

Chapter 4: Understanding the Housing Needs of Low-Skilled Bangladeshi Migrants in Oman

Case Study of a Labour Camp and Migrant-Dominant Neighbourhood

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INTRODUCTION

The Gulf region has a long history of migration. Over the years, the patterns of migration and the demographics of migrants within cities in the Gulf have changed. Before the 20th century, the Middle Eastern countries indulged in ‘intra-regional’ migration, with members of the Arab-speaking population that migrated in and out of the Middle East specialising in administration and education (Choucri 1986). During the 1930s, the intra-regional migration of both skilled and unskilled migrants was evident within Middle Eastern countries. The 1960s saw an upsurge in extra-regional migration, with labour moving from the Middle East to the West. However, with the oil boom of the 1970s, the focus of migration shifted back to the Middle East, namely to oil-rich Gulf countries. With rising oil prices, infrastructural development became economically possible and this increased the number of new jobs available for low-skilled workers, especially in the construction industry (Choucri 1986). As a theoretical concept, Maslow and Lewis’ (1987) needs triangle and migration theories were assessed in regards to the sustainable livelihood framework developed by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) (1997), wherein each livelihood asset (human, financial, social and physical) was studied in depth to identify the basic and psychological needs that were not being provided to migrant labourers in Oman. Further, laws, policies and processes were assessed following DFID framework so as to understand the social and spatial standpoints of these low-skilled migrants during their temporary stays in the country and to identify the

possible causes of their temporary situation. Finally, this study takes into account Lefebvre's (1991) concepts of both the social production and appropriation of space so as to understand how and why low-skilled migrants undertake the temporary development of their own housing and the use of open spaces in order to provide for their basic needs.

This article aims to answer two research questions: First, what is the state of Oman's existing available housing provision for its migrant workers? Second, what are the basic spatial and social needs of low-skilled Bangladeshi migrants living in Oman?

A qualitative research approach was taken, starting with 174 interviews of Bangladeshi professional, skilled and low-skilled migrants who were living in different locations across Oman during the time of the study. The aim of these interviews was to understand the general wellbeing or livelihood status of the interviewees and to understand the selection of their housing typology. An attempt was made to identify the rental prices of these dwellings, but unfortunately, we were not successful. This limitation was due to the lack of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee, which made it impossible to obtain honest answers on rental agreements from among the respondents; there was also a lack of valid quantitative data on property/housing rents. The results of these interviews provided answers to the first research question and these are documented in this chapter under the title Housing typology of Bangladeshi migrants living in Oman.

In order to answer the second research question, 20 low-skilled migrants were interviewed using a narrative approach to the case study. Ten interviewees, each either from a labour camp or a migrant-dominant inner-city neighbourhood, were selected and interviewed. The results were recorded in a graphical representation that provides a life-history mapping; development of livelihood assets (in the form of an assets pentagon which provides information on the livelihood status of individuals by looking at their human, financial, spatial, and social situations); and the development of a livelihood strategy matrix (Annisa 2018). Furthermore, spatial mapping was used to understand the usage of indoor and outdoor spaces in labour camps and migrant neighbourhoods, respectively. This is documented as a housing typology map that includes floor plans of low-skilled migrant dwellings.

BACKGROUND

The Sultanate of Oman, being part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), has followed the region's trend of inviting temporary workers from Southeast Asian countries to work in low-paying jobs in the country. Oman is situated on the southeast coast of the Arabian Peninsula. It has a total population of approximately 4.6 million, of which 44% are expatriates and 56% are Omani nationals (NCSI 2018). From 1973 to the present, there has been a steady increase in the number of Southeast Asian migrants coming to Oman. The work of Birks and Sinclair (1978) (as cited by Choucri (1986)) shows that, by 1975, Oman had become the second highest preferred destination of Southeast Asian migrants (notably Indians and Pakistanis), after Dubai. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), in 2013, fully 89% of all foreign workers in Oman were employed (the remaining 11% being family dependents) (NCSI, 2014), of which 87% originated from Southeast Asian countries, such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri-Lanka (GLMM 2014). Furthermore, it was noted that, in 2014, Southeast Asians predominated blue collar jobs, with 74% having attained below a secondary level of education (GLMM 2014). These statistics also help us understand that the highest population of migrants in Oman are single, low-skilled Southeast Asian individuals. Until 2016, Indian workers took up the first rank, being the highest number of migrants in the country, with 39.4% of the total migrant population in that country (NCSI 2018). However, by 2018, the percentage of registered Bangladeshis in Oman had fallen to 34%, still surpassing the 33.6% of Indian migrant workers (NCSI 2018); this and the fact the Bangla language and connections within the Bangladeshi community in the city of Muscat are seen as a strength compelled the researcher to prioritise an investigation into the dominant Bangladeshi community for the selection of the case studies presented in this chapter.

