Manja Stephan
Muslim Mobilities

Anthropology of Islam

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Manja Stephan

Muslim Mobilities

Geographies of Piety and Belonging
in Tajik Dubai Business

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In memory of
my grandparents,
as well as Irene, and Christine

We humans are incapable of accepting reality as it is,
and so create places to transform reality according to the ideas and images
of what we think reality ought to be.

(Robert Sack, The Real and The Good, 2003, 4)

For my purposes, religion will mean orientation –
orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one's place in the world.

(Charles Long, Significations, 1999, 7)

Preface and Acknowledgements

This book is the result of my long-term involvement with the interrelationship between religion, mobility, and space. Developing a cross-cutting research-field, the book synthesizes my research interest in the anthropology of Islam and Muslim piety in Central Asia with that in mobility and migration studies as well as in Gulf Studies. Moreover, the book's conceptual framework summarizes my preliminary work in New Area Studies theory and methodology. I have been particularly driven by the question of how transregional approaches can be put to work in, and through, both mobile ethnography and the ethnography of mobility. Connecting these different research areas opened up new intellectual horizons for me and helped me to break new epistemological ground. Religious economy for example became a suitable conceptual approach that led away from the one-sided academic focus on Islam and Muslim identity in Tajikistan as merely a political factor. It helped me to understand Islamic reform as a transregional configuration shaped by the interplay of mobility, global economy, neoliberal piety, middle-class sensibilities, and national migration regimes. After all, proposing the not-so conventional reading of the term 'Dubaization' as a multidirectional process of transcultural and transregional entanglement enabled me to write a thick description of mobile Muslim lifeworlds, and, in due course, to situate marginalized and supposedly peripheral actors at the center of economic and cultural globalization processes. It was also the religious economy concept that made me think of a possible positive future for Islam and Muslims from, and in, Tajikistan. My research coincided with the height of ISIS's media-staged atrocities on the one hand, and the movement's recruitment successes among Muslims from Central Asia on the other. While ISIS was a very present topic in many of the conversations I had, the people from Tajikistan whom I met during my multi-sited research did not relate to Islam as a political ideology. For them, Islam was a hopeful and self-empowering resource to fashion their economic activities in a morally and religiously meaningful way. Perhaps I have made the dreams and desires of my research partners too much my own. Be that as it may, by framing 'Dubai Islam' as a hopeful moral and social project, I see my book as a critical response to dominant academic narratives that tend to paint rather dystopian images of Islam in Central Asia against the backdrop of political discourses of securitization and Islamophobic tendencies.

Contrary to what the term suggests, monographs are never the product of a single person. This translocal ethnography was also a collaborative enterprise. In the long process from the idea for this book, through its realization to the completion of the manuscript, I have received strong support and inspiration from many peo-

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ple and institutional settings, intellectually, mentally, as well financially in form of fellowships and grants.

Some of the best ideas in this book have grown out of many years of intensive and trusting collaboration with my colleague, companion, and friend Philipp Schröder. Thanks to the generous funding of our research project "Translocal Goods – Education, Work, and Commodities Between Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, China, and the Arab Emirates" by Volkswagen Foundation from 2013–2017 [Az. 86870], we were able to make our shared enthusiasm for translocality, our countless discussions on migration, work, ethnicity, and religion, as well as our shared travel experiences conceptually and empirically productive (Stephan-Emmrich and Schröder 2018; Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich 2016).

My fieldwork in the Arab Emirates would have been impossible without the excellent research assistance of Abdullah Mirzoev. A doctoral fellow in our "Translocal Goods" research project, Abdullah opened the doors and hearts of my research partners in Dubai and Tajikistan and helped me to gain deep insights into the lifeworlds of Tajiks working in Dubai's fur business (Mirzoev and Stephan 2018; Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016).

A fellowship at the IGK International Research Center "Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History (re:work)" at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin enabled me to immerse myself in the conceptual nexus of work, piety, and mobility from March to July 2016. I am grateful to all re:work fellows for many inspiring discussions and for their critical feedback on chapter drafts, especially to Christian Strümpell, Cláudio Pinheiro, Milena Kremakova, and Nitin Varma, as well as to Andreas Eckert and Felicitas Hentschke for making this fellowship possible. I would also like to thank Achim Rohde and Claudia Derichs for inviting me to be a fellow at the research network "Re-Configurations. History, Remembrance and Transformation Processes in the Middle East and North Africa" based at the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS) at Philipps Universität Marburg. Between September 2016 until January 2017, the research network offered me a horizon-broadening academic setting, in which I had a stimulating exchange with other fellows, among them Ayşe Çavdar, on transregional approaches in Central Asian, MENA, and Gulf studies.

Without the many international workshops, conference panels, and public lectures I have had in the last 10 years, my book project would not have been able to benefit from the insightful feedback I received from my colleagues in anthropology, Central Asian and Eurasian Studies. I am grateful to Marlene Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse for their multiple invitations to the Central Asia Program (CAP) at George Washington University during the period 2016–2018, and to Aurélie Biard and Aisalkyn Botoeva for the insightful conceptual discussions on 'bourgeois Islam' during this time. Many thanks also to Marjo Buitelaar, who enabled me to discuss

parts of my book manuscript with her colleagues and PhD students from the Faculty of Religion, Culture and Society at the University of Groningen during the NISIS Autumn School "Travelling Muslims" in October 2018. In October 2019, shortly before the COVID pandemic began, I had the opportunity to discuss my thoughts and writings on Muslim migrant place-making with Dmitriy Oparin and his anthropology colleagues at the Garage, the Moscow Museum of Contemporary Art.

Many theoretical insights of this book were shaped in the course of my long-standing collaboration and exchange on concepts such as translocality, Muslim worlds, and on transregional Gulf studies with colleagues at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin (Leibniz-ZMO), in particular with Katrin Bromber, Ulrike Freitag, Stefan Kirmse, and Steffen Wippel (Stephan-Emmrich 2021). I am especially grateful to Samuli Schielke and Abdoulaye Sounaye for the many stimulating discussions on the anthropology of Islamic reform, Muslim piety, and everyday religion.

I also owe great thanks for the support I have received from my long-time colleagues and academic peers Jeanine Dağyeli and Jesko Schmoller, who shared insightful and instensive discussions with me and who critically commented on draft chapters. My special thanks go to Vincent Houben. He awakened my enthusiasm for New Area Studies and in our years of collaboration as colleagues at the Institute for Asian and African Studies (IAAW) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin has become an intellectual mentor who has inspired and encouraged me in my engagement with transregionality as an epistemological project. I would also like to mention with gratitude Claudia Derichs, who accompanied the genesis of the book, first in Marburg, and later as a close colleague at the IAAW in Berlin. Claudia not only gave me important intellectual impulses in the course of our numerous teaching and research collaborations in the field of transregional theory and methodology, she also stood by me as a supportive friend.

My thoughts and arguments for the book also matured during my many years of teaching at the Institute for Asian and African Studies, first as a junior professor of Islam in Asia and Africa, and since 2020 as a professor of Transregional Central Asian Studies with a focus on Islam and migration. I would like to thank all the students who joined my BA and MA courses for their feedback on my book prepublications. Their critical questions helped me to recognize blind spots, to see weak points in my argumentation, and to change perspectives. I am also grateful to my doctoral students for the inspirations and aha moments that I have had more as a side effect of reading chapter drafts and discussing their research projects, especially in joint colloquia, in particular: Anton Nikolotov, Rustam Samadov, Shahar Shoham, Muhammad Ashraf Thachara Padikkal, and Fiona Katherine Smith.

This diverse and productive academic setting could only emerge, flourish, and take effect thanks to my affiliation as a professor at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. I would like to thank my university for the institutional backing and my colleagues at the IAAW for their collegial support and the inspirations they gave me for my book. Many thanks also to the people who helped me finalize the manuscript: Anne Hodgson for her careful English-language editing, with which she gave my book its final linguistic polish, Elizabeth Stone for her English-language editing of earlier parts of the manuscript, and Tobias Stefan for his careful stylistic revision of the entire text, and last but not least, Katrin Mittmann and Torsten Wollina, for their encouraging and friendly support in preparing the book manuscript for publication with De Gruyter.

I could not have written this book without the willingness, openness, and hospitality of my research partners in Tajikistan and the United Arab Emirates. They deserve my deepest gratitude and humility for their time in supporting me in my fieldwork, the experiences and knowledge they shared with me, as well as for the generosity and warmth with which I was received and welcomed by their families. My deepest respect goes to their courage and faith to engage in the uncertain and precarious mobile lives described in this book, and for the trust they placed in me and my research despite their vulnerability due to their politically sensible status as 'non-conformist' Muslims. In writing this book, I have endeavored to do justice to their expectations, wishes, concerns, and fears. For reasons of research ethics and for the sake of privacy, I will refrain from mentioning the names of those people and their families who have become particularly dear to me over the years and will only use their pseudonyms here: Fazliddin, Sharif, Saidullah, Mehrigul, Fatima, Ahmad, and Ilhom – *rahmati kalon!*

In the end, it remains for me to confess that this book would not exist without the unconditional support and generosity I received from my parents and my two children during all the years of researching, traveling, and writing. In particular, I would like to thank Magda and Eddi for their understanding and patience in allowing me, their mother, to spend many weekends writing at my desk and many summer holidays reading, and my parents, Gudrun and Dietmar Stephan, for their indulgence, patience and their worries when I was away on fieldwork. I am grateful to Rico, the father of my children, for keeping my back free to write during the first half of my journey to this book. And thank you, Jan, for giving me the time I needed to finalize the manuscript, for supporting me mentally during the last stretch, and for sharing the joys and sorrows of writing a book. Last but not least, I am deeply indebted to Doreen, Anne, Angela and all my other friends for their patience, understanding and their emotional support during my long intellectual journey. As my sincere apologies go to all those whom I have wrongfully forgotten to mention, I dedicate this book to those close to me who are

no longer with me but who were in my thoughts while I was writing this book: my grandparents Frieda, Christa and Hellmuth, as well as my close colleagues Irene Hilgers and Christine Hunner-Kreisel.

Notes on Transliteration

Almost all ethnographic conversations took place in Tajik. In a few cases, interviews were conducted in English. In conversations about religion, my research partners often used Arabic terms, while Russian terms were common in conversations about business activities.

With the establishment of Tajik as a national language, a Cyrillic writing system with special characters was introduced, which is still in use today. In this book, the reproduction of Tajik terms in Latin script follows the Cyrillic transliteration system by Edward Allworth (Allworth 1971), with one exception: ъ is represented by (‘) instead of (’). For the transcription of spoken terms, I used the dictionary *Lughati Olmonī – Tojikī* (*Dictionary German – Tajik*) (Rzehak and Saifullojew 2010). To correspond to the liveliness of spoken language and dialects used by my research partners, *izofa* compounds are given as written together: *mamlakati islomī* as *mamlakati islomī,* and *zindagī-i khub* as *zindagii khub.* Similarly, semantic units such as *odob-u akhloq* are rendered as *odobu akhloq.* Only prepositions at the end of a word are hyphenated: *din-ba nazdik omadagī.*

The transliteration of Arabic terms follows the rules of IJMES (International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies). For Russian terms, the simplified rules of ALA-LC (American Library Association–Library of Congress) for Romanization are used.

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Introduction
Muslim Mobilities

A translocal ethnography of Tajik migrants' engagement with Muslim piety and belonging in Dubai, this book begins with the story of Karim, a young Muslim in his late twenties whom I met on a warm late summer evening in 2011 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan's capital city. Busy with final preparations for a trip to Dubai where he planned to work as a tour guide for Russian tourists, Karim proposed to meet in a fancy restaurant in the outer city, where families and youngsters came to consume the capital city's new modern lifestyle in form of a mix of Turkish-European-style food and global pop music. Finding ourselves in a noisy dining room equipped with several screens showing flickering pop music videos, we escaped to the dim terrace at the back of the restaurant, where, after ordering two soft drinks, our conversation ran its course. I wanted Karim to tell me about his Islamic studies at Cairo's al-Azhar University. But while listening to his story of how he came to embrace what he called in Tajik *isloh* (Arabic *ʾiṣlāḥ*)[1], Islamic reform, becoming a Muslim who pursued a pure Islamic lifestyle, I began to realize that his study trip formed part of a much broader moral geography that included other forms of travel and other places besides Cairo. Moreover, his Islamic studies at al-Azhar University grounded in an "ethics of leaving and dwelling" (Fadil, Moors, and Arnaut 2021) embedded in and shaped by transregional forms of Muslim mobility and connectivity linking Karim to people, places, and ideas across Tajikistan, wider Central and Eurasia, and the Middle East. In this moral geography, Dubai stands out as a Muslim place of meaning.

Karim's decision to study Islam in Cairo was driven by his desire to overcome his ignorance about his religion and to improve his knowledge about what during our conversation he repeatedly stressed as 'real', 'true', or 'pure Islam' (*islomi haqiqī, islomi toza*). Strikingly, for Karim 'real Islam' was something he did not think could be found in his home country. Unlike other Muslims in Tajikistan who became engaged in Islamic renewal in the 1990s and early 2000s, for him, 'true Islam' could only be found abroad (*dar khorija).* Raised in a family without any religious background or proficiency in Islamic knowledge, Karim's interest in religion had been awakened during his several stays in Dubai, where he worked as a seasonal tour guide for Russian tourists between 2006 and 2008. In Dubai, he be-

1 Tajik terms used by my research partners are shown in italics and in brackets. Relevant Islamic terms are given in Arabic the first time they are mentioned and labelled accordingly. Russian words used in Tajik are also labelled as such.

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came enthusiastic about the religious educational services offered by the emirate's many AWQAF[2] charity institutions. It was also in Dubai that a fellow countryman recommended Cairo's al-Azhar University to him, above all as an appropriate place to find the 'authentic' Islamic knowledge he was seeking, as a viable path to becoming an 'Islamic person' (*odami islomī*). In autumn 2008, Karim arrived in Cairo with the plan to study Islamic jurisprudence (Arabic *fiqh*). Some years before, he had completed a law degree at the National University in Dushanbe with the highest possible grade (*diplomai surkh*). With books about Islam and an Arabic dictionary in his pocket, he went to al-Azhar's international student services to enroll but was sent to one of the many Arabic learning centers in the city that offer language courses to foreign students. Karim started a private beginner's course on the Quran and prepared for the entrance exam to the *sharīʿah* department. His contacts with other Tajik Azharites and Tajiks living in Cairo's Nasr City helped Karim to quickly settle in. During his studies in Cairo, he was inspired by scriptural knowledge-oriented interpretations of Islam. Eventually, Karim became what he called *qur'onparast*[3], a committed follower of the Quran. Just half a year later, his parents pushed him into marriage with a Tajik girl from his neighborhood. After some negotiation, Karim convinced them to bring his bride to Cairo, where he married her in the presence of his mother. He started a family, managed to get a scholarship and accommodation for his young family from a pious endowment in Cairo (Arabic *waqf*), and continued his studies at al-Azhar, while his young wife attended private courses in Quranic recitation. In retrospect, Karim summed up over his soft drink, in Cairo he lived a "good Muslim life in a Muslim-friendly country" (*zindagii khub dar mamlakati islomī*). This period, however, ended abruptly in 2010, when Tajikistan's president Rahmon launched a media campaign to call back students from al-Azhar and other universities in the Middle East living abroad for their Islamic studies without official permission. In winter 2010, after local policemen visited his parents and urged them to bring their son home, the couple broke off their studies and returned to Dushanbe.

Switching back to an earlier stage in his spatial biography, Karim's route into Dubai's then-booming tourism business was smoothed for him in Moscow, again through the help of other Tajiks whom he had worked with for several years in

2 *Awqāf,* the plural of the Arabic term *waqf,* designates charitable endowments that operate under Islamic law. While Gulf charities cover a wide range of philanthropic activities run by a multitude of state- and non-state organisations and private actors, the majority of charitable endowments Tajik migrant visit in Dubai are assigned to *The General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments* (GAIAE), a legal authority close to the government. The emirate of Dubai alone actually runs 700 registered *awqāf*-centres.

3 Literally, the Tajik term *qur'onparast* refers to a person who 'worships the Quran'.

construction. His migration to Moscow, and later Dubai, was preceded by a long period of unemployment and frustrated quests to become a lawyer in the public sector. But he also felt stuck in Moscow. There was no personal advancement (*peshraftī*) for him there, only injustice, deceit, hatred, and violence. When we met, Karim had a temporary job at a Turkish construction company in Dushanbe but was otherwise very busy finding a way to leave home again. Like many other returnees from al-Azhar and other Islamic universities in the Middle East, Karim felt stuck at home and put effort into returning to Dubai, not only to earn money. He dreamt of continuing the good Muslim life he led in Cairo and could not realize at home.

Like Karim, many young, university-trained, and religiously aspiring Muslim men and women traveled to places in the Middle East in the late 1990s and early-2000s to gain proper knowledge about Islam, driven by the wish to remake their pious Muslim selves and to pursue the Islamic way of life guided by the ethical principles of purist Islam (Stephan-Emmrich 2017; Abramson 2010).[4] In the course of their travels, many of them, above all men, had temporary stops in Dubai, where they turned from students of Islam into street dealers, traders, freelancers or became middlemen in Dubai's multiple business worlds. Others found their way into an Islamic education institution in the Middle East through a work and business stay in Dubai. Still others were inspired to take an Islamic study trip to Cairo or elsewhere in the Middle East, or to move to Dubai after working as migrant workers in Russia. Tracing how these study and work trajectories became entangled in Dubai's fur and tourism business, and mapping these mobile trajectories onto larger geographies of Muslim mobility, piety, and belonging across Central Asia, Eurasia and the Middle East, this book was inspired by the question of why in the late 1990s and early 2000s so many young, well-educated, and reli-

4 Reliable figures are difficult to find because most Islamic students from Tajikistan traveled without official registration and by private means. Online analyses speak of around 1,400 Tajiks studying Islam abroad in 2010, while elsewhere there is talk of 4,000 Tajik Islamic students in Pakistan alone (https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-dushanbe-forcing-students-abroad-to-return-home, last check: December 4, 2023). David Abramson gives the following estimates for 2009: Egypt 500–1,000 Tajik students, Saudi Arabia 350–700, Iran 330+, and Pakistan 300+ (Abramson 2010, 47). In an online article from 2018, Eurasianet speaks of 3,400 students who returned to Tajikistan in 2010 as part of a state recall campaign (https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-former-students-of-islam-return-to-nothing, last check: December 4, 2023). State-controlled Imam Azam Abu Hanifa Islamic Institute in Dushanbe, founded in 2007, the only higher Islamic education institution operating today in the country, had a capacity for 1,500 students interested in Islamic studies in 2007 (Abramson 2010, 37). These very limited study opportunities explain, at least in part, why many Muslims from Tajikistan with religious aspirations studied abroad to acquire Islamic knowledge in the 2010s.

giously-aspirated Tajiks left their home country to pursue hopeful futures abroad, but eventually ended up working in Dubai.

When I began my research for this book in 2012, migration to Russia was already firmly established as a livelihood strategy for most individuals and families in Tajikistan. Dubai emerged as a new destination particularly aspired to and attainable by well-educated and religiously trained Tajiks like Karim. But what exactly drove them to Dubai? What were they looking for there, how did they get there, and what resources were available to them?

The absence of former Islamic students in Dushanbe's public in the time I did my fieldwork was as striking as the strong orientation towards *elsewhere* and the urge to leave that I sensed in many conversations with Muslims in Dushanbe who were engaged in Islamic renewal. Eventually, it was Karim's remark "If you want to meet people like me, you have to go to Dubai. Most of them are there. Hardly any of us are still here!", that led me to expand what I had originally planned as a classic one-place, local research into translocal fieldwork. Having moved between Dushanbe and Dubai between 2012 and 2015, I followed the mobile trajectories of about thirty pious Tajik Muslims like Karim. In Dubai, I got to know the places where Tajiks worked, lived, and longed to dwell in. I was able to dive into their working worlds, spending the little free time they had with them learning about their experiences, dreams, and aspirations as pious Muslims engaged in Islamic reform in Dubai. Even more, I followed my research partners in Dubai back home when they visited their families in Dushanbe or the surrounding villages during the summer holidays and learned about their struggles to continue their piety projects at home. While Dubai's business world was male-dominated, I had the opportunity to visit some of the Tajik families who had settled in the Arab Emirates. I was temporally immersed in their daily lives, dwelled in their neighborhoods, took part in women's religious gatherings, and helped the women prepare family celebrations. In so doing, I temporarily adapted to the rhythm of Tajik families' everyday life in the Arab Emirates, based on Islamic principles, and was able to get a sense of what 'the good Muslim life' means to them. Being as geographically mobile as my research partners, it was also through listening to their biographical accounts that I was able to travel with them virtually to meaningful places beyond Tajikistan and the Arab Emirates, i. e., places inhabited by my interlocutors in the past or with which they associated aspirations for a better future to come (see Stephan-Emmrich 2018a). Mapping the spatial biographies of pious Tajik Muslims onto larger geographies of Muslim mobility and connectivity, this translocal ethnography also follows the stories people told me in Dushanbe about Dubai and the related traveling spatial imaginaries, which depict the emirate as a place where people 'make good money' (*puli kalon mekunand*), but also where they become 'religious' (*dindor*), 'pious' (*taqvodor*), or 'Islamic' (*islomī*).

By the end of the 1990s, the Islamic renewal in Tajikistan was no longer a rather exclusive intellectual movement (Epkenhans 2017, 176; Dudoignon 2011; Khalid 2007a, 116–139; Mullojonov 2001); it had taken hold of much of the Muslim population. At the time of my fieldwork in the capital city of Dushanbe, these people's quest for what they considered 'proper' Islamic education, their pursuit of piety through the observance of religious practices, and their heightened engagement with Islamic lifestyles were strongly influenced by processes of economic and cultural globalization. Migration, consumption, neoliberal capitalism, and digital media permeated all areas of everyday life. Related processes such as the transnationalization of livelihoods, the pluralization of narratives about modernity and development, and the general culturalization of identity politics were important drivers for renegotiating Muslim identity and religiosity that situated Muslims from Tajikistan in spaces of Muslim mobility and connectivity that transcended the boundaries of ethnic, local, national, and regional definitions. Thus, engagement in reformist piety served not only spiritual needs. The search for a 'pure Islam' enabled people to form and articulate moral attitudes in response to economic inequality and social injustice and the related lack of progress and future perspectives in their home country. Even more, an obvious distrust in the public Islamic education sector together with the effects of rigid state secularism in people's daily lives, and an increasingly authoritarian political elite that sought to consolidate their power through the securitization of Islam, drove religiously-aspiring Muslims like Karim to search elsewhere for what they considered moral and good (see chapter one).

This book addresses the nexus between migration, religion, and Muslim subjectivity and explores Islamic renewal in Central Asia through a Muslim mobility lens. Mobility is a human experience, and it is a relation. Mobility relates people to the world they live in (Adey 2017). In that sense, mobility shares with religion that they are both everyday practices of world-making, providing "knowledge whereby people live their lives" (Schielke and Debevec 2012, 2–3, with reference to Michael Jackson (1996, 2) and helping people to locate themselves in the world and to cross through it (Tweed 2006). In line with that, the book tackles Dubai migration as an existential movement infused with multiple meanings, placing the analytical focus on the situated interplay of people's experiences with various migration regimes, spatial representations, and ideas about meaningful travels (Salazar 2018, 1, 4). Thus, 'Muslim mobility' highlights those moments in Tajik Muslims' mobile lives, when religion gained significance as an "immediate practice of making sense of one's life" (Schielke and Debevec 2012, 1). Moreover, conceptualizing Islamic reform spatially and situating Dubai migration in larger geographies of Muslim piety and belonging, the book shifts the gaze "from text to territory and from theology to lived religion" (Vásquez and Dewind 2014, 255). What follows is an exploration

of Islamic reform among pious Tajik Muslims in relation to the places in their mobile everyday lives, asking how these places formed their religious lives and shaped their Muslim selves. Tracing forms, processes, and effects of translocations through space and time, the book sheds light on how mobile Tajiks tried to navigate their dreams, aspirations, and ideals of a good Muslim life with complex everyday realities at home and abroad. These everyday realities were shaped by the multiple social locations these people dwelled in and crossed through as mobile Tajiks, Muslims, migrants, men, women, sons, husbands, students, street brokers, or middlemen.

Research on Dubai migration is dominated by economic and political gazes that analyze migrant subjectivities and processes of social positioning primarily in the context of exploitative labor regimes and their mechanisms of exclusion based on racism and discrimination (Kathiravelu 2016; Buckley 2013; Mahdavi 2011; Ali 2010). Ethnographies that draw attention to everyday migrant lives in Dubai and address more existential themes such as the dreams, emotions, and fantasies that migration thrives on and which shape migrant lifeworlds both in Dubai and at home, are only just beginning to emerge (Schielke 2020). The same applies to ethnographies that deal with how Gulf migration influences migrant religiosities and shapes revivalist movements (for Muslim migrants, see Ahmad 2017; Schielke 2020; Osella and Osella 2009; for Christian migrants, see Oomen 2016). This is where this book comes in. The lived experiences of my mobile interlocutors and the way they spoke about them to me directed me to investigate how scriptural Islam-oriented pious Tajik Muslims fashioned their migration to Dubai as a religiously motivated form of travel. Collecting stories about migration as a hopeful movement, the book explores Dubai migration as an integral part of reformist Islamic life projects.

One thematic focus explores how Tajik migrants' pious endeavors were given new drive by Dubai's vibrant Islamic economy, as compelling pious neoliberalism turned the moral endeavor of Islamic reform into an aspirational social project. With Dubai, the book brings a geographical location into focus that stands for many things, such as a spectacular global and cosmopolitan urban project, an economic paradise, a symbol of borderless neoliberal capitalism, an exclusionary and exploitative migration regime, or a sinful place pious Muslims should avoid going. However, there has been little scholarship on migrant imaginaries in the construction of Dubai as an ideal Muslim place associated with a pure Islamic way of life.

A second thematic focus emphasizes the knowledge created within my interlocutors' movement, turning the prevailing analytical gaze of methodological nationalism 'inside-out' (Houben 2017; Tagliacozzo, Siu, and Perdue 2015). Reading 'abroad' (*khorija*) as a place of Muslim longing for the moral and the good, the spatial biographies assembled in this book reverse existing political narratives that

construct 'abroad' as a site for the dangerous cultural and political 'Other' situated outside the borders of the Tajikistani nation-state. While I connect the Muslim mobility gaze developed in this book to a specific Tajik perspective, this perspective cannot speak for all Tajiks. In line with Enseng Ho's (2017) 'mobile societies' approach, I deploy mobility as a method to get out of the boxing paradigm inherent to methodological nationalism that favors essentialized and spatial fixed notions of identity. Although the book's focus is on ethnic Tajiks and does not include the perspectives of other Muslims from Tajikistan who worked in Dubai business, such as Uzbeks or Ismailis[5], I approach 'Tajik' as more than a fixed ethnic or national identity. Communities, locations, and identities are not isolated, they are processes and products of interconnected relations. Accordingly, this book is told from the perspective of people who form mobile societies that, being spatially dispersed, can only be partially recognized (Ho 2017, 907, 910, 922). Notions of being 'Tajik' or 'Muslim' can, therefore, only be thought of as situated and thus relational to those entangled processes of movement, placemaking, and subjectivity that have shaped the spatial biographies of the people I met who are presented in this book.

Eventually, exploring how the Arab Emirates, Tajikistan and places in the Middle East and Eurasia became connected through larger geographies of Muslim mobility, piety and belonging, the book brings the rather compartmentalized fields of Central Asian and Gulf Studies into a fruitful conversation.

Moved by Dubai

Thirty-three years after the end of the Soviet Union, migration has become a common livelihood strategy in Central Asia. In Tajikistan, this process has been reinforced by the civil war from 1992 to 1997 and its socioeconomic aftereffects. Economic hardship, poverty, lower educational standards, poor basic medical care, and a lack of future prospects reduced people's hope for a successful transition to capitalist democracy (McBrien 2017, 5) and drove many to leave the country (Shimizutani and Yamada 2022; O'Brien 2021; Ibañez-Tirado 2015). Today, migration – particularly to Russia – has become an important pillar for Tajikistan's gross na-

5 Turkic speaking Uzbeks constitute the largest ethnic minority in Persian-language-dominated Tajikistan. Uzbeks in Tajikistan are not a homogenous group but belong to different ethnic groups. Besides, they share with Tajik Muslims their belonging to Sunni-Hanafi branch of Islam (Elder 2016; Fumagalli 2007). The second large group of Muslims in Tajikistan is of Nizari Ismaili adherence. Belonging to the Shia branch of Islam, the majority of Ismaili Muslims in Tajikistan live in the mountainous and autonomous region of Badakhshan (GBAO) (Mastibekov 2014).

tional income[6], setting the parameters for what can be expected, dreamed of, pursued, and realized as 'a good life', and forcing people in a mode of being in the world that is less focused on the here and now than on a hoped-for or aspired-to future (Ibañez-Tirado 2018; Schielke 2015a). Russia plays an ambivalent role: Its visa-free regime makes it an easily accessible destination for labor migration, providing a sense of spatial familiarity due to the shared Soviet past and established mobility practices (and regimes) in the context of education, work, and business within former Soviet Union's territory (Kessler 2012; Kane 2012; Sahadeo 2012). On the other hand, the Soviet legacy and its associated forms of coloniality cement Tajikistan's economic (and military) dependency on Russia, which is reflected above all in the high rates of labor remittances (Ostrowski 2011) and provides ground for growing structural racism against Tajik, and other Central Asian, labor migrants in Russian society and on the labor market (Habeck and Schröder 2016, 7–8, 10–14; Sahadeo 2012; Roche 2018b; Urinboyev 2017, 124–125).

But with Tajikistan's participation in the globalized economy, other destinations for migration have appeared beyond the post-Soviet Eurasian space. In the early 1990s, and only for a short period of time, countries in the Middle East became hopeful places as they enabled people to imagine a better future in relation to a 'Muslim elsewhere'. While Turkey served as an attractive model for a Muslim modernity in its secular form, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India became interesting destinations in the context of cultural and academic exchange, but also in relation to work and study migration. This shifting orientation towards the Persianate Islamic world in the 1990s resonated with enthusiastic attempts by cultural and political elites to reconnect to and revitalize a shared Persian cultural and moral heritage across borders (Ahmadi 2019, 107, 108, 110). Articulations of a shared Persian identity strongly supported the state-led 'cultural reconstruction' (*bozsozii farhang*) of society after the end of the civil war that aimed to legitimize a secular statehood (*davlatdorī*), a national literary tradition (*adabī*), and a value system (*odobu akhloq*) without adding Islam as a basic ingredient (Epkenhans 2017, 191, 187). However, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and Iran's adherence to Shia-Islam hampered the development of longer-term binational collaborations in the cultural, educational, and economic sphere, while growing Turkish nationalism together with the spread of Turkish Islam via Turkish foreign policy and the educational activities of the Fetullah Gülen network (Balci 2018, 43–61) proved incompatible with the construction of a Tajik national culture, which in the late 1990s

6 According to World Bank data, in 2020 remittances from migrant workers accounted for more than 25 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. See: https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/86656.html.

was also characterized by strong isolation and political tensions between Tajikistan and its Turkic-speaking neighbors in Central Asia. The Arab countries of the Middle East, however, were ambivalent from the outset. The Hejaz as the cradle of Islam, with the 'spiritual magnetism' (Preston 1992) of its sacred sites, Mecca and Medina, made this part of the Arab peninsula a religious place of longing for Muslims in Tajikistan. Also, students from what was then the Islamic University in Dushanbe were sent to study abroad in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or Syria by the government to increase the level of Islamic education in the country. At the same time, the Arab world, but also Pakistan and the Sunni-dominated regions in Iran (Baluchistan) served the government as a political projection to incite fear of the influence of radical and extremist Islam and of political unrest in the context of the Arab Spring (see in detail chapter one).

It was in this period of disorientation that the emerging Gulf states made their impact. With their spectacular urbanization projects (Bromber et al. 2014) in tandem with a successful branding strategy that turned Dubai in particular into a hotspot of global and cosmopolitan modernity, marked by new Arab nationalism and a growing Islamic economy (Schuss 2023; Nasr 2010), the Gulf states offered a promising new horizon for Muslims in Tajikistan, and wider Central Asia, to reconceptualize modernity, development, and progress in their personal and societal contexts, in contrast to the failed promises of the Soviet and the Western models of modernity.

When I began my fieldwork in 2012, Dubai had become a prestigious, sought-after, yet exclusive destination for various forms of travel, including tourism, trade, and business trips. Moreover, Dubai was considered an attractive destination for seasonal work-based migration, a welcome albeit exclusive alternative to Russia. A veritable Dubai boom took hold of the country's capital in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Global middle-class Muslim lifestyle offerings, including Islamic fashion items, tourism advertisements, luxury perfumes, and kitchen utensils, reached urban and rural markets and city malls and circulated between households through the ritual economy and the souvenirs migrants bought home to their families and relatives. It was Dubai's exceptionality and the city's exclusive image as a modern, cosmopolitan, and global *Muslim* place that gave reformist Islam in Tajikistan new drive. People attached their pursuits of piety, moral development, and spiritual advancement to a hopeful place abroad that promised material well-being, social mobility, and success. Dubai's attractive mélange of urbanism, capitalism, and Islam traversed the mobile and religious life trajectories of young Muslims like Karim in multiple ways and eventually turned Islamic reform from a merely moral endeavor into an ambitious social project that bore the mark of the Muslim bourgeoisie. Thus, reformist piety became an important signifier of social positioning and a marker of social distinction among Muslims both in Dushanbe and Dubai. The following three ethnographic vignettes illustrate how Dubai was present and repre-

sented in Tajikistan in the early 2010s, when I did my fieldwork. The vignettes show how Dushanbe Muslims who were mobile and those who stayed at home became involved in Dubai's multiple business worlds through the work of aspiration and imagination. People were moved by Dubai[7] above all through sensational forms of material mediation and its associated ambivalent aesthetics, giving rise to the idea of an exclusive and bourgeois 'Dubai Islam', in which Muslim mobility, piety, and belonging merged with social status and economic success.

Fig. 1: "Shariʿa-compliant recreation. Elitist, child-friendly vacation and shopping tour". Dubai advertising poster of a travel agency on Aynī Street in Dushanbe. Photo: Manja Stephan, 2014.

7 I use the term "moved by Dubai" analogously to "moved by Mecca" (see Buitelaar 2017), to highlight that emotional and affective processes shape mobility and vice versa. As the term ‚motion' is etymologically linked with 'emotion', mobility and emotions are co-constitutive. Movement expresses emotion just as emotions can mobilize people to move (Svašek 2012).

My first encounter with Dubai in Tajikistan was during an earlier research trip. I had been invited to a wedding on the eastern outskirts of Dushanbe, and expected to meet a close relative who had studied Islam in Egypt. It was in the early afternoon on a hot day in mid-September in 2010, when I entered a crowded and lively courtyard full of people, with dozens of children running noisily and excitedly among the guests. With the help of my host I escaped the exuberant festive mood into a quiet room already filled with women who, seated close together, were in the middle of a joint Quran recitation for the newlyweds. After clearing a space for me by moving closer together around the richly decked *dasturkhon*[8], the *otin*, the knowledgeable woman and female religious authority leading the session, waited patiently until I had found my place on the *kurpacha*[9] to continue her recitation. The religious session was interrupted once more when the hostess entered the room with a young man on her side whom she invited to sit at the place designated as *bolo*, located at the front of the *dasturkhon* and directly opposite the door. The young man was introduced to me as a cousin of the groom who had studied at al-Azhar in Cairo but at the time of the wedding was working in Dubai. After greeting the guest, the only man in the women's room, politely, the Quran recitation continued, and at the end of the session, he was included by the *otin* in her blessings. What struck me particularly about this scene was that the young man was offered the place of honor (*bolo*). In accordance with Muslim tradition, the most honorable place in a room is reserved for the eldest and most respected people, such as religious authorities. I was surprised that the *otin*, previously occupying this position, moved aside unbidden to make way for the young man. At least for the ethnographer in the room this was an unusual procedure, so I asked the woman sitting next to me, why the young man was given this respect. "He is a big man in business in Dubai, after all," she explained in an appreciative voice, and when I asked for clarification, she continued: "Well, his businesses abroad are going very well, and he has given a lot of money to make this wedding happen."

One year later, I again came across the figure of the 'big businessman' (*biznesmeni kalon*), when, during a stay in a village east of Dushanbe, my host and I visited a mosque known in the village as an 'Arab mosque' (*masjidi Arab*). Two things struck me: The new mosque was built directly adjacent to the older village mosque looked after by the descendant of an old-established religious family (*eshon*), who informed us that the history of the mosque was closely entwined with the vil-

8 The term refers to Tajik hospitality (*mehmondorī*), and as such a core component of Muslim sociability in the region, which is characterized by generous hospitality and the sharing of festive food arranged on a cloth spread on the floor (*dasturkhon*) around which guests are seated.

9 A soft seat mat arranged in varying numbers around the *dasturkhon* as seating for guests.

lage history and the biography of his family. Secondly, although the new mosque was not yet completely finished, the prayer room was already equipped with a whole set of brand-new, high-quality copies of the Quran; something the old mosque did not have to offer. As we looked at the new Qurans, I asked my host why there was a second mosque in the village so close to the other one and who had donated the Qurans, the host responded: "Frankly, I don't know. But the Qurans you see are from Saudi Arabia, beautiful editions, and of good quality. A businessman brought them from Dubai. People say the guy is a big man in business, rich enough to finance the building of this mosque".

