engineers, teachers, and judges seek the means of social mobility and reproduction of status. A search to emulate Gulf cities is evident in new satellite cities of Cairo; it is reinforced by the ownership and involvement of investors from the Gulf; and it also informs the tastes and choices of high-earning urban families (among them, architects designing new upscale housing) who often made a part of their money working in the Gulf, and who seek to reproduce the motorised lifestyle of malls, villas, and affluent communities in new suburbs of Cairo (Elsheshtawy 2010: 249–275; Adham 2017; Sinno 2017). What New Cairo most explicitly shares with Gulf cities is a forward-looking yet conservative dreaminess where the social exclusivity of dwellings, vast spaces and lush greenery, and a gendered sense of protection from the masses feature among the key features of a good, unproblematic life at home (Adham 2005: 31).

The impact of migrant money and lifestyles is equally evident in non-elite homes. Farha Ghannam (2002: 151–159) tells the story of a new marital home in a low-income neighbourhood of Cairo in the 1990s. The future home of Magdy, a migrant in Kuwait, and his bride Salma was a privatised public housing unit, which was expanded in cooperation with neighbours (and in infringement of regulations). In Magdy's absence his sister and also (which was less conventional) his bride took charge of the practicalities, constantly informing and negotiating with him through mailed cassette tapes. Thanks to his financial means, the home included amenities (such as a bathtub, two bathrooms, and expensive wooden furniture) that distinguished a migrant household in a low-income milieu. Importantly, the expansion of the floor space allowed for the addition of a new room that was becoming more common in low-income milieus at the time: the *salon*.

The salon in Egyptian homes is a separate living room dedicated to receiving guests of importance, sometimes with a separate entrance of its own. It is structured by a spatial distinction between male/exposed and female/protected spaces of a home. Unlike the *majlis* in the Arabian Peninsula, the salon is not part of traditional architecture in Egypt. Until recently, only upper-class homes had one. Older rural and low-income urban homes I have visited or lived in usually have only a *sala*, a multi-purpose living room that is used for eating and homework, where the family gathers, and where guests are received. When men who are not kin or close friends come for a visit, women retreat to the bedroom if there is one. With increasing incomes and a correspondingly increasing size of homes, Egyptian home-builders more often include a salon. In her currently ongoing ethnographic research, the anthropologist Lina El-Shamy (2020) describes the salon as the public face of a home, typically furnished with heavy gilded furniture (an Egyptian adaptation of eighteenth-century French Louis design). Representative and unpractical, the gilded salon evokes a peculiar sentiment of estrangement at home, observes El-Shamy:

> People I talked to often revealed how their relationship to spaces within their own home are entangled with issues of belonging (*intima'*), ownership, and stability (*istiqrar*). They expressed sentiments towards their own homes that were not so different from feelings of displacement, estrangement, transgression, 'taboo', or even exile. For instance, many of my interlocutors expressed feelings of alienation towards their own salon rooms, stating their dislike for how it is a closed room that is open only for strangers (*nas aghrab*) and yet occupies a significant amount of space that could be repurposed to something more useful (like a larger living-room space or a children's playroom).
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> While some explained their attachment to and appreciation of the salon and its beautiful furnishings, one middle-aged man went as far as telling me he has no feelings towards the salon whatsoever since this room is not his; 'it belongs to guests'. (El-Shamy 2020)

The most iconic embodiment of home-making grounded in rural–urban–international mobilities is the self-built house in the outskirts of a village or in an informal urban neighbourhood. Yahia Shawkat (2020) argues that while the Egyptian government views 'informal' self-built houses in cities and villages as a problem that should best be removed, for their builders and inhabitants they present affordable and accessible solutions to a complex set of needs that include not only shelter but also the social requirements for marriage, a safety net for future contingencies, and a speculative investment (Shawkat 2020: 32–35). However, the capacity of houses and apartments to be the obvious answer to so many problems also contributes to the paradox of as many as 12 million housing units standing empty in spite of a growing population and a housing crisis (Shawkat 2020: 164).

Egypt experienced a construction boom in rural areas and provincial cities from 2011 to 2017, enabled by a temporary absence of controls and a sense of uncertainty caused by the revolutionary uprising that made real estate seem a safer-than-ever investment.[7] Rural builders I have met speak of home-building as a striving and a dream, and for many it is the primary motivation to migrate. This impression is shared by fieldwork-based studies of rural homes and migration from the past three decades (Weyland 1993; Saad 2005; Abaza 2013). These show that the cash earned through international migration since its onset in the 1970s has emancipated some sons from fathers and some agricultural workers from rural landlords, while it has also contributed to an increase of local inequalities between migrants and non-migrants. Homes, either replacing older ones inside the village or built on agricultural land outside the old village core, have played a crucial role in this process, providing as they do better comfort and privacy but also an ongoing sense of connectedness.