THEORIES OF TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

Every migrant labourer entering Oman requires an employment visa. These are only valid for a limited period of time wherein every visa type ties these migrants to a certain employment status (ROP 2018). Furthermore, under the Gulf's unique employment system (Kafala system), every employee is bound by law to their employer, who takes financial and legal responsibility for them (Longva 1999). Thus, the employee is bound to their employer and is not legally permitted to work for any other employer/sponsor (Oman Labour Code, Article

18Bis). This effectively limits the options of low-skilled migrant workers in terms of both work and housing. In regards to the location of work, some migrants are housed in labour camps in proximity to work place. Residents of labour camps face this challenge as they are provided temporary housing in labour camps and are thus segregated from city centres and do not have the option of selecting the location of their stay.

Migrant labourers are recruited to the Gulf in a complex process that involves a number of stakeholders in both the home and host countries and which can be explained by institutional theory (Massey *et al.* 1993). Further, migratory networks theory explains these migrants' dependency on the social networks that provide them with personal connections to former migrants in the host country (Massey *et al.* 1987), where these networks prove to be "valuable adaptive resources" in an alien environment (Massey *et al.* 1987, p. 147). With the help of these networks, illegal channels of migration have given rise to a type of visa that is locally known as a "free visa", where the migrants are bound to an employer on paper but, in reality, have no connection to these employers (Rahman 2011). As these visas are not recognised by law, the employer is not bound by law to provide these labourers with acceptable housing or safe working conditions at legally established wages. Migrants that fit under this category are accepted by various employers who employ them either on contract or on hourly bases to perform short-term tasks. These poorly paid migrants seek out affordable housing close to city centres, where they rely on their social networks to find information on job opportunities. Migrant networks help migrants sustain themselves economically, making it viable for them to live and work in a host country, and they tend to accumulate in migrant-dominant neighbourhoods in order to benefit from the social capital that exists there.

In today's globalised world, the dual-market theory of Piore (1979) implies that low-skilled migrants become part of a secondary sector in the job market where they take up difficult, low paid, labour-intensive jobs that nationals refuse to do. In addition to the lack of integration schemes and nationalisation policies in the Gulf, this phenomenon not only creates a segmented employment sector but also waters down the concept of a parallel society, where residents of the host and home countries segregate themselves from each other by living in enclaves within the same city with each practising their own ethnicity, culture and traditions.

In his hierarchy of needs triangle, Maslow and Leiwis (1987) identify three kinds of needs: basic, psychological and self-fulfillment needs, which contribute to the efficient functioning of the human mind and body; all of these aspects need to be touched upon. Basic needs are divided into physiological needs, such

as food, water, and warmth; safety needs, including security and safety; and psychological needs, which are categorised into the need for belongingness and the need for love, and these are acquired through friends and intimate relationships; and esteem needs, which include prestige and feelings of accomplishment. It is evident that Oman's labour camps provide low-skilled migrants with basic needs; however, these camps fail to provide these people with opportunities to fulfill their psychological and self-fulfillment needs. Evidence shows that the latter two needs are seen to be fulfilled through the development of livelihood strategies in migrant-dominant neighbourhoods by the migrants themselves (An-nisa 2018).

With an increase in the institutionalization processes of migration and in the technological advances that have taken place during our century, it has become easier for migrants to maintain connections between their home and host countries. Following this trend in migration, the term 'transnationalism' was coined in a new discourse in 1990 (Schiller *et al.* 1992). Schiller and colleagues define transnational migration as 'the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (Schiller *et al.* 1995, p. 48). Under this paradigm, '[f]amilial, economic, social, organisational, religious and political' connections and networks run effectively across physical borders (Schiller *et al.* 1992: ix). Transnational migrants have more than one location they refer to as 'home'. Their necessities and constraints are no longer bound to one region and, instead, expand over home and host countries. They develop strategies of adaptation on both an individual and communal level (Schiller *et al.* 1995). Their usage of space is affected by and developed as a product of their transnational relationships. In addition to Maslow's definition of basic needs, this paper concludes with a number of added aspects that can be considered as 'basic needs' for low-skilled transitory migrants living in Oman.