Together with the figure of the 'big man in (Dubai) business', in the early 2000s, the Dubai boom was fueled in Tajikistan's capital city in multiple other ways. It was materially tangible especially in aesthetic media images, street advertisement campaigns by tourism agencies (see Fig. 1), and luxury consumer commodities designated *dubaiskii* (Russian 'from Dubai'). The sensational way in which Dubai was present and represented in the capital city's public space provided the ingredients for displaying and longing for an expensive and exclusive Islamic lifestyle. Returned Dubai migrants became core agents in circulating such religious imaginaries, as the third ethnographic vignette illustrates. In the summer of 2015, I visited the home of Fatima and her husband Ahmad, a couple who regularly traveled back and forth between Dushanbe and the emirate because of Ahmad's involvement in Dubai's fur business. The family had spent their summer vacation in Dushanbe and was preparing to return to their other home in the Arab Emirates. Fatima invited me to join a small farewell party that close friends of her neighbors were also attending. During the gathering, not only the Arabic food (*oshi Arab*) prepared by Fatima gave away the family's involvement in the world of Dubai business. Fatima also presented the latest in Islamic fashion trends labeled as 'Arab' or 'Dubai style', crafting the family's mobile lifestyle into a signifier for an exclusive and cosmopolitan 'Dubai Islam'. "We are international (*bainalmillalī*)," Fatima said, making the Dubai image a trope for their own success while simultaneously inviting her guests to participate in the supporting narrative of modernity, social mobility, and progress (Stephan-Emmrich 2018b, 187–188). As shown elsewhere, the growing demand for fashionable Islamic clothing and other luxury commodities imported from Dubai closely corresponded with new urban planning manifested in prestigious architectural projects financed by Qatar, such as the Diyar Dushanbe complex or the Arab mosque in the Western part of the capital city. Such spectacular architecture supports the government's ambitious worlding project, branding Dushanbe as a globalizing city for the tourism and investment sector (Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016).

However, people did not embrace representations of Dubai unquestioningly. Like elsewhere, in Dushanbe perceptions of the Gulf oscillated between "epitomiz-

ing success and progress and disgust at dominance and arrogance" (Bromber et al. 2014, 11). The aesthetics inherent to Dubai's material representations in Dushanbe's public were consumed by many Tajik Muslims in the newly built urban shopping malls in the capital city. At the same time, the religious message these representations spread was subject to controversial discussions in Dushanbe and its rural surroundings. Accusations of misconceived piety circulated as people told each other stories about businesspeople who spent their Dubai money on multiple Mecca pilgrimages to compete for social prestige and status rather than dedicating it to the welfare of the Muslim community. Spending Dubai money on the construction of new mosques was not so much welcomed as an act of charity and a contribution to the diversification of the religious landscape than it was suspected to represent an intrusive form of Islam perceived as 'not ours' (*az mardumi mo ne*), as 'foreign' (*az khorija*), as the wording 'Arab mosque' implies. So to return to my guided tour of my host's village, later in the car ride back home, my host shared his opinion about the newly built mosque. "I think this Arab mosque is just for the prestige of individuals. People in the village don't need a second mosque. But there are many businesspeople in our country nowadays. Many of them got rich in Dubai and now spend their money on religion, on the Mecca pilgrimage (Arabic *ḥajj*). Or they build mosques".

The Arab mosques emerging in the rural landscape around Dushanbe epitomized a rather ambivalent piety, mixing the public display of wealth with a sense of religious superiority and painting the money donors as *arabparast* (Tajik, literally 'people who worship Arabs'). Although their connection to Arab Islam signified a reference to religious normativity and originality that none of the Tajiks I spoke to denied because the Arab countries in the Hejaz are regarded as the cradle of Islam, they considered this form of Islam incompatible with both the locally rooted, primarily Persian-Sufi Islamic tradition and the Hanafi legal doctrine, to which Sunni Muslims, the majority in the country, feel bound. As will become apparent in the following chapters, while reform-minded Tajik Muslims had to position themselves at home between a discursively constructed 'native', i. e., Persian, and a 'foreign', i. e., Arab, Islam, in Dubai they were able to use notions of 'Persian' and 'Arab' Islam flexibly as a resource for successful economic activity in the fur and tourism industries.

Being 'Islamic' – Navigating Belonging between Ambitions and Constraints

Ambivalent perceptions of 'Dubai Islam' in Tajikistan's capital city of Dushanbe were symptomatic of the Islamic renewal that accompanied the fragmentation

of religious authority and competition over the notion of proper Muslimness. In scholarship on Islam in Central Asia, an interpretation of 'Islamic renewal' has become established that classifies the rising level of piety among large sections of the Muslim population as something other than the re-appearance or re-emergence of religious practices and beliefs disappearing during the Soviet era. Instead, research recognizes the alteration of religious practices cultivated during the Soviet period. Accordingly, scholars advocate speaking of 'Islamic renewal' in Central Asia in terms of a *transformation* rather than a *revival* (Jones 2017a, xiii). Although I agree in principle with the proposed transitional nature of Islamic renewal over notions that emphasize rupture, the term 'transformation' implies a teleological notion of progress towards an implicitly assumed final goal. The spatial biographies presented in this book tell a different story. They prompted me to think of Islamic reform as a *reconfiguration* of religious practice and identification as the effect of Tajik Muslims' multiple positionings and orientations within an emerging transregional Islamic economy, in which neoliberal capitalism, post-Soviet nation-building, and global Islamic discourses on modernity, reform, and development have meshed in dynamic, fluid, and volatile ways. Following the multiple translocations my research partners underwent within and across the Muslim worlds of Dubai business, Islamic reform occurred not as a teleological development, but as a process of becoming in an open-ended, transductive mode shaped by creativity, disruption, contingency, and transience.

From the late 1990s onwards, Muslims like Karim increasingly appeared in the region around Dushanbe. Educated at renowned Islamic universities in the Middle East, following a scripturally oriented and purist sense of religiosity accompanied by publicly displayed piety clearly expressed in dress codes and lifestyles established in Arab countries, these Muslims embodied a distinct disruption. They were different. Both a self-designation and an external attribution, the label *islomī* established itself as signifier explicitly distinguishing them from those Muslims in the country who have also 'come closer to religion' (*din-ba nazdik omadagī*), 'become religious' (*dindor shudagī*) or are 'strongly affected by' or 'attached to religion' (*din-ro sakht kapidagī*). 'Being Islamic' was an articulation of a conscious differentiation between the idea of Islam in its purest essence and an ahistorical ideal (*islom*) on the one hand, and a notion of religion (*din*, Arabic *dīn*) many Muslims in Tajikistan share on the other. Those shared notions became deeply intertwined with a sense of ethnonational belonging in the late Soviet period. Tied up with a secularized understanding of 'Muslimness' (*musulmonī*), religion was then reinterpreted as part of Tajikistan's cultural and social heritage (Khalid 2007b, 137). Later, in the post-Soviet period, religion and Muslimness became reframed by state discourses on securitization that build on notions of 'national' or 'homegrown' Islam, as opposed to a 'foreign' Islam imported from the Middle East (Lemon and Thibault

2018). These newly emerging forms of religiosity were labeled 'Salafi' or 'extremist' and constructed as 'alien' and thus incompatible with the Muslim heritage of prescribed behavior crafted around Persian literature and ethics (*odob*, Arabic *adab*), cultural traditions and customs (*urfu odatho*), spiritual knowledge based on Sufism (Arabic *taṣawwuf*) as inherited by Naqshbandiya and Qādiriya families, and Sunni-Hanafi doctrine, which most Muslims in Tajikistan adhere to. One can say that the way Karim embraced Islamic reform is consistent with what Julie McBrien has described in the context of Islamic renewal in Kyrgyzstan as an emphasis on 'belief over belonging' (McBrien 2017). Taking inspiration from Islamic discourses on reform circulating in study and migrant networks in the Muslim Middle East, the notion of 'being Islamic' accompanied the cultivation of post-national, cosmopolitan, and global orientations. Such orientations did not contain any references to the reformist approaches of religious specialists, who like Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda were influential in the 1990s and early 2000s and at the same time followed a rather normative understanding of Sunni Hanafi tradition (Epkenhans 2017, 176). Nor did reform-minded Muslims like Karim base their pious self-fashioning, their idea of 'true Islam' and their striving for a scriptural religious knowledge on the intellectual heritage of the Jadids. This modern Muslim reform movement, which appeared in the Russian empire at the turn of the twentieth century, was influential in the Central Asian region during the early Soviet period (Baldauf 2001; Khalid 1998) and overlapped in their intellectual positions with reformist currents represented by Salafism and Wahhabism (DeWeese 2016, 80–82).

Making sense of his 'otherness', Karim referred to a shift in his attitude of faith (*aqida*, Arabic *ʿaqīda*) that he experienced while studying in Cairo and working in Dubai, and which later shaped his everyday life after returning to Dushanbe. Embracing *isloh*, Karim described his 'becoming Islamic' as an 'awakening' (Arabic *aṣ-ṣaḥwa*) accompanied by a deep quest for a 'pure' and 'ideal Islam' that drove him to engage in the study of books and to pursue an Islamic way of life, carefully distinguishing between a universal 'Islamic' way as opposed to a particular, local, traditional, or secular one. This shift, in line with Schielke (2015, 14) from a relational sense of religiosity (based on a spirituality based in the veneration of saints and the local authority of religious families) to a more ideological one (based on scriptural norms), coincides with the global expansion of a purist Salafism, which also affected pious and mobile Muslims like Karim. In using the term 'purist Salafism', I follow scholars such as Henri Lauzière (2016) and Bernard Haykel (2013) who consider Salafism to be, first and foremost, an idea or concept that emerged and developed in a specific historical environment where Muslim intellectuals shaped and defended it in ways that we now take for granted (Lauzière 2016, 3). Moreover, I make a clear distinction between Salafism as an intellectual or even political endeavor, and its different resonance in modern Muslim reform

movements across the world. With their focus on what they consider 'authentic' and 'true' Islam, the latter form of purist Salafism relies more on aspects of individual piety and places a strong emphasis on converting religious purity, self-mastery, proper education, personal choice, and responsibility into multiple types of moral and social activism, that, following a specific 'method' or 'doctrine' (Arabic *manhaj*), also include the obligation to engage in *da'wa*, the spreading of knowledge about Islam within the Muslim and non-Muslim environment. In this context, Islam provided reform-minded Muslims like Karim a perfect system of moral knowledge (Schielke 2015, 24; Lapidus 2014, 522–523). It is within this purist and education-oriented environment that I place the reformist Islamic life projects to which this book is dedicated.

Turning to the performative dimension inherent to Islamic reform as an ambitious project of Muslim self-fashioning, my research partners' storytelling was driven by a wide range of expectations and agendas. Karim's question addressed to my companion after our meeting – "How was my speaking, did I convince her?" – may point to his efforts to tell a good, compelling story, meant to entertain me. But it also reveals that processes of religious transformation are often embedded in empowering narratives of change, which help to articulate pious endeavors and form religious selves (Schulz 2011; Buitelaar and Zock 2013; Asad 1996). Besides, stories like Karim's also bear an inherent missionary intent based on the duty of those who have come into the knowledge of Islam to spread that knowledge and give both Muslims and non-Muslims the opportunity to be awakened and engage in Islamic reform (*isloh*) themselves. Such narrative endeavors entangled the ethnographer with matters of morality, ethics, emotional vulnerability, and normativity, fusing intellectual and emotional processes while studying the reform-Islamic everyday practice of her interlocutors. Reflecting on how I got personally involved in my research partners' quest to convince with their piety by becoming an addressee of their *da'wa* activities, helped me understand the social pressures and high self-expectations to live up to the ideals these people had set themselves, which revealed 'being Islamic' as an ambitious and volatile moral project.

Besides, the need to 'be different' formed an existential experience characterized by discontinuities of past and present, as they manifested in an alienation from home and feelings of estrangement and dislocation. Wearing an Arabic man's robe, his beard uncut, religiously trained in an Arab country and adhering to a purist version of Islam, in both travel biography and appearance, Karim corresponded to the idea of a Muslim with deviant piety commonly labeled 'Salafi' (*salofi*) in Dushanbe. Like Karim, many followers of purist interpretations of Islam who migrated for work or study to places in the Middle East, faced rejection, hostility, discrimination, and social exclusion after returning home to their families. Fatima, whom I met by chance at Dushanbe's Kurvon bazaar and who recom-

mended educational videos about Islam to me, had been wearing a fashionable black *ʿabāya* only since her husband began taking work trips to Dubai. When we met, she complained that she had rarely left the house since the couple had returned from Dubai, as she felt no longer accepted as part of her home community. Taxi drivers wouldn't give her a lift or would call her *terroristka* (Russian a female terrorist) because of her clothes, and passers-by on the sidewalk would be afraid of her and cross the street.

While Fatima's experience of disruption and dislocation 'at home' led to depressive moods and fueled her longing to return to Dubai, other reform-oriented Muslims integrated experiences of alienation and exclusion into their cultivation of exclusive piety that built on notions of exceptionality and being chosen and subjected to divine testing (Stephan 2006). For Karim and many of his compatriots I met in Dubai, feelings of alienation and dislocation were "affective drivers" to migrate (Röttger-Rössler 2016). A strong orientation towards Muslim places elsewhere informed the cultivation of an ethics of leaving (Arabic *hijra*), in which pursuing the moral and good life abroad became an integral part of fashioning oneself into an 'Islamic person' (*odami islomī*). After some negotiations about where to meet, Karim finally suggested the stylish restaurant in outside the city center of Dushanbe, insisting on the companionship of a third person we both knew well. The restaurant's fancy ambience and stylishly dressed audience stood in sharp contrast to both his distinctive 'Islamic' appearance and his emotional narrative about his spiritual awakening (*isloh*) that mainly centered around his discomfort with Tajikistan's post-Soviet trajectory into capitalist democracy. The whole situation of our meeting felt inauthentic to me and put us both into a state of continuous uncertainty: Karim was also visibly nervous and uncomfortable about the surroundings as he opened the menu, written in both Tajik and English. After cumbersomely studying the dishes on offer, he handed it over to the person accompanying us and said, "Eh, you do it. I don't know about these things." He leaned over the table and explained me, "I have been away for too long from such places, I usually don't come here or other places in town." When I asked in surprise why he had chosen this of all places to meet, he offered: "Nobody would expect to find me here". Later the evening, I learned that by 'nobody' Karim was referring to the Tajikistani intelligence services watching him and checking his civil obedience regularly since he had returned home from Cairo.

National security discourses permeated not only the stories I heard and the ways people fashioned themselves through these stories. They also limited my access to these people. Strategies of avoidance, together with suspicions about spies are as old as anthropological fieldwork. But in my very concrete case, they not only prevented me from recording mobile life stories to secure trust. The dynamic combination of avoidance, testing, and humiliation during my fieldwork also debunked

the illusion of the anthropologist's neutral position in a highly politicized research field (de Koning, Bartels and Koning 2011, 170) and finally pushed me, like my interlocutors, to move abroad to be able to continue my research.

Finally, people's articulation of 'being Islamic' included preferences for economic environments that allowed combining work and piety. However, restrictive state secularism in Tajikistan made it difficult for Muslims who, like Karim, publicly displayed their piety to find work in the state market sector. Additionally, post-soviet capitalism (Bandelj 2016) has left its mark on the country. The introduction of global capitalist market principles, which met with pre-existing clientelist economic-cum-political networks linked to the government, led to the emergence and consolidation of an upper class close to President Rahmon consisting of the 'new rich'. Meanwhile, the political elite failed to create incentives to enable the growth and consolidation of a solid new middle class. This political-cum-economic environment fostered social inequality and fueled a sense of injustice (*beadolatī*) in the country, which made it difficult to avoid getting involved in corrupt practices (*porakhurī*). Doing business 'the Muslim way', that is adjusting economic practice to Islamic principles, was therefore only possible in the private sector (Biard 2019; Botoeva 2018). Thus, trade (*tijorat*) was favored as a particularly God-pleasing activity with reference to the Prophet Mohammad, who was a trader himself (see chapter three). However, the state's grip on the private sector was strong, especially when private enterprises not part of the political elite's patronage network were flourishing. Tajik middlemen successful in Dubai's business worlds told me that their healthy businesses and revenues back home (one ran a cement company, another a private petrol station) had been confiscated by the state under the pretext that they were financing 'Islamic fundamentalism' (*islomgaroī*). To protect their economic activities from state intervention, many economic-cum-religious entrepreneurs shifted their business activities to transregional business fields. Thus, Dubai's booming Islamic economy offered a welcome alternative space to pursue a good Muslim life allowing a combination of work and piety. Belonging to the dispossessed or "disinherited" (Biard 2019, 2) segments of society, with their economic autonomy and a cosmopolitan or global orientation critical to state corruption and intervention, the figure of Dubai businessmen embodied a form of Muslim bourgeoisie that cultivated Islamic reform as a marker of social distinction along class lines (Botoeva 2018, 249–253). In crafting pious neoliberal subjectivities (Schielke 2015a; Atia 2012) in Dubai, pious Tajik Muslims embodied the success story told in Dushanbe of compatriots who had become not only rich (*puldor*) but also religious (*dindor*) in Dubai.

Following up on my understanding of Islamic reform as a reconfiguration of being Muslim, in this book, I shall prefer the term 'belonging' over 'identity' to focus on the dynamic interplay of subjectivity, spatial agency, and performativ-

ity, and to highlight flexibility, multiplicity, and translocation over essentialized modes of thinking difference (Anthias 2006). In dealing with the question of how religious, economic, and social positions were produced, shaped, negotiated, and performed in Tajik Dubai business, and with which social and political consequences, reflections on performativity and belonging are revealing. Following Vicki Bell, for whom belonging is not simply given, but a performatively produced achievement (Bell 1999, 3), I understand the multiple self-identifications and attachments of the people I met during my research to be emotive effects of their performative positionings as Tajiks, Muslims, 'Islamic people', migrants, or businessmen engaging in the wider context of relational placemaking. In that sense, belonging is both a process and an outcome of affective interrelations (Mattes et al. 2019, 302) and thus always situated spatially and temporally. The multiplicity of religious identification is reflected in the various senses of 'Muslimness', 'Arabness', and 'Persianness' that Tajiks display at the workplace, in their leisure time, or in their residential practices. It shows how they have situated themselves in their mobile worlds, and how diversely they have related to places at home, in the host country, and to other places they have previously inhabited. As we will see, religious identifications such as 'Islamic' that were created, embodied, and performed in the entangled socioeconomic and cultural spaces of business life in Dubai have produced a wide range of openings and limitations in the context of social integration and belonging, access to business networks and national labor markets, as they have promoted the making and unmaking of difference and sameness – always in relation to shifting social, political, and other contexts. Being an 'Islamic person' has emerged as an alternative form of sociopolitical belonging that transgresses ethnic, national, or more localized forms of identification.

Performativity is intimately entwined with the politics of visibility, audibility, and articulation and at heart of the modern Muslim public spheres that have emerged on the global stage (Hirschkind 2006; Eickelman and Salvatore 2006, among others). Following the multiple ways in which the Tajiks I met in both Dubai and Dushanbe displayed their reformist piety through Islamic lifestyles, belonging also blends with acts of indexing socioeconomic and religious status. Indexing is the "stylized repetition of acts that cultivate the sign and sense of belonging" (Bell 1999, 3). It works through the following practices: i) the application of specific Islamic concepts such as *hijra, isloh*, or *kofir* (Arabic: *kāfir*) (chapter one and five), ii) the cultivation of specific notions of proper work (chapter three), iii) preferences for certain ethnic restaurants in Dubai (chapter four), and iv) multiple forms of embodiment and material mediation (e. g. in the way of cultivating religious affects and sensations, Islamic lifestyles, specific dress codes, housing practices, or the practice of renaming), as shown in chapters four and five.

Conceptualizing the multiplicity of Tajik positionality and situatedness through Bell's performative belonging also helped me clarify my position on the academic concepts that have proved relevant in writing this book, such as 'Islamic reform', 'reformist Islam', and 'Salafism'. Preferring "longing to belong" over simply being, Probyn (1996, 8) has pointed to the fragility, fluidity, elusiveness, and desire for some attachment (to certain people or places) inherent to the idea of 'truly' or 'really' belonging. I find this thought appealing because it prevents me from conceiving of Salafism, or reformist Islam, as a clear and fixed identity. Pious Muslims like Karim became involved to varying degrees in what has been largely described in scholarship as 'purist Salafism', while studying and working in the Middle East. Globally circulating Salafi thinking, lifestyles, and practices (or rather, fragments of them) became crucial to their Muslim re-fashioning, moral reasoning, business ethics, and social differentiation while in Dubai. However, not all Tajiks I met in Dubai were aware that they were dealing with ideas rooted in the ideological and theological doctrines of Salafism when using, adapting, modifying, and passing them on in their daily life at the workplace and in their migrant accommodations and family homes. Some of my conversation partners were not interested in these labels, while others deliberately claimed them for themselves. Reformist Islam and Salafism emerged as situated positionings and flexible modes of performative belonging. In that quality, both categories formed integral part of broader cultural registers that Tajiks (more or less) flexibly draw upon to find their economic position in Dubai's business fields, to negotiate their social and religious status, and to attach themselves to diverse aesthetic and discursive formations (Meyer 2009; Reichmuth 2000, 64; Wuthnow 1989, 16). These Muslim socialities created a communal space for establishing religious truth, framing religious experience, and enabling senses of belonging that were post-national, post-secular, cosmopolitan, and bourgeois in nature, and that also enabled them to make sense of precarious translocal livelihoods.

Spatializing Islamic Reform

Writing a translocal ethnography of Islamic reform and Dubai migration that links recent debates in the anthropology of Islam and Muslim piety with the broader field of mobility and migration studies and theoretical stances in New Area Studies, proved to be a challenging cross-cutting endeavor. Mapping dynamic geographies of Muslim mobility, piety, and belonging, I had to come to terms with numerous methodological and epistemological concerns that addressed the three interlacing aspects of movement, relation, and position. One concern centered around how to write a spatial analysis of Islamic reform that does justice to the transformative nature of my interlocutors' mobile endeavors, the fluidity of

their lifeworlds, and the contingency and elusiveness of migration as a moral project. Another addressed the situatedness of my translocal ethnography: How could I consider the multiplicity, historicity, and shifting cultural and social contextuality of movements, locations, and relations that shaped my research partners' mobile Muslim subjectivities? How could I locate Muslim piety and belonging in the context of spatial formations emerging through 'thick' connectivity and the sense of connectedness, while fluid and volatile in nature (Verne 2019; van Schendel 2015)? In other words: How would I be able to capture the dynamic, fluid, and transient, and write a spatially expansive and yet integrative account of pious Muslims whose shifting mobile lifeworlds transcend fixed territories and borders, like nation states (Ho 2017, 912)?

Another concern related to shifting perspectives and multiple positionings. The mobile life stories collected in this book are highly diverse in terms of itineraries and spatial trajectories. This is true for the places I met my Tajik migrant research partners as well as for the stages in their life course from which they were viewing their mobile lives, incorporating their spatial imagination and experience into various processes of narrative identification and performative self-fashioning as pious, reform-minded Muslims. So given the multiplicity in space and time and understanding the places and spaces involved in the mobile life stories as inter-relational concepts, where would I need to begin the situated analysis of Muslim mobility, piety, and belonging? Which perspective would I start with? How could I do justice to a Tajik perspective on Dubai migration, even as many of my interlocutors stressed that they no longer perceived themselves as Tajiks but simply as Muslims?

Long before the mobility turn pushed the idea of a fetishization of mobile ontologies in post-modern and post-structural science, James Clifford (1986, 22) plotted a 'tectonic' shift away from stable places such as an island or a mountaintop from where to map human life, journey out, and analyze cultural expressions and relations. As mountaintops and islands, too, are in constant motion, just like the people, things, and ideas involved in what we study as societies or cultures, the 'local' is as shifting and relational as the anthropologist's positionality; both are situated perspectives. Moreover, in what later should become a major premise in global anthropology, Clifford underlined that such situated perspectives are always embedded in global movements of difference and power. In time, I had to deal with how my translocal ethnography could define its object of study to permit "detailed, local, contextual analysis and simultaneously the portrayal of global implicating forces?" (Clifford 1986, 22; see also Hage 2005; Burawoy 2000).

Such epistemological shifts in anthropology caused by the spatial and mobility turn resonate with integrative analysis of movement, connectivity, and relation, as recently developed in New Area Studies. The pledge for thinking space as relational and not merely as a process (Verne 2019, 85) has led to a new understanding of

area as an analytical tool that allows shifting perspectives, using area as a particular "research approach that creates intermediate epistemic space" (Houben 2021, 266) as well as producing a particular kind of knowledge that favors dynamic and relational concepts of identity, society, nation, and region as not spatially fixed. Thus, the spatial agency of people, especially non-elites, the realm of the everyday, as well as the mobile biographies of material objects has moved into the focus of area studies analysis and shifted interest to alternative spatialities and how they are formed and shaped across the boundaries of academically defined areas (Marsden and Mostowlansky 2019; Stephan-Emmrich and Schröder 2018b, 33–38; Ho 2006). In 'mobile societies', Enseng Ho introduces a spatially expansive and yet integrative approach that shifts the analytical focus from individual countries, societies, or places, to the people who inhabit, cross, and move between them (Ho 2017, 914). Such an approach favors mobility to understand locality and community, not as isolated, spatially fixed entities, but as shaped by interconnected relations. Adopting Ho's argument, following people's journeys and studying how their multiple interconnectivities localize in space, place, and time, we can grasp only partial notions of societies, communities, or ethnic groups in each location, yet still recognize the historical and social thickness of these interconnectivities (Ho 2017 and 2014).

Eventually, synthesizing all these epistemological and methodological considerations into a coherent spatial analysis of Islamic reform, 'Dubai business ', 'spatial biography', and 'translocations' proved to be helpful conceptual lenses to structure my thoughts and findings in a way that makes this translocal ethnography informative for, and connectable to, research interests informed by anthropology, migration, and new area studies.

Dubai Business

Writing this book, I was driven by my concern to undo methodological nationalism in research on Islamic reform in Tajikistan and wider Central Asia. Following Stephen J. Collier and Aihwa Ong's conceptual proposal of 'global assemblage' (2005, 4), I tried to combine all scales of analysis into a single framework that allowed me to fix the dynamic, fluid, and complex entanglements between migrant subjectivities, geographical places, national politics, global economies, and transnational religious movements. Eventually, I came up with using 'Dubai business'' as a polysemous concept to analytically grasp these entanglements and map the multiple economic, social, and religious worlds in which these entangled relationships were embedded and shaped. In this dynamic assemblage, Dubai occupied a central analytical position as a spatial node in Muslim networks and mobilities, linking the

Persophone, Arabophone, and Russophone Muslim worlds across Central Asia, Russia, the Gulf region, and the wider Middle East. While Dubai was where Muslims from Tajikistan went to work, do business (*biznes, tijorat*) and pursued reform-minded Islamic lifestyles, the term 'Dubai business' also addresses market mechanisms of place-branding that Tajik migrants both engaged in and were moved by. Doing business *in* and *with* Dubai, this translocal ethnography shifts analytical interest towards the production of places as meaningful sites of what is good and moral.

In a more metaphorical sense, I use 'Dubai business' to reconfigure a larger conceptual field that brings material, social, and mental worlds into closer conjunction (Daniels 2011). Picking up on an argument I made in a recent publication (Stephan-Emmrich 2021, 58–59), the concept of 'Dubai business' permits connecting compartmentalized fields of knowledge in area and migration studies and anthropology. A dynamic time-space configuration of material and immaterial flows, transfers, transitions, and translations, 'Dubai business' conflates work migration and continental and maritime trade in luxury goods such as fur coats with the fields of Russian middle-class tourism, Muslim pilgrimage, Islamic education and Gulf charity. In that sense, one can understand 'Dubai business' as a transregional platform of connectivity, interaction, and exchange (Ho 2014) that assembles a plurality of actors, practices, places, things, ideas, and identities across academically constructed and fixed regions such as Central Asia, Eurasia, and the Near and Middle East.

'Dubai business' conceptualized as a dynamic phenomenon of transregional connectivity and connectedness raises the question of how such an alternative spatiality is inhabited, shaped, and reshaped as a meaningful space by people dwelling in and crossing through it. Accordingly, the book invites an understanding of 'Dubai business' as a trans-region where multiple lifeworlds emerge and merge. These entangled worlds are made and re-made, inhabited, shaped, sensed, crossed, and intertwined by the mobile and spatial agency of Tajik migrants as firmly Muslim worlds. The interplay of post-Soviet politics, neoliberal capitalism, Muslim renewal, and global middle-class sensibilities have resonated in the mobile everyday lives of Muslims from Tajikistan. When traders in Dushanbe's markets do business *with* Dubai by selling and embodying a certain idea of this place inherent to both the consumer goods they advertise as *dubaiskii* ('from Dubai') and the pious habits that inform their professional business conduct (Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016), or when Fatima shows off the latest Islamic fashion items brought from Dubai, Tajik Muslims, by engaging in transregional aesthetic formations, rework Dubai into a spatial idea for a Muslim modernity. As the book will show, Dubai and everyday Dubai business life is created by mobile and pious Tajik Muslims into a production site for their hopes, dreams, aspirations, religious ideals, emo-

tional attachment, and elusive sense of belonging. Arguably, it is in the productive context of this transregional aesthetic formation that the idea of an exclusive, bourgeois, cosmopolitan 'Dubai Islam' is fabricated. It forms an assemblage of geographical movements, social imaginaries, and spatial experiences enabling migrants from Tajikistan to re-fashion their Muslim selves along different notions of migration, work, piety, and belonging. Giving impetus to a stronger consideration of the material turn in transregional research, 'Dubai business' eventually also offers a conceptual lens to illuminate how religious imaginaries (ideas, ideals) travel in and across geographical regions and different migratory contexts (multiple Muslim worlds), and how these 'immaterialities' mesh with ideas of place, modernity, progress, and cosmopolitanism. Moreover, the concept shows how enmeshed religious and spatial ideas and imaginaries materialize in the properties of the pursuit of 'the good Muslim life'. I argue that these Muslim *matters* – accompanying the Dubai boom in Tajikistan and beyond – are crucial to understanding what moved Tajiks to go to Dubai, and why and, more importantly, how they became more pious while being there.

Spatial Biography

Spacial biographies help to trace how the relational interconnectedness of people, places, things, and ideas became inscribed in Tajik migrants' bodies; that is, how the multiple worlds of Dubai's business fields formed their imagination, experiences, and memories and thus shaped their biographies of religious becoming. There are excellent studies on spatial biographies that explore the religious becoming of specific places (Hammond 2023; Nasritdinov 2018). Differing from these studies here, I use spatial biography bio-centrically and relationally. My interest is in how Muslim subject formation and self-making processes relate to the specific places and spatial surroundings my Tajik interlocutors, the owners of these biographies, inhabited in the past, where they lived when we met, or where they longed to go in the future. Put differently, thinking biographies spatially means highlighting how humans construct their being *in relation* to movement, placemaking, and time. This makes two aspects salient: First, spatial biographies locate people in space and time, connecting multiple places and different times and crossing multiple boundaries. They are thus translocative as well as transtemporal. Second, they invite us to think of place, space, movement, and subject, not simply as processes, but as relations inscribed into people's bodies, shaping their life trajectories and their Muslim selves.

Based on these functional dimensions of spatial biographies, we can now think ahead in four directions to understand relational placemaking as a practice

of Muslim world-making. First, spatial biographies blur the boundaries between subject and place. Referring to Edward Casey's "no place without the self and no self without place" (2001, 684), the identity (and biography) of places and the people moving between them is always relational rather than fixed in an essentialist sense. It is through 'dwelling' and 'crossing' as the two core metaphors of relational placemaking borrowed from Thomas Tweed's (2006) path-breaking study of migrant religion as a practice of location, that Tajik migrants turned geographical locations into places. Lived experiences are what turn geographical locations into meaningful sites or what Willem van Schendel terms "thick places" that "enhance our sense of meaning, belonging and connectedness: they provide us with enriching experiences" (van Schendel 2015, 99–100).

Second, spatial biographies are temporal fixations of transient transregional phenomena. The life stories I collected during my research allow me to trace the material effects of the lived experience of pious Tajiks engaging in Muslim mobility, connectivity, and connectedness on their bodies, specifically their memories, emotions, habits, and linguistic repertoires.

Third, spatial biographies provide 'thick moments' that shed light on the very specific contexts in which movements and placemaking practices take place, and by which mobile Muslim subjectivities have been shaped.

Mobilities become meaningful through their embeddedness within societies, histories, and cultures. This "impacts upon what mobilities mean and how they work" and on how "illusions [and representations] of mobility and immobility are created" (Adey 2006, 83). This leads to the fourth insight: Spatial biographies are constructed narratives of the self and, as such, part of migrants' Muslim self-fashioning. Following my interlocutors' mobile live stories, I learned how they mobilized places and landscapes as sources for subject formation. Moreover, while incorporating places into Muslim self-images and narratives of personal advancement and successful becoming, my interlocutors crafted these places and their movements to be meaningful. Thinking Islamic reform through the conceptual lens of spatial biography helped me to become attentive to the very concrete everyday life contexts at work, at home, in the city space, or on the move, in which reform-minded Tajik Muslims fashioned their migration as a moral endeavor. Tim Ingold reminds us to think movement not in terms of a *transport* (carrying across) of completed being but rather as the *production* (bringing forth) of perpetual becoming (Ingold 2011, 150–151). This approach to mobility favors transductive modes of becoming as they are significant in post-structural thought to challenge modernist characteristics of identity, essence, and origin (Mackenzie 2002). Differing from linear, teleological notions of becoming, transduction depicts a coming into being or "in-becoming of something" (Adey 2006, 79) through dynamic and open-ended processes of relational connectedness as they unfold, for example, in the multiple

worlds of Dubai business. That reading permits the transformative moments in the migration of Tajiks to and from Dubai that are explored in this book to be seen as a mode of transductive becoming. Such an open-ended understanding of becoming allows Islamic reform, like Dubai migration itself, to be approached as a highly contingent project. Following up on these conceptual thoughts, how did the contingency of Tajik migrant moral and social endeavors play into the processes of their self-fashioning? Taking spatial biographies as ethnographic facts, the book sheds light on how the Tajiks with whom I talked tried to come to terms with the inconsistencies and ruptures that shaped their pious mobile endeavors by narrating Dubai migration into a coherent story of moral and religious becoming.

Thinking Muslim subjectivity through processes of mobile subject formation, the elusive nature of Islamic reform and Dubai migration can be best illustrated linguistically though expressions such as the Tajik term *harakat.* Depicting geographical movement, the semantic meaning of the word also includes a metaphorical movement towards a set goal or formulated ideal, thus putting emphasis on the investments and efforts involved in this process. Talking with me about their piety, reform-oriented Tajiks very often used the phrase 'I strive' (*man harakat mekunam, man mekūsham*) to describe their commitment to reforming their Muslim selves. In their introduction to everyday religion as a fruitful concept for tackling the complex duality of religion as an everyday practice and a normative doctrine that reveals itself at best in moments of contradiction and constraint, Schielke and Debevec argue that "people may refer to such perfectionist ideals not in order to reach them, but in order to make at least some sense of the imperfections and complexities of their lived experience" (Schielke & Debevec 2012, 7, see also Beekers and Kloos 2017 in relation to failure and ethical formation, and Pelkmans 2013b in relation to articulating doubt*).* A reading of piety that attaches importance to the moments in which imperfection in everyday life stimulates the quest for religious ideals is reasonable when related to the co-constitutive relationship between movement, place, and (Muslim) subjectivity. Again, linguistic concepts are illuminating here. My research partners sometimes used the Tajik terms *musofir* ('traveler', 'wayfarer', from Arabic *safar*, 'travel') and *muhojir* ('migrant', 'refugee', or 'emigrant', from Arabic *hājara,* 'to emigrate') to describe how they sensed their being in the world as people constantly on the move. Thus, references were made to the Islamic doctrine of seeking and spreading knowledge about Islam and deepening personal faith through travel, while simultaneously highlighting the risks and hardships of travel. Evoking a semantics rooted in Muslim concepts of travel, place, and space, my research partners attached a deeper meaning to Dubai migration as an aspirational project of pious and moral becoming, embracing both the hope to progress and the imponderables and uncertainties that mobile life trajectories entail (Urinboyev 2017, 131).

Transregionality, Translocality, and Translocations

As a translocal ethnography, this book combines my interest in Muslim mobility, piety, and belonging with my many years of intensive academic research into transregionality as a leading concept in the theory and methodology of new area studies. A very abstract concept, transregionality is an ambitious epistemological project that engages shifting epistemologies and reversed perspectives to de-center knowledge orders and their colonial and orientalist legacy in spatially organizing the world we live in (Derichs 2015). Emphasizing movement, connectivity, and transience of fixity, transregionality is a critical response to analytical nationalism and regionalism. The concept also provides an epistemological anchor to counter metageographies that cater for geopolitical interests more than they take account of the realities of people's lived realities and lifeworlds that tend to transcend the borders of areas constructed and spatially fixed by academia (Mielke and Hornidge 2017; van Schendel 2005; Lewis and Wigen 1997).