CONCLUSION

In her research in homes built by Egyptian 'transmigrants' to Italy and back, Francesca Giangrande (Giangrande and De Bonis 2018) argues that with their money, architectural styles, and most importantly with their striving for distinctive privacy through isolated villas on the green outskirts of villages, the class of successful migrants contributes to 'rurbanisation', a transformation of rural lifestyles towards a partially urban shape. I have described the resulting rural–urban communities as 'suburbs of the Gulf' (Schielke 2020: 101) that provide homes for families that extend to urban centres, Gulf cities, and other sites abroad. Yet rather than simply levelling ways of living between villages and metropolises, this condition of migratory, diasporic, and suburban extendedness also has a tendency to reinforce the village home as the ideal of a morally centred life. This contributes to North African labour migrations' socially conservative thrust: with their focus on a dream of return to a morally whole-

some home, and with the corresponding division of male mobility and female domesticity they seek to reproduce gendered hierarchies. Those hierarchies are ideally located in a rural home and alley, and their reproduction is so successful in part because ways of living that don't fit into them can be externalised to metropolitan non-homes in Cairo, Dubai, or Milan.

The tension between idealised family homes in the *balad* and temporary accommodation in the *ghurba* is importantly also an artefact of visa regimes that maintain migrants in a precarious state of deportability. Wherever those regimes provide legitimate paths or loopholes to citizenship or permanent residence, we find many *mughtaribin*, temporary migrants, becoming permanent inhabitants of a new home. And yet their terms of settlement remain grounded in a moral imperative of return that continues to generate long-term diasporic attachments that last over generations.

Accommodation and home form a moral binary of opposites, and as is the way of moral binaries they conceal more complex attachments and imagined futures. As moral strivings do, also the striving to build a home through migration has a tendency to produce new forms of living and homing that are not contained by the original expectation of social reproduction. By way of conclusion, it is therefore important to draw attention to the complexity of homing trajectories, such as that of Nafisa, born and raised in a Nile Delta village as the daughter of a religious leader, who is one of the few female interlocutors in my current research.

In September 2019, Nafisa showed me around the house that was being built opposite her parental home in her native village. Some years earlier, she had married an Egyptian pharmacist in Saudi Arabia and joined him abroad. Upon arrival in Saudi Arabia she soon found work of her own in sales, and took responsibility for managing the family's finances and investments. They did not hope to return to Egypt, neither to stay long in Saudi Arabia. Instead, they dreamed of gaining an immigration visa to Canada or Germany (which is conceivable with her husband's qualifications). And yet she had built a large house of three floors. She said: 'I built' in a manner I more often have heard from men talking about their houses; in fact, half of the money was her husband's, and while she was in Saudi Arabia, her mother oversaw the construction work and attended the court hearings due to missing building permits. I was impressed by the pride and confidence that the success of this building project evoked in her, and yet she and her husband had no intention of living there. The ground floor currently housed her mothers' chickens and ducks, and the top floor was for her toddler son, so that one day he would have an apartment for his marriage. This plan conforms with a patrilocal ideal where sons move into an apartment added to their parental home when they get married – and yet it was not clear at all whether her son would actually grow up and live in Egypt. This house was not built with the primary aim to live in it, but as an emotional act of proximity towards her mother, and as a safeguard in case their other plans failed and they were forced to return to Egypt. As such, the house was neither a conservative dream of return nor a contradiction to their dream of forward and upward mobility, but rather, an asset that allowed her to be flexible, connected, and safe at the same time. As such, it is part of a more complex homing trajectory of her family (and perhaps of a nation- and region-wide social class) where home as a moral and material project is divided between their current, transient, yet long-lasting dwelling in Saudi Arabia, a dreamed-of arrival in diasporic permanence in the West, and a potential return in affluence and comfort to the native village. Such versatility of multiple homing trajectories is the driving force that keeps transforming circular journeys to the *ghurba* into diasporas that maintain a connection with the *balad*.

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NOTES

1. The scope of this chapter is regional, not ethnic. I also draw upon research on Amazigh speakers in Morocco and Iranian and South Asian migrants in the Gulf.
2. Among Moroccan migrants to the UAE, women even constitute the majority with 56 per cent (in 2018), largely due to the gender and class niche they occupy in low-skilled jobs in sales, hospitality, entertainment, and sex work (Berriane 2018: 702).
3. Before the internet, mailed cassette and video tapes were a key mode of communication in addition to letters and phone calls. See, for example, Ghannam (2020: 155).
4. His and other interlocutors' names in this chapter are pseudonyms.
5. Oil reserves of the UAE are controlled by Abu Dhabi, which compelled Dubai to become a forerunner in diversification and secondary investment of oil wealth.
6. Due to its dependence on new inhabitants, tenants, and investors moving in, a population growth-based economy resembles a Ponzi scheme, a form of pyramid fraud in which dividends to investors who joined the scheme at an early stage are paid from the funds invested by those who join later, while publicly claiming to make profits through legitimate business activities. A Ponzi scheme works only as long as more investors keep joining.
7. The boom ended around 2017 when restrictive measures against informal building were enforced, peaking with the controversial Construction Violations Reconciliation Law 17/2019. See Shawkat (2020: 55).

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