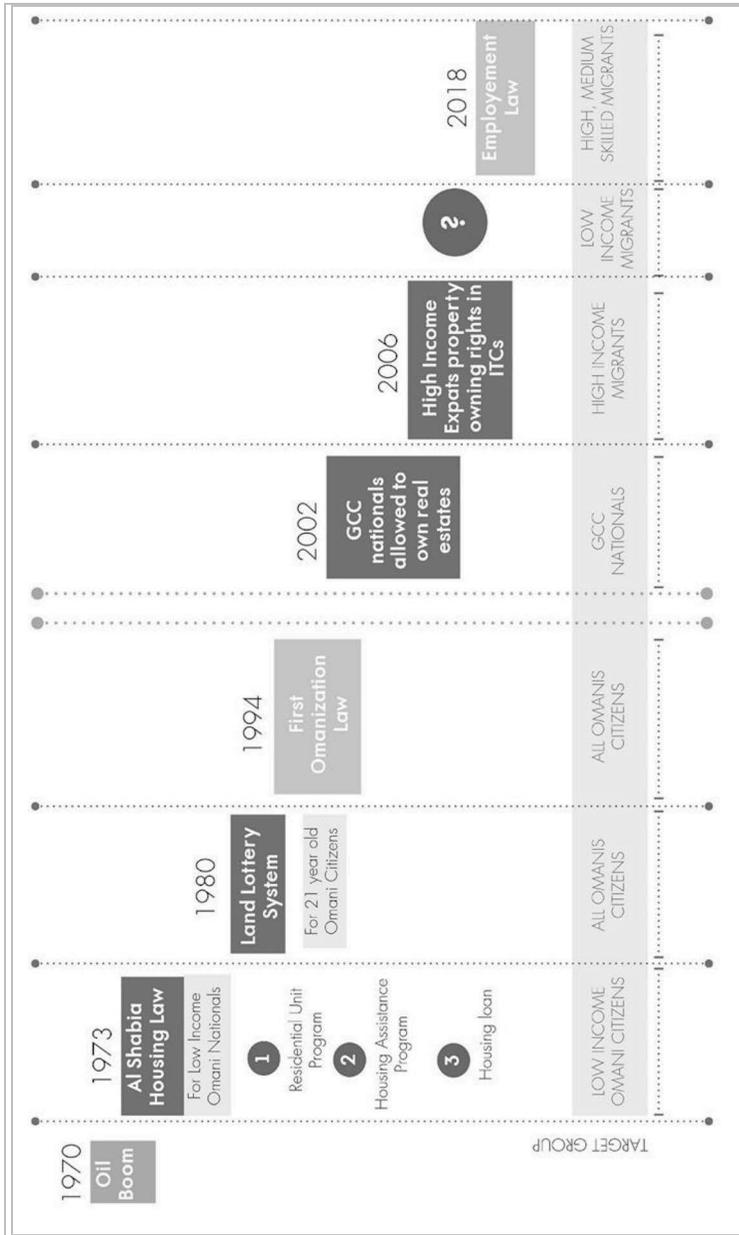
When considering the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), focussing on Goal 11: To make cities resilient, sustainable and inclusive, the urgency of providing the basic, psychological and esteem needs of migrants becomes of high importance. Furthermore, taking into consideration Goal 3: Good health and wellbeing, it is essential for the Gulf countries to consider the living conditions of their low-skilled labourers working under a temporary state. Given that the GCC's large portion of low-skilled migrant workers continues to prove beneficial to the region's economic and infrastructural development, catering to these people's needs in relation to the efficient functioning of their wellbeing becomes important.

HOUSING PROVISION FOR OMANIS, GCC NATIONALS AND HIGH TO MEDIUM-SKILLED MIGRANTS

With the 1970s oil boom and a push to move towards Oman Vision 2020, the Sultanate of Oman began a period of rapid development that focused on infrastructure, housing, health and education. In 1980, as part of this development, the government of Oman initiated a land lottery system for Omani nationals; its aim was to provide and regulate the country's housing stock.

According to this policy, every Omani male citizen, from the 1980s on, and every Omani female citizen, from 2003, on, was eligible to enter into a draw to receive a plot of land in Oman (MOH 2009). This system encouraged Omani families to move to peripheries where larger plots were available. Furthermore, the social housing policy that was developed in 1973 offered three systems to aid low-income Omanis, who were earning less than 300 – 400 Rials (USD700 to 1000), to obtain housing (Al Shabia Housing law 1973). Under this program, the government provides residential units (a built dwelling) to households; further, the Ministry of Housing's housing assistance program provides 20,000 OMR (USD 52,000) to rebuild, construct, or restore a dwelling; and the housing loan programme provides loans to low-income Omanis for the construction of their dwelling (MOH 2009). In 2002, the government of Oman decided to permit GCC nationals to own real estate. In 2006, it permitted high-income expatriates (high-skilled migrants only) to own property in three locations within the Sultanate, under a programme that allowed them to own high-end dwellings in integrated tourism complexes (ITCs) where recreational facilities were available. Once this investment is made, the expatriate is eligible to apply for citizenship (OBG n.d.). While the news media have reported on various discussions about permitting long-term migrants to own property outside the ITCs, since 2016 nothing has yet been confirmed. Therefore, migrants are not permitted to own property outside the ITCs in Oman. Further, as the prices of these properties are high, they are far out of reach of Oman's low-skilled migrant population.

Figure 1: Prominent laws and policies in Oman regarding housing



Source: Author, 2018.

The land lottery system has been heavily criticised by authors such as Al Gharibi (2014) and Nebel and von Richthofen (2016), who stated that this system has resulted in urban sprawl and has encouraged car-based mobility as the allocated lands are distant from economic centres. As such, the land lottery system and social housing policy have encouraged the movement of Omani nationals away from crowded older city centres and into the peripheries, causing an impact on inner-city neighbourhoods, such as Mattrah, Ruwi and Wadi Kabir. These neighbourhoods now consist of low-rent properties, largely rented to migrant families and individuals.