What permitted me to put transregionality to work in this book was the concept of translocality. This concept helped me to break down an epistemological endeavor into methodologically graspable social realities, to understand how these social realities were produced and shaped by 'everyday actors', and to recognize the co-constitutive relationship between movement and placemaking in migratory contexts that traverse political and other boundaries (Stephan-Emmrich and Schröder 2018a). The fascinating thing about translocality, however, is its integrative potential: The concept depicts processes of traversing and connecting and its transitive effects; it points to the relationality of space, place, and movement and enables new approaches to regions; it helps to re-territorialize religious, political and other imaginaries by tracing the trajectories and networks of partial societies; finally, it provides an attribute to describe how processes of relational placemaking unfold at different scales.

With all these benefits, translocality is a fruitful analytical concept to depict a specific condition and modality of acting and being. In that sense, the geographies of Muslim mobility, piety, and belonging mapped in this book can be read as meaningful translocal formations. But how to study the effects of the conditions and modalities of the spatial actions (movement and placemaking) that shape these translocal and transregional formations? What do processes of connecting and traversing do with the people involved in them? How do they shape their mobile subjectivities?

In line with Muslim mobility as an existential approach, this book seeks to understand how geographies of piety and belonging in Dubai business life unfold as lived realities and lifeworlds inhabited and shaped by Tajik Muslim migrants' multiple locations and movements. Following Tajik Muslims' journeys through space

and time and examining how these journeys shaped their pious and moral Muslim selves, I prefer the term *translocation* (from the verb *to translocate*) over *translocality* to highlight my interlocutors' spatial agency in processes of relational placemaking. Thus, the focus is on how Tajik migrants crafted their spatial biographies through multiple translocations within and across various and shifting religious, economic, social, and political contexts. Moreover, using Thomas Tweed's two spatial metaphors 'dwelling' and 'crossing' throughout this book, I will depict the interrelatedness of Muslim piety and belonging with movement, place-, and spacemaking through practices and processes of translocation. Both dwelling and crossing highlight migrants' spatial agency. Location is the effect of human existence in the world, which is directly related to the practice of *dwelling*, i. e., placing oneself in space. For Tweed, dwelling does provide spatial agency. Through processes of mapping and building, migrants transform their environment and inhabit the world they construct (Tweed 2006, 82). So, dwelling is homemaking, orienting migrants in time and space. As homemaking creates meaning, dwelling turns migration into a meaningful movement and geographical locations into meaningful sites, i. e., "thick places" (van Schendel 2015).

With *crossing*, emphasis shifts to boundaries and how people cross them by movements that can be prescribed and proscribed by religion (Tweed 2006, 123). All three forms of crossing that Tweed introduces – terrestrial, corporeal, and cosmic – are about crossing over one's horizon and shifting a personal limit or a social boundary. In that sense, crossing is also about connecting. It links religion (Muslim piety and belonging) with other lived realities: While political and economic causes can trigger migration, migrants imagine their crossings, and dwellings, by using religious tropes (Tweed 2006, 131). Finally, while dwelling emphasizes the locative power of religion, crossing puts the focus on *transport* (a change in location), *transition* (a gradual process of re-orientation that aims to cope with and make sense of changing conditions) and *transformation* (a fundamental change from one state or passage to another, e. g., in the life-cycle).

Translocation is not the same as relocation. Not only replacement and emplacement mattered in my interlocutors' spatial biographies, but also interconnectedness and relationality. Engaging in the translocative practices of dwelling and crossing, mobile Tajik Muslims connected places, people, things, and ideas; the past with the present and future; and the moral with social, spiritual, economic, and cultural worlds. It was through their multiple dwellings and crossings that Tajik migrants fashioned pious and moral Muslim selves, felt a sense of belonging, and turned their migration to Dubai into meaningful movements and the geographical locations in the Middle East into meaningful places. In addition, considering relational placemaking only in terms of being 'in place' or 'making a place' would obscure its opposite: displacement. With the concept of translocations, the

book highlights the significance of space, place, and its spatial representations (proper Muslim places abroad) in Tajik migrants' biographical narratives, as well as addressing the social relations, religious formations, and identity politics emerging in the larger context of Dubai migration. Accordingly, translocative practices not only signify spatial relations, but simultaneously depict related social positions and positionings, as they are determined by age, gender, race, class, religion, and stage in the life-cycle. In line with Anthias (2006, 21), uncertainty, disconnection, and alienation make people more obsessed with finding and fixing a place where they feel at home or a sense of belonging. If feelings of displacement are a driving force for movement, Tajik migrants' multiple dwellings and crossings in Dubai's business worlds must be read in relation to how they have experienced social and political inclusion and exclusion in particular places. Following Anthias further, we should think of belonging in terms, not merely of cultural identification, but also of existing "preconditions of quality of life" (Anthias 2006, 20), including the range of social experience from enablement (self-fulfillment, progress) to impediment (feeling stuck). Thus, two things become salient: Muslim belonging is a relational category that highlights location and position, and, secondly, translocative practices do not only have a spatial dimension, but are also of social, emotional, and affective significance. Starting from these considerations, this spatial analysis of Islamic reform examines how Tajik migrants' pious and moral selves and their senses of belonging were shaped in geographically expanded social worlds determined by difference and hierarchy. Take the meaning of 'abroad': The Tajik term *khorija* means not simply the opposite of 'home' (*vatan, zodgoh*). Rather, 'abroad' designates a relation, a position, and a shifting perspective relative to what is imagined, articulated, and experienced as home, or being at home. This also includes experiences of uncertainty, anxiety, or marginalization that have led to feelings of alienation from home. Returning once again to mobility as a lived relation, an "orientation towards oneself, to others and to the world" (Adey 2017, XV), with its meaning 'away' or 'outside of,' *abroad* emphasizes both absence or (internal) displacement from home and emplacement somewhere else. This relation becames imbued with meaning when the Tajiks I met fashioned the places they migrated to as ideal, far-off 'Muslim places' (*joihoi musulmonī*, *mamlakathoi islomī*). Taking Tajikistan's transition into a capitalist democracy that in the late 1990s and early 2000s was accompanied by instability, corruption, nepotism, and the securitization of Islam, the term 'abroad' refers also to a specific moral, social, and political positioning, based on what in the book will be identified as post-national and cosmopolitan orientations.

Chapter Outline

The structure of the book largely follows the course of my research. It begins with the place where my fieldwork started; the place the people I met had left, whether temporarily, long- or short-term, or intentionally forever; the place to which they returned again and again and with which they remained deeply connected despite their attempts to detach themselves; the place that remained the central reference in their mobile and reform-oriented Islamic life projects: their birthplace, Dushanbe, and in a wider sense, Tajikistan. Accordingly, the first chapter assembles testimonials by former students of Islam who left and returned to their homeland in their youth and eventually moved further to immerse themselves in Dubai's multiple business worlds. The subsequent chapters then address Tajiks' everyday lives in the Arab Emirates, where they find themselves, not only economic actors, but also adults responsible for the families they left behind or took abroad. In that sense, the book's structure also follows my research partners' movements through their life-cycle, thus mapping the intersection of their professional, religious, and social trajectories onto larger geographies of Muslim mobility and connectivity. Following the people and their biographies, the book structure runs the danger of constructing, yet enshrining, an apparent linearity and consistency in their mobile lives that would not do justice to their more contingent mode of religious becoming. Such linearity would obscure the existing ruptures, ambivalences, and contradictions, as well as the multiple crossings, overlaps, and interlaces of multiple movements, localizations, and temporalities that form their migratory experience and shape their lifeworlds and livelihoods.

Chapter one examines the reconfiguration of Tajik Muslim mobilities across Central Asia, Eurasia, and the Middle East in the intersecting context of secular nation-state politics related to the securitization of Islam in Tajikistan and the strong attraction of the booming Islamic Gulf economy. The focus is on how mobile Tajiks engaged the three entangled forms of Muslim travel, namely *riḥla* (travel in search of knowledge), *hijra* (Muslim emigration), and *ḥajj* and *'umrah* (pilgrimage to Mecca) and the related ethics of dwelling and leaving to fashion their migration to places in the Arab Middle East as meaningful movements that promised spiritual and moral advancement, social mobility and economic well-being. Mapping the religious economy of Tajik Dubai business onto larger moral and emotional geographies in which mobile Tajiks situated their personal projects of Islamic reform, the chapter illustrates how imagination, morality, emotion, and embodiment mattered in the relational, intertwined, meaningful processes of Muslim place- and self-making.

Chapter two traces the transition of former students of Islam, most of them alumni from Cairo's al-Azhar university, into street brokers and business middle-

men. Both the male-dominated work fields in Dubai's trading and tourism business sectors and the multi-ethnic and culturally diverse migrant accommodations where Tajiks resided serve as a spatial lens to examine how religiously trained young Tajiks, by drawing on their travel knowledge, religious authority, multiple language proficiencies, and on a broad repertoire of urban skills, coped with precarity and temporariness in Dubai's informal and formal economic sector. At the same time, this broad cultural repertoire fostered a wide range of translocative practices through which Tajik street brokers and middlemen flexibly traversed and connected the hierarchical economic and religious worlds of Afghan traders, Iranian businessmen, and Arab sponsors. Following performative practices of migrant self-fashioning, the chapter concludes by illustrating how Tajik middlemen upgraded their informal migrant status in Dubai and used their cosmopolitan and pious Muslim businessman identities to signify an exclusive socioeconomic position in the hierarchical field of Asian migrant workers in Dubai.

Chapter three zooms in on the religious economy of Dubai's fur business. Drawing on the growing body of anthropological studies on 'neoliberal piety' or 'pious neoliberalism', the chapter explores how Tajiks combining work and piety engaged in reformist Islam as an all-encompassing way of life to secure economic prosperity, and to make sense of both economic success and failure. This involves Tajik Muslims' engagement in godly, i. e., Shariʿa (Arabic *sharīʿah*) conform work. This chapter reveals how Tajiks situated their Muslimness in a field of competing discourses related to 'correct' work practices and business ethics, as circulated and cultivated in Dubai's reformist Muslim business networks. Arguably, a heightened mobility within and across different Islamic traditions enabled Tajiks to flexibly combine the moral heritage of Persian Sufi Islam with the entrepreneurial spirit and purist piety of their Salafi-minded Dubai business partners. By drawing on the various logics of dwelling and crossing as translocations in economic, social and religious terms (covering multiple positionings and translations), this chapter illustrates that while Tajiks connected themselves to the cosmopolitan heritage of Muslim trading worlds in and across the 'Persian Gulf' and Eurasia, they simultaneously longed for the aspirational political project of the 'Arabian Gulf'.

In the following two chapters, the focus shifts to practices and processes of migrant placemaking outside the workplace. Mapping the moral and emotional geographies of everyday migrant life in Dubai, the second part of the book explores how Tajiks engaged in spatial politics of Muslim piety and belonging in an urban environment shaped by diversity, difference, and ambivalent cosmopolitanism, providing some opportunities and limiting others. *Chapter four* provides a spatial analysis of how Tajiks engaged in processes of embodied placemaking through a wide range of leisure activities conducted in Dubai's city space. The chapter explores how the mutually constitutive relationship between migrant bodies and

urban space produced a specific sense of Dubai as a 'good Muslim place' that is set in relation to circulating social imaginaries about the city as a place where people become pious. With a focus on visiting spectacular mosques as both cosmopolitan places of worship and iconic tourist sites, on selective practices of eating out in ethnic restaurants, as well as on the practice of adopting Arab names, the chapter illuminates the complex relationship between place, space, and Muslim subjectivity. As will be shown, Tajik migrants incorporated the powerful religious and political ideologies of the urban places they inhabited as they simultaneously envisioned and made these places meaningful in relation to their former spatial experiences as migrant workers in Russia or deviant Muslims at home (instead of passively adapting to the reigning spatial regimes of national politics of identity and belonging). Tackling reformist Islam through translocative practices that situated Tajiks in the moral geography of Dubai's urban space, the chapter unfolds the argument that the realm of leisure provided a crucial space in addition to the workplace that allowed Tajiks to craft moral Muslim selves and to sense alternative forms of sociopolitical belonging to Dubai despite an exclusive citizenship and migration regime.

Shifting to the lifeworlds of Tajik women accompanying their husbands to Dubai, *chapter five* explores how the organization of work in the fur business together with related work ethics and professional identities tied to notions of Muslimness closely resonated with Tajik migrants' residential practices and family lifestyles in the United Arab Emirates, mainly in the neighboring emirate of Sharjah. Arguably, housing preferences, home-making practices, and neighborly cohabitations were closely intertwined with the social integration into and cultivation of business networks, the formation of pious subjectivities, and the fashioning of migrant identities. This observation places Tajik women and their embodied religious placemaking at the center of this chapter. Two findings are guiding: Firstly, migrant women's worlds were not limited to the private space of the home. Instead, Tajik women actively participated in and shaped the urban public through involvement in the aesthetics and ethics of self-organized neighborhood sociabilities, as they emerged around religious infrastructures like neighborhood mosques and Quranic recitation courses. Thus, Tajik women's religious placemaking intertwined the domestic, family, and neighborhood space in Sharjah (i. e., the women's world) with the realm of work and business in Dubai (i. e., the men's world). Secondly, circulating migrant stories about Tajik women who transformed into 'Islamic women' in Dubai relate their religious self-fashioning to cosmopolitan moments of shared neighborly sociabilities in which reformist Muslim piety was also reconfigured as a signifier for middle-class belonging.

The *Conclusion* reprises the major themes of this translocal ethnography and reflects on the epistemological, methodological, and conceptual gains of the

'Dubai business' and 'Muslim mobility' lenses deployed in the book. This last chapter highlights the book's contribution to an anthropology of Muslim mobility and transregional Islam. A final reflection on religion as a practice of translocation in migratory contexts determined by volatility, unevenness, and contingency aims to achieve a synthesis by discussing four analytically relevant aspects and their interrelatedness: temporality, flexibility, positionality, and connectivity.

Chapter 1
Meaningful Movements, Meaningful Places: The Good Elsewhere

This chapter begins with a readjustment of the two questions that gave rise to the present book: Why did Tajiks migrate to Dubai in the early 2000s, and why did they become pious Muslims there? Karim's story given in the introduction and to be continued below compels me to reweigh the two questions. Accordingly, I should not only ask *why* they migrated, and *what* motivated Tajiks to go to Dubai. I shall also include the aspect of *how* it happened. Shifting focus from cause-effect to the process of movement itself, this chapter is dedicated to the question, what *moved* Tajiks to migrate to Dubai, morally, emotionally, bodily? And closely related, what *moved* them to become (more) pious in, and through the process of movement? Tracing the spatial biographies of Tajiks mobile between Tajikistan, Dubai, and other places in the Middle East, this chapter shows that Dubai migration was not only an economically driven spatial practice. Drawing attention also to the cultural representations of migration performatively produced in the moments, when spatial biographies were narrated by my mobile research partners, Dubai migration appeared as a spatial movement that was made meaningful through fashioning it as a form of Muslim travel and aimed to pursue the good elsewhere. There are excellent studies revealing how transregional spatialities spanning parts of Eurasia and the Middle East were formed, shaped and reshaped through Muslim mobility and connectivity throughout history and on multiple scales, despite or beyond changing geographies of geopolitical interest (Marsden and Mostowlansky 2019; Marsden and Henig 2019). But how are these transregional time-space configurations imagined, experienced, inhabited and shaped as meaningful worlds, lifeworlds, homes or spatialized futures, by those Muslims who dwell in and cross through them? Taking these questions into account, this chapter draws attention on the subjective and discursive nature of mobility and relational placemaking. Tracing how Tajiks involved in processes of place- and space-making through multiple forms of Muslim travel between localities in Central Asia, Eurasia and the Middle East, this chapter maps the religious economy of Tajik Dubai business life onto larger moral and emotional geographies of Islamic reform. Focus is thus on imagination, emotion, and embodiment, and on how these aspects matter in the closely intertwined meaningful processes of making Muslim places and making pious and moral Muslim selves.

In his decision to study Islam at Cairo's al-Azhar university, Karim was driven by his desire to improve his knowledge about what during our conversation he re-

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peatedly stressed as 'true', 'real' (*haqiqī*), or 'pure Islam' (*islomi toza*). But while many of his Muslim compatriots engaged in spiritual renewal (*isloh*) at home, for Karim, 'real Islam' was something he did not consider finding in his home country but only through studying it abroad. While we enjoyed our iced soft drink and waited for the food we had ordered on the summer evening cool veranda of the stylish Turkish restaurant in Dushanbe, I asked him for a trigger for his pious striving that brought him to Cairo. Referring to his dream to become a good lawyer in order to help forming a just society in Tajikistan, Karim explained: "I was not driven by money or success, but I wanted to do something good (*kori nekī*). I wanted to become a good lawyer and tried to get an employment in a law office in Dushanbe. But things went wrong." Frustrated about hurdles and injustice (*beadolatī*) he faced during his attempt to enter the national job market with an outstanding university degree and disenchanted with the lack of future prospects in his home country, he went to Russia and later Dubai to earn money. In that time, he began to seek answers in religion: "I had no idea of Islam (*dini islom*) before. Religion was never a topic in my family. But something drove me, I wanted to know whether there is anything else in this world, something better than what I experienced so far in my life." To search for this 'else', Karim had to go abroad. During his work stay in Dubai, he attended free beginners' courses at one of the state-sponsored AWQAF Quran centers and later moved to Cairo to study Islamic law (Arabic *fiqh*) at al-Azhar university.

Karim's story is revealing in multiple ways: It shows an engagement in Islamic reform as moral activism that attaches religious ideals such as 'pure Islam' or the 'good Muslim life' to places located elsewhere. Thus, religious ideals have undergone spatialization. In addition, like the personal projects of spiritual, moral, and social self-fulfillment, this pursuit was tied to the need to migrate. Spatializing Islamic reform among mobile Tajiks by highlighting their orientation elsewhere, this chapter unfolds a comprehensive discussion of the three entangled forms of Muslim travel, namely *riḥla, hijra*, and *ḥajj.* Arguably, using a spatial lens on reformist Muslim piety and belonging helps to better understand how Muslim travel and the underlying 'ethic of dwelling and leaving' (Fadil, Moors and Arnaut 2021) has moved reform-minded Tajiks and paved the way to enter Dubai's business fields. Tracing spatial biographies of mobile Tajiks such as Karim, the conceptual lens of 'translocation' helps to gaze analytically at movement and place-making, as well as the co-constitutive relationship between movement and place-making. Thus, the two concepts 'abroad' and 'elsewhere' turn out to be crucial relational categories designating situated forms of knowledge that have allowed reform-minded Tajik Muslims to use migration as a signifier for an exclusive moral and social position.

Further, Dubai and Tajikistan prove not to be the only places that matter in the moral and emotional geographies of Muslim travel. The two sites are situated in a larger topography of connected meaningful places that encompasses Cairo, Moscow, Mecca, and Medina in the Hejaz, as well as other places in the Middle East.

To understand how mobile Tajiks turned 'localities' into 'meaningful places', the chapter uses a relational placemaking approach. Accordingly, the meaningfulness of places such as Tajikistan, Dubai, and Russia only emerges in relation to how Tajiks have perceived other places they have inhabited in the past or they long to inhabit in the future. In line with this approach, Dubai migration is not to be understood as a one-directional process but as situated in larger trajectories of Muslim travel that are formed through multiplicity, rupture, and entanglement. These mobile trajectories build on, create, and shape Muslim connectivity and connectedness through spatial practices of 'dwelling' and 'crossing' (Tweed 2006). As the spatial biographies presented in this book show, this connectivity was what *moved* Tajiks to return home, or to migrate further. Drawing on the mobilizing power of moral sentiments and emotional attachments through the narration of sensational *ḥajj* stories, the last part of the chapter shifts focus from connectivity as a dynamic process to connectedness as a lived experience. Apparently, connectedness shapes the sense of belonging as it involves mobile Tajiks in aesthetic forms of binding that foster post-national and post-secular orientations. With a focus on *riḥla* and *hijra*, the first two parts of the chapter show how the two forms of Muslim travel form an integral part of a moral geography that tells a lot about how my pious Tajik research partners both sensed and made sense of the place they called home. Thus, feelings of estrangement and dislocation at home became forces mobilizing them to leave. As will be shown in the chapter's first part on *riḥla*, the search by Tajiks for hopeful knowledge was closely tied to good Muslim places abroad. With an emphasis on individual experiences related to the process of returning home, part two of the chapter depicts the contingency of Islamic reform, thereby illustrating how the elusiveness of spatialized religious ideals can trigger new forms of Muslim travel, i. e., *hijra.*

According to Verne (2019, 85), all transregional phenomena are volatile and difficult to fix in time and space, yet have effects and leave traces, if sometimes only temporarily. Helpful in this regard is what van Schendel calls 'spatial moments', and citing Hugh Raffles (2002, 7–8) explains as moments that come "into being and continue being made at the meeting points of history, representation, and material practice" (van Schendel 2015, 116). Starting from here, this chapter depicts 'moments of connectedness' – of places, people, things, times, and tenses – and the material traces they leave. Traces occur, are imagined, embodied, experienced, sensed, enacted, valued, and shaped during mobile Tajik engagement in perfecting their reformist piety and sensing belonging. As they take shape during the spatial

practices of dwelling and crossing, moments of connectedness are always situated and are both translocative and transtemporal, as are their effects.

Going Abroad to Seek 'Hopeful Knowledge': Engaging in *Riḥla*

The Tajiks I met in my fieldwork who came to embrace reformist ideals, placed great emphasis on acquiring the 'right' or 'correct' knowledge (*ilmi durust*, *ilmi haqiqī*). This quest to know Islam in its purest essence was constituted by a shift from religious practice to text. Describing himself as *qur'onparast*, i. e., a person who 'worships' the Quran, Karim emphasized both his orientation towards scriptural Islam and a piety based on the acquisition of proper knowledge (*ilm*, Arabic *ʿilm*). He did so to distinguish himself clearly from the Muslims in his environment, whom he called *odamparast*, i. e., people who 'worship' other human beings and their words and deeds. Karim, applied the term *odamparast* to people following the interpretation of the Quran and Sunna authorized by religious authorities (*uloma,* Arabic *ʿulamā'*) adhering to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence (Arabic *taqlīd*). While worshipping and visiting the tombs of saints (*avliyo,* Arabic *ʾawliyā'*) forms an integral part of the Muslim tradition in the region, as one of the religious practices rooted in the rich Sufi Islamic heritage in Persian-speaking Central Asia, to Karim, this constituted *odamparast.* Related concepts of proper Muslimness (*musulmonī, odobu akhloq*) have been integrated into and shaped by the Hanafi school of law prevalent in Tajikistan and wider Central Asia.

Such a book-centered approach was coupled with the idea of Islam as an all-encompassing way of life and a coherent system of rules, norms, values, and sentiments (Arabic *manhaj*) which can be rationally discovered by studying scripture systematically. This included not only Quran and the Sunna, but also scientific books. During my fieldwork in Dubai and Tajikistan, I was repeatedly told the story of the miraculous conversion of the French pioneer of oceanography Jacques Yves Cousteau (d. 1997). Allegedly, the famous researcher embraced Islam after learning that his discovery that water of different salinity cannot be mixed finds confirmation in the Holy Quran. Cousteau's miraculous conversion story is revealing in several respects. Firstly, the circulation of such sensational stories between places and people in Tajikistan, Dubai, Egypt, and Russia and beyond shows the spatialization of a larger trend towards faith in science along with a quest for authenticity through facticity (Russian *fakty,* Tajik *haqiqī*), building on universal book knowledge. Juxtaposing science with culture, Islam in its purest form (*islom*) became a universal identity in sharp distinction to those understandings of Muslimness (*musulmonī*) shaped by local cultural traditions and national values. Thus, secondly, the scientific knowledge-centric paradigm has become a marker for Muslim

piety and a foundation for moral personhood that reform-minded Tajiks share with Muslims in other parts of the world (see for example Schielke 2015a, 70, 74). Thirdly, as part of a discursive-performative repertoire, my research partners used Cousteau's conversion story to present themselves as reformist Muslims before a researcher from a European university. Simultaneously, and according to the *daʿwa* principle, they tried to convince this European anthropologist to embrace Islam (as Cousteau had done a few decades earlier).

Islamic Knowledge Reconfigured

Eventually, the story of Jacques Cousteau's alleged conversion to Islam exemplifies a reconfiguration of Islamic knowledge production and dissemination driven by the aestheticization of educational content through an increasingly digitalized visual culture that Muslims in Central Asia consumed and shaped in multiple ways. In the early 2000s, mediatized Islamic knowledge production and dissemination was co-constitutive in the growing global knowledge industry. While transregionally active piety and missionary movements from the Middle East and South, including Turkey's Gülen network, the Tablighi Jamaat movement, and movements such as Hizb-ut Tahrir or Salafi groups were already waning or limited in scope in the early 2000s due to political restrictions in Tajikistan, Muslims from Tajikistan were involved in these Islamic knowledge circuits through virtual and physical mobility. Mobilities increased significantly in the 1990s, partly as a result of the abolition of Soviet border and migration regimes that had regulated mobility in Central Asia's societies. Work migration to Russia, migration to Afghanistan during the country's bloody civil war (1992–1997), as well as study, tourism, and business trips in combination with the pilgrimage to Mecca accelerated a heightened orientation towards the Middle East. Moreover, increased mobility flows between Central Asia, Eurasia, and the Middle East contributed to the emergence of a Muslim public sphere that was significantly shaped by Islamic media formats such as videos, CDs, television series, and Islamic television programs for domestic consumption (Schwab 2018; Dağyeli 2015; McBrien 2012). Soon, social media would take on an influential role in the aestheticization of Islamic educational content (Stephan-Emmrich 2018a). In addition, a booming market of religious guidebooks and educational literature on Islam in Russian, English, Persian, and Turkish together with Quran translations sponsored by the Saudi royal family travelled with migrants, traders, and businesspeople from Dubai, Cairo and elsewhere in the Middle East and Russia (Stephan-Emmrich 2021). Finding ways into local markets and migrants' homes, these commodities shaped new media formats and aesthetic forms of distributing scientized Islamic knowledge. Attracted by the aesthetic materiality of

these new education formats, many Muslims from Tajikistan embraced globalizing discourses on Islamic reform as they were produced and disseminated in the intellectual environments of Islamic universities such as Cairo's al-Azhar or the Islamic University of Medinah, Islamabad's International Islamic University or the Jamiah Darul Uloom in Zahedon, Iran. The knowledge acquired in these institutions and the material forms of its mediation circulated together with purist, script-oriented discourses and doctrines close to Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood (Arabic *al-ikhwān al-muslimūn*) through the many AWQAF charity organizations in Dubai and media channels of globally influential preachers such as the Egyptian and Doha-based Islamic scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi[10] (d. 2022). Tajik migrants regularly frequented these educational offers while in Dubai. Moreover, they applied, re-worked, and distributed these aestheticized knowledge formats while involved in different transregional migrant sociabilities. In so doing, they re-crafted their Muslim selves along identifications beyond forms of 'being Tajik' that were post-national and cosmopolitan and transcended ethnic, local, and regional and kinship-based affiliations.

In this evolving Muslim public sphere, religious authority, leadership, and Islamic education underwent dramatic pluralization. Tajik Muslims needed to recraft their newly gained reformist mindset and pious Muslim selves with respect to existing normative orders. One was maintained by the authoritative body of local Muslim tradition and represented by influential religious personalities such as Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda and his brothers Nuriddinjon and Mahmudjon, Pir Ismoil Muhammadzoda, or Said Abdullah Nurī, strongly rooted in the tradition of Sufi ethical practice, thought, and metaphysics, above all by the Naqshbandiya and Qādiriya orders (Arabic *turuq*). Another normative framework was set by a binding state-definition of Islam that promotes Hanafi Islam as part of Tajikistan's cultural heritage and identity, but "de-Islamicized" Hanafi doctrine by integrating them into the crafting of a national Persian literary heritage complex (Epkenhans 2017, 191). Thus, a discursive line of conflict emerged between a designated 'homegrown' (*vatanī, mahallī*), tolerant (*purtahammul*) and just (*odil, haq*) Islam closely interwoven with the Persian literary tradition, Sufi ethics and Hanafi doctrine and rather purist interpretations of an Islam labeled as 'Arabic' (*islomi arabī*) and marked as dangerous (*xatarnok*), radical (*ifrotī*) and brought from 'outside' (*az khorija*). This line of conflict determined everyday Muslim life in Tajikistan

10 Yusuf al-Qaradawi was an Islamic legal scholar and influential member of the Muslim Brotherhood (Arabic *al-iḫwān al-muslimūn).* He quickly became a global religious authority ('global mufti') due to his influential televised sermons, which he broadcast on his Al-Jazeera television program *As-Sharia wal Hayat* (Arabic *aš-šarīʿa wal-ḥayāt*, *The Sharia and Life*). He is considered a controversial voice for moderation in the Muslim world (see Gräf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2009)

and fuelled contestations about religious authority and authorized power to define what 'proper' Islamic knowledge (*ʿilm*) is (Abashin 2006; Rahnamo 2004).

From 'Learning' to 'Traveling for Learning': *Riḥla fī Ṭalab al-ʿIlm*

The reconfiguration of Islamic knowledge production and dissemination was very conducive to the emergence and cultivation of aspirations, sentiments and normative environments that mobilized reform-minded Muslims from Tajikistan to seek for proper knowledge by traveling abroad. These movements were, at the same time, rooting in Tajikistan's Muslims' deep emotional and spiritual attachment to sacred landscapes spanning holy sites and institutions of Islamic learning across Central Asia, Eurasia and the Middle East. In due course, an understanding of Islamic reform (*isloh*) began to take hold, according to that the properness of knowledge (Arabic *ʿilm*) derives from the authoritative power of institutions of Islamic learning along with the moral assessment of places abroad as good places to study, live, and work. As both proper institutions of Islamic learning and proper Muslim places were located by my research partners abroad (*dar khorija*), i. e., outside Tajikistan, the engagement in *riḥla fī ṭalab al-ʿilm,* the Muslim tradition of traveling for the search of knowledge became a strong marker for reformist piety. Mapping the spatial biographies of former students of Islam, who later got involved in Tajik Dubai business life, unto larger geographies of piety and belonging, *riḥla* turns out as a meaningful movement: Promising personal development and self-fulfilment through the acquisition of *ʿilm* as a form of 'hopeful knowledge', *riḥla* forms integral part of a moral activism, which is directed to the imagination of the good elsewhere.

Designating a journey, a travel, or a voyage, in the *ḥadīth* literature the Arabic term *riḥla* got also implicitly related to the desire for knowledge. Expressed by the phrase *riḥla fī ṭalab al-ʿilm* (Arabic 'travel in the search of knowledge'), the liaison between traveling, or wanderlust, with knowledge acquisition was canonised by the famous call of prophet Muhammad to the faithful to seek knowledge even as far as China. However, what I describe in the book as ethic of dwelling and leaving is not specific to reform-oriented Muslims. The crystallization and expansiveness of historical and contemporary Sufi networks in many parts of the Muslim world, just to add another example, make clear the overall close interweaving of mobility and Muslim subjectivity, piety and belonging (Ziad 2012; Salvatore 2018; Can 2012; Euben 2008; Cooke and Lawrence 2005). The distinct tradition of Muslim travel has sedimented into a literary genre called *riḥla*, travelogue, as it developed in the context of pilgrimage, above all to the sacred places in the Hejaz (Gellens 1990; El Moudden 1990). Both traveling and the written representations

of travel experiences were crucial for the formation of a Muslim consciousness based on the idea of being part of Muslim community as a whole (Arabic *ummah*) and simultaneously on a sense of locality in terms of the specificity of one's own cultural background. What El Moudden (1990) framed as ambivalence of *riḥla* formed an important component for sensing Muslim connectedness, which in turn has shaped a cosmopolitan understanding of being-in-the-world among Tajik Muslims I met in Dubai. This Muslim *Weltverständnis* is inscribed in the concept of *musofir* (Arabic *musāfir*), designating a traveling person, and linked with the cultivation of a wide range of religious and moral norms, values, and sentiments subsumed under the Tajik term *odobu akhloq.* The obligation among Muslims from Tajikistan to treat a traveling person (*musofir*) with respect resonates in the Muslim identity-forming tradition of hospitality (*mehmondūstī*). This respect at the same time refers to the high value assigned to knowledge and to the person bearing this knowledge. Because in terms of Islam all knowledge derives from God, a sharp distinction between secular and religious knowledge would obscure the broad scope of the term *ʿilm* (see Euben 2008, 35). Accordingly, *ʿilm* covers any kind of travel experience including foreign languages, professional skills, or strategies in successful dealing with migration and border regimes. Following anthropologist Tim Ingold (2013), knowledge is created through acts of making. Tackling Muslim travel as a translocative practice, it creates knowledge through world- and place-making. This knowledge is transformative, as it includes "what is revealed in the translating practices of the traveller who purveys and represents what is unfamiliar by way of comparison with what is familiar" (Euben 2008, 34). This translating activity, Euben further states, "simultaneously discloses and articulates the shifting boundaries and content of other and self" (ibid).

For Tajiks like Karim, who embraced Islamic reform, knowledge acquisition abroad was above all driven by the search for *ʿilm* as 'hopeful knowledge', i. e., knowledge based on hope, and more concretely, the hope to progress. In his work on youth, education, migration and neoliberal capitalism in urban Ethiopia, Daniel Mains defines 'hopeful knowledge' in reference to Richard Rorty's (1999) pragmatic philosophy as a form of knowledge that "supports possibilities for imagining and achieving a different and desirable future" (Mains 2013, 17). Articulations of hope in relation to knowledge acquisition require the existence of social environments, in which education is highly valued and constructed as the primary path to success (Mains 2013, 73). In the early 2000s, the scientific knowledge paradigm of reformist Islam met with great resonance of an aspirational environment shaped by the high value that higher education had in Soviet times on the one hand, and by the globalization of educational policies on the other hand. In addition to that, the booming Gulf economy with its promise of success was a driving force in the economization of education (Spring 2015). Inspired by Mains' defini-

tion, the concept of 'hopeful knowledge' provides a fruitful lens to expand the scope of meaning young Tajiks attached to the tradition of Muslim knowledge travel as a meaningful movement that brings personal transformation. For the thousands of young Tajiks, who had left their country in the late 1990s and early 2000s to acquire Islamic knowledge in universities and madrasa in the Middle East, *riḥla* was above all an aspirational education project directed towards places of institutionalized learning in the Middle East. In this quality, *riḥla* designated Islamic reform (*isloh*) as both a moral and a social project of self-fashioning that promised self-fulfilment and progress to be gained outside the home country. Thus, their engagement in *riḥla* was articulated by my research partners in direct response to the experience of economic deprivation, unemployment and lacking future perspectives for Muslim youth.

Cairo's al-Azhar University in Egypt, Medina's al-Madinah University in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's International Islamic University in Islamabad (IIUI) or the Darul Uloom complex in Zahedon hosting the famous Makki Mosque as the largest Sunni Muslim mosque in Iran, were highly frequented study destinations, connecting Tajikistan's Muslims with globally circulating discourses on Islamic renewal. While Islamic universities in Moscow, Petersburg and Kazan were also frequented in continuation with institutionalized Islamic education abroad during the Soviet era and very likely also in combination with work migration to late-Soviet metropolises like Moscow and Leningrad (Sahadeo 2019, 23–25), Middle Eastern universities gained a special popularity in the early 2000s as places where hopeful knowledge could be acquired. The reasons for this were numerous and encompassed a mix of spiritual, moral and economic motives. From a pragmatic perspective, al-Azhar, IIUI or Darul Uloom were easily accessible because of uncomplicated visa regulations and existing social contacts through previous migration movements, above all as a result of the civil war in Tajikistan and the related migration wave to neighboring Afghanistan. From a religious perspective, universities such as al-Azhar or al-Madinah were favored study destinations due to their proximity to the sacred cities Mecca and Medina in the Hejaz. Due to their situatedness in the sacred geography of Islam, educational institutions such as al-Azhar enjoyed a high level of religious authority among Sunni Muslims. At the same time, with its mix of seminary tradition of Islamic learning with Western university-style formal structures, al-Azhar university, but also lesser frequented al-Madinah university, represented a modern approach towards Islamic knowledge production and dissemination (Bano and Sakurai 2015). The same in Pakistan. There, the International Islamic university in Islamabad (IIUI) had successfully implemented the modernist Islamization of knowledge project established in the 1970s (Derichs 2017, 33–35; Reetz 2017). But the university attracted Tajik students also because of its international and modern outlook in combination with a lived culture of openness to re-

ligious pluralism, as well as to Persian Islam and Sufi metaphysics. In the following, I am paraphrasing what Sharif, who studied philosophy and comparative religious studies at International Islamic University of Islamabad in the late 1990s and worked as a freelancer journalist for a renowned daily newspaper in Dushanbe when we met in 2013, told me about his religious awakening abroad. Sharif emphasized that it was only during his studies in Pakistan that he became aware of the deep roots of his Muslimness in the spiritual heritage of Sufi-influenced Persian Islam. "There were Muslims from all kinds of countries in my class. Each with their own religious mindset (*aqida*, Arabic *ʿaqīda*)". But it was above all, he remembered, the comparative and embracing approach of his study department that made him understand who he is as a Muslim and where he belongs to. As a consequence, he returned as what he described himself as a pious (*taqvodor*, *khudotarzish*) and open-minded (*ozodandesh*) Muslim. Even more, Sharif realized that the religious mindset (*aqida*) that many Tajik students from Arab countries brought with them does not fit to the mindset of the majority of Tajik Muslims (*rost nameoyad*): "We are simply too strongly influenced by the Persian Islamic tradition. That is our Islam". Being global players in the dissemination of Islamic discourses on 'reform', 'modernity' and 'progress', Islamic universities like IIUI, al-Azhar or al-Madinah were at the same attractive as multipliers of 'hopeful knowledge'. The Muslim epistemologies they produced and disseminated were very much connectable with circulating purist-Salafist thought and simultaneously appealing to those Tajiks, whose educational aspirations were influenced by Soviet logic of science and related concepts of knowledge and educational ideals that build on scientific rationalism, facticism, and systematics.[11]

Getting Stuck and the Ethic of Leaving

In his geographical analysis of the relation between place, the real and the good, Robert Sack points out that places "are essential instruments in the transformation of existing reality into a new reality we think we want or ought to have" (Sack 2003, 13). For the author, places are intimately connected to the moral, and to

11 In Central Asia's Muslim societies, a return to Jadidism with decolonial traits has been observed in public discourse for some years now. However, this trend did not find any resonance in the conversations I had with my Tajik research partners. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out here that scientific rationality in Muslim thought and a scriptualistically orientated concept of knowledge (*ʿilm*) was formative to Jadids' approach to Islam (DeWeese 2016, 76, 81). Notions of knowledge that build on scientific rationalism, facticism, and systematics are obviously not only the result of Soviet education policy in Central Asia.

what it means to be and to do good. Accordingly, moral activism requires a place, or a certain idea of place, in order to become real. And one step further, moral placemaking is always relational. Through moral assessments that construct places in the Middle East such as Cairo, Dubai, or in more general terms *Arabiston* (Tajik 'the land of Arabs') as good, or 'pure' Muslim places (*joyi insoftarin, mamlakathoi musulmonī*), Tajiks made these places meaningful. Thus, the concomitant moral assessments were made in relation to spatial experiences made elsewhere: at home in Tajikistan, while working in Russia, or studying in Islamabad. Morality, in that sense, forms an arena for conscious social practices relative to and as a product of different historical and geographical configurations. A "form of situated knowledge" (Sack 2003, 37), morality signifies a particular social position that is marked by the desire to progress, spiritually, morally, socially. In the logic of Islamic reform as a translocative practice, this desire calls for an ethic of leaving, in which Tajikistan, the home country, formed a meaningful spatial reference by help of which Tajiks shaped their pious selves and sensed belonging.