Housing provision for low-skilled migrants

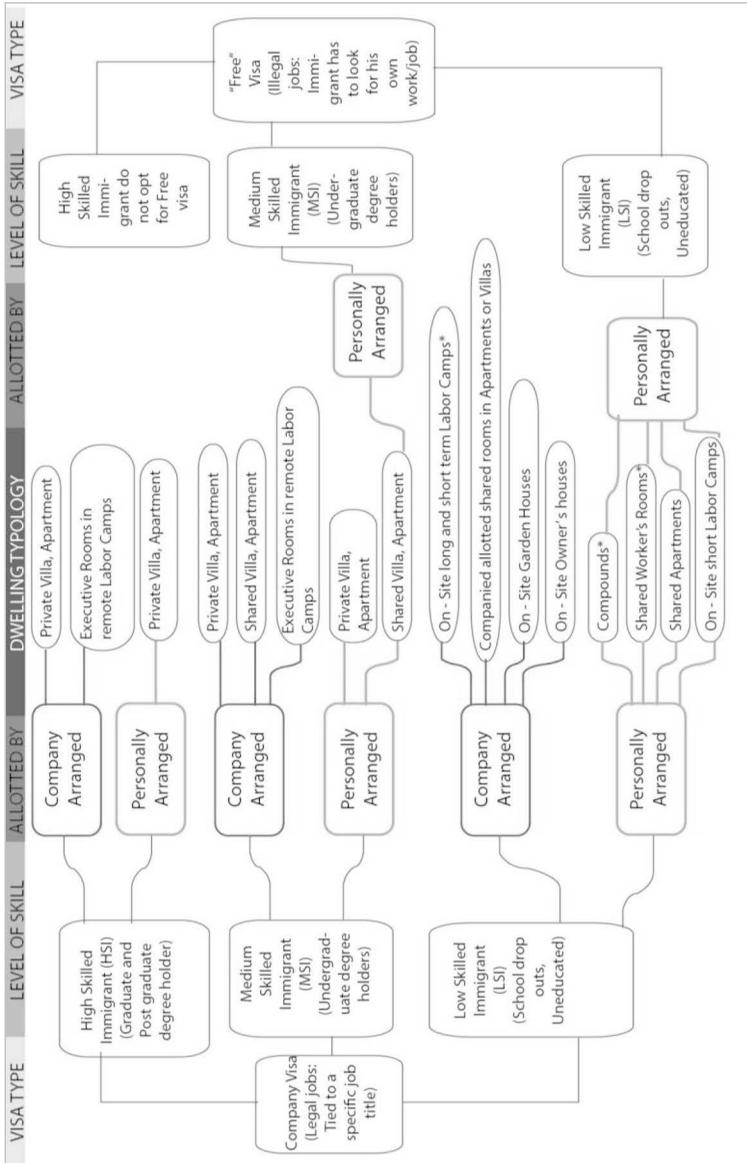
A large number of low-skilled migrants are housed in labour camps that are situated in close proximity to their work sites; others live in apartment buildings or villas that employers rent out as shared housing to their employees (Gardner 2010). Each type of dwelling may differ in form and appearance but what they have in common is segregation. Notably, the most common deficiency in these spaces is any mode of recreation, open spaces and possibilities for informal activities. Being stripped away of basic necessities and living in camps that are located far from city centres often causes boredom, leading to mental health problems (Bruslé 2012). Further, these low-skilled (unmarried) migrant workers are perceived as a social threat to locals in terms of inappropriate social behaviours and are, thus, tucked away where they are not visible in what is perceived as the formal city (Elshashtawy 2008). Qatar, for example, goes so far as to plan mini “bachelor cities” for their migrant population in order to move them “out of public view” (Gardner 2010). Dubai’s attempt at this is to create “luxury labour camps”, which are strictly planned in a grid with housing and shopping facilities but are placed outside the city. Furthermore, Oman is currently working on plans for “bachelor colonies” and has delegated three plots for the development of large-scale housing for single migrant workers. Muscat municipality has located plots in Amrat, Bawshar and Mabella, which are known for being the city’s industrial sites (Das 2017).

Housing typologies of migrants in Oman

However, these types of complexes are presently in the planning process and are not yet available for residents. But the question remains: how effective are these labour camps for the low-skilled migrants’ livelihoods and wellbeing? This part of the paper analyses one such labour camp and documents the adaptations and

modifications low-skilled migrants have created so as to provide for their own basic social and spatial needs.

Figure 2: Housing typology based on skill level and affordability.



Source: Author, 2018.

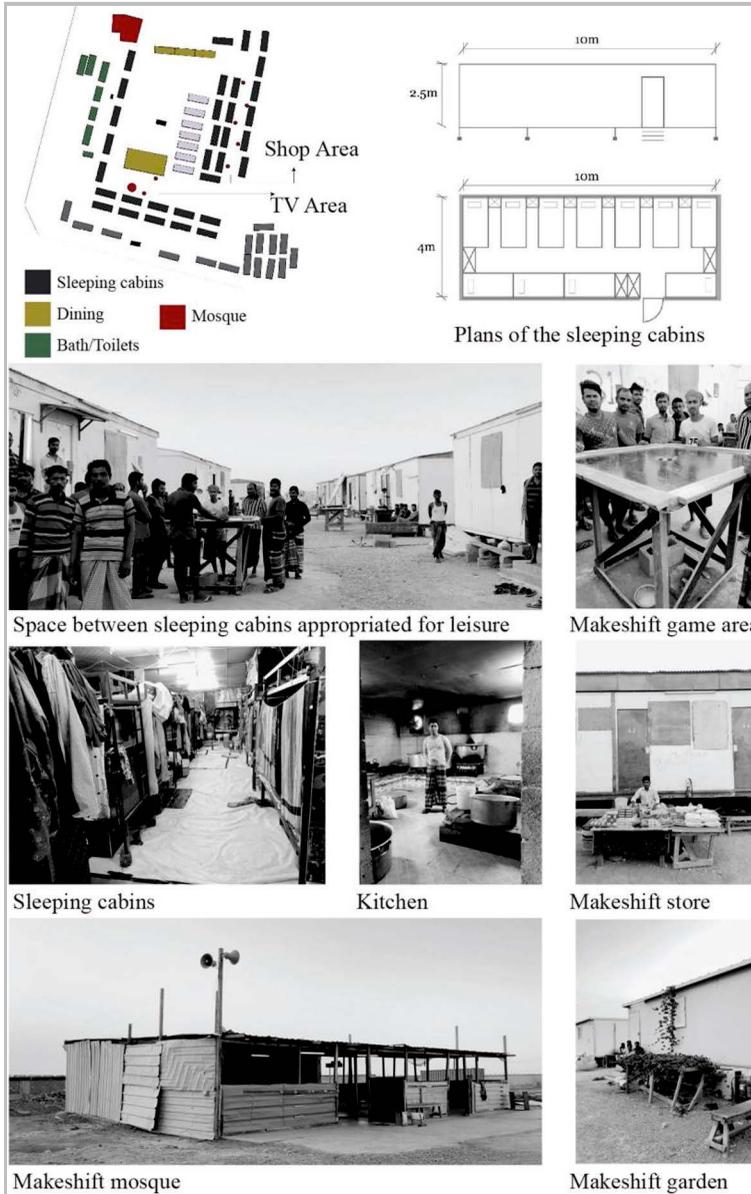
A strong phenomenon was noted regarding low-skilled migrants' housing selection: Their visa type seemed to be correlated to their housing selection. The concept of a 'free visa' has given rise to illegal forms of work. On paper, migrants with these types of visas had employers and therefore automatically had job contacts but, in reality, their visa type placed them far from their skill level and, therefore, they lived on short-term free-lance jobs they found for themselves. These free visas were commonly used by low-skilled migrants who were in desperate need of migrating to Oman as a livelihood strategy. Therefore, low-skilled migrants who were on a free visa opted to live in migrant-dominant neighbourhoods where their social capital was high and it was easier to find short-term contracts for free-lance jobs. In these migrant neighbourhoods, they devised intensive shared housing typologies due to the lack of affordable housing.

Lessons learned from the case study of the labour camps

A case-study camp was selected whose name is withheld for privacy issues. Gaining access to labour camps is difficult; thus, for the purposes of the case study, the camp selection was done on the basis of successful access through the author's social networks. The camp in question has characteristics of a typical labour camp in the Gulf region but, in addition, has adaptive spatial and social features that the inhabitants had developed in order to fulfill particular dire needs.

The selected labour camp is situated on the periphery of the capital city, between Muscat and Barka, and it houses about 600 inhabitants. The closest town is 10 km away and the closest largest municipal area, Barka, is about 15 km away. The nearest mosque, petrol station and grocery store can be reached by car within approximately 30 to 40 minutes. The labour camp is situated inside a construction area and is closed off by a boundary wall and only accessible via its main gates. A typical labour camp consists of worker's cabins, executive cabins for management, a kitchen, a dining area, and toilets and a washing area; thus, catering to some aspects of Maslow and Lewis' (1987) basic physiological needs but failing to cater to psychological and esteem needs. With a combination of an empathetic camp manager and empowered inhabitants, the case-study labour camp has successfully developed adaptive features that cater to the needs of its resident migrant workers (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Case study labour camp.



Source: Author, 2018.

Portable cabins of 40 square metres each were built with lightweight concrete walls, and cardboard and tin-plate roofs, mounted on concrete blocks that raise them half a metre off the ground. The two-by-one metre bunk beds and closed windows permits these cabins to accommodate the maximum number of inhabitants possible in such a small space (Figure 3). Small cupboards and spaces under the beds are used as storage for personal belongings and the structure of the beds means they can also be used for drying clothes. Thus, each cabin not only lacks optimum natural ventilation and daylight but also personal space. This increases the need for being outdoors. Mapping of the inhabitants' daily routines showed that they had nothing to do after work. A lack of gathering points, TV areas, and recreational activities was mentioned by 89% of the inhabitants. From the literature review and the interviews, it is evident that internet and news channels on TV are the main tool for low-skilled migrants in the Gulf to keep their transnational connections alive. Therefore, the inhabitants were not only segregated from their host country but were also separated from their home country. The camp had no on-site grocery stores, leaving the inhabitants dependent on car mobility to purchase food and other daily necessities.