"If you want to meet people like me, you won't find them here. You have to go to Dubai" – Karim's prompt response to my request for help in further contacting returned students of Islam hints to the spatial shift that Muslim renewal in Tajikistan had undergone when I started my research in 2012. The effects of the multiple translocative practices involved got manifest in a condition that has shaped my research significantly: people's absence from home. No matter if temporary, final, recurring or only longed for, the state of absence marks a specific social position, or an intersection of multiple social positions determined by age, gender, regional origin or educational background. Articulations of this social position occurred in the moral rhetoric of *riḥla.* According to that, being absent marks a moral state that manifests in the spatialization of the Islamic concept of *jahl.* Designating a state of ignorance and the lack of truth, in the narratives of reform-minded Tajiks like Karim *jahl* (Arabic from *jāhiliya)* formed the opposite of *ʿilm.* Accordingly, *jahl* designates a state of ignorance that manifests itself in the veneration of saints (*avliyoparast*), the blind following of religious authorities (*odamparast*) and conformity to an established teaching doctrine (Arabic *taqlīd*), i. e., local Muslim practices often referred to as *shirk* (Arabic 'idolatry'). Thus, emphasis was put on the necessity to acquire *ʿilm* abroad in order to overcome *jahl* at home. Closely related to that doctrine was the cultivation of an ethic of leaving that built on the shifting meaning from *jahl* as designating a human condition to a spatial description (from an inner state to a state of place). Correspondingly, the obligation *to learn* in order to become a proper Muslim and to find the truth, i. e., to overcome the state of ignorance and lack of education in oneself, shifted towards the normative impetus to *travel for learning* abroad, i. e., leaving a place of *jahl* in order to find Islam in its purest and most truthful form elsewhere. As a religious category, *jahl*

simultaneously referred to the absence of hopeful knowledge and the absence of possibility to progress.

Tajiks' mobile trajectories into Dubai's multiple business worlds show significant heterogeneity with regard to itineraries, destinations, and the social background of the people involved. However, as a striking shared feature, they were shaped by biographical ruptures and stasis caused above all by the bloody civil war, the shortcomings of a weak state education system, both the secular and the Islamic one, economic instability and limited access to the national and international labor market. Facing failure, struggling with a lack of future perspectives together with the feeling of being stuck particularly affected aspiring university graduates like Karim, who were confronted with the de-evaluation of their university degrees and a lack of recognition of academic qualifications in general (DeYoung 2010; Lepisto 2010). Karim's experience of injustice in his efforts to get an employment as a freshly trained lawyer was amplified by an economic sector pervaded by corruptive practices, regimes of nepotism, and a monopolized market control through political elites which systematically suppress alternative economic interests (Bandelj 2016; Özcan 2010, 55–56). Nasrulloh, a previous student who returned from al-Azhar after the presidential call-back campaign in 2010 and ran a thriving gas station in Dushanbe with his brother, started a new business selling spare parts for SUVs in Dubai after local authorities confiscated the gas station business for allegedly promoting extremist Islamic networks and threatened the two business owners with jail time. Apparently, the combination of heightened "de-socialization of economy" (Bandelj 2016, 96) with a social stratification that consolidates uneven access to and distribution of wealth between Tajikistan's new rich (*Tojiki nav*) and a larger group of dispossessed, or "disinherited" (Biard 2019, 2) people framed how young and educated people in Tajikistan evaluated post-Soviet modernity and critically scrutinized values such as democracy, freedom, justice and social equality.

Articulations of religious ideals such as 'pure' Islam happened in direct response to the sensed disjuncture between an experienced contemporary reality and former promising narratives of development and progress. A post-colonial experience that Tajikistan's Muslims share with many other Muslims in the world, Pauline Jones argues that this "disjuncture has fostered the emergence of Islamist and reformist movements that challenge secular state authority by articulating alternative visions of development, progress as well as governance in accordance with proper societal values and a claim for cultural authenticity" (Jones 2017b, 292; see also Lapidus 2014, 522; Nasr 1992). Evoking authorized Islamic concepts of travel such as *riḥla*, reform-minded Tajiks draw from a discursive repertoire to fashion themselves as moral agents able to create alternative conditions for progressing instead of accepting stasis and passivity as common roads into adulthood (Roche

2014a) and central features of obedient citizenship (Lemon and Thibault 2018). Against the background of the perceived collective loss of value after the breakdown of Soviet Union (Yurchak 2005), unfulfilled promises of modernization and development made by the post-Soviet government after independence, and personal encounters with growing authoritarianism coupled with economic instability and decline, corruption and repression, the ethics of *riḥla* and the related meaning of 'abroad' created an horizon of opportunity for Karim and his pious peer-group to tame contingency, "to break away from particular temporalities, [and] to escape destined futures and to create the conditions for an alternative social project", thus redressing the course of history instead of passively receiving the state's, adults' or elders' version of history and future (Bromber et al. 2015, 9; see also Biard 2018, 122).

Summing up, following a global trend, among Tajik Muslims, reformist Islam has become a signifier for an exclusive moral position. Particularly well-educated Muslims like Karim embraced the idea of a universalizing 'pure' or 'true' Islam and performed commitment to a universal Muslim community (Arabic *ummah*) as a strategy for self-identification. Thus, the scientific-purist knowledge paradigm mapped out clear boundaries in lifestyle orientations. Here, it was mobility as an Islamic lifestyle, that worked well in the context of cultural pluralization, while cosmopolitan and post-national orientations provided a resource to transcend and overcome local deprivation, repression and social exclusion (McLoughlin 2010, 228). Young and aspired Tajiks' disenchantment with national education policies and the striking social closures in the job market not only for lawyers was fuelled by the compelling drive of the globalization of education which, pushing the aspiration for international education, has also led to a critical assessment of institutionalized Islamic education at home (Stephan-Emmrich 2017). With globalization, Islam opened itself to the world market and thus became a powerful resource for religious re-enchantment and thus the vehicle of demands for individual autonomy and progress. With an emphasis on 'hopeful knowledge' encompassing scripturality, rationality, and purification, in the early 2000s engagement in reformist piety had become a compelling way for Tajikistan's Muslims to participate in modernity alternatively to the restrictive epistemological framework set by the secular and post-Soviet nation state in their vision of the future of education and development in Tajikistan.

The Moscow – Cairo – Dubai Connection

Expanding the topography of meaningful places to be mapped onto the moral geography of Islamic reform projects among mobile Tajiks, Russia turns out as an im-

portant landmark imbued with meaning as spatial reference in processes of relational Muslim placemaking. Shifting the analytical gaze to Russia thus helps to understand how deeply engrained the ethics of *riḥla* is with global economy. Following the ways, Tajiks like Karim opened up for pursuing their Islamic studies in Egypt, their spatial biographies depict a very special historical moment of connectivity, that was shaped by the creativity and risk-taking attitudes of these mobile individuals at the intersection of work migration, tourism and diasporic settlement. Although this moment of connectivity some years later closed in the course of restrictive migration regimes, the Moscow – Cairo – Dubai connection helped Tajiks to establish pathways into Dubai's business life.

Like Karim and many other university graduates, at the age of 24, Muzzafar went to Russia to earn money after he could not find work at home. A degree from Islamic University Imam al-Termizi in Dushanbe in his pocket, Muzzafar was driven by his desire to continue his Islamic studies at a high-ranking university abroad. Starting at the age of twelve with religious studies with a mullah in the neighborhood and later continuing at the Islamic University in Dushanbe, Muzzafar quickly missed engagement with religious studies while working in Russia. "Earning money went well in Moscow. But I wanted to continue my studies. I simply didn't get any further with my studies. No progress (*peshraftī*) anymore". He tried to enrol in the Islamic universities in Kazan, Moscow and Petersburg. But after months of struggling with bureaucratic hurdles, he gave up and went to Cairo. Muzzafar evaluated Cairo as a good place to study in close relation to his previous experience of working and studying in Moscow: "Earning money is an easy thing to do in Russia. Also, Russia has very good Islamic universities. But as a Tajik, you are nothing there. You are not respected as a human being. You have difficulties everywhere. This situation made me really tired. I got sick from that and started looking for a place where I could do my studies properly and in peace. No harassments. No fear. No police!" On the base of a tourist visa, Muzzafar left together with Russian tourists via a ship to Sharm el-Shaykh, and from there, and with the help of an Egyptian service employee from the ship company, further to Cairo. In Cairo, he connected himself with Tajiks living in Nasr City. His compatriots in Cairo helped him to successfully pass a half-year language training and to therewith upgrade his Arabic language skills. Later, he enrolled in the faculty of language and translation and additionally attended private courses on *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *qirā'āt* and *fiqh.* Obviously, Muzzafar benefitted from a dynamic transregional configuration of connectivity between work and study migration flows, diasporic dwelling and expanding tourism markets and the related flow of people between Tajikistan, Russia and Egypt, and further.

In the early 2000s, Cairo and Dubai had become popular destinations for Russia's new urban middle class. For Tajiks seeking alternatives to labor migration in

Russia, new livelihood opportunities presented themselves in the tourism business. The much-expressed desire to avoid working in Russia and doing business with Russians however remained unfulfilled. On the contrary, the realization of Islamic life projects through studying in Cairo and working in Dubai was largely based, and depending, on both the booming Russian middle-class tourism industry in the Middle East and the Tajik community in Russia. In other words, the good elsewhere could only be realized with the help of that which one wanted to overcome. Even more, at the early 2000s, this emerging transregional configuration of migration flow, educational travel and tourism mobility had not yet produced any trodden pathways that Muzzafar could have easily entered. What he found was a moment of possibility, that required creativity as improvisation, flexibility, and risk-taking to get recognized, and to get used. "I only had this one chance!" was a common explanation given by my research partners for their travel trajectories. At the same time, such moments of possibility fostered a mode of self-organized travel that occurred outside of state regulation, bypassed migration regimes, and accordingly led to vulnerable social positions, which consequently triggered new migration flows, as the subchapter about *hijra* further below will illustrate.

Riding the wave of Russian middle-class tourism to the Middle East, also Wasim found his way to Cairo's al-Azhar, and later into Dubai's fur business. After finishing his technical studies in Dushanbe with best grade, Wasim followed his uncle to Russia, where he helped him to run a mobile phone business in Moscow. Very adept at dealing with his uncle's clients, his savings grew quickly, and Wasim began to travel, while establishing his own businesses on the side. Wasim explained me his hustle and bustle and his business acumen with reference on his family tradition: "You must know, business and travel are in the genes with me. My father was a train conductor in Soviet times. He used his trips to Odessa to do a bit of shoe business on the side. The shoes he traded in were of high quality and secured him a good additional income." On a trip to Cairo, Wasim felt in love with the place that embodied for him what he called *Arabiston.* In Cairo, he discovered his religious roots and returned to the city in 1999 to enrol at al-Azhar, where he took courses in Quran, *tafsīr* and *tajwīd.* To earn money for his studies, he first followed Russian tourists from Egypt to Dubai, where he sold them mobile phones. When the market in Dubai was flooded with Chinese cell phones, he gave up that business, returned to Cairo, invested in a cab, and offered Russian tourists private trips to the pyramids. When we met in 2013 in Dubai, then 32-year-old Wasim had shifted his private tourist guide business to Dubai and, because of his very good contacts with Russian tourists, also got involved as a middleman in the Tajik fur business (see chapter two).

So far and as the spatial biographies of Muzzafar, Wasim, Karim and his mobile compatriots revealed, it is the interconnectedness of people, mobility

flows, processes, and relations, that *make* places (Cresswell 2002, 26; Massey 1991, 244). Furthermore, it is the pious endeavors of the people who inhabit these places – physically or virtually – that make these places *meaningful,* or 'thick places' (van Schendel 2015). Mapping the interconnectedness of morally good or bad places, we recognize that they form topographies spanning social spaces that constitute meaningful worlds; that is lifeworlds that mobile Tajik Muslims inhabit, dwell in, and cross through in their search for orientation, self-fulfillment, and belonging. Translocative practices of movement and placemaking and the related moral positionings make this interconnectedness itself significant in making pious Muslim selves. But how do Tajik Muslims position and orient themselves in these topographies of ‚thick places'? How do they imagine, sense, embody, enact, and experience interconnectedness while being mobilized for spatial movement by the thickness of these places and the moral and affective dimension of their interconnectedness? To understand how history, representation and material practice work together in translocative practices, we will now deploy a gendered and family perspective on the Muslim tradition of *riḥla* and on the moral meaning of *Arabiston* in the making of Muslim home abroad. We now turn to the trajectories of mobile Islamic reform projects that involve women and children.

Meaningful Places: Gendered and Family Perspectives

In the early 2000s, *riḥla* was by no means an exclusively male issue. It was also an option put forward by many young, religiously-aspiring, well-educated women. In a small-scale survey I conducted among female students at Abu Hanifa Islamic Institute in Dushanbe in 2012, Arab countries such as the Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt topped the ranking of study destinations named with a view to aspirational future careers in journalism, media entertainment, and private entrepreneurship in fashion and design. When I asked about the motivation for studying at the Islamic Institute in Dushanbe, almost all female students referred to their wish to learn Arabic, not only as the sacred language in which the Holy Quran was revealed, but also as a foreign language, and thus as a form of 'hopeful knowledge'. Like English as a global language, Arabic has been associated with accumulating international educational capital, opening up alternative roads into the global job market, particularly in the booming Gulf economy. Obviously, in the early 2000s, universities in the Middle East had become integral to a growing and diversifying landscape of private and state-funded higher education opportunities in Europe, the U.S., Russia, China, and the Middle East. Representing important milestones for the realization of professional and academic careers, universities such as Cairo's al-Azhar whose curriculum offered a mix of secular and

religious subjects were seen as an alternative to hard-to-reach educational institutions in the U.S. or in Europe. Combining a degree in journalism with Quranic studies, for example, was often linked to the expectation of satisfying a desire for spiritual advancement, socioeconomic aspiration, and a possibility for self-empowerment alongside future career prospects. However, for female students, the combination of 'modern' religious and secular knowledge acquisition in a Middle Eastern university environment was associated with another kind of hope: to pursue their university training in a morally safe environment, thereby gaining a good position in the marriage market for reform-minded Muslims in Tajikistan (Stephan-Emmrich 2017).

The religious economy of *riḥla* was also shaped by parents who had sent their sons and daughters for religious education to Arab countries with the aim of preparing them for their religious maturity (*baloghat*). This education strategy integrated Egypt as a major destination in *Arabiston* and was not only popular in Tajikistan itself, but also among pious Tajik migrants in Russia (Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich 2014). In their striving for a correct Islamic education for their kids, many pious parents with whom I talked in Tajikistan turned to places preferable in the Arab Middle East, but also in the Sunni part of Iran (Zahedon), in a direct reaction to the secular environment of the state school system that they accused of lacking a systematic moral education (*tarbiya*, from Arabic *rabbā*, 'to raise', 'to educate'). In addition to that, reform-minded parents were concerned that co-education at state schools would jeopardize the moral reputation of their daughters. While purist Salafism comes along with strict gender segregation for girls and women, it was also common in Muslim families with a religious background (*makhsum, eshon, oksuyak*) to take their daughters out of school when they reach religious maturity. This happened to Mehrigul, whom we will get to know in chapter five, the daughter of an influential *makhsum*[12] family, who was educated by her mother and her father at home only after she reached her religious maturity. For pious Muslim families in Dushanbe, it was primarily the urban public sphere with its secular values that was seen as a moral threat to adolescent daugh-

12 In Tajikistan, the title *makhsum* (Arabic *makhdum*, means 'teacher of sunna') designates hereditary affiliation to a family knowledgeable in religion. Due to the Islamic knowledge passed down within these families (besides Quranic knowledge this may also include sacred knowledge) members of *makhsum* families are recognized as mullahs (*mullo*), spiritual masters (*pir*) and traditionally perform ritual and religious education-related tasks within and across their neighborhood (*mahalla*) (see Abashin 2006, 272–273) In the wake of more restrictive legislation regarding religious practice in the country between 2007 and 2010, the field of religious instruction for these families has been severely curtailed and, as will become apparent in the following chapters, has driven many members of these families to emigrate, for example to Dubai or Cairo.

ters. This eventually drove parents to limit the urban and thereby educational mobility of their daughters. The underlying religious normativity, combined with the evaluation of the urban public space as dangerous, was reinforced in the collective memories of the 1992–1997 civil war. The conversations I had with people in Dushanbe about the security of young women's reputation (*sharmu hayo*) by limiting their urban mobility evoked memories of neighbors and relatives who used to hide their daughters inside the house during the fights to protect their lives, physical integrity, and moral reputation from attacking stray militias.

Against this background, the centralization of all levels of Islamic education at the Abu Hanifa Islamic Institute located in the capital city of Dushanbe caused parents to look for alternative, morally superior places to prepare their daughters for their religious maturity. A mother explained the family's decision to send their thirteen-year-old daughter to Cairo in the company of her older brother (who took over the part of being her *mahram* (Arabic *maḥram*[13]) to enable her education in the basics of Islam and in Quranic recitation (*tajwīd*) instead to the Islamic Institute in Dushanbe as follows:

> Well, that would certainly work as well. They have a lyceum there, also for girls. But she has to get there. Every day, across half the city. How should that work? Dushanbe is not a proper place for young women. It is not a Muslim place. In Egyptian society, they have higher moral standards there. It is a Muslim country, with Muslim manners and a Muslim-friendly environment. That's much better for my daughter.

Preferences for gender segregation in boarding schools and dormitories were often articulated by parents in the context of general criticism of the perceived moral decay of state institutions of learning. This often mingled with moral criticism of the government's failure to keep the promise of democracy, instead imposing a strict secular regime on its Muslim citizens. When we met in Dushanbe in 2014, 54-year-old Anorakhon explained why all of her sons and daughters were studying at al-Azhar. According to her assessment, the Soviet era was not a good time for Muslims in the country. Nevertheless, there have been opportunities to pray in secrecy, or to gain religious knowledge privately, at home or in the house of a mullah as officials often turned a blind eye to people's everyday religious practice. In comparison to such gentle agreements with state politics in Muslim everyday life during the Soviet time, post-Soviet time did not bring more religious freedom, instead

13 The Arabic term *maḥram* refers to a male traveling companion for Muslim girls and women. According to Islamic rules, this person corresponds to a kinship relationship that prohibits marriage and sexual relations as *harām.* A Muslim woman does not have to cover her shame (Arabic *'aura*) in front of a *maḥram.*

promoting state secularism and a related securitization policy that penetrates all areas of public and private life:

> Today, everything is forbidden. The government talks a lot about democracy (*demokratiya*) these days. But where is the freedom (*ozodī*) they promised us, when the mosques are closed for our kids? Religious courses in mosques (*sabaq*) are banned. What freedom is it, when knowledgeable Muslim people (*khondagī*) are punished with imprisonment for teaching Quran to their daughters, nieces, and nephews? This is worse today than it was in Soviet times. We are all Muslims here, our country is a Muslim country, but our government has turned it into a Muslim-unfriendly place.

Translocative practices in the context of children's religious knowledge acquisition are not a new phenomenon. Handing over mature sons and daughters to the care of a religious authority, often a relative but not necessarily so, has been an integral part of the Islamic tradition of becoming a proper Muslim in Central Asia, arranged with the saying "The (children's) flesh is yours, the bones are ours."[14] Children's educational mobility between households, sometimes far away, took place in a space that was considered morally safe, familiar, and protected, and was accordingly understood as an extended space of the domestic sphere. Based on an idea of moral education (*tarbiya*) through a religious authority, the related process of learning and cultivating *odobu akhloq* (proper morality, obedience, and mannerliness) encompassed the acquisition of morals, decency, and a measure of civility in preparation for religious maturity through the embodiment of religious knowledge in combination with assisting in the master's household. However, a new surge in this educational practice occurred with the absence of fathers and male members of the household in the context of labor migration to Russia in the post-Soviet period. As a consequence, the burden of livelihood shifted to the mothers' shoulders. Sending daughters abroad turned out to be a suitable alternative, given parental duties under conditions of heightened moral and economic vulnerability in combination with the prospect of one person less in the household to feed and care for. As an observation, the religious economy of *riḥla* was mainly driven by families where religiously-aspiring mothers worked as mobile traders and regularly traveled to Dubai, China, or Kyrgyzstan. Staying away from home for correspondingly long periods of time, these women welcomed Cairo as a place of opportunity for sending their adolescent daughters to relatives living there, or to special religious course programs privately offered by al-Azhar teachers for underage Mus-

14 This parental practice can also be found in the training of apprentices in various trades up until the early Soviet period. The related master-pupil relationship (*ustod-shogird*) can therefore not exclusively associated with the realm of religious education. Nevertheless, craft training also included elements of religious knowledge transfer (Dağyeli 2011, 148–149, 119–120).

lims from Central Asia, often in combination with free lodging in student dormitories.

Parental orientation towards *Arabiston* as a suitable place for the Islamic education of their children further increased when the government passed a law entitled "Law on Parental Responsibility in Bringing Up their Children" (Jumhurii Tojikistan 2011). The law forbids any kind of private and non-institutionalized Islamic teaching of underage children at home or in mosques (*sabaq*). During my previous fieldwork trips to Tajikistan, I often took part in neighborly religious courses in female religious teachers' (*otin*) homes (Stephan 2012). These courses offered girls and young women not only religious education (*tarbiya*) through the study of religious texts in combination with some helping in the teacher's household; they also provided a quiet space to prepare Quranic readings or to do homework for school under the eyes of a religious authority. With the government's heightened legal efforts to securitize Islam in the country, this form of extended girls' education in the close neighborhood, and within a morally safe space, nearly completely disappeared in Dushanbe after 2010, while it was shifted with all its moral functionalities to the learning environment of Cairo's al-Azhar university.

Much more distant in geographical terms, against the background of the growing Tajik diaspora in Cairo at that time, *Arabiston* was perceived by parents as an easily accessible, morally safe, and intimate social space. Accordingly, the translocation of Muslim parental educational practices heavily relied on trust in an unknown, distant place elsewhere in combination with a moral evaluation of a place afar reinforced by the good reputation of al-Azhar University as a place of transmission of acceptable Islamic knowledge. Based on the existence of a Tajik community in Cairo consisting of former Azharites and their families and other Tajiks living and working there permanently or temporally, Cairo with its radiant university formed a ‚thick place' and thus an important landmark in the larger geography of the good elsewhere; a meaningful place, as it enhanced Tajik Muslims' sense of belonging and connectedness as well as their striving for reformist piety. An integral part of Tajik spatiality, the Tajik diaspora in Cairo contributed to the formation of a larger Muslim space which supported parents in educational tasks that they were not able to fulfil at home, secured the properness of educational endeavors abroad and, finally, enabled reform-minded parents to signify their religious and moral orientation.

In that quality, the Tajik community in Cairo's Nasr City, which emerged around al-Azhar study activities also enabled the spatial expansion of the marriage market of reform-minded Tajik Muslims. At weddings I attended in Dushanbe, women repeatedly asked for daughters with the appropriate religious orientation as marriage partners for their sons studying at al-Azhar, who were al-Azhar trained themselves or had experience with Cairo life. Especially for religious fam-

ilies in direct lineage from the family of the prophet Muhammad or his four successors (Arabic *khalīfa*) that maintain strict endogamous marriage rules, such as *eshon*, *tura* or *oksuyak* families (Abashin 2006, 270), the Tajik diaspora in Cairo offered an important expansion of the otherwise very limited marriage market among their peers. For young and reform-minded parents, Cairo's Tajik diaspora community opened up a horizon of possibility to break with family traditions and bring up their children in a purist Islamic way (see chapter five).

Returning Home … and Leaving Again: *Hijra*

As illustrated so far, the projection of religious ideals onto spatial imaginaries is constitutive for how Tajik Muslims envisioned, performed, and articulated moral projects in relation to the good elsewhere. In his meanwhile classical work *Modernity at Large,* Appadurai (1996, 3) emphasizes the creative power imagination occupies as a culturally organized practice. In this quality, imagination creates moral 'horizons of possibility' (Graw and Schielke 2013). The latter are crucial in shaping young people's goals and aspirations in the context of a globalizing education industry and inform what Michiel Baas has described as 'imagined mobilities' (Baas 2012). Thus, religious imagination can play a co-constitutive role in the creation of such horizons of possibility, as it has the capacity to mobilize for migration for the sake of progress and self-fulfillment (Mc Loughlin 2010). However, leaving the meaning-making role of the process of imagination and the resulting imaginaries aside, one has to ask how people come to terms with the religious ideals they evoked in the context of their mobile everyday life full of constraints and contradictions. In other words: How did Tajiks pursue the moral activism and pious endeavors related to *riḥla* after returning home?

Considering the power of normative discourses to structure people's lives around sentiments and rules that are supposed to make sense of the world (Bens and Zenker 2019, 96) together with the "open-ended productivity of everyday life, which complicates normative discourses and shapes life courses" in a variety of ways (Schielke 2018, 7), religious ideals and the related imagination work they imply tell a lot about the political, social and economic circumstances in which they are envisioned, invoked, and articulated in performative ways by people who try to emulate them. These circumstances are constitutive for the complexities and multiplicities of mobile lives. Contributing to the contingency of personal Islamic reform projects and the elusiveness of the moral and religious ideals attached to them, everyday life constraints produced a wide range of ruptures, which shaped Tajiks mobile trajectories. Whereas a pragmatic approach to experienced ruptures in *riḥla*-related travel endeavors ultimately paved way for entry into Du-

bai's business worlds, the senses of failure, crisis, or doubt related to these ruptures were constitutive of how Tajiks formed pious mobile selves (Beekers and Kloos 2018, 5), and how they sensed belonging in the context of social, political and economic constraints on local, national, and transnational scales.

Only a small number of former students of Islam who were working in Dubai at the time of my fieldwork had earned a degree in subjects such as *fiqh* or *falsafa* in an international Islamic education context. Most of them had dropped out at some point, or interrupted of their studies to earn money, often in Russia, or in Dubai. The reasons were manifold. Lack of money was often mentioned, or parental marriage plans put an end to their religious educational aspirations. A combination of lacking motivation, perseverance, or even insufficient preparation to complete Islamic studies abroad over several years were also decisive. Difficulty in finding work due to a lack of official residence status had an aggravating effect.

A strong vulnerability to political measures regulating Muslim cross-border travel arose when *riḥla* was undergone without registration by a state authority. In August 2010, students of Islam abroad became the focus of governmental efforts to securitize Islam in the country (Lemon and Thibault 2018; Lemon 2016). More than a thousand students, including Karim, as well as Fazliddin and his friends, whom we will meet in chapter two, and who were studying in Egypt, Iran, or Pakistan, had to break off their studies after President Rahmon called them to return home via state-controlled media channels.[15] Propagated as part of state measures to create a 'healthy education' system in Tajikistan (Lemon 2010), the presidential call-back campaign joined a series of political measures the government launched to combat the propagated threat of Islamic fundamentalism (*islomgaroī*) as it was attached to militant or terrorist Islamic movements active in the country like Islamic Movement Uzbekistan (IMU), ISIS and al-Qaida. Worried about the import of religious extremism and militant activism through unregulated cross-border travel, the government also ranked several universities and madrasas in the Middle East on a 'blacklist' of dangerous study destinations to be prohibited due to their supposed radicalization potential.

Karim initially ignored the presidential recall, which he learned about from social media. But when security officials came to his home place and put pressure on his parents, he broke off his studies in Cairo. Back home, he faced the unintended consequences of his study trip. Labeled as an act of illegality (*khayriqononī*), his *riḥla* to Cairo underwent a criminalization. Inspections at the airport, regular vis-

15 See for example "Tajikistan urges parents to recall children from foreign religious schools" Refworld August 25, 2010, see: https://www.refworld.org/docid/4cb83e62c.html ; "Tajikistan: Former students of Islam return to nothing", Eurasianet July 25, 2018, see: https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-former-students-of-islam-return-to-nothing.

its to his home, and interrogations at the presidency led Karim to make himself as invisible as possible and to meet me in a public place where, as he stated, "none of these guys (security officials) would guess me here." While this explained the strangeness of our meeting in a rather inappropriate place, which Karim and I felt equally during our conversation, Karim's attempt to hide from surveillance is symptomatic of the sense of dislocation he and other returned student travelers felt at that time. An interrupted study abroad, treated as a radicalized subject and marginalized in the national labor market because of his 'illegal' study trip in combination with a deviant Muslim appearance (he wore an unshaven beard when we met), Karim got stuck at home again.

Apparently, 'abroad' shifted meaning from a trope for the good elsewhere in Islamic reform projects of young Tajik Muslims to a trope for an 'evil land' (*joyi or mamlakati khatarnok*) and hotspot for the production of the 'dangerous Muslim Other'. Highlighting another normative discursive position that represents the secular nation state, the term has a second negative meaning, i. e. being in error or having gone astray, in the sense of having left the right path or being off-track. This reversed interpretation of the co-constitutive relationship between 'home' and 'abroad' is symptomatic of how the Tajikistani state spatializes fear of instability through a security discourse that constructs 'disorder over the border' to justify authoritarian power structures at home (Koch 2018). Following the moral geography constructed by the government, the Middle East became stigmatized as a trope for political disorder and instability associated with religious fundamentalism and extremism. In the course of increased cross-border mobility after the end of the Soviet Union, the transregional purist Islamic reform movement inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism, and Saudi Wahhabism gained influence in shaping Muslim renewal in Tajikistan, offering youth post-secular and post-national orientations that transcended national, ethnic, or regional identity concepts. The fear of political instability spilling over from the Middle East through a perceived 'Islamic threat' was intensified with the events of the Arab spring. The political liberalization movements that emerged from the street protests and uprisings in Arab countries together with the resulting global solidarization waves was feared by Tajikistan's political elites to promote a compelling alternative for the country's youth that could mobilize protest against the authoritarian system at home.[16]

Security discourses in Tajikistan went hand in hand with the culturalization of the political and the production of essentialized and racial categories of spatial

16 "Tajikistan: Ban on religious education abroad without state permission to be adopted soon?", Forum 18 News Service, May 26, 2011, see: https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4de4dc732.pdf.

identity. State promoted narratives of instability incited fear of a 'foreignization' or 'Arabization' of Islam in Tajikistan. The construction of a territorially fixed 'home', i. e., the Tajik nation-state, to be secured from a spatially diffused dangerous 'abroad', i. e., the Middle East, builds on the correlation between the two concepts of *farhang* (culture) and *begona* (foreign, strange, other) (Nozimova 2018, 261–262). Consequently, young Tajiks like Karim or Muzzafar who studied in Egypt or Pakistan became signifiers of this 'foreignization of Islam'. Carrying the seeds of extremism and radicalization, this 'foreign Islam' jeopardized the construction of a territorially fixed 'homegrown Tajik Islam' rooting in the tradition of Persian culture and literature and the openness and tolerance of the Hanafi branch of law (Epkenhans 2017, 187–192). Building on affective politics of binding (Ahmed 2014), the Tajik state nourished sentiments and shaped imaginaries of non-/belonging relational to homogenized, spatially, and historically fixed cultural identities that worked effectively in shaping how its Muslim citizens inhabit the created 'landscapes of fear' (Tuan 1979); thereby securing the existing authoritarian system by redirecting fear of the repressive state body to "a fear of the loss of the stable certainty of the prevailing order" (Koch 2018, 19).

The way *Arabiston* is imagined and engaged in this moral geography underpins the governments' highly contradictory relationship especially with the Arab Middle East. In the quest for re-orientation within the tense field of a relaunched geopolitical Great Game[17] in the post-cold war era, Tajikistan turned towards the Middle East in the early 2000s. As a welcome alternative to Russia's neo-colonial influence, the relative inaccessibility of Western states and China's growing economic appetite for its Central Asian neighbors' resources, the Gulf states, with their emerging and vibrant Islamic economies, promised an attractive alternative road to modernity and development under the umbrella of a shared Islamic civilization and heritage. For example, with financial support from Qatar, the government launched the construction of the biggest mosque in Central Asia and reconstructed Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe as a developing urban metropolis with references to a global Muslim modernity (Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016). In parallel, religious networks and monetary flows from Gulf states were included in official security discourses as supportive of humanitarian initiatives, charity organizations, and educational activism in 1990s combining development projects with missionary activities (Wilkowsky 2009; Balci 2007).

17 This is an allusion to the historical conflict between the British and Russian empire for supremacy in Central Asia in the middle of the 19th century, see for example Ewans, Martin (ed). 2004. *Britain and Russia in Central Asia.* London: RoutledgeCurzon.

Fears over the border stirred up by the political rhetoric found a favorable breeding ground in internationally circulating security narratives, as they emerged in globalizing Islamophobic sentiments in response to 9/11, al-Qaida, the foundation and growing influence of the Islamic State (ISIS) from 2004 on, and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. For the Tajikistani government, global security discourses such as the War on Terror formed effective references to underpin their own security policy. In the early 2000s, the term 'Salafi' initially prevailed in public discourse to designate deviant religious behavior related to public dress codes and travel practices. However, like the label 'Wahhabi', a term introduced by the political elite in the late Soviet period (Rasanayagam 2014; Khalid 2007a, 169), 'Salafi' turned into a signifier for extremism and fanaticism in a broader sense and became a powerful discursive register in the political rhetoric to subsume all kind of domestic oppositions under the label 'internal terrorism'.[18]

Following Nathalie Koch (2018, 16), narratives of instability are persuasive when they strengthen existing collective memories, myths, and fears in effective pre-existing identity narratives. In Central Asian societies, negative collective memory of disorder and crisis is closely related to the collapse of Soviet socialism (Yurchak 2005; Nasritdinov 2018, 326–330). In Tajikistan, collective memories of disorder are condensed in the civil war that shook the country between 1992–1997; and they were subsequently merged with a fear of militant activism and extremism based on Islam. Thus, the political rhetoric in the early 2000s went hand in hand with the official historiography of the Tajik civil war in producing a discourse of fear that put instability and political opposition in direct relation to a religious activism that is positioned by the government as being outside the law (Lemon and Thibault 2018). As a consequence, political measures were launched by the government to securitize Islam. These measures included the implementation of a several laws between 2007 and 2011, such as the "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" (Jumhurii Tojikiston 2009), or the "Law on the Responsibility of the Father and Mother in Education and Upbringing of a Child" (Jumhurii Tojikiston 2011), as well as the ban of the Islamic Renaissance Party Tajikistan (IRP) in 2015, after being designated as a terrorist organization by the country's Supreme Court. Handling Islam as 'security problem' and 'danger' instead of acknowledging it as an integral component of social order and identity (Epkenhans 2011a, 102), the government's security policy has reproduced Soviet and imperial resentments against Islam as the 'backward' and 'fanatic' Other resistant to mod-

18 See for example the government's official interpretation of the militant conflict in the Rasht valley in 2010 as an act of Islamic terrorism, "Tajikistan: Militant Ambush Puts Spotlight on Security Situation", Eurasianet September 20, 2010, see: https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-militant-ambush-puts-spotlight-on-security-situation.

ernization and with the potential for radicalization (Abdullaev 2018, 73; Khalid 1998, 51).