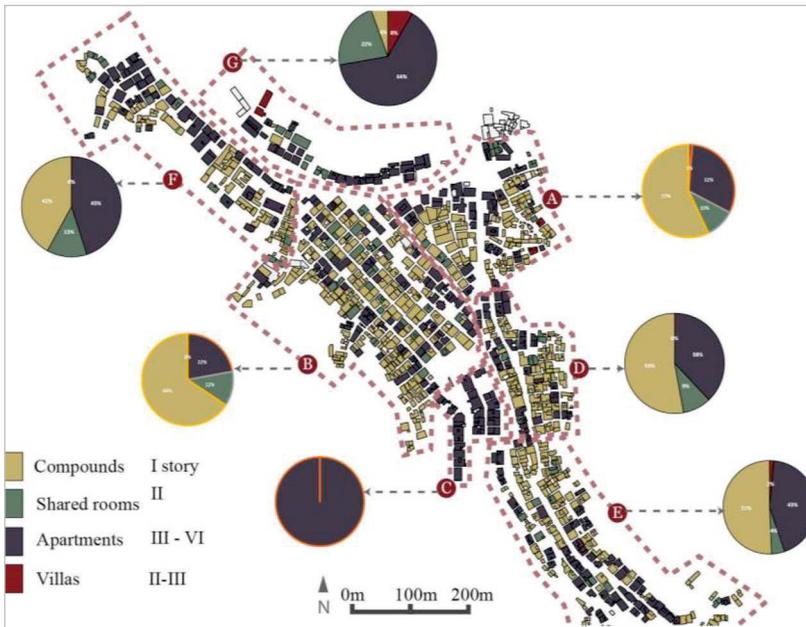
Furthermore, 83% of the inhabitants of this labour camp are Muslims with a need to pray five times a day, but no mosque or praying area was provided. These conditions led the inhabitants of this particular camp to get together to cater to their own needs. They built a makeshift mosque within the camp for their use (fig 3, bottom left). They self-funded a TV for themselves as a free-time activity and to stay connected to the on-goings in Bangladesh. They developed informal vendors within the camp, where simple groceries and phone cards were sold during the evenings (Figure 3, middle left). They built makeshift game boards to gather around in their free time (Figure 3, top right). The informal vendors, makeshift game areas, and TV area are all located around one location which is close to the designated kitchen and dining area. 'Almost no one eats inside the dining area, they line up to get their food and walk outside to crowd around the TV or game area' (Interview: Manager). The need to be outside in the fresh air surfaced in many interviews. Vegetables and meat are part of a daily diet for Bangladeshis. In order to cater to this need, some inhabitants brought special seeds from Bangladesh and grow them inside the camp. Breeding chickens is also noted. For some of the camp dwellers, this and growing vegetables are also considered free-time activities as they were accustomed to doing these back "home" (Figure 3, bottom left). 'I am from a farmer's family. We live in the village. It is impossible for me not to grow my own vegetables. I do it for fun. I also like running behind the chickens. They remind me of home.' (Inter-

view: Inhabitant). Thus, by catering to their own needs, these camp dwellers were able to increase their human, financial and social capital.

Lessons learned from migrant neighbourhood: Al-Hamriya

After careful analysis of different areas in the capital city Muscat, Al-Hamriya was chosen for this case study. This is because Bangladeshi migrants dominate its demography and it is also relatively easy to access.

Figure 4: Four different housing typologies found in Al-Hamriya show that the typology of the compound dominates the area.



Source: Author, 2018.

Al-Hamriya is located in Ruwi, which is one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Muscat. During the 1980s, Ruwi's development focused on commercial, industrial and residential construction. Three types of residential categories were planned for: a high-rent area in the north, medium-rent districts located behind major commercial strips, and low-rent districts in the south. Development in Al-Hamriya fell under the last category (Scholz 1990), thus having a history of being inhabited by a low-income population. This area is homogenous in terms

of the height of its buildings and the fact it mainly functions as a residential area with a strip of mixed-use buildings along one street. There were no planned recreational spaces owing to the fact that it was developed to house temporary residents. Today, Al-Hamriya is a preferred destination of absconders (Safar and Levelland 2015), free visa holders and runaways. This neighbourhood consists of a large number of financially vulnerable inhabitants who live and work there illegally. During our interviews, we found that these people selected Al-Hamriya because of the strong social networks within its Bangladeshi community; its proximity to the city centre; the availability of short-term contract jobs; and the ability to rent affordable rooms semi-legally (Annisa 2018).