Many student travelers found themselves situated between two conflicting moral geographies and notions of 'home' and 'abroad' marked as 'good' and 'bad' in a contest over the 'right' interpretation of Islam and 'proper' places to gain Islamic knowledge. Their moral activism experienced a significant turning point. While some returning students integrated into the official Islamic education system and continued their studies at the Islamic Institute of Tajikistan named after Imam Azam Abukhanifa[19] in Dushanbe, others adjourned or abandoned their religious educational aspirations and turned to more mundane issues, while still others left the country again. The trail of many of the latter was lost in Russia, while others re-appeared later in Cairo's Nasr City neighborhoods or in Dubai's fur business around Baniyas Square (see chapters two and three).

As modern iterations of older patterns of circulation and connectedness (Marsden and Mostowlansky 2019, 4), these mobile trajectories are the effects of rather invisible but historically deeply grounded geographies of connected Muslim places and communities across nation-states and regional borders. They shape Tajik Dubai business life and other transregional configurations while spanning large parts of Eurasia and the Middle East. From these invisible mobilities arises a knowledge repertoire for obtaining creative agency to be mobile despite national migration regimes. Creativity here is not understood in a modernist and rather narrow sense of being the end product of pure innovation (Ingold and Hallam 2007). The term instead designates an ongoing process of improvisation fostered by "the tension between experiences of (un)predictability and (restricted) choice." It builds on both anticipation and novelty and entails practices of repeating existing cultural repertoires of mobility and building new ones (Svašek 2016, 3, 5). Such an understanding of Muslim travel and connectedness in terms of creativity-as-improvisation transcends the boxing paradigm of methodological nationalism and associated binaries such as agency-versus-structure, resistance-versus-subordination, or internal-versus-outside. Commonly used categories such as 'informal', 'irregular', or 'illegal' designate transregional mobility and connectedness merely in relation to geopolitical development, whereas the related transgressions of imposed borders and boundaries are signified as deviant actions, as exceptions, and as acts of disorder. Used that way, these categories became effective tools to naturalize nation-state power hegemony and to de-legitimate non-state organized forms of mobility and connectedness (Steenberg 2016; Ibañez-Tirado and Marsden 2020). Re-

19 Founded in 1997 as Islamic University of Imam al-Tirmizi, this educational institution was renamed in 2007 into Islamic Institute of Tajikistan named after Imam Azam Abukhanifa.

flecting official discourses that nourish a fear of instability over the border, such representations of transregional mobility that are not regulated by the state are constitutive in the formation of affective discourses such as those around Islamic fundamentalism that helped the Eurocentric project of Soviet modernization to take shape in Central Asia (Abdulloev 2018, 73), or around the Global War on Terror campaign to spread Islamophobia in the world after 9/11 (Marsden and Mostowlansky 2019, 4). These global discourses of fear of Islam and Muslims eventually helped the Tajik government securitize Islam at home through strict travel regulations. All of these geopolitically-oriented categories overlook the durability and contemporary relevance of historically grown transregional connections. I remember the explanation by one of my research partners in Dubai of the migration behavior of his compatriots. Aptly, he replaced 'informality' with *urf-odat*, i. e., 'tradition', when stating: "Tradition is like a river. You can build dams, or walls. The water still makes its way."

Decentering prevailing secular-nationalist and geopolitical gazes in the study of Muslim mobilities in Central Asia up to today by drawing attention to local epistemologies of Muslim travel does not mean negating the shaping power of the nation-state and its regulating migration regimes. State borders and other boundaries are still there. The potential of a religion-as-translocation approach lies more in shifting the gaze to the very specific contexts in which political borders matter in the obtaining of mobile agency by those who must cope with them (Kalir 2018, 350). This can include moments of their permeability or insignificance, but also those in which the Tajikistani state border regime has provided a meaningful rhetorical register to fashion migration as moral activism. Some of my research partners adopted the set political geography of the government consisting of a fixed 'good home' space (i. e., the territory of the nation state) that must be protected from a 'dangerous external' space (i. e., abroad), just to reverse its meaning. Thus, Tajiks responded to the political narrative of abroad as the 'evil outside' with an ethics of absence, and in close association with that, with the decision to leave an 'evil place' for the sake of a good Muslim place to dwell in, centering around another concept of Muslim travel, i. e., *hijra.*

54-year old Anorakhon, a mother who had sent her children away to study at al-Azhar was critical of the government's failure to deliver on its promises of democracy. When I met her on the eastern outskirts of Dushanbe in 2014, she was dissolving her household and preparing her tiny courtyard (*hovli*) for sale to follow her sons and daughters and their families to Cairo. Officials had come to her for the recall sanction to convince her to bring her children back home, so Anorakhon had decided to leave Dushanbe as well. "I want to see my grandchildren grow up in a country where they can move freely as Muslims. Here, a Muslim government stifles its Muslim citizens. Here is no freedom (*ozodī*) for us." Arguably, mobilizing

hijra creates a possibility to integrate experienced ruptures into a meaningful story of moral self-fulfillment, in which 'abroad' is associated, not only with the right places for proper Islamic knowledge acquisition, but also with the hopeful spatial imagination of a Muslim home elsewhere that makes it possible to live a good Muslim life.

An Islamic concept of Muslim travel, *hijra* is associated with the exodus of the prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD, who sought to escape persecution after converting to the new religion of Islam. Crucial for the formation of the first Islamic community and the shaping of a collective Muslim identity, this migration marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Closely related to an Islamic concept of Muslim and non-Muslim space, in its territorial dimension, *hijra* designates the act of leaving a familiar place and moving to a place where a religious identity can be protected and preserved, or a new religious identity can be lived in a Muslim-friendly environment.

As a religious translocation, *hijra* can be understood in two ways: Emphasizing the associated processes of dis- and re*location*, the decision to leave marks a break with existing social ties and cultural norms (i. e., 'to abandon') in order to begin a new life elsewhere. If, however, the focus shifts to *trans-* in translocation, *hijra* designates a journey with the aim to overcome a distance. This can be a distance to a place, e. g., a proper Muslim place, or to a religious ideal, such as the state of perfect piety or purity (Nasritdinov 2018, 345), or a specific time, a sacred past, or a longed-for future. In both readings, *hijra* has a transformative effect. In the latter, however, the emphasis lies not so much on the breaking with a past through leaving, but on the restoration of a sense of connectedness to a place, an associated tradition, or past that can be achieved by returning to a sacred homeland (as *hijra* is preferably performed to the sacred places in the Hejaz), or through a renewal in terms of reforming the Muslim self (*isloh*) through migration. This sense of connectedness decisively shapes Tajiks' dwelling and crossing in and through a larger Muslim space. The related experiences of translocating this space shapes belonging and attachment to multiple places and times simultaneously, rather than a belonging fixed to either home or abroad.

Meaningful Places: Dubai

In the pre- and early Soviet history of Muslim migration in Central Asia, places such as today's Afghanistan, Iran, or India had acquired an important significance as destinations for *hijra* in the context of political pressure (Abdullaev 2018). Tajik Muslims' orientation towards Dubai marks a spatial shift in post-Soviet time. Appearing at first glance to be a new orientation, this spatial shift is more of a re-ori-

entation, and as such embedded in a deeper transregional history of Muslim mobility and connectedness omitted in historiographies of Muslim Central Asia merely focussing on 'national histories' (Abdullaev 2018, 62). When Karim assessed Dubai as a place of 'most perfect purity' (*joyi insoftarin*) and thus an ideal place to work, study, and to live a good Muslim life, he responded directly to the normative discourse of Islamic reform (*isloh*) and attached a particular moral meaning to a certain place he had inhabited in the past and longed to dwell in again in the future. Karim thereby transformed the cultural environments that constituted his reality by virtual place-making (Sack 2003, 4). He did not craft his reformist moral self by transforming his homeplace in Tajikistan into a proper Muslim place, as pious Muslims had done with their urban neighborhood in Bishkek (Nasritdinov 2018). Karim attached his moral activism to an ethics of leaving directed to a proper Muslim place already in existence somewhere else. Accordingly, he embraced reformist piety as a spatial endeavor that put emphasis not in the transformation of a place but in the process of moral self-transforming through migrating elsewhere. He ascribed a Muslim identity to Dubai that derives from the emirate's environment which encourages combining making money the proper way (*kori* halal, see chapter three) with an Islamic way of life in a Muslim-friendly environment. This allowed combining work and study with pious self-making, Karim and other former students of Islam related their pious transformation to circulating migrant narratives about Dubai as a place where Tajiks could become, not only rich, but also religious (*dindor*) or Islamic people (*odamhoi islomī*). Praising the Arab Emirates as an example of good Islamic governance (*huqumati islomī*), Karim also shared utopian visions of a divinely governed Islamic state and society that secures Muslim well-being, welfare, and dignity (see Fig. 2).

The mobilization of *hijra* in that sense goes hand in hand with work migration rather than with flight and expulsion, although in both cases social and economic aspirations can also be decisive (Abdullaev 2018; Eickelman and Piscatori 1990; Masud 1990). A proper Muslim place to work and live, Tajik Muslims aspired to Dubai as a brand for a bourgeois Islam that conflated the hope for spiritual self-fulfillment with social aspirations and economic well-being under the horizon of a new global modernity thriving on the soil of strong Arabic nationalism, class belonging and good Muslim governance (Bromber et al. 2014; Vora 2013, 47–55). Dubai's attractiveness roots also in its geographical proximity to sacred places in the Hejaz, while the emirate is far more accessible as a migrant destination than are the two cities Mecca and Medina. What is articulated in discursive rhetoric as a break is, from a historical perspective, the overcoming of a distance to a Muslim homeland, which emerged from the shared historical experience of migration and connectedness between people and places on the territories of today's Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iran, India, Pakistan, and Turkey, and which spans a trans-re-

Fig. 2: Street scene in Dubai with advertising for Expo 2000, which was hosted by the United Arab Emirates on the initiative of the government under the motto "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future". The main location of the world exhibition was the emirate of Dubai. Photo: Manja Stephan, 2014

gion designated as West-Asia (Marsden and Mostowlansky 2019). This social imaginary of a Muslim space or homeland builds on shared cultural and religious identities as Persian-speaking (*farsizabon*) Sunni Hanafiyya Muslims and a shared Muslim space of travel and connectedness through *ḥajj, riḥla, ziyāra,* and *hijra.* Tajik Muslims were cut off from this shared space of travel, connectedness, and belonging by border regimes established in the course of the three empires' Great Game. The space was later consolidated by Soviet national policies (Abdullaev 2018, 64–73). Reaching far into what is designated as the territory of the Arab Middle East, this Persianate culturescape (*vatani farsizabonho, qalamravi farsigūyon*) (Green 2019; Ahmed 2016) forms an intermediate zone of 'thick' connectivity between different Muslim worlds, mobilized by Tajiks in the present to find their way into Dubai business life. What is striking, and will be explained in the following chapters, is that Dubai was clearly considered part of the Arab Muslim world (*Arabiston*).

Although Dubai was named as the preferred destination for *hijra*, i. e., the good elsewhere as such, migration often did not take place directly but via intermediate stations such as Cairo or Moscow. Many Tajiks preferred to move to Cairo first be-

cause Egypt was easy to access, offered good conditions for living a Muslim life, particularly for gaining proper Islamic knowledge, and had a favorable cost of living. However, due to difficult conditions for non-registered work in Egypt, many Tajiks migrated seasonally to Moscow to earn a living or to save money. Hoping to gain a foothold in Dubai's multiple business fields, many Tajiks remained stuck in Cairo for long periods of time, caught up with their families, and stayed. While getting a residence permit in the Arab Emirates is a rather elusive endeavor for most, some Tajiks like Saidullah, whom we will meet later in the book, managed to obtain one and relocated there with their families (see chapter five).

Elaborating on a different interpretation of translocation, Emil Nasritdinov (2018) links the concept of *hijra* not to physical travel, but to the transformation of place closely tied to the spiritual transformation of the self. In his ethnography of Muslim renewal in an urban neighborhood in Kyrgyzstan's capital city of Bishkek, the author describes *hijra* as an internal evolution, a self-change that affects external chance. Through personal reform, the place of residence that used to be non-Muslim while secularized, became Muslim with regard to the daily religious practice of its residents. In other words, the main destination of the spiritual journey was the neighborhood itself as a Muslim place (Nasritdinov 2018, 345). This innovative reading of spatial biography provides a good link to studies that illustrate how Islamic reform in the context of migration between Muslim India and the Gulf translates into an engagement to develop one's homeland. 'Doing good and making good' is thus not only linked to the practice of *da'wa* (i. e., the spreading of Islamic knowledge), but to social and economic uplifting in the home society, for example through charitable deeds (*sadaqa,* Arabic *ṣadaqa*) (Osella and Osella 2009). This kind of pious patriotism, serving one's homeland as an educated Muslim (*khondagī*), was mainly put forward by graduates from Gülen-related Turkish educational institutions in Dushanbe as the proper way for personal Islamic reform that emphasizes moral perfectioning by returning home. By contrast, Islamic study returnees like Karim, Muzzafar, and Ahmad justified their intention or decision to leave by needing to overcome external forces preventing them from their obligation to do good for society as an educated Muslim.

State restrictions, as in the case of Ahmad and his wife Fatima, were one explanation. After Ahmad fled with his family from Kurghonteppa to Dushanbe during the civil war, he began his studies at the Islamic Institute al-Termizi. Later, he mobilized private contacts and went to Cairo to study Islamic law and the Quran at al-Azhar. In Dubai, where he was seasonally involved in tile trade, he earned money for his stay in Cairo and deepened his Islamic studies at an AWQAF educational center. Back in Dushanbe, he tried to open a Quran learning center in his city district, where his wife Fatima would also teach girls and young women in *tajwīd.* After the local authorities first supported the educational project, a long

process of obstruction began. Fatima was officially threatened with imprisonment for her private Quran lessons at home. The couple eventually gave up their educational endeavor and moved their main residence to the Arab Emirates. When I met them there, Fatima was teaching Quran recitation (*tajwīd*) to Tajik migrant children in her neighborhood in Sharjah (see chapter five).

However, continuing *riḥla*-related Islamic reform projects back home also failed due to a lack of acceptance in the local Muslim community. Tensions arose above all in everyday life over proper Muslim practice. It was often in family contexts such as marriage relations or weddings celebrations, where the returnees' orientation towards a purist Islam interpretation clashed with the ideas and practices of Muslim renewal that were rooted in the prevailing Islamic tradition (*musulmonī*) and more closely aligned with Persian culture, the spiritual traditions of Naqshbandiya, or Qādiriya sufism, and had opened up to Soviet modernity. In a telling example, al-Azhar returnees like Karim and Muzzafar faced a difficult time asserting their preference for gender segregation, according to which their wives remain in the domestic space, to their parents. Parents would often cite pragmatic reasons to secure at least one income for the new family by having their son's wife work outside the home. There were also differing positions within the peer group itself regarding how reform-oriented piety related to the social role of women in Tajik society, and in the wider sense to modernity. Discursive frictions occurred around the relationship between knowledge and action (Arabic *ʿilm va ʿamal*), addressing issues about the proper application of the acquired correct knowledge. Sharif, the graduate from the International University in Islamabad whom I met several times during my fieldwork in Dushanbe, condemned the female role image shared by many followers of a purist Islam as incompatible (*rost nameyoad*) with the reality of Tajik Muslim society, and as not useful for the development of the country:

> They claim to possess proper knowledge, but they do not apply it correctly, that is, for the sake of society (*ba khizmati jomea*). Sincerity (*ikhlos,* Arabic *al-ikhlāṣ*) does not mean forbidding women to work or study and confining them at home (*dar khona mahkam kardagī*). Encouraging one's wife in her personal development and thereby serving one's society, participation in society, this means piety! This is how knowledge and action (Arabic *ʿilm va ʿamal*) work together properly!

It was also difficult for the wives themselves to continue the purist Islamic lifestyle they adopted at the place of study abroad after returning home to Tajikistan. Conflicts were triggered primarily by the conspicuous Islamic dress code. Marking a distinct religious position built on knowledge acquisition abroad, the black dresses (Arabic *ʿabāya*) Emirati and Muslim migrant women wear in Dubai in combination with *hijab* (Arabic *ḥijāb*) and face veil (Arabic *niqāb*) stands for the negative image inherent to an 'Arab Islam' brought from outside, and thus became a signifier for

what the Tajik government constructed as the foreign and dangerous Muslim Other. Several Tajik women who relocated with their families to Dubai and had worn Emirati women's dresses during their visiting stays at home in Tajikistan told me about their experiences of having been accused of being 'black widows'[20] and radical Muslims. These accusations led to their social exclusion from wedding celebrations or taxi drivers refusing to pick them up.

The purification of faith by ridding it of cultural tradition also led to a division in families over children's education. In many cases, this division became spatialized in *hijra.* Reform-minded young families preferred Arabic or Quranic names for their newborn babies, marking an estrangement from family heritage such as the traditional giving of the name by an elder member of the family. Ramziya, whom I met in Dubai a month after she arrived in the new apartment with her husband and three sons, complained about the quarrels she had with her mother-in-law about the sons' upbringing, which eventually pushed her to follow her husband to Dubai. "Dubai is release. Here, we can educate our children in a godly, Islamic way, not according to the will of our parents. Their understanding of Islam is only tradition (*urf-odat*), but not pure Islam (*dini islomii toza*). We want to follow our prophet; only he shows us the right path (*rohi rost*)." Following the spatial biographies of my Tajik research partners, the homecoming experience transformed *riḥla,* i. e., the Muslim tradition that emphasizes traveling to acquire knowledge needed to become a proper Muslim, into deviant religious behavior accompanied by discrimination, marginalization, and often social exclusion. Consequently, some Tajiks converted their status as a *musofir* into that of a *muhojir*, a Muslim emigrant.

By focussing on envisioning and performing *hijra* to places in the Arab Middle East, I do not want to overemphasize the religious dimension of mobility and migration to these places. People also had other reasons to leave their home in Tajikistan. However, for those who evoked Islamic concepts of mobility, place, and space, *hijra* provided an authorized Islamic rhetoric for articulating a specific ethical position in relation to an existing Islamic horizon of possibility. In other words: They obtained moral agency in contexts of multiple constraints. I follow a recent study on Muslim travel that characterizes *hijra* less as a motivator than a signifier that indexes a specific discursive framework for Tajiks to fall back on to structure their migration experiences around meaning-making narratives of spiritual and moral self-improvement (Fadil, Moors and Arnaut 2021, 9, 12).

20 The term 'black widows' (Russian *chërnaya vdova*) came into circulation in Dushanbe in the context of the female suicide attacks in Chechnya in 2002 and was used to label Tajik women wearing Arab clothing.

Situating *hijra* in the larger context of everyday life, Islamic reform as a translocative practice provides more than openings; it simultaneously produces restrictions. The religious fashioning of migration as a pious action limits the repertoire of possible destinations, reducing opportunity and the flexibility to return to places left behind, such as Russia. Religious mobility provides hope, as it creates choice, but it also restricts choice about good places to go. Take Karim: He valued Russia as a good migrant destination, as "there is work, more religious freedom to experience than in Tajikistan, and there are Russian women waiting to get married." Russian-Tajik marriage relations are a door-opener to acquiring Russian citizenship, which at that time enabled travel anywhere. But "as a Tajik you are nothing in Russia. They hate you. Russia is a *kofir* place. I cannot go back," Karim explained, only to add that Dubai and other places in the Arab Middle East are good Muslim places where "we are among ourselves" and "are treated well as Muslims."

This position was not shared by all Tajiks active in Dubai business. Instead, there was a certain bandwidth with regard to whether, and when, Russia was considered a good place for Muslims to go. Such assessments are themselves highly relational to experiences had elsewhere. Eventually, returning to Russia or even Tajikistan shows that *hijra*, like *riḥla,* is a contingent endeavor. The religious significance of Muslim travel may be transient rather than static, as changes in one's ethical commitment can occur just as the commitment to Muslim renewal can fade or gradually change (Fadil, Moors and Arnaut 2021, 13). Far more pertinent, however, was a certain flexibility in dealing with the moral ideals of Islamic reform resulting from multiple mobile lifestyles and multiple senses of belonging that accompany them. Take Saidullah, who relocated his family to the Arab Emirates. Designating his Dubai migration as *hijra* to a Muslim place that enabled him to engage in work that, according to Saidullah, the prophet loved most, i. e., trade (*tijorat*), he and his family returned to their homeplace in Dushanbe seasonally in order to visit close relatives left behind, to involve them in his trading business, or when Mehrigul gave birth to her two sons. Moving between two homes, all the Tajiks I met in Dubai also poured money into building houses or buying apartments in their hometown; so apparently, they were investing in two futures in parallel.

Summing up, mobile Tajik Muslims built their moral activism on the creative spatial practices of *mapping* (i. e., the work of imagination) and *inhabiting* (i. e., dwelling and crossing) (Tweed 2006, 82). Rather than being a final decision that symbolizes a state of piety, *riḥla* and *hijra* are meaningful discursive registers that form part of a larger repertoire of cultural representations that allow a person to shape their moral subjectivity in migratory contexts full of contestations and constraints. How can this all be related to a theory of religion as translocation? For this, let us return to the question raised at the beginning of this chapter. Taji-

kistan mattered in the spatial biographies in multiple ways as a meaningful place: as a homeland one belongs to; a non-Muslim place to leave for the sake of a good Muslim life elsewhere; a place one returns to, by choice or force; an intimate home base despite multiple homes elsewhere, and even an 'evil place'. Considering all these qualities, Tajikistan forms part of a larger topography of connected meaningful places that span an intermediate space, in which sacredness conflates with familiarity, intimacy, but also with dislocation and estrangement (Mattes et al. 2019, 302). In relation to the complexity and multiplicity constitutive for Tajik migrant lifeworlds, Tajikistan remained a crucial, if shifting, spatial point of reference; a position that helped migrants to orient themselves in time and space; a position that allowed them to inhabit the Muslim worlds they constructed in a specific way; and a relation that qualified how Tajik migrants experienced and gave meaning to their multiple translocations. Through mapping and inhabiting, Tajik migrants situated themselves in a larger geography of Muslim piety and belonging that is not only morally connotated, as discussed, but also highly emotional in nature. Being at home, feeling belonging, and sensing connectedness are matters of affect, the senses, and persuasive aesthetic forms. The driving forces in the formation of pious subjectivities and communities that transcend spatially fixed political, social and cultural categories such as the nation state, society, ethnicity, or the local community, as well as affect, sense, and aesthetic forms, are crucial to how Tajik migrants dwelled in and crossed through sacred, moral and emotion landscapes. This leads us to consider a third form of Muslim travel, *ḥajj*, i. e., the Mecca pilgrimage, which has significantly shaped the religious economy of Tajik Dubai business life.

Sensing 'Real' Connectedness through *Ḥajj* Stories

As illustrated above, *riḥla* and *hijra* are envisioned and performed by Tajiks in relation to an ethics of self-realization and an underlying Islamic horizon of possibility to move, relocate and, in the case of *hijra*, engage in practices of homemaking abroad. By drawing on normative scripts referring to Muslim travel and placemaking, Tajiks were thus able to positively value their migration, as well as to give meaning to their mobile trajectories by turning them into a signifier for individual engagement in Islamic reform. Apparently, moral activism provides a fruitful lens to understand how migration can be fashioned into a personal project of pious self-making in relation to specific social positions associated with social exclusion, marginalization, or dislocation.

Mapping the moral geography of Muslim mobilities in the larger context of Tajik Dubai business is a fruitful approach to grasping how discursive forma-

tions on Islamic reform shape mobile practices and articulations in the context of the politics of belonging, and how they establish normative orders constitutive in the production of meaningful movements. However, this approach does not provide a fully comprehensive answer to why Tajiks in the late 1990s and early 2000s migrated to the Middle East. Interrogating the existential dimension of the *Why* in this question, I am more interested in what really *moved* or affected them to go abroad, and once there, to move on to places elsewhere. What drove parents to send their daughters to far-off places they themselves had never traveled, did not personally know, but valued as morally safe?

To go beyond the dimension of cultural representation in the study of Muslim mobilities, Verne's (2019, 85) characterization of transregional phenomena as volatile and therefore difficult to fix but nevertheless traceable through their effects provides a good point to start with. Transregional formations not only leave discursive traces in the formation of mobile Muslim subjectivities among Tajiks, their effects are, I argue, materially traceable in how Tajiks have sensed connectedness to places in the Middle East and how these effects have moved them emotionally and physically, while situated in larger geographies of social exclusion, marginalization, and dislocation. The statement "We go everywhere, as long as there is a Tajik, or a Muslim" not only reflects Tajiks' competencies in making neoliberal flexibility and related precarious life conditions meaningful, or in fashioning them by evoking a moral language. To understand the existential (affective, emotional, sensorial) dimension of dwelling and crossing in meaningful spaces larger than one's immediate home in Tajikistan, we need to understand how Muslim sentiments and imaginations work together to induce modes of shared feelings that have binding power through particular aesthetic styles.

Meyer's (2009) conceptual twist from imagined communities to aesthetic formations marks a shift in the study of imaginations as being merely representations towards material approaches that emphasize the role of cultural forms in processes of binding and belonging. Seeking to understand how the social imaginaries related to concepts of the Muslim home, homeland, and homing desire become real and thus 'true' to mobile Tajiks, Meyer (2009, 5) argues that they must become tangible, materializing in the lived environment through architecture or things, or by appealing to and inducing bodily sensations.

Such sensually appealing forms are not only inherent in media images or consumer objects related to Dubai, the wider Gulf, and the Middle East. They also appear and have a traceable effect in migrant narratives about the Mecca pilgrimage. When shared through narrative performances, stories about *ḥajj* (the great pilgrimage to Mecca) or *ʿumrah* (the small pilgrimage to Mecca) create affective bonds between people and places far away from one's immediate home (see also chapter five). Arguably, mobile communities evolve not only around shared Muslim senti-

ments. They are, as to be shown, at the same time shaped, as well as sensed, or felt, as 'real' through cultural forms that induce in those who share them a particular common aesthetic style of connectedness and belonging (Meyer 2009, 9). These moments of sharing images, experiences, and moods through *ḥajj* storytelling are precisely what 'move' people (Buitelaar 2017; see also chapter five). Building a sense of familiarity, security, and trust, and creating 'real' connectedness to places elsewhere, sensational *ḥajj* stories make those involved feel a part of something larger, i. e., a Muslim space that transcends, not only the territory, but above all the binding power of the Tajikistani nation state; the ethnic, regional, or local community.

In close entanglement with *riḥla* and *hijra*, the pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj* and *ʿumrah*) paved ways into Dubai business life, forming an integral part of its religious economy. The performance of the Mecca pilgrimage is a central milestone in Tajiks' striving for a good Muslim life abroad. It also forms an important benchmark for evaluating the success of migrant journeys to the Gulf. With the end of the Soviet Union and the opening of its territorial borders, the Mecca pilgrimage experienced a noticeable upswing as one of the Muslim duties, which then became feasible for a larger, no longer exclusive group of Muslims in the former Soviet space. In response to this growing religious need, the Tajik government started to organize the *ḥajj* in cooperation with the Committee for Religion (*kumitai dinī*), while Central Asian neighbors such as Kazakhstan entrusted private agencies with the organization of the Mecca pilgrimage.[21] However, in addition to the quota set by the Saudi Arabian government each year, the possibility of making the Mecca pilgrimage has been limited due to the government's tightened control of the selection process. This includes, for example, raising the age limit from 35 in 2016 to 40 in 2017.[22]

Due to its closeness to the Hejaz, Dubai has become central for pursuing alternative roads to Mecca to perform the Muslim pilgrimage to the holy sites. In Dubai, I met Tajiks who tried to circumvent the strict *ḥajj* regulations set by the Tajik government. While some organized the pilgrimage to Mecca via their working contracts with a Dubai-based company, others found their way to Mecca via their Arab sponsor (*kofil,* Arabic *kafīl*). Some former al-Azhar students among them were sponsored to perfom the *ḥajj* by a private Arab donor as a reward for their good study performance. Moreover, Dubai's proximity to the Hejaz and its growing importance as a transregional economic hub has turned the emirate

21 "The Hajj Price in Tajikistan Went up Again. According to the Government, the Reason Is the Rising Prices in Saudi Arabia", CABAR May 30, 2019, see https://cabar.asia/en/the-hajj-price-in-tajikistan-went-up-again-according-to-the-government-the-reason-is-the-rising-prices-in-saudi-arabia.

22 "Tajikistan expected to tighten control over selection of people for Hajj", Asia-Plus March 7, 2017, see: https://old.asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/society/20170306/237332.

into an important marketplace for evolving trade with *ḥajj* paraphernalia and related consumer goods, which are more desirable when brought directly from Mecca. Muslim women have only recently been studied in terms of their creative involvement as pilgrims, long-distance traders and mobile entrepreneurs in the *ḥajj* business (Kenny 2021; Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016). Female pilgrims have also been studied for their active role in contributing to the commodification of the *ḥajj* in the context of religious tourism trips among new Muslim middle classes in Asia (Thimm 2018). These modes of travel to the Gulf have also had a downside, as they have positioned Tajik pilgrims in the grey zone between formal and informal modes of moving to and dwelling in Mecca and Medina for the purpose of doing business beyond the Mecca pilgrimage; activities which might lead to arrest and deportation. Stories about Tajiks involved in risky *ḥajj* businesses confirm that the Mecca pilgrimage is a strongly marketed commodity in a growing global Islamic consumer culture that mixes aspirations for status and class belonging with piety, educational aspirations, and economic goals (Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016). Moreover, the religious economy of the Mecca pilgrimage is receiving major impulses from increased tourism in the Gulf. Advertisements of Dubai-Mecca-Medina tourism packages (see Fig. 1) went hand in hand with the branding of sacred places in the Hejaz as attractive and proper destination in direct response to the increased demand for Shariʿa-compliant honeymoons among well-off, reform-minded Muslims such as Saidullah and Mehrigul, whom we will meet later in the book. Obviously, the Tajiks' striving for the good Muslim life has included the Hejaz as a travel destination that allows pilgrims to merge spiritual self-fulfillment with aspirations to signify an exclusive socio-economic status.

This interplay of spatial imaginations and social aspirations was articulated in highly emotional ways in narratives about the Mecca pilgrimage. As I will elaborate in chapter five, sensational digital images strongly supported narratives about the Mecca pilgrimage and the cultivation of past religious experiences via shared aesthetic forms (see also Stephan-Emmrich 2018a). By evoking past religious experiences and sharing them through narrative performances, Tajiks dwell in, cross through, and locate themselves within a Muslim space that includes the sacred centres of Islam in the Hejaz. Apparently, the affective power that emanates from sensational *ḥajj* stories has merged with circulating media images and consumer products that brand Dubai as the epitome of a global Muslim modernity and thus an opportunity for social mobility that in the social imagination of many Tajiks I met during my field research was located in what is termed *Arabiston*, i. e., the Arab Muslim world.

Stories about signs of wonder and miracles experienced during the Mecca pilgrimage have followed a well-practiced Islamic script through which pilgrims co-constitute the 'spiritual magnetism' of Mecca by investing it with their own embod-

ied memories and emotions (McLoughlin 2015, 49–53). In the *ḥajj* narratives I have collected during my fieldwork in the UAE and Tajikistan, miraculous encounters or reunions with relatives or other Muslims from Central Asia that happened on the way to Mecca or during the ritual performances in Mecca and Medina appear as a recurring motif with the power to affectively bind people. One of the stories that touched listeners, including the researcher, very much, was about the reunion of an elderly Tajik couple with a long lost relative. In the very late 1990s, the couple was traveling to Mecca through Iran aboard a bus that broke down in a small town, causing a stopover of a few days, when who should appear but the husband's missing cousin, who had fled to Afghanistan during the civil war in Tajikistan and got stuck in Iran on his way on to Mecca. Having lost his passport, he could not make the return journey home. The traveling couple and the other relatives back in Tajikistan had thought he was gone. But he had been listening to the radio when he heard about the group of pilgrims from Tajikistan stuck in his town on their way to Mecca. He went to the hotel that was hosting the group in the hope of receiving or passing along a message to his relatives back home, and there found the cousin, his wife, and other close relatives.

This wondrous story of reunion of relatives separated by the civil war resonates with other narratives that recalled the unexpected encounter of pilgrims from Tajikistan with members of the old Central Asian diaspora in Mecca and Medina. While performing the *ḥajj* rituals, Tajiks surprisingly met descendants of Turkic- and Farsi-speaking Muslims who found refuge in Saudi Arabia from Stalin's kulak purges in the late 1920s/early 1930s and who worked as *ḥajj* guides or ran souvenir shops for pilgrims from the former Soviet Union (Balci 2017). Such meaningful encounters abroad imbued statements like "We Tajiks are everywhere" or "We go everywhere as long as there is a Tajik, or a Muslim" with an understanding of a historically deep sense of belonging and being connected, as Muslims from Central Asia, to places, regions, and people outside of one's immediate homeland. What is more, these encounters also bring together historical and contemporary forms of Muslim travel, above all *riḥla, hijra*, and *ḥajj* and the associated tragic fated flights and make them sensible and thus real in a meaningful way through a grand religious narrative.

In more general terms, stories about the Mecca pilgrimage as a space of Muslim encounter share their functionality and social meaning with the historical genre of written *ḥajj* memoirs or travelogues, as they produce powerful imaginaries about Muslim connectedness, belonging, and home abroad that can mobilize for travel and migration. As Eric Tagliacozzo (2013, 235) concludes in his book *The Longest Journey*, narrated *ḥajj* stories "trickle into the consciousness" of pilgrims as part of the larger Muslim world, shaping not only perceptions of possibilities of travel, migration, and connectedness across national and other borders. Stories

about miraculous Muslim encounters also distribute important knowledge about historical mobilities and migrant communities abroad that provide an important resource for Tajik migrants to involve themselves in the religious economy of Dubai migration. Besides a variety of Muslim mobilities around Islamic education and missionary work between Saudi Arabia and Central Asia, diasporic encounters during the *ḥajj* have also led to the establishment of sustainable business relations between Tajikistan, Dubai, and Mecca, and have triggered informal travel routes for business activities in Saudi Arabia with the risk of arrest and deportation as described above.

However, this analysis would be incomplete without considering the affective and sensorial power such *ḥajj* stories release to bind the Tajiks who narrated and listened to them to imagined places, and to shape pious Muslim selves and communities through shared aesthetic styles that make imaginaries of Muslim home, home-making and homing desire tangible, and thus authentic and real through the body and senses. Sharing the awe about miracles witnessed during the Mecca pilgrimage creates powerful moment in religious terms that confirm the economy of *baraka* as it builds on the miraculous abundance of divine generosity (Mittermaier 2014, 285). Co-producing the 'sensational' power of the *ḥajj*, Tajiks negotiate and reflect concepts of piety and Muslim belonging in relation to how they attach themselves affectively to place and time. Moreover, when sharing narratives of miraculous encounters and reunions during the Mecca pilgrimage, Tajiks move across, dwell in, and locate themselves in an emotional geography spanning sacred places and lands in orientation towards Mecca as the birthplace of Islam and its prophet. This sacred-cum-emotional geography can be mapped around Tajiks "embodied and performed consciousness of, and attachment to, places, people, and beings at scales that are both horizontal and territorial and vertical and transcendent" (McLoughlin 2015, 43). Following Thomas Tweed's spatial theory of migrant religion, *ḥajj* narratives encompass translocative practices of a world-making that allow Tajik pilgrims to transcend peripheral positions and the related social, political and religious boundaries they experienced while dwelling in and crossing through terrestrial, corporeal, and cosmic spheres. In the moments when sensational *ḥajj* stories are shared, Tajiks have connected themselves affectively to "a powerful chain of (placed) memory" (McLoughlin 2015, 49). These meaningful moments have also evoked a religiously-framed 'homing desire' (McLoughlin 2010, 223) that ties feelings such as hope, longing, or dislocation to the longing for a metaphorical diasporic return to an imagined sacred homeland, from which many Tajiks I spoke with felt themselves cut off as Muslims during the Soviet time. And even after the country's independence, accessing the sacred Muslim homeland was problematic for them due to Tajikistan's strict regime of cross-border Muslim mobility. The affective power inherent to stories of Muslim encoun-

ters during the *ḥajj* pilgrimage resonated with the multiple peripheral positions my Tajik research partners felt themselves in; be it as Muslim migrants (Russian *migranty*) from Central Asia, facing institutional and everyday racial discriminations as Tajiks working in Russia, or be it as students returning from Islamic universities in the Middle East, stigmatized as deviant 'Muslim Others' and labelled as 'radical' while infused by a foreign Arab Islam by the Tajik government and wider society. Against this background, sensational *ḥajj* narratives contributed to an aesthetic form of connectedness between people and places elsewhere that were sensed as immediate and as a real Muslim home elsewhere by those who shared them, transcending boundaries created by political narratives that construct the Muslim Middle East as the home of a foreign, Arab Islam dangerous for national security, social cohesion, and Tajik cultural unity.

Thinking Enseng Ho's mobile societies (Ho 2017) as aesthetic formations, the *ḥajj* narratives and the related translocative practices of Muslim migrant homemaking and home-desiring clearly play a key role in the larger politics of belonging that work through affect and sense. Feeding post-national sentiments, sensational *ḥajj* stories reveal the interrelatedness of movement, relation, and position; above all the relational notion of place and place-making, as well as a complex understanding of home. Home is not only security, stability, and familiarity, but also bears possibilities of strangeness, discomfort, and dislocation. Home is thus a matter of affect (Ahmed 1999, 342). Memorizing experiences made during the Mecca pilgrimage provides a proper cultural form to overcome discontinuities of past and present and to materially mediate, realize, and bodily sense belonging and emotional attachment to imagined and historically meaningful places that transcend territorially-fixed concepts of identity and belonging set by the nation state. The 'reality effect' of cultural forms such as *ḥajj* narratives obviously turns the social imaginary of an ancestral, rather distant Persian-speaking homeland (*mamlakati farsigūyon*) that existed until its division under the Russian Empire and later by Soviet border politics, into a tangible, accessible and immediate world. This Muslim space extends far into the Hejaz and connects the world of the Persian with the world of Arab Islam, thus blurring the boundaries between the sacred Muslim center and the lived periphery.

Summing up, the 'good elsewhere' is a moral notion that draws its mobilizing power from an emotional geography of connectedness and belonging that builds on a sense of being at home in and with a space far larger than where one was born, has lived, or where one's family comes from. Based on shared religious sentiments and rooted in an ethics of dwelling and crossing, spatial imaginaries attached to abroad and places afar create a meaningful world that is inhabited and crossed by Tajiks through aesthetic styles of binding and belonging. As will be shown in the following chapter, this Muslim space provides multiple pathways

into the worlds of Dubai business, while merging economic, social, and religious networks into a web of cultural familiarity, moral and economic security, and trust.

Chapter 2
Kamak Worlds: "We do Business, We're not Migrants!"

Baniyas Square

Jovid was the first Tajik I met in Dubai. A 28-year-old man from Gharm, a mountainous region in northeast Tajikistan, he had been working in Dubai since 2007, mainly as a small-scale entrepreneur in the second-hand car and spare parts business he ran with his older brother between Dubai and Dushanbe. Shortly before we met, Jovid had moved into formal employment and begun working in the lower management of an Arab real estate enterprise. Jovid was chosen to pick me up from the airport because he had access to his boss's car. On a very early mid-November morning in 2013, after a long arrival procedure at the airport, he brought me to my hotel in Dubai Deira, the Emirate's historical city center where the majority of the Tajiks I would later meet worked and resided. After handing over my luggage to the porter in the hotel lobby and making sure that my room was in order, Jovid apologized, because on that day he had to carry on working. He recommended me to Fazliddin, a close friend he knew from their days studying Islam together at Cairo's al-Azhar University, suggesting I should go and see him as soon as I had recovered from my journey. "But how do I find him?" I asked, quite exhausted and somewhat confused. Jovid told me not to worry: "Just go to Baniyas Square. Many Tajiks are there, doing business with furs (Russian *shuba*). Everyone there knows him. Just ask for 'the *shaykh*'".[23]

The area around the metro station, Baniyas Square (also called al-Nasser Square[24] by Dubai residents, taxi drivers, tourists and some of the Tajik street worker I met), offers a complex ethnic and cultural mix shaped by past and pre-

23 This chapter assembles the core statements of two recently published articles: "Playing Cosmopolitan: Muslim Self-fashioning, Migration, and (Be-)Longing in Tajik Dubai business Sector", by Manja Stephan-Emmrich, *Central Asian Affairs* 4/2017: 270–291; and "Crossing Economic and Cultural Boundaries: Tajik Middlemen in the Translocal 'Dubai Business' Sector", by Manja Stephan-Emmrich and co-authored by Abdullah Mirzoev, In *Mobilities, Boundaries, and Travelling Ideas: Rethinking Translocality Beyond Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. by Manja Stephan-Emmrich and Philipp Schröder, Open Book Publishers: Cambridge, 89–117.

24 Jamal Abd el-Nassar Square is close to the Dubai underground station of Baniyas Square.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111343518-005

sent commercial, trading, and migration circuits (Elsheshtawy 2010)[25]. After a few hours' sleep and a small breakfast in my low-budget hotel run by a middle-aged man from Pakistan, I stepped out onto one of the main roads that traverse the area around the square. I was immediately surrounded by various types of street noise and the hustle and bustle of people, voices, and smells that meshed with the growing heat of the day and a striking multicultural atmosphere, matching what has been described in recent literature on the Gulf as 'transient cosmopolitanism' (Elsheshtawy 2020) or as 'superdiversity' in recent studies on migration, social complexity, and diversification (Vertovec 2023). My entry point into the historical part of the city, Baniyas Square, became my main field site for the next two months. Immersion in the daily life of this place essentially framed how I experienced, sensed, and understood Dubai through the lens of the everyday life experiences of the Tajiks who worked and lived there in the early 2010s. Here, I arranged multiple street and lunchtime talks with Tajik street workers (*kamak*) and middlemen. From Baniyas Square, I made my explorations into other parts of the city and returned after visiting Tajik families residing in the neighboring emirate of Sharjah.

Fig. 3: Street scene at Baniyas Square. Photo: Manja Stephan, 2013.

25 See also "Baniyas Square: A Concise History", by Yasser Elsheshtawy, https://baniyas-square.tumblr.com/post/61214079728/baniyas-square-a-concise-history, last access 22 December 2023.

The cosmopolitan character of this part of the city, stretching to Dubai Creek side, developed out of transregional and transcultural commercial ties, migrant flows and trading networks spanning Iranian port cities and continental markets in and across the Indian Ocean (Vora 2013; Osella and Osella 2012; Elsheshtawy 2010). Accordingly, large numbers of international trading, cargo, and shipping companies have set up their offices in Dubai Deira. With their eye-catching, multilingual advertising signs, these companies shape Deira's cityscape. Labor migrants mainly from South Asia working in nearby construction sites filled the square in the evening, relaxing from their work as the heat gave way to a pleasant nighttime coolness. By day, in contrast, plenty of street brokers, traders, shopkeepers and porters from South and Central Asia, Africa and the Caucasus, as well Arab, Afghan, and Iranian businesspeople and merchants would be seen filling the streets or eating in the dozens of ethnic food stalls and cafés that dotted the square and led the tourists to the invitingly polished facades of McDonalds and KFC.[26]

Following the literature on Dubai, the area around Baniyas Square is representative of the transformations that have altered Dubai from a small fishing village to an international business and tourist city (Elsheshtawy 2020; Elsheshtawy 2010, 90). Historically, Deira district was the major commercial center of Dubai. However, as revenues from the oil industry and tourist sectors soared since the late 1990s, Dubai expanded from a mere two square kilometers in 1950 to the 1,000 or so square kilometers of today. In 2015, the official city center moved to Sheikh Zayed Road and the Business Bay districts, with their high storied commercial buildings and spectacular tourist sites. Deira however remained one of the main business centers, catering to low- and middle-income groups, and became a major dwelling area for migrant workers and other foreign residents from Asia and Africa. The latter work on construction sites, in hotels, in the care sector, the sex industry, and the city's many malls and markets, or as street vendors.

The area around Baniyas Square is also a popular destination for Gulf tourists. Here, among other visitors, well-off Russians, Eastern Europeans and Central Asia's new urban middle-classes, mostly from Kazakhstan, had access to a wide variety of shopping malls, traditional markets, popular fashion shops, brands, and restaurants. Additionally, there was an extensive selection of electronic, cosmetic, jewelry, and toy stores. Most of Dubai's fur coat shops were also situated here and attracted tourists with their sparkling modern showrooms. As the meeting place of Dubai's vibrant trading and tourism sectors, Baniyas Square formed the spatial center of Dubai's fur business when I did my fieldwork there in 2013 and 2014.

26 For more information on Dubai Deira see Yasser Elsheshtawy (2008, 978 ff.) and Michaela Pelican (2014, 255 – 309).

Thus, most Tajiks worked in the Russian-speaking tourism sector, where they favored engaging in the fur business together with other Central Asians, Caucasians, and people from Sub-Saharan Africa. The fur coat market began to flourish in Dubai Deira in the 1990s, when Russia's new urban middle class discovered the United Arab Emirates as a luxury holiday site and a place for conspicuous consumption.[27] Equipped with Russian language skills and the shared historical experience of being part of the former Soviet Union (*shakhrvandhoi shūravī*), many Tajiks followed the influx of new tourism and engaged in the fur business tailored to the needs of Russian-speaking tourists. While some Tajiks became traders, purchasing fur coats in China and bringing them to Dubai, others found work as shop vendors selling Chinese fur coats in Dubai Deira as faked Greek products.[28] Most Tajiks in Dubai, however, found their way into street work and became *kamak*[29]. The Greek term *kamak* originally designates commissioners, who like Fazliddin and his friends introduced potential customers (here tourists from Russia and other CIS[30] countries) to a specific business (here, the fur coat shop they worked for) and in return received a commission of 10–15% of the total sale from the shop owner. Since the fur business in Dubai is historically closely connected to Greek's fur business in the Byzantine and Ottoman empire as well as later in post-Soviet Russia[31], the term *kamak* only refers to commissioners working in the fur coat trade.

Due to the high density of hotels frequented by Russian visitors and the presence of many Central Asian and Caucasian dealers, Tajiks jokingly referred to Ba-

27 After Saudi Arabian and British tourists, the ex-Soviet Russian-speaking states provided the third-biggest group of tourists in Dubai. For instance, in 2007 about 300,000 Russian tourists visited Dubai, see https://thearabianpost.com/TAP/2015/09/dubai-hopes-to-see-return-of-russians.html and http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/society/dubai-s-fur-business-feeling-the-heat-1.1484942 (accessed October 9, 2016).

28 It was a common and profitable business practice for Afghan and Iranian fur shop owners to have furs imported from China and the label 'made in Greece' sewn in by Dubai-based sewing factories to attract Russian tourists in the emirates, in particular. A centuries'-old tradition, Greek furs were famous during the Byzantine and the Ottoman empires and served the Russian market, especially; see https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/02/22/387757419/a-greek-city-nervously-watches-its-fur-trade-falter, last access December 22, 2023.

29 Due to the undocumented status of *kamak* workers, there are no statistics or official figures about them. The number 300 to 500 reproduces my main Tajik interlocutors' estimation of Tajik *kamak* workers working around al-Nassar Square in Dubai Deira between 2010 and 2014.

30 Commonwealth of Independent States.

31 See https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/02/22/387757419/a-greek-city-nervously-watches-its-fur-trade-falter, last access December 22, 2023.

niyas Square as *mini Cherkiz bozor* in the style of Moscow's erstwhile biggest urban market.[32] Like those from other post-Soviet countries, Tajik *kamak* workers had their own particular gathering points. These followed the spatial allocation of the Dubai fur business along ethnic lines, which were, however, dynamic and flexible enough to be temporarily transgressed or suspended in case of a joint business deal.

At one of these gathering points I eventually found Fazliddin. He was standing with a group of other street brokers at 'their corner', where they waited for clients next to a well-attended mobile phone shop and near to the apartment in which he and the other Tajik *kamak* people surrounding him resided. Holding a rosary in one hand, he was looking for customers while simultaneously chatting with a Tajik vendor who had come out of the mobile store for a short cigarette break. At the time of that very first encounter I did not yet know that Fazliddin, with his extended *kamak* network, would become one of my main interlocutors during my fieldwork in Dubai. I also did not yet know that 'his' street corner would serve as a core meeting point with Tajik *kamak* people throughout my fieldwork. I also did not know at that time that I would visit Fazliddin and his family a year later in his natal village near Dushanbe and stay in contact with them until today.

30 years-old Fazliddin had been working in the fur business since 2010. Like his friends Jovid and Abubakr (the man standing next to him and one of his closest friends), he was married and had two children who lived with their mother on his parents' farm in a small village in the countryside near Dushanbe. Fazliddin was a sojourner, coming to Dubai during the Russian tourist season from October to March, trying to make as much money as possible to forge ahead with the construction of his own house near his father's residence. The youngest of three sons and two sisters, Fazliddin married early. He was the only son to try going to university, but he quit after a year due to a lack of motivation and his concern that a career in journalism would be hopeless in terms of being able to feed a family. While his brothers got by driving cabs and carrying out various small jobs in Dushanbe, he made it into business life in Dubai through the help of his friend Jovid, whom he met during his studies at al-Azhar University.

All three friends were former Azharites who dropped out of university early. Jovid, who studied Quran (*al-qur'ān*), Quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and the traditions (*ḥadīth*) between 2007 and 2009, had difficulties coping with the high learning workload. Fazliddin, who started the same subjects in 2008, had more endurance

32 Cherkiz bazaar was one of the biggest international bazaars in Moscow, where many Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Azerbaijani migrants worked, until it was closed by the city administration in 2008.

than his friend but eventually gave up his plans to get a degree in Quranic studies when, in 2010, President Rahmon launched his campaign to call back Tajiks studying Islam abroad without being registered (see chapter one). Fazliddin, who like many of his Tajik fellow students traveled to Cairo without an official registration through the State Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA, Tajik *kumitai dinī*), did not want to endanger the good social reputation of his father, who had worked in the higher public service before retiring. Abubakr, originating from Khujand, who had also traveled unregistered to study in Cairo, on the other hand, had to quit because his father had suddenly died. As the eldest son in the family, he took over his father's position and was forced to earn money. Returning home without a diploma but with basic Arabic language skills, a sound Islamic knowledge and lots of social contacts resulting from their study time, the three former Azharites eventually found their way into Dubai's fur business. How exactly they managed this is illustrated in the following sections.

Zooming in on the lifeworlds of Tajiks who, like Fazliddin and his compatriots, worked seasonally as street brokers, this chapter illustrates how former students of Islam turned into core economic agents in Dubai's fur business sector. Thus, a major focus is on how they capitalized on their study-based networks and travel knowledge to gain a foothold in Dubai's fur business. This is linked to my broader interest in understanding how Tajiks both made and experienced Dubai as a meaningful place – a Muslim place – through the work they did, the business networks they became involved in and the places they resided. Tracing the working careers of former students of Islam, this chapter sheds light on how it came about that Tajiks, as circulating narratives about Dubai migration claimed, had become more pious in Dubai's multiple business worlds. Finally, by tackling the nexus between Islamic knowledge, religious authority and piety, the chapter provides an entry point into the religious economy of Dubai business life as it was co-shaped by Tajiks, followed by a more detailed discussion about the relation between work and piety in chapter three.

Providing a particular Tajik perspective on the globalization of market, culture, and religion, and mapping migrants' multiple translocations in and across Dubai's multiple business worlds, three themes are salient: (i) middleman-ness as a cultural skill that built on as well as fostered Tajiks' economic mobility within and across multiple business fields and beyond ethnic networks; this mobility became possible through Tajiks' ability to connect Persian-speaking Muslim traders and dealers with Arab sponsors and Russian tourists; (ii) precariousness as a common migrant experience in Dubai and the way Tajiks coped with and made sense of it as part of their Islamic reform projects; and (iii) cosmopolitan sociabilities as key settings, in which Tajiks refashioned migrant identities and tried to overcome

the peripheral status they had internalized as 'illegal' economic actors in Dubai, as Central Asian migrant workers in Russia, and as deviant Muslims in Tajikistan.

Another associated topic covered in this chapter is the relationship between work and (the idea of) place. Tracing how Fazliddin and his friends navigated translocal economic, social, and political realities in relation to the circulating cultural imaginaries of Dubai as an 'economic paradise', an ideal Muslim place and a trope of possibility, the chapter illuminates how Tajik *kamak* workers made sense of the striking gap between the migrant expectations of Dubai, and the lived experience of the Tajik *kamak* workers there. As I will argue, Tajiks were clearly not just passive consumers of the social and material fabric of cosmopolitan and economically vibrant places such as Dubai Deira. They actively participated in turning Dubai, the Arab Emirates, and the wider Gulf into a Muslim place by engaging in the politics and practices of relational placemaking and belonging.

I will start with a short history of Tajiks' involvement in Dubai's business worlds. The individual economic trajectories I trace in this section point to the central role of assembled religious and commercial Muslim networks, which facilitate various forms of transregional activity (economic, moral, pious) above all in the context of extended ethnic belonging. The latter manifests in notions of 'Persianness' or 'Muslimness'; and based on these identity markers Dubai's business networks integrated Tajiks from multiple backgrounds while transcending kinship and residential and ethnic affiliations. The latter significantly structure migrant networks, lifeworld references, and access to labor market sectors in Russia (see Samadov 2023; Urinboyev 2017). This is followed by two sections addressing the possibilities and constraints of attaining economic mobility and prosperity within Dubai's formal and informal business sectors. The focus here is on how Tajiks coped with precarity resulting from multiple forms of dependency, uneven power relations, and uncertain working conditions, by moving flexibly between formal and informal economic sectors. In line with this, the ethnographic case studies presented will reveal that Tajiks are by no means a homogeneous group of economic actors to be subsumed easily into the category of 'Gulf labor migrants' – one category prevalent in scholarship about Gulf economies. Instead, I will look at the performative dimension of 'Persianness' and 'Arabness'; forms of belonging by means of which Tajiks connected themselves to Dubai and the wider Gulf in multiple ways. The last part of this chapter, which deals with the fashioning of migrant selves into cosmopolitan Muslim businesspeople, illuminates Tajiks' translocal positionalities (translocations) in and across business worlds shaped by uneven participation in processes of cultural and economic globalization.

This chapter takes into account that Tajik Dubai business is not exclusively but above all a man's world. As a consequence, the focus in this and the following two chapters is on male experiences and practices.

Tajik Dubai Business: Entangled Routes, Histories, Connectivities

Given the longstanding history of trade and commerce in the Gulf region, Tajiks are newcomers in the Gulf economy. Tajiks' entry into Dubai's multiple business worlds can be traced back to socio-political and commercial cross-border ethnic networks, both established and strengthened during the country's civil war, that broke out in 1992, officially ended in 1997 but continued to smolder into the early 2000s. The developments in Tajikistan outlined in the following coincide with Dubai's post-oil boom transformation into a dynamic transregional business and tourist hub, attracting above all high-income population groups from Central Asia and wider Eurasia.

In the mid-1990s, Tajikistan's political elite – mostly civil war warlords and military commanders allied with today's President Rahmon – discovered the Arab Emirates as an exclusive tourist destination, as well as a lucrative place for trade and real estate investment. Due to historically, economically, and culturally close relations with Tajiks in neighboring Afghanistan,[33] cross-border trade of luxury cars, smartphones, flat-screen televisions, and modern kitchen appliances began to flourish between the Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, including also markets in China and wider Central Asia (Marsden 2016b). The circulation of prestigious 'Dubai goods', which were labeled by traders and consumers as *dubaiskii*, was supported significantly by the well-established transregionally active Afghan trading community, which hold close connections with the longstanding Afghan and Baluch diaspora and the local Persian-speaking population in the Gulf and wider parts of West Asia (Marsden 2021 and 2016b; Elsheshtawy 2010, 75 ff; Parsa and Keivani 2002). These transregional connectivities became a further drive, when Tajikistan's president Rahmon officially visited the United Arab Emirates for the first time in December 1995 in order to establish bilateral relations in the fields of political, economic and cultural cooperation as well as in the health and environment sector.[34]

33 Tajiks and Afghans share a long history of cohabitation, kinship relations, and exchange. Even during the Soviet era, many Tajik families continued to maintain close relationships with kin across the Tajikistan–Afghanistan border. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the succeeding civil war in 1992, several thousand Tajiks fled to neighboring Afghanistan. Because of their Persian language, their shared history of Persian Islamic tradition, and historical border-crossing mobilities, Tajiks feel a strong cultural bond with Sunni Muslim Iranians, with the Baluch people in Iran, and with the Dari-speaking Tajik population of Afghanistan.

34 See https://mfa.tj/en/dubai/view/19/relations-of-tajikistan-with-united-arab-emirates, last checked December 21, 2023.

Facilitating social mobility and wealth, the multitude of commercial ties established with the Gulf region had accelerated the formation of a new economic elite close to the government, the 'new Tajik' (*Tojiki nav*), a new citizenry in the country, shared, like in other parts of Central Asia, by those who have found their place in the country's post-Soviet capitalist order (Trevisani 2014) as well as by those who maintained close family and other loyal relationships with the political elite. Building on the flourishing but rather exclusive Dubai business, the lifestyle of this new economic elite manifested in luxury multistory housing constructions, tourist trips to the Gulf, driving imported SUVs, and investing in the real estate market in the Emirates. In the early 2000s, many of these new rich owned urban markets and commercial centers in Tajikistan's capital city and maintained close relations with the leading Rahmon family. The new wealth in the country, along with the growing influx of prestigious consumer goods from Dubai sold in urban markets and shopping malls, led many other Tajiks to follow suit, fueling a Dubai boom that reached its apex in the mid-2010s (Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016).

Among those emulating this approach and helping to distribute Dubai's image as both an 'economic paradise' and a brand for global modernity were Tajiks like Fazliddin and his friends – mobile, well-educated, urbanly socialized young men, often equipped with degrees in international relations, law, economics, or journalism from national universities in the country. Many of them had worked in Russia before and studied Islamic subjects in universities in the Middle East. With multilingual proficiency, able to activate their study- and work-related networks in Tajikistan, Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and other places in the Middle East, and getting support from relatives who fled the civil war to Afghanistan and later traveled through the Middle East as pilgrims, students, or migrant workers, this group of young, aspirational, and well-skilled mobile Tajiks turned into small-scale entrepreneurs, freelancers, or traders. As such, they significantly contributed to Tajikistan's 'bottom-up' integration into Dubai's transregional Afghan and Iranian-dominated trading and tourism business in the Arab Emirates from the early–mid-2000s on. While most of them worked seasonally in the fur business, others invested in cross-border businesses that linked Tajikistan's markets with a globalizing consumer culture, covering second-hand car and spare parts cargo business, electronics, household appliances, as well as fashionable Islamic clothing (Mirzoev and Stephan-Emmrich 2018; Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016). Once businesses were firmly established, these individuals gave relatives positions as purchasing agents or local partners, thereby consolidating the transnational structure of their economic enterprises. This eventually allowed the most successful of them to save enough money to invest in translocal lifestyles that, combining work and piety in proper ways, matched their striving for reform-minded Islamic life projects abroad, even if only temporarily. Residing with their families in the

Arab Emirates, like Saidullah and his wife Mehrigul, whom we will meet in chapter five, they simultaneously remained bound to their natal home and invested in two futures, one at home, the other abroad. This relatively successful second generation of Dubai boomers have become role models for many youngsters in Tajikistan who, like themselves ten years before, hang on the grand narrative of bettering their lives and pursuing a career through traveling abroad. Co-shaping circulating stories of success, this second generation of Dubai businesspeople significantly formed the social imaginary of Dubai as an 'economic paradise'; i. e., a place of possibility for self-fulfillment that covered the realization of material well-being, social mobility, and, as we will see later, spiritual advancement; a spatial trope that became embodied in the figure of the 'big Dubai businessman'. The accompanying migration dynamics towards the Gulf experienced an institutionalization, however fragile, in the context of Dubai's fur business, but consequently led to dynamic changes in the social fabric. Around 2013, when I did fieldwork in Dubai and the third wave of Dubai boomers arrived on the street corners of Baniyas Square, the fur business had begun to undergo a process of ruralization and had started to lose its exclusive character.

Approaching Dubai business as a transregional spatiality, the configuration of entangled religious and secular networks that nourish this dynamic cross-cutting spatiality became manifest in the spatial biographies of the Tajik I talked to in Dubai. Thus, four aspects struck me most: first, the key role played by former al-Azhar students as connectors and brokers; second, the existing Cairo – Moscow – Dubai connection and the flow of people, goods, ideas, and knowledge between these three geographical sites[35]; third, the important role of relatives, above all the older brother (*barodari kalon*, *aka*), as migration channel to Dubai; and forth, the integrative nature of Dubai's business networks, which stand in sharp contrast to the ethnically, locally and regionally homogenous migrant communities in Russia.

In the second generation of Tajik Dubai boomers, who played a decisive role in shaping the various Persian-speaking business worlds in the Emirates in the early 2000s, former al-Azhar graduates in particular stand out as key nodes of connectivity. As to be illustrated below, in their quality as both economic actors and religious authorities they operated as intermediaries, brokers, or middlemen in the classical sense, as they connected people from their personal economic and reli-

35 It should be mentioned that other routes into Dubai's business worlds existed for Tajiks. Among them were travel routes to Dubai via Afghanistan, on the basis of civil war related mobilities and power networks, and via Pakistan and Iran, on the basis of Islamic study-based networks. See also Tunçer-Kılavuz (2014), Epkenhans (2016), Reetz (2017 and 2009). Since the majority of my Tajik research partners in Dubai were former al-Azhar students, the focus in this chapter is on the Cairo – Moscow – Dubai connection (see also chapter one).

gious networks. Dwelling in and crossing through multiple business worlds (tourism, fur coat, car spare parts, mobile phone) spanning Tajikistan, Dubai, Russia's Moscow, and Egypt's Cairo, they also became cultural translators connecting the Persian-speaking world with that of Arab speaking businesses in Dubai. Moreover, they recruited new *kamak* workers for the fur coat business, organized visas and accommodation, shared their travel and business knowledge and, as we shall see later, supervised newly arrived compatriots. People like Fazliddin, Abubakr, and Jovid contributed to the institutionalization of mobility flows between places in Tajikistan, Russia, Egypt, and the Arab Emirates. In this role, former students of Islam had also a great impact on the transformation of Dubai business life from an economic activity of high-skilled actors into a destination for chain migration, which has brought many inexperienced and uneducated Tajiks to Dubai, leading to social and cultural tensions and creating new economic uncertainties while simultaneously increasing the demand for flexible working careers (see more in chapter three). Eventually, the entanglement of economic and religious networks had contributed to a specific culture of Dubai migration largely based on individual positions in social hierarchies, for example within the family, the kin group, or in village or neighborhood structures (Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich 2014, 422, 437; Roche 2014a). Apparently, older brothers (*barodari kalon*, *aka*) took over a key role in smoothing pathways into Dubai migration for younger siblings.

Jovid's entry into the world of Dubai business was down to the support of his family. After finishing secondary school, Jovid was brought by his older brother, an al-Azhar student at that time, to Cairo. The brother enrolled Jovid in an Arabic language course and later organized a place for him in a preparatory course for the study of *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* at al-Azhar University. Two years later, Jovid took a break due to his difficulties with Arabic. Attracted by the accounts of other Tajik Azharites, who raved about Dubai as a great place to make money in a Muslim-friendly environment, Jovid decided to give Dubai a try. Again, the older brother helped him to get a visa for Dubai and a foothold in the fur and later cargo business by drawing on his own business contacts in the Arab Emirates. The brother was able to establish those contacts again with the help of Tajiks who, like Anorakhon and her family, whom we met in chapter one, had migrated to Cairo's Nasr City. In the Arabic language center where he studied in Cairo, Jovid met Fazliddin, who was preparing for the examinations for entrance into al-Azhar's study program together with other Tajiks. The two men became good friends. Later, when Jovid got used to working seasonally in Dubai, he brought Fazliddin to Baniyas Square. Fazliddin, who had previously been to Russia to work on a construction site during the university holidays, again helped Abubakr, whom he knows from Moscow, to find work in Dubai. He organized a visa, provided him with accommodation in his apartment, and integrated him into his existing *kamak* worker net-

work. Until Jovid's move to his new job in the real estate sector, these three men, all with a different regional background, were close business partners, sharing accommodation, clients, and revenues.

As this story of translocal connectivity and friendship further reveals, routes into Dubai's multiple business fields were also affected by the large flow of migrant workers from Tajikistan to Russia and the resulting vibrant diasporic life that has developed in Moscow and other cities in Russia since the early 1990s. But Russia's bazaars, construction sites, and migrant apartments not only provided a space for religious instruction and for re-negotiating Muslim identity and belonging (Oparin 2017; Roche 2014b). They also simultaneously formed hubs that fostered transcultural encounters and transregional connectivities, together with the exchange of travel and business knowledge. While Tajik Azharites draw on their social ties with fellow former students and the growing Tajik diaspora in Cairo,[36] labor migrants in Russia easily connected with Tajiks settling in Cairo through family networks. As a consequence, many Tajiks living and studying in Cairo worked seasonally in Russia too, due to the difficult working conditions in Egypt. Russia-based Tajiks in turn obtained visas for visiting or studying in Egypt through relatives in Cairo, eventually ending up working in Dubai with their support (Stephan 2013, 130–131).

Clearly, a vibrant space of exchange and the flow of people, knowledge, and goods had evolved between Tajiks in Egypt, Russia, and the Emirates, creating a horizon of possibility, and facilitating a dynamic configuration of working opportunities, study destinations, and multiple channels for trading businesses and knowledge flows. In this context, access to (sometimes faked) visa and residence permits that were obtained through local contacts and officials played a crucial role in enabling mobility within or across these networks. Therefore, the resulting translocal livelihoods were based wholly on rather unregistered modes of travel and migration, as the channeling routes led Tajiks first into Dubai's informal economy sectors, which operated outside the *kafāla* system of migrant sponsorship and regulation. These non-formalized routes and modes of mobility resulted to precarious travel and working conditions, which were accompanied by new economic uncertainties.

Tajiks embraced the informality of their working status in Dubai as a mode of flexibility that allowed them to gain economic autonomy from state and other regulating regimes not only in Dubai itself, but also in Tajikistan and Russia. This confirms that informal travel and work patterns, together with the translocalization of families and kin groups, have become the major modus operandi in the social and

36 About the growing Tajik diaspora in Cairo in the early 2000s see Chapter One.

economic afterlife of post-Soviet development, since the care for individual livelihoods has shifted from the realm of the protective nation state to a matter of individual and collective responsibility (Pine 2014). In that context, widely dispersed, translocal family and ethnic networks have turned into a major resource to cushion economic failure, to widen the horizon of possible future trajectories by pointing out new mobility options, and to facilitate the experience of wellbeing beyond economic success in the migratory context (Urinboyev 2017). As the spatial biographies I collected from Tajiks in Dubai reveal, translocally dispersed social networks and a resulting sense of connectedness, both favored the flexibility demanded by the neoliberal capitalist order and cushioned the related experience of uncertainty and insecurity. Tajiks who sought to escape from racial discrimination and structural exploitation in Russia came to Dubai, and those who failed economically in Dubai were able to go back to Russia any time, while those who refused to return to either Russia or Tajikistan could go to Cairo or to figure out new destinations for pursuing a 'good life' elsewhere. As Fazliddin, whom I asked about his mobile way of life and that of many of his countrymen, explained: "Mobility has become our way of life. It is simply normality. Since the state is too weak to support us, we look for own ways to survive. Fortunately, we Tajiks are everywhere!"

Doing Business with *Shuba*

For Tajiks, the main channel into Dubai's business fields was through becoming a *kamak* and doing business with furs, for which Tajiks used the Russian term *shuba.* Tajik newcomers in the fur business were introduced to Fazliddin's group in the same way that I was: 'just ask for the *shaykh*'. Based on ethnic, kin, neighborhood, or former classmate (*hamsinf* bzw. *hamkurs*) networks, the group of *kamak* street workers sharing the business within a street for one or more particular fur coat showrooms, provides a culturally cozy, or nested economic space (Finke 2013; Kirmse 2011). At the same time, belonging to a particular group of *kamak* workers simultaneously opened up various pathways into other fields of business through access to coworkers' personal connections (*aloqa*, or Russian *svyazi*). On a structural level, the key role of Tajik kamak networks confirms the blocked mobility thesis, which posits that economic environments shaped by informality, regimes of exclusion, and racial barriers in the hosting society produce unfavorable and limited labor market conditions for ethnic minorities. Accordingly, migrants' economic innovation, prosperity, and entrepreneurship are secured above all through ethnic networks (Rahman 2017).

Doing business with *shuba* (Tajik *kamakkunī*) was a temporary and circular business. Following the seasonal rhythm of the Russian tourism business in

Fig. 4: Fur stores on Baniyas Square. Photo: Manja Stephan, 2013.

Dubai, Fazliddin and his friends came as bachelors in November, stayed for several months, during which they resided in one of the multiple private apartments rent to migrants, traders and other non-Emirati residents or in low-budget traveler guesthouses in Dubai Deira, and then returned to their families in March. With the influx of Russian tourists, the fur business had evolved into a lucrative economic sector in Dubai because it enabled Tajiks to make a considerable amount of money in a very short time. Tajiks therefore arrived in Dubai with the expectation to make big and fast profits (*puli kalon*) and to accumulate as much money as possible to progress to a rather indeterminate future back at home. Simultaneously, a successful *shuba* business promoted a social status upgrade that Tajik *kamak w*orkers could convert into economic and social capital both in Dubai and at home. For instance, Azim, a former drug dealer and one of the fur business pioneers at Baniyas square, had done breathtaking deals that had enabled him to buy several apartments in top locations in Dushanbe city in just a few years. In that way, he secured the livelihood of his extended family back home in Dushanbe and was at the same time able to hold a pool position for himself in Dubai business life. Thus, he became the leader of a *kamak* group that he had working for him but also hedged economically through profit shares. Boasting of his tremendous achievements in Dubai's fur business, Azim embodied the ideal image of a 'big businessman' (*biznesmeni kalon*), combining economic success with social accountability.

Economic possibilities were there, but they were contingent, volatile, and unpredictable. *Kamakkunī* therefore also marked the precarious status that Tajiks had in Dubai's business worlds. Doing street work on the back of a tourist visa, which only allowed for short-term stays but did not include work and residence

permissions, Tajiks in the fur business worked 'off the books', that is, outside the Emirati sponsorship system (Arabic *kafāla*) that regulates migration and determines residence and work status and thus governs foreign residents' inclusion and exclusion (Damir-Geilsdorf and Pelican 2019). Although informal work meant a certain degree of economic autonomy and mobility, *kamak* workers always run the risk of being arrested and deported. In sum, like Fazliddin, Abubakr, the majority of Tajiks involved in the Dubai fur business did not fit into the category of labor migrants as contract workers. Instead, they are better described as economically driven 'perpetual visitors' (Nagy 2006), or 'sojourners' (Rahman 2017, 4), who operated as freelancers or small-scale migrant entrepreneurs. Since long-term residency was hard to obtain and required integration into the *kafāla* system, *kamak* work depended on middlemen and informal sponsors. In light of this, Tajiks working in fur business often acted in the gray zone between formal and informal, documented and undocumented work.

Corresponding to Dubai's image as a lucrative place where one can make big money in a short time, the working conditions Tajiks faced while working as *kamak* revealed the fur business as a highly volatile economic field shaped by the unpredictable fluidity of capital, and in line with this, a high degree of temporariness, transitoriness, and precarity. These conditions pertained to Tajik *kamak* workers' residence status but also described the highly uncertain prospects of economic profit. An elusive future was one concern that Tajiks shared with many other migrants involved in the Gulfian (post-)oil-based economy (Schielke 2020). Therefore, the continuous search for other ways to earn money and to secure one's stay in Dubai to the greatest extent possible often run parallel to everyday street work. As Abdullah, one *kamak* I regularly met at Baniyas Square, stated:

> Dubai is perfect for making big money in a short time. But there is no future here for us. Things change too fast – politics, living conditions. You live constantly with the expectation that tomorrow everything might be over. And you should be prepared for this moment, either to go back to Tajikistan or elsewhere. This is challenging, and I am tired of this situation.

As a strategy to cope with these unpredictabilities, the future moved to the center of Tajik migrants' imagination and hope. Many Tajik *kamak* workers in Dubai therefore invested in parallel futures, both in material and non-material terms. While saving their money for a better future at home, many Tajiks simultaneously engaged in constructive works of imagination, which were mostly centered around alternative pathways to progress. A creative exercise of imagination and movement through different temporalities, and a form of agency, daydreaming together with planning was a major way for Fazliddin and his group to pass the time while waiting for customers; it served as a common strategy to cope with dislocation, home-

sickness, and idleness. Following recent studies in the anthropology of hope and the future, performing boredom may open up new perspectives and possibilities to progress, as it emerges as "a distinctive ideology (…) that informs a critique of everyday life and values" and carries "a normative tenor of (…) self-realization" (Schielke 2015a, 43–44; see also Khosravi 2017). While hanging around with Fazliddin and his friends at 'their corner', I had many chances to join in their shared daydreams that centered around a good life in the future. Thus, we talked about unfinished house construction projects at home, long-desired good marriage deals, or sorted out opportunities to establish effective trading business between Dubai and Tajikistan that would allow bypassing the high trade taxes in Tajikistan (Mirzoev and Stephan-Emmrich 2018, 107–109). Other street brokers, however, dreamed of getting a work contract and formal employment in Dubai so as to live in the Emirates with their families for a longer period. Most of them were driven by their wish to enable their kids to have a good education abroad, for instance Abubakr, "I would stay here, at least until our kids are grown up". Others in turn dreamed of earning so much money in one tourist season that they would never have to come back, and instead live a good and quiet (*zinadagii khub va orom*) life at home. Finally, dreams of progressing also appeared as the wish to improve one's own work situation. Owning or getting access to a car was a popular trope with Fazliddin and his friend.[37] Although it was a rather elusive goal, a car promised economic mobility as it connected Tajiks with more clients and hotels beyond Baniyas Square. It also enabled urban mobility for increased feelings of wellbeing by allowing for multiple leisure activities (see also chapter four).