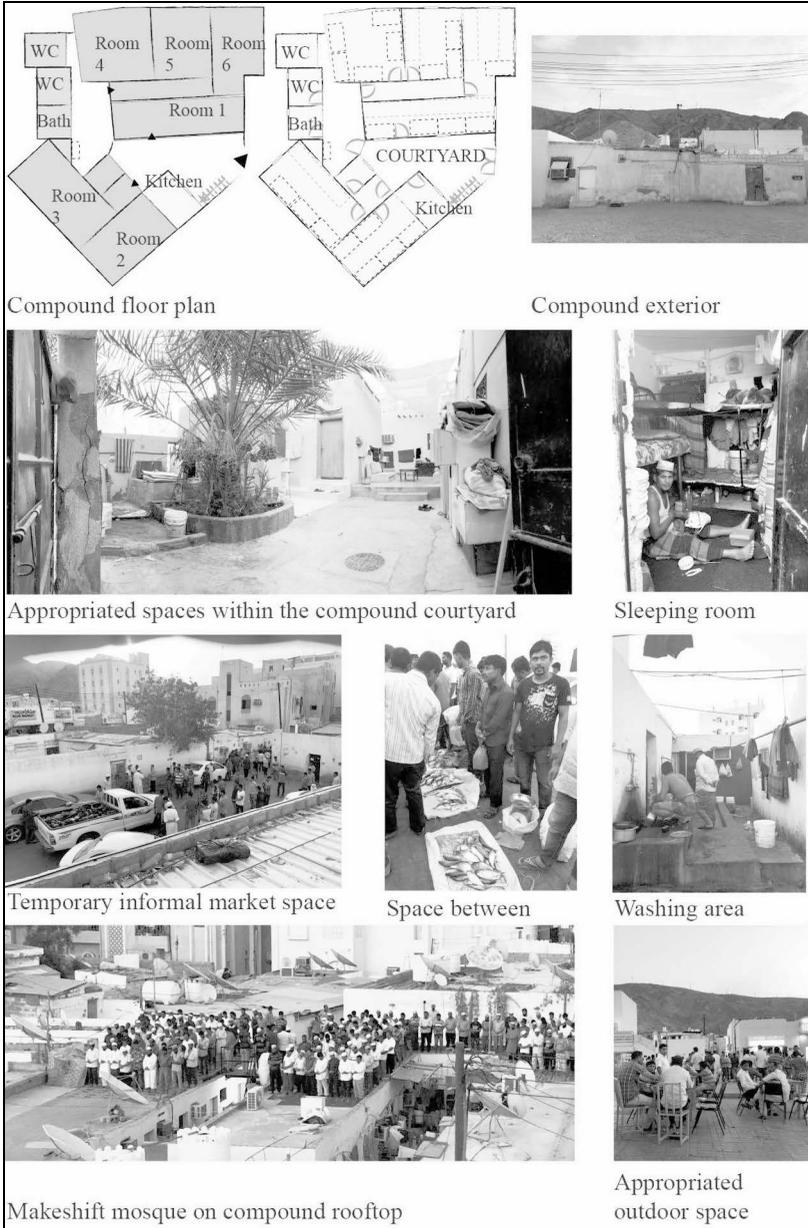
Land and housing in Al-Hamriya can only be owned by an Omani national. Migrants are not legally allowed to do so. Omanis rent a large number of residential buildings to migrants (commonly referred to as migrant owners) and these migrant owners further sub-rent units in these building to other migrants (Tenant B, C, D...) without checking the legal residence or work status of these sub-tenants. These migrant owners' aim to make an optimum profit by renting units out to a large number of tenants. At the same time, the migrant tenants' aim is to minimise their living costs by minimising their rental space. These intensive shared-housing units in Al-Hamriya are commonly referred to as 'compounds'. The internal spatial organisation of a compound is very similar to that of the portable cabins in the labour camps. However, unlike in a labour camp, the migrants themselves opt for this spatial organisation, owing to their livelihood strategy of 'minimising living costs and self-developing shared housing' (Annisa 2018, p. 98).

A compound is a typology of housing where single rooms or units of rooms are clustered around a courtyard (Figure 5). Spaces within these compounds are used to the maximum possible efficiency and to accommodate basic needs. Each room contains from 6 to 18 single beds, depending on the size (Figure 5). On average, a person gets about 2.3sqm of personal space in a compound. Each compound contains a kitchen, a bathroom, a washing area and toilets, which all the inhabitants share. Internal walls are added to ease the flow and division of space between individuals. Often, additional holes are cut into the walls in order to install air-conditioning. Extra plumbing is added to create washing areas or toilets, and staircases are added to gain access to the roof. Additional floors are also added, depending on the need. Due to the shortage of space inside these rooms, residents often put a couch or a chair in the courtyard or store other things there. Within the courtyards of these compounds, migrants were noted to plant vegetables and fruits that are specific to Bangladesh and to take care of them. According to one interviewee, 'In my free time, I take care of my vegeta-

bles, it reminds me of Bangladesh. Not only me, there are other friends of mine who does the same. It's fun. (Interviewee, Inhabitant of a compound in Al-Hamriya). So often the courtyard substitutes as a living space, whereas the rooftops, streets and thresholds are often used as refuges from these people's crowded rooms (Figure 5). Even during warm evenings in the peak of summer, residents in need of personal space will climb to the roof. Owing to these migrants' livelihood strategy of maximising their modes of income (Annisa 2018), a large part of their daily life depends on networking and job-searching. Being visible in public gathering points is essential. These are primarily spaces that are situated between mixed-use buildings that provide higher chances of socialisation and thus are the main areas migrants are attracted to for such activities. A larger cluster of shops, restaurants and coffee shops provides seating opportunities in outdoor spaces. During the interviews, the inhabitants noted that, over time, these places have developed into hotspots, which recruiters and job-hunters refer to as "manpower supply points" or temporary informal markets where individual vendors sell vegetables, fruits and fish. Occasionally, fruit trucks enter these areas, also contributing to the informal activities that take place there (Figure 5).