In general, the discrepancy between what might be or is imagined and what actually is in real framed how Tajiks evaluated Dubai as a good place to live and work. These ambivalent and multilayered assessments were not only framed by material and discursive representations and regimes at work in Dubai. They were also substantively filtered through Tajiks' past experiences as labor migrants in Russia. During our early meetings, Fazliddin raved about Dubai as a good place in comparison to Russia, stressing the business-friendly atmosphere and the experience of feeling safe at the workplace: "Here, I don't have to be afraid of police checks. I can easily work with my clients in the street. Nobody comes here and takes my money." His statement contrasts strikingly with the street raids, which increased significantly after Dubai won the bid for World Expo 2020. However, Fazliddin's assessment confirms the experiences of other *kamak* people, who, despite their vulnerable status as undocumented street workers, stressed the absence of

37 On the significance of owning a car in a migrant context in Russia, see Rustam Urinboyev (2017).

risk of losing one's earnings through street crime, making profit more calculable. As for Fazliddin, Dubai's appeal as a business-friendly urban environment had attracted many Tajik migrants based in Russia, who had left their well-paid jobs in Moscow for a place of more public safety, but also for the sake of greater economic autonomy. This goes particularly for those Tajiks whose regional belonging made them vulnerable to economic marginalization at home. As a *kamak* from Gharm, stated:

> Moscow is a good place to earn money, because you can work on the basis of employment contracts. But you are not safe there. The streets are full of criminals and drunks. They attack you, rob you. On my way home from work I was constantly thinking 'Okay, something's going to happen to you today. Be careful' […] A particular evil is the police. They don't protect you, but instead take your money! […] I wanted to return home (from Russia to Tajikistan), but as a person from Gharm you cannot live a good life in Tajikistan these days.[38] If you have a good business, they come and destroy everything.[39] They even find you in Russia. That's why I came to Dubai. I don't have rights here and cannot move up in my job […]. But I am safe, and autonomous (*ozod*).

Fazliddin confirmed this articulated desire for freedom, not only in economic terms, but also in relation to state politics. His father had lost a high-ranking position in the civil service, along with the good social reputation that had afforded, after being accused of political infidelity to the system. This shock, along with the lack of future prospects in the state labor market, made Fazliddin decide to engage in the private economy:

> I won't work in the state sector. Never. I want to be free (*ozod gashta mekhoham*). A little bit of business (*biznes*) here, a little bit of trading (*tijorat*) there. Or owning a small shop in the city. As long as the business runs well and I earn some dollars, then I am satisfied.

Such statements map Dubai as "a real possibility of escape" (Kathiravelu 2016, 45) from street crime, but also an option to circumvent the arbitrary grasp of state power in Tajikistan (Thibault 2018), which comes along with corruptive and nepotic economic practices, as well as an option to evade exploitative work conditions in Russia.

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38 Gharm is a city and region in the Rasht valley, i. e., an area in the northern part of Central Tajikistan that was the hotbed of the opposition forces during the civil war 1992 – 1997. Accordingly, Gharmi people are treated with mistrust by the government, which is primarily from the Kulob region in the south, where President Rahmon also comes from. They are discriminated against and systematically marginalized on the labor market and in social life.

39 Here he refers to the powerful position of the Rahmon clan and the despotic regime they established in the non-state and informal economy sector in Tajikistan, see also chapter one.

While their status as undocumented street workers offered more freedom and autonomy than a formal employment contract does, Tajiks at the same time faced precarious working conditions in Dubai, as their undocumented status made them more vulnerable to being arrested and deported by the local police. Viewing Tajik's assessment of Dubai's working conditions through the conceptual lens of relational placemaking, Dubai was sensed to be a good place in relation to the working experiences they had made elsewhere. This explains why my Tajik research partners embraced the risks inherent in Dubai's fur business simply because these risks seemed much easier to handle than the arbitrariness, unpredictability, and fear of physical harm that characterizes migration regimes and the xenophobic society in Russia.

While initially praising Dubai as an ideal place to realize a working career in the private economy, later, when Fazliddin had become used to my presence, he started to complain about the working conditions in Dubai, emphasizing in particular his suffering from mental strain. For him, *kamak* work was not that physically hard compared to the work he had done for several years on a Moscow construction site. But the pressure to succeed, which intensified with Dubai's last debt crisis in 2009, which made sales in the fur trade increasingly difficult to calculate and thus uncertain, together with the increase in deportations of undocumented migrant workers from Central Asia, overshadowed the alluring image of Dubai as economic paradise and had caused many Tajiks in Dubai to think about alternatives to Dubai's fur business. Against this background, *kamak* work became emotionally challenging for Fazliddin. Days of waiting in vain for a good deal together with the constant danger of street raids and worrying about his people at home, caused Fazliddin to suffer from the tension caused by the striking difference between how he imagined Dubai as a good place before he arrived and the actual everyday experience of being there.

Aside from the unpredictability of success in the fur business, the socio-economic precarity Tajik *kamak* workers faced not only in Tajikistan and Russia but also in the Emirates reveals the 'fakeness' of migratory imaginaries and stories about Dubai as an ideal work destination. These stories obscure the everyday manifestation of social difference, polarization, and the structural inequality Tajik migrants have experienced in the Gulf as well as in the wider global capitalist economy (Elsheshtawy 2010; Mahdavi 2011).

This striking gap between expectation and experience, and the need for Tajiks to cope with it, obviously limited access to Dubai's business worlds. Furthermore, not everyone involved managed to progress. As the following sections reveal, economic and social progress relied heavily on access to cultural resources, as well as

on the ability to capitalize on them.[40] These cultural resources were, above all, multilingualism, social networks, cosmopolitanism, and, as will be elaborated in later chapters, religious authority through knowledge. Drawing on these cultural resources, many religiously trained Tajiks were able to cross over ethnic networks and explore new economic fields, providing more freedom but simultaneously creating new economic dependencies.

Crossing over *Kamak* Worlds: Becoming a Middleman

Wasim, aged 32, was working as a Russian tourist guide when we ran into each other in front of the mobile phone shop where I used to hang out with Tajik *kamaks* who worked for a nearby fur coat showroom. Looking for a new mobile phone battery for one of his clients, we quickly got into a conversation and arranged to meet later by Dubai Creek. Enjoying the cool evening air during a walk along the creek, I asked Wasim to tell me what moved him to come to Dubai. He promptly replied, "Well, everything started in Egypt." His entry into the tourism business took place in the late 1990s, during his studies in Cairo, when he recognized a business opportunity in the growing enthusiasm of Russia's new middle class to travel to the Middle East. To finance his private al-Azhar stay abroad, he sold mobile phones he bought in Dubai during his semester break to Russian tourists. However, a certain entrepreneurial mindset permeates his entire biography. His father, who worked as train attendant during the Soviet times, used his trips to Odessa and Kiev to get involved in incidental business buying and selling materials, shoes, and jewelry. "That's how I became familiar with the world of business, through my father." After completing his education with the highest grade ('red diploma'), Wasim went to Moscow, where he dealt in mobile phones

40 As a good illustrative example of this serves the specific position Uzbeks from Tajikistan held in Dubai business. People from that national minority group faced difficulties to be mobile within and across ethnic networks. As Tajik *kamak* workers told me, Uzbeks from Tajikistan were not able to gain a foothold in both Persian-speaking and Turkic-speaking business networks due to their ambiguous in-between affiliation. As some of them didn't speak Uzbek or spoke a specific dialect that revealed their different Uzbekness, they were not accepted by Uzbeks from Uzbekistan. As a consequence, they were dependent on their Tajik countrymen, who preferred to do business with Bukharians and Samarkandis; i. e., Tajiks from Bukhara and Samarkand. Uzbeks from Tajikistan therefore either built their own networks or tried to hide their Uzbekistani, i. e., national, identity. Another reason why Uzbeks from Tajikistan held a peripheral position in Dubai business was their late arrival in Dubai, i. e., not before 2008. At that time, Dubai's fur coat business was already divided between Tajik *kamak* workers and those from other Central Asian regions and Azerbaijanis.

and communication technology, and later ran two shops. He was able to save enough money to take holidays. Once in Egypt, he felt in love with the country and the people's Muslim culture and decided to stay and study Islam. He took courses in Arabic (Arabic *al-lugha al-ʿarabiya*), enrolled in al-Azhar's preparatory courses for studying law (Arabic *fiqh*), recitation (Arabic *tajwīd*), and exegesis (Arabic *tafsīr*), and worked on the side. The mobile phone business was going well until the Chinese took over the market. He then turned to the tourism market, bought a car and offered private sightseeing tours for Russian visitors to the pyramids. As well as being time consuming, the guide job hardly made any money. In the end, Wasim discontinued his studies, returned to Dushanbe, got married, and three years later, in 2005, started to get involved in Dubai's fur business. Like all other Tajiks I met in Dubai, he first tried it with *kamakkunī* in the fur business. But benefitting from his business experience in Cairo, he began early on to establish himself in the tourism business, too. Eventually, he left the *kamak* business, became a small-scale entrepreneur as tourist guide, and eventually also turned into a middleman. From his savings he bought a car and used his *kamak* networks to promote his private guided tours for Russian tourists to Abu Dhabi, Dubai Jumeirah, or the Indian Ocean. Since he maintained good connections to the Tajik *kamak* community at Baniyas square, he was able to offer transport services to fur shops further away, while occasionally did some decent business in furs himself, or he brought his own sight-seeing clients for shopping to one of the fur coat showrooms he once worked for himself. Simultaneously, Wasim cultivated good ties with Tajiks working in the Iranian-owned tourism market and mobile phone shops. This gave him the opportunity to provide his Russian clients, not only with fashionable fur coats, but also with the latest communication technology, or with sought after Dubai souvenirs.

At the time we met, Wasim was enjoying his economic situation. Combining middleman activities with entrepreneurship, he experienced a high degree of economic mobility and progress. This led to Wasim praising Dubai's neoliberal and business-friendly conditions, which allowed him to work toward his dream to set up his own tourism agency and bring his family to the Emirates. However, while he had already bought a family-sized apartment in the neighboring emirate of Sharjah, he also continued with the construction of a prestigious, three-story house for his family in his natal village on the outskirts of Dushanbe, which he started building when he left the petrol station he successfully ran with his friend in the city. When I asked why he invested all his money in two different life plans simultaneously, he replied: "The apartment is for now, the house for later, when I retire and my kids are grown. Maybe I can return home one day, when the situation in our country gets better." Like Wasim, many of the Tajiks I met in Dubai had given up their well-running businesses at home due to being targeted

by the government's arbitrary surveillance and regulation regime in the private sector (see also Thibault 2018; Öczan 2010). As these biographical accounts show, Dubai's furs and tourism businesses open up avenues for pursuing alternative economic interests, which would be otherwise suppressed at home.[41]

But the economic mobility and freedom Dubai's fur business offers to middlemen and entrepreneurs in particular, was neither permanent nor unlimited. During our meetings, Wasim repeatedly complained about the volatility of entrepreneurial success in Dubai. Coupled with Tajiks' general economic dependency on Russia, this allowed him to sense his own marginal position in the global economy. Once, I asked Wasim about his alternative plans in case he had to give up his businesses in Dubai. Referring to the unequal power relations that determined how Tajiks became involved in *kamak* business, he responded:

> Honestly, I don't have a plan. Not yet. In principle, I could go anywhere, as long as there are Tajiks. And we are everywhere (laughs). At home, in my neighborhood, there are now only old men. The young and middle-aged are all in Russia, working. We have been independent for

41 In the early 2010s, many entrepreneurs suffering from adverse conditions in the non-state economy had become attracted to Dubai's business-friendly environment. To run a successful business in Tajikistan, entrepreneurs must have informal 'access' (*kanal*), or 'connections' (Russian plural *svyazi*, Tajik plural *aloqaho*) to government officials. These costly connections and the linked corruption, together with the overall economic crisis in the country, had caused difficulties for entrepreneurs struggling to cover their business expenses. In addition, the decline of migrants' remittances due to the financial crisis in Russia in 2009 (the country depends heavily on remittances from migrants in Russia, which provided an equivalent of half of the country's GDP in the year of 2013, see World Bank Group report 2015, 12) critically affected Tajikistan's economy. Consequently, the government increased taxes and thus jeopardized small- and mid-scale entrepreneurial and business enterprises (Mullojonov 2016). The informal economy was additionally hampered by constant surveillance by local authorities and elites who tried to monopolize the trading and bazaar business. Fires in the central bazaars of both Dushanbe and Kulob destroyed many vendor' properties. Mainly uninsured, these vendors were ineligible for compensation for lost property (See http://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/incidents/20120314/damage-caused-qurghon-tepppa-s-central-bazaar-fire-estimated-312000-somoni, http://www.rferl.org/a/kulob-bazaar-fire-market-sahovat-shops/25465601.html, last accessed October 17, 2016). It is important to note that the insurance system in Tajikistan is neither well developed, nor do people trust in the system. Many of the affected traders used bank loans to reopen their business. Banks in Tajikistan offer loans at extremely high interest rates (In 2016, the bank rate was 29% to 32% for Somoni, and 22% to 35% for USD. See http://fmfb.com.tj/ru/legal/loans/), and they overburden borrowers with a lot of confusing bureaucratic paperwork. Ultimately, many vendors have transferred their business to the United Arab Emirates in order to pursue their economic interests without the pressure to get involved in corruption, the need to pay bribes or the high risk of being targeted by the government's arbitrary surveillance and regulation regime in the informal economy sector (see https://www.ukessays.com/essays/economics/barriers-to-entrepreneurship-development-in-tajikistan-economics-essay.php, last accessed October 17, 2016).

> more than 20 years. But still, our country is so dependent on Russia, economically, military. Working in Russia is an option, but a pretty bad one. All of my friends working there try to come here, to escape from Russia. Russians treat us badly. But wherever you go, you end up doing business with Russians, even in Cairo (laughs again). We are dependent on them. They feed us, with their money. Therefore, we follow them wherever they go.

However, due to his successful translocal business activities and the possibility of capitalizing on his entangled study and work-related networks in Cairo, Moscow and Dubai, Wasim was financially well equipped to not only dream but also materially invest in two parallel futures: one at home, connected with the hope of return if the living conditions in the homeland improve, and the other abroad in the hope of long-term employment and residency.

As a general observation, switching from, between, or combining being street broker, middleman, freelancer, or entrepreneur, many Tajiks in Dubai accepted precarity for the sake of promoting their entrepreneurial self. Hence, precarity – understood both as socio-economic condition and ontological experience – on the one hand describes Tajiks' translocal experience of ambient insecurity, uncertain futures, and risky mobile livelihoods in the Gulf. On the other hand, the term applies to processes of subjectification that rely on self-responsibility, flexibility, creativity, and yet a certain amount of opportunism (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006), which was facilitated first of all in economic fields that ran outside the Emirati *kafāla*-system, and that built on unregistered modes of travel. My Tajik research partners in Dubai embraced both the negative and positive components of precarity, as well as engaged in a certain optimism around the opening up of a possibility for entrepreneurship, social mobility, and a different mode of subjectivity (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006). Thus, precarity was both cushioned and made meaningful in the context of what I will in the following subchapter, as well as later in chapter five, discuss as cosmopolitan sociabilities; these are contexts of social interaction, exchange, and cultural translation, as they were produced in transregional Afghan, Iranian, and sometimes also Arab business networks and neighborhood spaces in the Arab Emirates.

Persianate-Muslim Business Hubs: Migrant Apartments

The multiple transregional connectivities, relations and positionings – economically but also culturally, religiously, and morally – that shaped Dubai business life when Tajiks got a foothold in it took on a spatialized form in the migrant apartments around Baniyas Square, where the majority of Tajiks I met in Dubai temporarily resided. As places of "entanglement, the meeting up of different histories,

many of them without previous connections to others" (Massey 2006, 50), in migrant apartments, Tajiks were involved in and shaped cosmopolitan sociabilities, enabling and promoting business connections, migrant solidarities, trust, and Muslim belonging. Dubai's migrant apartments were social hubs where Tajiks met business partners, exchanged business knowledge across cultural, national, and other boundaries, and got involved in new economic activities.

The area around Dubai Deira offered different categories of accommodation for migrants, travelers, and traders. While the low-budget and poorly equipped guesthouses were an affordable residence option above all for traders and business travelers with short stay, middlemen activities or employment in a Dubai-based company allowed for longer residency and enabled Tajiks to move to better-equipped guesthouses. Although more expensive, these apartments offered more space and comfort. The majority of *kamak* workers, however, dwelled in the low-budget, rudimentarily equipped, and often overcrowded two-four bedroom privately owned apartments around Baniyas square that were managed by a caretaker who was an interim tenant and who regulated tenancy and looked after the paying migrants.

Being male-dominated bachelor spaces, staying in migrant apartments as a woman was impossible. Accordingly, visits were possible only rarely and only when invited to communal lunch or dinner.[42] The Tajik accommodations that I was allowed to get to know were owned and managed by Afghans, who have specialized in renting three- or four-bedroom apartments in Deira's residential areas situated close to the main commercial zones.[43] An apartment manager was responsible for his tenants' safety, supervised keeping the house rules, and sometimes also stored and managed the migrants' cash income. Interim tenants also paid for a cook, often an Afghan as well, who was responsible for lunch and dinner, but also operated as the room cleaner and facility manager.

Despite the constant flow of people, most Tajiks working around Baniyas Square had a fixed place in one particular apartment, where they would stay during their trips to Dubai, often with other Afghan and Baluch traders and businessmen, or sometimes also Arab migrants (as we will see in chapter four), whom they had known for many years. Once, I was invited to lunch in Azim's apartment. When we arrived, about a dozen men were sitting relaxing around the *dastur-*

42 Otherwise, I stayed in hotels nearby or lived with the families of Tajiks residing longterm in apartments in the emirate of Sharjah.

43 Access to migrant apartments, where Tajik *kamak* workers resided in, was only possible thanks to the mediation and accompaniment of my doctoral student and research assistant Abdullah Mirzoev.

khon[44]; while carrying on their conversation, they waited for me – their guest – and the chef to serve the food. After doing business during the daytime, the roommates met in their apartment to share lunch and dinner. Eating and relaxing together, this time off from work created a social space for debating politics, economics, and religion-related issues. After we had Afghani *palow* with salad together, the chef served tea and heralded the gradual end of the communal meal. Some tenants left to retire or watch TV, others stayed with me at the dining table. After talking for a while about business opportunities and life in Germany, they switched to discussing trading conditions, prices, business contacts, and visa regulations, all more daily concerns. Later, they shared their latest family stories before we started talking about the living conditions for Tajiks in Dubai.

Access to guesthouses, as I learned from the person sitting next to me, a Baluch dealer who did business in expensive cars, requires trust. Relying on 'the right connections' (Tajik plural *aloqaho,* Russian plural *svyazi*), the Baluch man explained, may work as a gateway to favorable apartments. Even more, having access to financial resources, and bringing personal qualities such as reliability and a good social reputation, Tajiks were involved in a system of informal sponsorship that institutionalized the overlap between dwelling and doing business in Dubai. As a Tajik tenant from Dushanbe explained, to get permission to stay in the apartment, he needed to find someone to take responsibility for paying the monthly rent on his behalf in case he was not able to pay himself. Ideally, the informal sponsor would be running a sustainable business on the basis of long-term residency or a work contract with a Dubai-based company. Besides, gateways into an apartment-based residency in Deira were often business partners or relatives of the apartment owner. Capitalizing on their roommates', the apartment owner's, or the interim tenant's own contacts, Tajiks in Dubai engaged in networks of trusted familiars who might even share their business profits and their clients.

Preferences for Afghan-owned guesthouses were overwhelmingly articulated in cultural and religious terms. Thus, a sense of 'Persianness' Tajiks shared with Afghan landlords and traders, Baluch dealers, and Sunni-Iranian businessmen promoted a sense of belonging to an ethnically extended business community. 'We trade with whom we trust' was a core principle, ruling not only the Tajiks' Dubai business life. This principle first of all points to the importance of ethnicity- and kin-based business networks and the leading role family members played as ideal business partners because 'they would never cheat you'. However, the cultural proximity of Iranians from Baluchistan and Dari-Farsi-speaking Afghans rendered them "trusted familiars" instead of strangers (Osella and Osella 2012, 128).

44 A traditional Central Asian tablecloth spread on the floor and where food is served.

Belonging to the Sunni-Hanafi branch of Islam and possessing a shared Persian culture, literature, and history, Tajiks perceived Afghans, Baluch, and other Sunni Iranians as brothers (*barodar*) and claimed to belong to 'one people' (*yak millat*) sharing one historical-cultural identity. It was therefore no surprise that Tajiks considered Sunni Iranians and Dari-Farsi-speaking Afghans as closer (*nazdik*) than Turkish-speaking Central Asians or Uzbeks from Tajikistan. A shared sense of religious and cultural belonging and the related sense of cultural connectedness had a great impact on how Tajiks adapted to and felt they belonged to the city, integrated into Dubai's multiple business fields, and articulated unity, sameness, and constructed difference (see also Landa 2013).

In such a culturally nested economic environment, migrant apartment-based spaces of connectivity and connectedness with Dubai's Persianate-Muslim business world opened up a real possibility for Tajiks to progress both economically and socially, as well as to feel a sense of Muslim belonging. Cultivating relations with the established Afghan or Iranian diaspora community in Dubai, Afghans had an influential position in the Emirates' transregional trading business, but also in the real estate business and the growing middle- and upper-class tourism sector (see Elsheshtawy 2008; Parsa and Keivani 2002). For Tajiks, Afghans were therefore potential gateways to relations (Arabic *wasta*) around potential Arab sponsors (*kafil*) and, as such, an important prerequisite to upgrade one's status as an unregistered 'migrant' to a 'businessman' through moving within and across the informal and formal economy.

The well-established Persian-speaking business community in Dubai benefited from the Tajiks' role as social mediators, economic middlemen, and cultural translators. Based on their multiple language capacities, Tajiks connected their Persian-speaking business partners with Russian clients and Arab sponsors, as they recruited and expanded established trading businesses into new economic fields, as well as into new markets in Central Asia, Eurasia, Europe, and the United States.

However, when integrating into Persian-speaking business networks, Tajiks had to cope with existing business hierarchies, economic dependencies, and multiple other constraints they were faced with in their everyday life in the migrant apartments. Tajiks clearly dwelled in Dubai's business worlds as newcomers. In this position, they accepted, yet subordinated themselves to the often-claimed cultural superiority, business expertise, and religious leadership of Iranian business partners and room-mates. It was above all Iranian business partners who treated Tajiks like 'little Soviet brothers', who, due to their isolation from the wider Muslim community during the Soviet period, had a profound lack of cultural and religious knowledge. Accordingly, Tajik *kamak* workers sometimes complained of being the frequent targets of an aggressive religious and cultural proselytization. This is consistent with an incident I observed during a communal lunch in a mi-

grant apartment. Azim, the *kamak* worker who invited me into his apartment, and who had spent some years studying Islamic subjects in Riyadh, left the room when, in one of the numerous discussions after lunch, his Iranian room-mate boasted extensively of the cultural sophistication of Iranian people and their crucial role in shaping Islamic civilization. Later, when I asked him about his reaction, Azim explained: "Iranians always boast about their culture. I don't like it. (…) Also, I don't share his religious conviction (Arabic *'aqīda*). What he says about women in Islam, for example, is not right. But he's the best friend of my employer. So, I keep quiet, or leave if it gets too much for me."

While difference in Dubai's Persian-speaking business worlds clearly existed and were articulated through cultural and religious superiority and hierarchical business relations, Dubai business life did not create real ruptures with previous economic activities, Tajiks has been involved before in Tajikistan, Russia, or even Egypt. Instead, Dubai's vibrant furs, tourism and trading sector formed a pivotal spatial knot within a larger socio-spatial configuration, which was shaped by transregionally extended ethnic business networks. This allowed Tajiks to cross-over one's own kin- or ethnicity-based network's natural boundaries, as it enabled Tajiks to involve in the production of what Finke, in his study on the Kazakh minority in Mongolia, terms 'institutional coziness'. In other words, Tajiks co-shaped the institutional production of ideas about appropriatedness that included the longing for "a geographical and social environment with which one is familiar, knows the rules of the game, and feels at home" (Finke 2003, 178). This institutional, or cultural, coziness provided crucial channels into the Persianate-Islamic business world in the Gulf, as it allowed Tajiks to create new fields of economic activity, in which they realized economic mobility (see Mirzoev and Stephan-Emmrich 2018, 102–103). In this capacity, Wasim and his friends made the interregional history of Dubai's merchant cosmopolitanism their own (Osella and Osella 2012; Ahmad 2012b), while they simultaneously became creative agents of economic and cultural globalization, when connecting hitherto separated business fields on the basis of their multilingual skills and study- and work-based transregional networks.

Working with Arabs

In a striking contrast to the everyday work realities as they were formed through Tajiks' involvement in Persian-speaking business worlds, Dubai was imagined, and desired, by my interlocutors above all as part of *Arabiston*, the 'Arab world', as described in chapter one. Based on Dubai's proximity to both the holy sites of Mecca and Medina in the Hejaz, and to the al-Azhar University in Cairo – this prox-

imity was nourished by multiple Muslim mobilities and connectivities across these places– the attributed Arab identity of Dubai reveals how Tajiks positioned themselves as Muslims in relation to the Middle East as the perceived center of Islam. This relational placemaking as a form of Muslim world-making simultaneously got inspiration from circulating media representations of Dubai's version of global Muslim modernity and political leadership that contributed to the branding of the Emirate as part of an emerging Arabian Gulf (Bromber et al. 2014, see also in the Introduction). Such media representations shaped migrant imaginaries in Tajikistan, Russia, and elsewhere. Meshing with the trope of an economic paradise, Dubai's image as an ideal migrant destination formed a crucial landmark in geographies of Muslim piety and belonging, in which mobile Tajiks located their Islamic reform projects.

To understand this paradox relation between migratory imagination and experience, we have to look at the role of cultural-geographical imagined Otherness that Arabs in Dubai were adhered to. In their narratives, Tajiks did not always differentiate between Emirati (Arabic *khalyji*) and other Arabs. Persianness was strategically cultivated as a form of cultural rootedness, or a historically-deep rooting Muslim belonging to a widely dispersed community of 'Persian-speakers' (*farsizabonho*), that provided economic mobility. Arabness, in contrast, appeared to be a multilayered notion condensing a wide range of religious and moral ideals, rather elusive, and was therefore highly desired to accumulate as symbolic capital in multilayered form, but nothing 'naturally' given or easily accessible. Regarded as equivalent with Islam, being Arab connoted *islomī* 'Islamic' (as similar to the case in Indonesia, see Lücking 2014, 37, 38) in terms of religious authenticity and origin as articulated in often used formulations like 'real' (*haqiqī*, *durust*) or 'pure Islam' (*islomi toza*). Following the conceptual link between spatial co-presence or proximity and *baraka*, the latter terms designates god's blessing Muslims hope to receive during their spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage, Arabness could be translated by Tajik Dubai migrants into social capital at home, as the respectful treatment of the Arab-educated young Dubai businessmen at a wedding in Dushanbe described in the Introduction to this book as shown (see also Lücking 2014, 39–40). But the symbolic capital adhered to Arabness also worked because doing business with Arabs provided channels into prestigious economic fields. Moreover, due to Emiratis' leading position in the social hierarchy of the Gulf, collaborations with Arabs promised access to the state and its legal(izing) bureaucratic institutions itself. This eventually allowed Tajiks to convert their status as undocumented migrants into that of legal residents. Finally, in terms of political utopia, Arabness was linked with an ethnocratic model of national statehood and ideal Muslim governance, which warranted wealth and elite status to a single ethnic – here Arab – group (Longva 2005). In spite of the reconstruction of Arabness as a national cate-

gory that excluded Tajiks, like any other foreign residents in the Gulf, from citizenship, Emirati leadership stood for development, esteem, and wellbeing in a Muslim-friendly environment, as to be discussed in detail in chapter four. As Karim in the introduction of this book confirmed, Emirati leadership and governance served Tajiks as a moral antidote to the governments' 'virtual policies' and its 'faked democracy' in Tajikistan (Epkenhans 2016; Heathershaw 2009).

As we can see, the symbolic capital inherent to Arabness as a rather elusive form of Muslim belonging worked in multiple ways to increase economic, social as well as religious status in the context of migration. In the sum of all these qualities, access to Arabs' business worlds was a desired way to get beyond ethnic networks and the power relations producing and underpinning them, and to traverse national and ethnic boundaries and therewith realize social mobility. However, while Arabs were at the core of Tajiks' work of imagination, hope, and desire, economic collaborations with them are seemingly rare, since the majority of Tajiks operated as economic actors outside of the *kafāla* system. A bureaucratic sponsorship system that regulates migration flows and residence status in the Emirates, *kafāla* is led by both protectionism and the absence of any attempts to integrate foreign residents into Gulfian society. Instead, it subordinates foreign residents to Emirati citizens, who often act as sponsors for economic enterprises initiated by foreign residents, in the process gaining a fixed share of their profits (Rahman 2017, 13 ff). Immigration, though, is not exclusively a state project, as often suggested in scholarship. As recent studies reveal, *kafāla* is an assemblage of diverse people and transnational practices, including state agents, institutions, and a wide range of private actors that manage migration and benefit from it. Accordingly, Gulf migration, and in particular working in the informal economy, is not experienced uniformly. The same goes for the formal work sector (Vora and Koch 2015; Rahman 2017; Osella and Osella 2012; Ahmad 2012b).

As former Tajik *kamak* trajectories into formal employment show, access to Arab-led business sectors was dependent on both Arabic language proficiency and the 'right connections' (Russian plural *svyazi*, Tajik plural *aloqaho*) or 'channel' (Russian *kanal*). The latter were often provided by networks formed in the course of studying Islam in the Middle East. Access to formal employment therefore confirmed a sense of exclusiveness, which was cultivated by Tajiks working in Arab-dominated business fields, but also by those who did not have access to but longed for it. Appreciative statements such as "He has become a really great businessman" point to the capability to achieve social advancement and status improvement in a system, which encompasses advantage via social relationships (Arabic *wasta*) at a high level, in domains such as Arab-led enterprises in the tourism or real estate sector, international entrepreneurship in the Islamic economy, or where the state itself works, for example through *kafāla* (Osella and Osella 2012, 132).

Tajik narratives of working with Arabs were therefore often surrounded by an aura of unattainability. This is in line with my own futile efforts to approach Tajiks working in Arab-led or -dominated international enterprises. While Jovid always kept apologizing for having a lack of time, other Tajiks refused to cooperate because they feared that my presence would bring them in an unfavorable position in relation to their business channels. Yusuf, a newcomer, was brought to Dubai by his older brother, a former Azharite who had been working in Dubai since the early 2000s, and who arranged a job contract for his younger brother in an Arab tourism enterprise. When asking him to meet his brother, Yusuf replied dismissively: "He wouldn't want to meet because he is a really important person." When I asked him for clarification, he referred to the big business (*biznesi kalon*) in which his brother was involved.[45]

Yusuf's restraint corresponds with my observations that Tajiks prefer to avoid talking freely about important contacts in order to not jeopardize the resulting benefits, such as legal work status and long-term residence permission. Arguably, narratives about Arab business worlds confirm the image of the formal work sector as a highly prestigious, exclusive and therefore rather elusive business field. At the same time, such narratives reproduced orientalized images of Arabs as ideal business partners, which were consolidated through a transfiguration of distance and unattainability.

Switching from the power of imagination to everyday realities, the following case studies give insight into how Tajiks experienced working with Arabs, and how they talk about it in front of me. Tackling these narratives as a way into how Tajiks refashioned their migrant status in the Gulf, they also offer insights into the unpredictable and unexpected consequences – above all, disenchantments – that integration into Dubai's formal labor market brought.

Saidullah, a former student of Islam with expertise in the fields of Islamic law (*fiqh*), Quran exegesis (*tafsīr*) and philosophy (*falsafa*) and holder of a degree from the University of Sana'a in Yemen, worked for several years as a dealer in a Tajik car spare parts business that ran between Dubai and Dushanbe before he was hired as manager for a fur coat showroom near to Baniyas Square, owned by a Tajik businessman and sponsored by an Arab *kafīl.* With the new job, Saidullah took over responsibility for sales, customer contact, and fur coat imports from Turkey and China, and for the whole accounting. On the basis of a renewable three-year employment contract and a salary depending on the profit the store made, he was able to rent a family apartment in neighboring emirate of Sharjah,

45 This ties in directly with the problem of field access in the anthropology of elites (see Abbink and Salverda 2013).

where he lived with wife and three children at the time we met. Both his degree in Islamic studies and his good reputation as a man of Islamic knowledge within the Tajik *kamak* community were important credentials for fulfilling three important preconditions for the job – namely, credibility, sincerity, and trust. The door opener into formal employment however was Saidullah's good Arabic language skills, which he acquired in Yemen. As he explained:

> In Dubai you need either English or Arabic to get connected with Arabs, or at least with people who know Arabs. Otherwise you can't get anywhere here. My boss (the Tajik shop owner) himself, because of he does not speak Arabic recommended me to his *kafil*, who needed a translator to communicate with him. And so, he took me on.

Able to capitalize on a broad repertoire of cultural skills, eventually Saidullah was to become himself both a key and successful player in the fur business. He spoke Arabic with the sponsor, Russian with the clients, Tajik or Farsi with dealers and middlemen. Called *shaykh* by other Tajiks, which confirmed his religious authority, he also supervised the Tajik *kamak* street brokers working for his fur showroom, as will be shown in more detail in chapter three. Thus, Saidullah turned his rather peripheral position as a broker working unregistered on a freelance basis into a comfortable role as an employed shop manager, cultivating a wide range of contacts into different business networks and therewith acting as hub, or "redistribution point" (Osella and Osella 2012, 128; see also Mirzoev and Stephan-Emmrich 2018).

Due to his language abilities, he overturned the exotic image Tajiks have as poor and ignorant ex-Soviet Muslims among Arabs in Dubai. Saidullah's story was a small glimpse into a world that was otherwise rather closed to me, the ethnographer, namely the ways in which Arabs perceive Central Asian migrants in the Gulf:

> When the *kafil* heard that I speak Arabic he was amazed. Arabs don't expect Tajiks to be fluent in Arabic. When my boss told him about me and praised my Arabic skills, and also that I have studied in Yemen, the *kafil* became curious and wanted to get to know me.

Saidullah is a good example of what 'progressing' in Dubai's fur business could mean, namely when Tajiks were able to operate as middlemen. Crossing the boundaries of his ethnic networks, Saidullah demonstrated his ability to take advantage of his Islamic university education via his informal social connections to reach the status of official employment. Even more, his work trajectory led him to a certain degree of economic autonomy and flexibility, which definitely broadened his horizons of possibility. Based on a relatively stable income and a residence permission he was able to invest in a future in the Gulf and in bringing his family to the

Emirates. Additionally, the possession of a residence card together with an employment arrangement allowed him to circumvent the restrictive regulations and long waiting lists back home for the pilgrimage to Mecca (see more on this in chapter five). Like Saidullah himself, Tajiks in Dubai tried to perform *ḥajj* and *'umrah* through the help of their employers, often several times. This is rather difficult to realize for compatriots still based in Tajikistan.

Simultaneously, the integration into the *kafāla* system is accompanied by a number of constraints, which clearly affected Tajiks' economic wellbeing in Dubai. Instead of overcoming the precarious working conditions in the informal sector, formal employment created new forms of economic uncertainty and vulnerability. Enhancing social prestige and offering financial security not provided by the *kamak* business, the bond to an Arab sponsor could at the same time compound the restriction of economic freedom and mobility made possible in the context of informal work. This fueled a heightened sense of dependency and inferiority, which was reinforced by the neoliberal atmosphere of unfettered entrepreneurship, as pushed by Dubai's transformation into a capitalist enterprise (Smith 2014).

When we met in November 2013, Saidullah's business was going badly. During the tourism boom, more and more fur coat shops had opened in the area around Baniyas Square. This intensified the competition for Russian tourists, whose number dramatically decreased after Dubai's last crisis in 2009. When Dubai won the bid to host World Expo 2020, the first to be held in the MENA region, the local police station ramped up their street raids around Baniyas Square and started to deport Tajik and other *kamak* workers in large numbers to polish up the clean image the emirate wanted to hold in the global public eye. Moreover, unforeseeable trends in the housing markets rapidly pushed up cost of living in neighboring Sharjah, where Saidullah resided with his family. As confirmed also by other Tajiks who resided in neighboring emirates in Sharjah, in winter 2013 the annual rent for his three-room apartment in Sharjah had increased from 37,000 to 40,000 dollars. This depressing assemblage made Saidullah realize how dependent he was both on his *kafīl* and on global dynamics, which define work and life in Dubai and force foreign residents into the position of being "temporary labor migrants" (Ahmad 2012b: 22, Kathiravelu 2016: 94 ff). The desired economic paradise, where Saidullah tried to build a future with his family, turned out to be a highly unpredictable beast. Mehrigul, his wife, whom we will meet later in chapter five, had her own thoughts about it, which she shared with me during one of the many chats we had while I was staying in the family's apartment.

Mehrigul: We used to have happy times here. But now, when he comes home, he's often depressed. He has been worried since the *kafil* suggested to him recently that he better returns to Tajikistan until business picks up again.
Manja: How did he react?
Mehrigul: Life has become hard compared to when we first got here. But we shall never go back to Tajikistan, he says. Also, we cannot. The children go to school here. We've paid school fees for the whole year. Our *kafil* helped us to get a place in a school nearby. They get a good education there. So how can he push us to leave now? He should understand our situation.
Manja: Does Saidullah know his *kafil* personally?
Mehrigul: Yes. The two met via Saidullah's Egyptian friends in the mosque. Sometimes they go together to Friday prayers. He has an assistant, a Syrian, a very approachable man. But rules here are very hard. As long as the business runs well you are welcome. If not, it's "please go home, bye bye!" But we shall try to stay here until our sons finish school.
Manja: But how will you manage that?
Mehrigul: My husband negotiated with his *kafil* to wait for another half year to see.