Conducting an economic activity without a valid permit is illegal in Muscat. Therefore, vendors do not use furniture or stalls but sell their products out of trucks or cars; thus, they have developed quick ways to display their goods and to clear out on short notice. Intense social and informal economic interactions were documented within these spaces, such as conversations between multiple people, temporarily playing on makeshift game boards that are popular in Bangladesh, selling phone cards, drinking tea and enjoying snacks. The lack of parks and recreational spaces in Al-Hamriya has also encouraged residents to take over the larger spaces between buildings and parking lots for recreational activities, such as cricket and football (Figure 5). Makeshift game boards are developed (Figure 5). Drinking tea and chatting with friends are the most common activities noted. Conclusively, these communal spots are noted as the busiest locations, within Al-Hamriya, that are temporarily appropriated by the inhabitants themselves in response to their need to increase their financial and social capital, to respond to their need for esteem and to attend to their psychological welfare.

Figure 5: The housing typology of the compound dominates the area in Al-Hamriya.



Source: Author, 2018.

CONCLUSION

The temporary appropriation of indoor and outdoor spaces in both case studies can be taken as an indication of city management failing to provide basic social and spatial needs to low-skilled migrant workers in a system where members of this population are considered temporary and hosted in Oman for only short periods of time. However, this temporary situation has been reoccurring, most notably, since the oil boom of the 1970s. Therefore, more permanent infrastructure is called for, such as housing, mobility options and recreational spaces. Further, the development of compounds is illegal and must be enforced by law. If no other affordable housing options are legally available, then low-skilled and low-paid migrants will automatically be left to provide for their own needs. Thus, the need to provide legal affordable housing options should be a high priority.

Migrants who wish to maximise their incomes (Annisa 2018) need to be close to city centres or at least have adequate access to mobility options to travel to city centres. Policies that focus on these factors, in relation to migrant workers, tap into psychological and esteem needs in addition to respecting the SDGs Goal 11 of developing inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities.

Both case studies show that migrants workers in Oman depend, live and function with the support of social capital, such as personal interactions, ties and trust. Communal gathering points, be they within labour camps or neighbourhoods, must be considered. The careful study of informal vendors in the labour camps and informal markets in neighbourhoods show the need for providing options for ethnic food and drink. Such activities should not be discouraged. It was also noted that transnational connections (economic or social) are established through access to television and telephones. Talking to their loved ones is an essential part of every interviewee's daily routine, and options for such activities are recommended regardless of whether these people live in a camp or a neighbourhood. Both of the case studies also show that recreational spaces are non-existent and temporary appropriation is strongly visible. Therefore, recreational spaces for playing sports or providing other options where migrants can spend time together, for growing vegetables and breeding chickens, for example, should be taken into consideration. The same goes for areas for praying and access to mosques. Religious rituals provide migrants with a strong connection to their roots, connections they value most when situated in foreign lands. Therefore, providing religious spaces is also recommended. A lack of indoor spaces has triggered the use of outdoor space, even during times of the day when it is extremely hot and humid. However, being present in outdoor spaces and increas-

ing their social capital by interacting with others develops into a norm for this group of migrants; thus, outdoor sitting/gathering options are encouraged.

It is important to recognise that, while discussing the housing needs of a low-skilled migrant, the word 'house' for them does not necessarily mean a private space with four walls and a key to the front door but a place they willingly share and that is open to others. In a foreign land, these individuals are alone. And as they come from a family-oriented society, these individuals find family in the others around them and therefore prioritise social interaction. Thus, in addition to providing basic needs for sleeping, personal washing and cooking, the development of housing that includes spaces that encourage social interaction is highly necessary. The rooms can be small: the kitchen and bathrooms can be shared, but large living rooms, areas with TV or WiFi, areas for praying, courtyards and areas for planting are highly recommended. It is important to understand that housing should also incorporate the social and spatial needs of this group. Not everything can be planned. This group should take charge of their informal needs, themselves. Small informal vendors that undertake small economic activities seem to be highly successful in attracting a crowd. People gather near these vendors in search of something familiar, be it a product from Bangladesh or a chance to speak in Bangla. It is recommended that such spaces not be termed illegal; rather, they should be encouraged as they provide low-skilled migrants with opportunities to increase their financial and, more importantly, their social capital.

Finally, with the global agenda of working towards safe, resilient and inclusive cities, the status of low-skilled migrants within Gulf cities needs to be addressed (see also Mukaddim et al. in Chapter 7 for a discussion on addressing the status of migrants). While the countries of the Gulf region are assessing their sustainable development goals, policy-makers should not forget to include the high percentage of the low-skilled migrant population that lives and works there, paying special attention to Goal 3: Good health and wellbeing and Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities.

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