Investing in a medium-term future in the Emirates was a risky endeavor, particularly when families were involved and migration to Dubai was driven by aspirations such as proper education for the offspring and family life in a Muslim-friendly environment. In this context, dependency on the Arab sponsor has weighed more heavily, and economic vulnerability has increased since Dubai is no longer perceived as a transitory place. This goes in particular for Tajiks like Saidullah, who linked a moral activism to their Dubai migration and fashioned their move to Dubai as *hijra* to a country reigned by Islamic rules, accompanied with the intention of not returning to Tajikistan (see chapter one). Against this background, official employment and the associated dependence on both the Arabic sponsor and unpredictable global market dynamics could prove a trap.

Drawing on his extended *kamak*, middleman, and student networks as well as on his social reputation as a *shaykh*, Saidullah was eventually able to negotiate his precarious economic situation by reactivating old channels into the former car spare parts business he worked in before. Reinvesting more in sideline business activities, he simultaneously mobilized close relatives to open a branch of his trading business at home, while looking for further Muslim-friendly destinations in the Middle East in which to work and live with his family (more in chapter five). In so doing, he reconnected himself to the realm of the informal economy and became flexible enough to cushion both the dependency and unpredictability of his current employment arrangement, and to regain economic flexibility and autonomy.

But not all of the Tajiks I met in Dubai were able to connect in this way, or move flexibly between the formal and informal economy, just as not everyone was able to capitalize on social networks, university and travel knowledge, and

other skills to pursue economic mobility as well as material and immaterial progress. As a pattern of shared experience, formal employment relationships increased a sense of security for the price of giving up economic flexibility and freedom, but also, as the following case study illustrates, personal development prospects.

When I met Ikrom, he was employed as a low-level manager in a tourist shop in Dubai Deira. This was actually the dream of many *kamak* workers I met, but Ikrom complained about the absence of any career prospects and options for economic mobility in his job. In short, he felt stuck, a feeling that he, like many other Tajiks in Dubai, was already familiar with from his time as a recent university graduate and later as a migrant worker in Russia (see chapter one). Thus, realizing that "I am fully dependent on my boss" was at the heart of his frustrations about the pitfalls of the expected economic paradise he hoped to find in Dubai. His initial plan, which entailed investment in a long-term future at home and a medium-term future in Dubai, was to get a good job that would allow him to bring his family and have a good life and good education for the kids in Dubai, while simultaneously building a house in his natal village, where the family could live later, on returning home.

But the increase in economic and physical safety went hand in hand with the decrease in his wages. While in Russia, he had earned more money than in Dubai but was not safe from racist assaults, robbery, and fraudulent employers, who cheated him out of his salary. In Dubai, he knew that he would get his salary on time and could take it home without being attacked on the street. However, his major concern, which he shared with many other Tajiks working in the tourism industry, was the lack of recognition for his educational qualifications, as well as the limited possibility to transform his language skills into economic and social capital, or in other words: to progress (*peshraftan, inkishof yoftan*). Besides his mother tongue, Ikrom was fluent in Farsi, Russian, English, Arabic, and know some Urdu, having learned the latter of these languages during his studies at the International Islamic University in Islamabad in the early 1990s. Although, for this reason, he was hired for the customer contact area of a flourishing souvenir center at Baniyas square, Ikrom suffered in his service job, losing himself over and over again in nostalgic memories of his dream of becoming a teacher. In the following, I summarize the main points of a larger conversation we had about his sense of incompatibility of his aspirations and future plans and the limited opportunities his job in Dubai offered for realizing them.

> Ikrom came to Dubai in his late thirties in the hope of investing his university knowledge and combined language proficiencies in a good job. In Tajikistan, he had worked as teacher for some years, but since the salary was too low to feed his family, he went to Moscow and St Pe-

tersburg, where he worked on a construction site and later as shop vendor. In Dubai, he found himself in an employment situation that again did not pay enough to build a stable future either at home or abroad. In addition, Ikrom suffered from the lack of personal development in intellectual terms: "I am not making any progress (*heche inkishof nayoftan*). I love books, I want to learn and pass on my knowledge. Instead, I spend all day talking to tourists about prices and shelf numbers." Overall, things did not go as he had hoped. Troubled by the feeling that he was underpaid and his qualifications and skills were not appreciated, he wrote several letters to his French boss, the owner of the souvenir market, with the help of an Iranian and an Arab *kafīl*. But he never got any answer. Unlike many Tajik *kamak* workers I met, Ikrom articulated a very critical position on the low status that foreigners like himself hold in the *kafāla* system: "I don't have any rights here," and "Human rights here do not work for people like me." Besides, having no direct contact with the senior management of the shop where he worked, he missed out on social connections that might help him to find another job: "If you don't have a direct channel to your boss, or to the *kafīl*, you don't have a chance to progress." After sending dozens of applications and making phone calls to get information about the status of his application or to try and get an interview somewhere, he became frustrated and started looking for other destinations where he might work. But where to go? Besides Saudi Arabia, he had Bahrain and Kuwait on his wish list, while sensing Qatar as even worse than Dubai due to the harsh neoliberal working conditions and salaries there.

But disappointments about shattered dreams of investing in several, i. e., translocal, futures were not only rooted in unfulfilled educational aspirations thwarted by the restrictive Emirati *kafāla* system. The experience of precarity within formal employment may also intersect with and be fueled by the structural minoritization of members of particular regional groups within Tajikistani society due to the socio-political afterlife of the country's bloody civil war in the early 1990s. In short, Ikrom's spatial biography was shaped by experiences of displacement, not only in the present, but also in the past. Ikrom comes from a family with Gharmi roots living in Kurghonteppa, the region that provided the basis for the opposition groups against the forces of current President Rahmon during the civil war (Epkenhans 2016; Dudoignon 2011). Ikrom's complaint that people from Gharm region cannot get a good job anywhere in Tajikistan reflects the politics of regional identity (*mahallagaroī*) in post-civil war Tajikistan which up to now regulates access to economic sectors, not only at home, but also in the various migrant destinations abroad. Thus, related personal and communal experiences of social exclusion and economic marginalization travel with the migrants even to the Gulf and framed how Tajiks made sense of their experiences with Dubai's *kafāla* system. Hence, Ikrom's lack of access to social networks in the fur trade and middlemen business linked back to the specific history of Tajiks' involvement in Dubai's business worlds, which advantaged urbanly socialized and well-educated mobile Tajiks from the central region around the capital city of Dushanbe. While Gharmi families and sometimes even whole villages dominated large parts of Russia's bazaar

businesses, they were not able to invest the same resources to get a foothold in Dubai's tourist and trading sectors. As a consequence, Ikrom drew on his inferior role as a Gharmi as a common, yet accepted narrative to come to terms with his negative working experiences in Dubai. It helped to justify the lack of success and progress and to make sense of the double peripherality of his position as a Tajik from Gharm, he experienced in Dubai's formal economy sector.

This sensed impossibility to cross-over boundaries set by regional belonging, however, turned out as an experience characteristic for Dubai's formal employment sector but were not shared by other Tajiks with Gharmi origin in the informal furs and tourism business. Even more, as Jovid's career from migrant entrepreneur to employee in the real estate business exemplifies, moving into formal employment may indeed open up alternative avenues to progress also for Gharmi people in economic niches outside of ethnic networks dominated by Tajiks from the central region of Tajikistan. Dubai's business worlds clearly provide quite different options for pursuing economic and social progress and to experience wellbeing abroad: the option of safety at the price of blocked economic mobility, together with the danger of being trapped in a low-wage occupation (Rahman 2017, 10), as provided by formal employment on the one hand, and the option of economic autonomy and the possibility of economic prosperity provided by the informal work sector, which was however always coupled with a heightened risk of arrest and deportation, on the other. The case studies presented above show that Tajiks were able to choose, oscillate between, or combine these options in different, yet uneven ways.

Everyday working experiences in Arab-led companies also led to cracks in the circulating imaginaries about Dubai as an ideal Muslim place. Moved by orientalist imaginaries, Tajiks associated Arab-dominated business sectors with Dubai's growing Islamic economy and aspired to them as Shariʿa-compliant workplaces (Wilson 2012, 146 ff). Thus, Arabness was translated into a high morality of employers and therefore often articulated as an antidote to the arbitrary and corrupt behavior of employers in both Russia and Tajikistan. But while the narrative of Dubai as both economic paradise and ideal Muslim place continued to spread when Tajiks traveled home, or when they fashioned themselves as proper Muslim businessmen in Dubai (see Introduction of this book), in intimate moments my research partners harshly criticized the fact that capitalist interests and neoliberal sentiments have gained hegemony in Arab-led enterprises, swallowing Islamic values such as modesty, moderation, and piety.

Mahyar was an acquaintance of Saidullah. The two knew each other through their wives, who lived in close proximity in Sharjah and regularly met in the neighborhood mosque (see chapter five). Working in a clothing shop in a mall in Sharjah, Mahyar described his work experiences as morally disenchanting, complain-

ing above all about the neoliberal working conditions to which he was exposed. Meeting him several times during his lunch break or directly after work for a shared dinner, he vented his current frustrations about the conditions at his workplace without being prompted. Thus, Arabs' interest in money and profit was at the core of his criticism. Once he arrived late and excused himself: "My boss even monitors my lunch break with his stopwatch," and continued: "Really, here is no happiness. Everywhere is only money, money." The morality of greed at his workplace continued while he described looking for a more affordable apartment for his family, which he was pushed to do due to rapidly rising rent in Sharjah. The rule of money in the Emirates resonated with earlier encounters with the corrupt environment in his university at home, which led him to give up his studies in International Relations. Eventually, Mahyar was forced to learn that greed is not primarily the moral project of postsoviet capitalism (Bandelj 2016, 95ff) but also ruled a neoliberalizing Gulf economy. Hence, the ignorance of religious duties at the Muslim workplace reflected badly on established images of Dubai as a hub of a new, Islam-inspired neoliberalism (Nasr 2010). Ultimately, the following summary of our lunch talks reveals the disenchantment of the younger generation of well-educated Tajiks, who were driven to the Gulf (and sometimes to drop out of university) by the success stories of their older brothers or other relatives, who represent the generation of the Dubai boomers in the early 2000s.

Mahyar dreamed of going to Dubai since he was studying at the Turkish language center. He wrote essays in English about the emirate as a trope of Islamic modernity, lured by media images and the successful Dubai career of his older brother. When he later broke off his studies in Dushanbe, his older brother organized him a job in Sharjah. Working as a low-level manager of three clothing shops led by Arabs, just like Saidullah, Mahyar was highly mobile, had an average income, and was able to use his good English. He could be satisfied, but was struggling with the cracks in the ideal image of Dubai that his working experience had left him with: "Arabs are hot for money. They are first and foremost capitalists, not Muslims. I can't even get time to pray here. They don't let me because I have to work on Fridays. Money rules." Again and again, Mahyar struggled with his naïve illusions that brought him to the Emirates, just like many of his compatriots:

> Work is hard here. Also, not everyone is able to live here. In Tajikistan, people think in Dubai money grows in the palms, like a paradise. Just as I did then. When my brother came here, life went well. But now the situation has changed. We work harder than they used to do.

But not with the same success. Mahyar went on to make a common observation, saying "It seems we only feed Arabs instead our families". Mahyar's disenchantment increased when his younger brother, who also came to the Emirates to

work in Sharjah, was kicked out of his job after six months. Asking him what he intended to do now, he listed the three options he had: first, either looking for a better place to work somewhere else in the Middle East, or returning home. In order to successfully realize the latter option, he had started to research how to buy a university degree, something he saw to be needed to somehow move forward in Tajikistan. The third option he discussed was to give the *kamak* business another try. Since it took a lot of paperwork to get his manager job off the ground, Mahyar filled in time with *kamak* business, but did not perform well: "If I liked it, I'd go back to *kamakkunī.* But that's not for me."

Mahyar's consideration to switch back from paid to self-employment due to blocked economic prosperity was shared by many other Tajiks with employment contracts. This corresponds with the attitude of those *kamak* workers who sought to avoid the formal economy due to the risk of abuse and dependency. But this avoidance got another twist through a sensed morality of greed in the Muslim business community. In the words of Osella and Osella (2012, 114), the pausing in, or switching back to ethnic networks undermines "a dualism between the alleged morality of socially embedded economic practices and the assumed amorality (or immorality) of impersonal market exchange". I see here a clear link to what Richard Sennett in his book about the personal consequences of work in the new, flexible capitalism describes as "emotional, inner life adrift" people experienced due to a perceived loss of predictability in work biographies and social relations fueled by working conditions that made social and economic life increasingly episodically and fragmented (Sennett 1998, 20, 26). And further, being a "morality of opportunity for the poor", giving preference to informal employment relationships also confirms that economic mobility, social advancement, and self-realization were offered within the realm of informal, yet illicit economies flourishing across the Gulf (Osella and Osella 2012, 123).

Depending on their translocal work experiences, Tajiks sensed, and evaluated, formal employment arrangements very differently. There is nevertheless a shared pattern. The bond to an Arab sponsor appears to be seen in highly ambivalent terms, as it provided both a wide range of advantages and a lot of new constraints. This confirms the common image of *kafāla* as an oppressive system but simultaneously reveals the privileges and perks it could produce for foreign residents (Vora and Koch 2015, 546; Rahman 2017). This draws a more nuanced picture of *kafāla* worlds in the Arab Emirates from the perspective of migrants and other residents from Central and other parts of Asia. Paying attention to how working experiences were narrated, I contend, helps to understand how Tajiks navigated their strong wish for economic autonomy and self-realization through the material but also the moral conditions set by both the formal and informal labor market in Dubai. This also confirms studies pointing to the centrality of personalized net-

works to various forms of transnational social formations in the working of contemporary global capitalism (Vertovec 2009).

Moreover, the symbiotic interactions, the overlapping, as well as the flexible switching between formal and informal work complicate any attempt to detect a consistent 'Tajik' experience of Gulf migration. The trajectories into Dubai's fur business, and the associated individual work experiences the spatial biographies assembled in this book entail are too heterogenous and uneven. Finally, the presented narratives challenge the majority of studies, which consider migrant experiences in the Gulf in a rather unbalanced manner through the concepts of ethnocracy and *kafāla.* As Vora and Koch (2015, 541) argue, such narrow perspectives overdetermine the framing effect of related mechanisms of migrant labor abuse, exclusion, and citizenship on how foreign residents experience the Gulf. Moreover, they obfuscate the individual capacities Tajiks possessed, worked for, or they lacked to flexibly move between formal and informal economies. This runs counter to the prevailing academic category of 'the Gulf migrant worker' as a docile, passive, and subordinated subject driven only by economic rationales, which the Tajiks I met in Dubai obviously did not fit into. This observation is also confirmed in the performative practices of Tajiks' self-fashioning as Muslim businesspeople but not migrants, which draws attention to emic categories of work, but also to alternative forms of socio-political belonging to the Gulf. This will be the focus of the following section.

Peripheral Cosmopolitans

When talking about their work and employment status in Dubai, Tajiks repeatedly emphasized that they are not migrants but do business.[46] Stressing therewith the level of economic mobility and autonomy (*ozodī*) they experienced as *kamak* workers, middlemen, or small-scale entrepreneurs, such statements simultaneously revealed that Tajiks were highly aware of the circulating discourses on Asian labor migrants in the Gulf, and of the discriminating and exploitative working conditions many Gulf migrants face.[47] However, and to support one central argument in this book, Tajiks' refusal to accept being migrants as a category of self-identification was integral part of a relational placemaking in Dubai as a Muslim place, which based on racial discrimination, marginalization, and social exclusion Tajiks experienced elsewhere, above all in Tajikistan and Russia. Related feelings of dis-

46 In Tajik "Mo biznes (or *tijorat*) mekunem, migranty nestem".

47 I will expand on this argument in the following two chapters.

location and estrangement intersected with other aspects such as regional origin and religious belonging. In that sense, the statement "We do business, we're not migrants!" did more than just mark an economic position. The statement at the same time underlined Tajiks claim for a moral as well as a socio-political position.

As Ahmad (2012b, 23) notes critically, migrant activities are "obfuscated by hegemonic discourses that reduce their presence in the Gulf to their labor". Moreover, scholars often discuss migrant experiences in the Gulf as fundamentally shaped through the *kafāla* sponsorship system. Thus, the latter in turn is mainly reduced to its functions as structuring labor laws, regulating migrant flows, and reproducing exclusionary citizenship regimes (Ahmad 2012b, 22; see also Gardner 2012). In a contrasting way, the multiple work trajectories and stories presented in this chapter reveal the need for more nuanced ethnographies that do justice to the complex and multilayered experiences of Tajiks, and other foreign residents, working in the Gulf's formal and informal economy. Finally, embracing both their marginality and precarity for the sake of a remaking of the entrepreneurial self, the narratives of my Tajik research partners debunk the limits of 'labor migrant' as an analytical concept to adequately grasp and understand Tajiks' agency, their striving for and experience of dignity, esteem, and autonomy, and finally their contribution to both Dubai's old transregional trading work and its economic growth.

Inspired by recent works that study migrant experiences and identifications in the Gulf *beyond* labor migration (Rahman 2017; Ahmad 2012b), the following discussion takes the conceptual limitation of labor as a starting point. In her work on foreign residency and cosmopolitanism in the Gulf, Ahmad (2012b), following Hannah Arendt in her political theory laid out in *The Human Condition* (1958), links *work*, as the realm of social reproduction, with *action*, the realm of political activity, to examine foreign residents' experiences in the Gulf (Ahmad 2012b, 23). In that reading, working in the Dubai business world is more than simply an economic activity to secure subsistence; it is in line with Ahmad also a socio-political practice. Fashioning themselves as businesspeople rather than migrants, Tajiks engaged in practices of translocation and politics of placemaking, through which they created, articulated, and legitimized projects and concerns of socio-political belonging. These projects and concerns extended beyond traditional notions of ethnic and national identity, and formed an alternative to excluding regimes of restrictive citizenship in the Gulf (Vora and Koch 2015, see also chapter four). Cultivating and intermingling notions of Persianness, Arabness, and Muslimness, Tajiks engaged in a peripheral cosmopolitanism, which I will grasp as a situated socio-spatial practice through which they connected themselves to and located themselves within Dubai's and the wider Gulf's multiple Muslim business worlds.

I am aware of the pitfalls inherent to the combination of the two analytical concepts 'cosmopolitanism' and 'peripherality' and the normative voices embed-

ded in the related philosophical, cultural, and political discourses that entwine around these concepts. Accordingly, and in line with the many critical responses to postcolonial and Eurocentric notions of the term, I shall use 'peripheral cosmopolitanism' to point to moments of hierarchical relatedness arising from a certain marginal status Tajiks in Dubai experienced and that they articulated and referred to in their self-perception as deviant Muslims at home, Central Asian labor migrants in Russia, economic actors in the Emirates, as well as former-Soviet Muslims located peripheral to the sacred centers of Islam in the Arab Muslim world. This peripheral status was constantly attempted to be overcome, but also emphasized and strategically displayed. Such moments of ambivalence, multiplicity and simultaneity confirm recent studies that situate migrant cosmopolitan identifications within the realm of possible sociabilities, as they arise from a general human competency to create social relations of situated openness and inclusiveness in transnational networks, lifestyles, and new environments, and which are no longer merely elitist but shaped by the all-encompassing consequence of globalization (Freitag 2014; Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011, see also in chapter five). The concept of sociability, just as that of conviviality, not only shifts the focus from political and normative discussions around cosmopolitanism to more "quotidian practices of social interaction between (…) similar and different historical actors" (Freitag 2014, 380). The concept also helps to see cosmopolitan orientations no longer as in opposition to cultural and other forms of rootedness, but instead to reflect the simultaneous and dynamically entangled relationship between moments of openness and closure as well as people's engagement in "overlapping and multiple identities and socialities and the intersectionality of diverse representations" (Freitag 2014, 402). This also covers the engagement in alternative (political) identifications and forms of belonging rooted in post-national sentiments (Robbins 1998, Appadurai 1996).

In this view, the proposed concept is close to what has established itself in migration and diaspora studies as 'vernacular' (Werbner 2006; Bhabha 1996), 'everyday/tactical/migrant' (Landau and Freemantle 2010), or 'global cosmopolitanism' (Darieva 2016), and what serves as an argument in the postcolonial condition on citizenship, unequal dignity, social rights, and the rule of law (Appiah 2006). On the other hand, cosmopolitanism has a long historical tradition in Central Asia due to the region's position at the crossroads of empires (Khalid 2021; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). Even more, cosmopolitanism is a sensibility, a certain positionality, and way of relating to the wider world based on Central Asian Muslims' mobility and other forms of connectedness within and beyond Central Asia (Marsden 2016b; Crews 2015; Grant 2010). In this quality, and turning to my ethnographic data, peripheral cosmopolitanism means many different things, which are all closely related: an economic strategy, an orientation, a social location and related

forms of social positioning, and finally a religiously-connotated imaginary. The overlaps and interplays of these different aspects are best illustrated by the following example.

Arabness as Capital

On a Friday morning in November 2013 I ran into Jamal, a middle-aged *kamak* working for a fur salon near Baniyas Square. Wearing a white *ʿabāya* combined with a red and white plaid scarf wrapped around his head, I would have taken him for an Arab if he had not approached me to share some news. On my complimenting him "You look like a real Arab," he smiled and explained that he liked to wear the traditional Gulf dress on Fridays since he had performed the *ḥajj* to Mecca. Together with his beard, he was hardly recognizable as a Tajik, and he stressed that this was the intention:

> I don't want to be recognized as a Tajik. Russians don't like us, really. Once, I invited a Russian tourist to visit our shop. But he became very angry and ranted: 'Fuck off, you damn Tajik. I didn't come (to Dubai) to get things from you guys. So, get off my back.' Therefore, some of us wear Arab clothing (Arabic *ʿabāya, jilbāb*) (when at work) to hide ourselves. Further, some wear their *ḥajj* dress they brought from (pilgrimage to) Mecca. [...] In such a dress you are invisible for the local police as well. They have become very clever and conduct their raids in plain clothes. So, we cannot escape quickly enough.

This small episode is telling in several ways. As a general note, displaying Arabness was part of a broad cultural repertoire Tajiks use to adapt to various economic and social ends in the Emirates (see Stephan-Emmrich 2018b). Clearly, selective clothing was also a practice of camouflage done to be publicly invisible to the local police, aiming to secure economic prosperity despite an informal work status which increased Tajiks' vulnerability to deportation. As a strategy to obscure ethnic identity, the practice of donning Arab clothing simultaneously points to the interdependencies in the *kamak* business, which characterize Tajiks' ambivalent relationship with Russian clients. The informal status of *kamak* work coincides with the precarious conditions Tajiks faced as undocumented, low-skill, and as stigmatized 'black' migrant workers in Russia and which they attempted to escape. However, as a crucial marker for collective self-identity, Tajiks' marginalized, racialized, and discriminated migrant subjectivities traveled with them on their back to Dubai. In this reading, Arabness was a performative way to obscure Tajikness. This confirms narratives such as that of Wasim, which stressed a rather unwanted dependency on Russian clients. Dealing daily with Russian tourists and profiting from their conspicuous consumption, Wasim nevertheless would rather avoid being with them.

The story is further complicated when Russian language skills are involved. A precondition to be successful in Dubai's tourism business, when Tajiks proudly enumerated their multiple language skills to me, the importance of speaking Russian reveals the vivid afterlife of Soviet internationalism as a political idea, and an ideal, in the social imaginary of Tajiks.[48] Under advanced socialism, which promoted social pluralism and cultural diversity as desired ideals, Russian language turned into a core signifier of an elitist, urban sophisticatedness and modernity (Grant 2010). In Dubai, Tajiks still worked with these Soviet imaginaries and their elitist meaning when they fashioned themselves as Dubai businesspeople. This is an important finding, as it expands the current discussion on the continuation of Soviet policies in the post-Soviet Tajikistani society (Thibault 2018). Moreover, it shows that the social afterlife of Soviet political imaginaries was not limited to the political narratives of post-Soviet state nationalism, but also shaped migrant cosmopolitanism and identities in the Gulf.

Likewise, the episode demonstrates how Tajiks actively involved themselves in the symbolic work of embodied placemaking and therewith created Dubai as a meaningful locale within the moral geography of their migration. When displaying *Arabness* through specific clothing styles, a certain attachment to Dubai as a place in *Arabiston*, the sacred center of Muslim spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage, was articulated. But as we shall see in the following chapters, such a converting of cosmopolitan orientations into a sense of urban elitism allowed Tajiks, as businesspeople, to differentiate themselves from other, non-Muslim Asian or African migrant groups, but also from rural newcomers in Tajik's Dubai business world (see chapter five). Obviously, both Dubai's Persianate and Arab business worlds, together with the vibrant and cross-cultural living spaces of migrant accommodations, challenged as well as at the same time promoted Tajiks' capacity to deal with difference, to maneuver through different systems of meaning, and to utilize various cultural registers in order to become economically successful (Vertovec 2010). In that reading, Tajiks became cosmopolitans in Ulf Hannerz's (1990) sense. Thus, their flexible yet creative switching between being Tajik, Persian, Arab, or Muslim, or between being migrant, middleman and businessman, was built on a broad cultural repertoire that stressed "the simultaneity of rootedness and openness, and of ethnic local attachments with cosmopolitan attitudes" (Darieva 2016, 2). Accordingly, when Tajiks engaged in cosmopolitan orientations, they did not simply celebrate cultural sophistication. They also produced as well as coped with the boundaries

48 Following Humphrey (2004, 141–142), it is necessary to distinguish Soviet internationalism, and also cosmopolitanism as an idea, from the historically particular construction of *kosmopolitizm* as an ideological product of the Soviet regime. As the 'rootless' Other, the latter played a crucial role for legitimizing control, surveillance and regulation of mobility during Soviet times.

and exclusions that accompanied their dwelling in Dubai's multiple business worlds, which draw from a wide range of meaning-producing structures and experiences. While integrating into Dubai's business worlds through Persian-speaking networks, Tajiks simultaneously longed for belonging in the corporate and elitist world of Arab business, which was difficult to access. While a rather 'natural' belonging was performed in multiple ways through the notion of a shared Persianness, a desired belonging, or longing, was cultivated and set in relation to orientalist notions of Arabness. Thus, Tajiks aspired, imitated, and consumed habits, lifestyle products, and discursive references to Arabs' business worlds. Through this, they articulated belonging to the Gulf outside the structurally limited framework of citizenship.

In reference to Vertovec (2010, 66), the production of new arrangements through cosmopolitan practices does not occur in an "unbridled horizon of cultural appropriation and enactment," since social actors are always "embedded in a constellation of relations and structures," and moreover since their actions are multiply embedded. In other words, the cosmopolitanism Tajiks engaged in Dubai was not necessarily only a lived experience, but above all the reflection of an imagination – an imagined ideal and the related longing – that reveals a lot about the limitations and constraints placed on them not only in the United Arab Emirates, but also in Russia and in their Tajikistani home (Schielke 2012; Grant 2010, 134). This mutual conditionality of longing and belonging resembles with how young Egyptians aspired to make global modernity their own by migrating to Europe. Anthropologist Samuli Schielke, in his work on migratory expectations in Egypt, links cosmopolitanism with longing and emphasizes that Egyptian youngsters' horizon of possibility was not unfettered but strikingly limited and restricted. Following his notion of cosmopolitanism as "a modality of both action and imagination" (Schielke 2012, 178), I argued elsewhere that Tajik *kamak* workers, middlemen and entrepreneurs in Dubai engaged "in a world evoked by the spatial representations and realities of Dubai's multi-cosmopolitan business spaces", which in actuality was not without borders, but full of them and "inhabited by people who try to cross them" (Stephan-Emmrich 2018b, 205).

Engaging in cosmopolitanism, Tajik migrants in Dubai did not preserve but re-evaluated and reformulated identity and therewith became deeply involved in ethics of obligation or local engagement. This goes beyond what has been termed in migration studies as "tactical cosmopolitanism", that is, a migrant strategy to capitalize on cosmopolitanism's power without being bounded to its spatial responsibilities (Landau and Freemantle 2010). Such an understanding of vernacular cosmopolitanism runs the risk of narrowing down the complexity of Tajik lifeworlds in Dubai to concerns with economic benefits only, and thus obscuring the fact that political, social, moral and other regimes mattered and formed the

context in which Tajiks in Dubai acted, dreamed, and strove to become cosmopolitan.

Embracing Precarity in the Economic Paradise

Switching eventually the spatial lens from abroad to home again and more concretely to the translocally circulating imaginaries of Dubai as economic paradise as described in the books' introduction,[49] how then did this master narrative influenced how Tajiks experienced Dubai as the place in which they worked and resided? And related to that question, how did Tajiks made sense of the gap between desire and reality in the ways they embraced the precarious realities they faced in the Dubai business world?

Merging investigations on Gulf urbanity that focus on how people incorporate Dubai's urban vision as a simulation of reality into processes of world-making (Elsheshtawy 2010) with the realm of low-wage labor migration, Kathiravelu's (2016) recent study on migrant Dubai provides a fine-tuned ethnography of how Asian migrant workers frame their precarious and marginalized work experiences in the context of exploitative work regimes, neoliberal principles and mass media representations, which produce alluring imaginaries of economic and social possibility in the region. But what this excellent analysis shares with many other related studies is the lack of a translocal livelihood approach that goes beyond the dual relation between home and host society, but instead situates migratory spatial imaginaries of and experiences in the Gulf – as well their formation, reframing, and revaluation – in the context of more extensive travel itineraries and spatial biographies. Recalling that both ideas and senses of place are relational and always situated as discussed at length in the introduction to this book, the various ways in which Tajiks experienced and coped with their precarious working conditions in Dubai have their specific spatial history, connecting the present with how Tajiks experienced places they have worked or lived in before.

My argument here, and in the following chapters, is that Dubai's assessment as a good Muslim place to work and live forms part of a larger moral geography that evolved from translocally assembled experiences of precarity, marginality, and the peripheral status that Tajiks experienced, cultivated, and tried to overcome in their everyday working life in Dubai. Reversing the hegemonial gaze in Edward Said's imagined geographies, which attaches imaginative power to the colonizers' carto-

49 A clear definition of how I use the concept of precarity, together with a related discussion on Tajiks' precarious mobilities, is given in chapter one.

graphic techniques of what he calls the orientalizing process, here, subaltern, yet post-Soviet Muslims – with their imaginaries and related hopes and desires – endow the material dimension of Dubai as a place with specific imaginative values and cultural meanings. These were further reproduced in migrant narratives, although reality as we have seen was often different one. Thus, the related notions of Muslimness, Persianness, and Arabness conflated religious, moral, and economic ideals. These ideals tell us more about the present conditions in which they were articulated and evoked than about the ideals themselves, as they intensified Tajiks' "own sense of their self by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close and far away" (Said 1978, 55). Drawing on orientalist narratives of Dubai as an ideal Muslim place, Tajiks articulated experiences of discrimination and racial exclusion and the related sense of peripherality, which, I argue, go beyond the biopolitics working through the Emirati *kafāla* system. In line with critical evaluations of Gulf studies, migrants' experiences of the Gulf are largely determined by seemingly constraining working conditions. Accordingly, focus is fixed on either *kafāla* practices and their hegemonic power to construct and discipline foreign residents into being "temporary labor migrants" (Ahmad 2012b, 22), or on notions of informal work that frame illegality, vulnerability, and abuse as the dominant working experiences in what is actually a highly diverse and dynamic economic sector (Mahdavi 2011 and 2012). Following the religion-economy-mobility nexus in Dubai's fur business, Tajiks' working experiences in the Emirates are clearly as much diverse and dynamic than the conditions offered by both the *kafāla* system (Rahman 2017; Vora and Koch 2015) and informal networks for Tajiks' economic integration (Osella and Osella 2012). Moreover, depending on in what and where Tajiks worked, as well as on the divergent trajectories of their urban careers as well as on their different social locations, Tajiks conceived of Dubai as a Muslim place to work in all manner of ways. But as a common pattern in the ways they talked about progress and the 'good Muslim life' in their position as fur coat dealers, middlemen, freelancers, or salaried employees, the relation between cultural imaginaries and sensed realities in Dubai emerged as a highly ambivalent matter.

Chapter 3
Furs and Piety in the 'Evil Paradise'

The frequently heard statement 'in Dubai, people become religious (*dindor*)' or 'pious (*taqvodor*)' reveals that the spatial imaginary of Dubai as a place of possibility does not refer exclusively to economic careers but also includes spiritual advancement and the refashioning of pious Muslim selves. This imagination resonated in miraculous stories that circulated among Tajik street broker (*kamak*) about former drug dealers who turned into pious businessmen in Dubai donating money for the construction of mosques in their home place; in the choice of an Islamic style of dress after visiting the holy sites in Mecca and Medina, or in the migrant practice of adopting Arab names, as will be discussed in chapter four. Taking these performative mediations of Tajik Muslims' religious transformation in the course of their Dubai migration as starting point, this chapter sheds light on processes of religious becoming in relation to migrant work and explores, what translocations these transformative processes have brought about within the entangled Muslim worlds of Dubai business. Assembling different discourses about 'proper work' (*kori* halal) as they circulated in Dubai's business networks and tracing how Tajiks multiply positioned within them, the chapter zooms into the religious economy of Dubai's fur business.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Tajiks involved and situated themselves in translocal spaces of Muslim politics of identification and belonging through multiple translocations. While transgressing a wide range of boundaries (ethnic, cultural, economic, social) fostered cosmopolitan orientations, these translocations at the same time confirmed Tajiks' peripheral position in the world. In the following, I shall illustrate that in this dynamic assemblage of mobility, work, and religion the negotiation of work ethics and the fashioning of professional identities played a key role in how Tajiks situated themselves as pious Muslims, street broker, middlemen and as religiously-trained people within and across the entangled religious and economic worlds of Dubai's fur business. I begin with the ethnographic observation that work occurred not only as an economic activity to secure Tajiks' mobile livelihoods. To the same extent, so the argument in this chapter, work, and more specifically, concepts and ideas of 'proper work', opened up possibilities of religious location. Returning once more to Hannah Arendt's philosophical work on *vita activa* (1958), this chapter connects working in Dubai's fur business with the concept of 'action' (*Tätigkeit des Handelns*). For Arendt, it is through 'action', as it takes place in the realm of interpersonal relationship, i. e., the social environment, that people create meaning of what they do and what they make (Arendt 1958, 7– 9). In accordance to that, this chapter explores how Ta-

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jiks related themselves to Dubai's business worlds as pious and reform-minded Muslims by creating meaning through the work they did and by attaching value to what they did as street broker or as middlemen.

Concerning the meaning-generating dimension of work, a growing body of anthropological and other studies addresses the intersection of reformist and revivalist Muslim piety and work (Botoeva 2018; Koning and Njoto-Feillard 2017; Sloane-White 2017; Sounaye 2016; Atia 2012; Rudnyckyj 2010; Nasr 2010; Osella and Osella 2009; Hefner 1998). Drawing on global trade, religious entrepreneurship, or the world of corporate Islam, these studies explore how the complex assemblage of a 'pious neoliberalism' or a 'neoliberal piety' as a major new trend in the Muslim world has stimulated a governing of the self through affect, rationality and calculation in order to form proper and effective pious as well as professional subjects. An all-encompassing mode of existence, the marriage of Islam and neoliberal capitalism also shaped how Tajik Muslims related themselves morally, spiritually and economically to the worlds of Dubai business. In his work on hope, frustration and ambivalence among reform-minded young Egyptian Muslims, anthropologist Samuli Schielke for example has shown how capitalism and Islamic revival "share a sense of temporality that connects the two in complex and unpredictable ways", while tackling this temporality as "a life in the future tense" (Schielke 2015a, 105). I will follow Schielke further and situate the multiple ways in which Tajik Muslims conflated work, piety and belonging in the context of what the author has identified as the tensions and complications arising from the interplay of capitalism as providing "a sense of livelihood and better future" and reformist Islam as providing "a promise of moral righteousness and existential truth" (Schielke 2015a, 106).

Playing with the multiple perspectives emerging from a reversed reading of work-as-piety and piety-as-work, the chapter puts emphasis on how proper forms of doing work as *kamak*, middleman, as well as outside of the realm of fur business at all, formed integral part of how Tajik migrants pursued their Islamic reform projects in Dubai. In particular, the chapter deals with everyday ethics and contested notions of 'proper work', through which Tajiks reflected on and renegotiated their Muslimness, refined their pious selves and articulated belonging as well as non-belonging also in social and cultural terms. The first section zooms into everyday sociabilities as they emerged in street brokers' working spaces (the street, migrant accommodations, fur coat shops) and illustrates how these Muslim sociabilities facilitated an increased personal engagement in work-as-piety and piety-as-work. Thus, Tajiks involved in communities of discourse via their business networks and in very different ways and with very different positions. Within these business networks the circulation of business skills conflated with work ethics, Islamic knowledge and moral values through Tajiks' engagement in *da'wa* practices. Forming dis-

cursive communities, in Tajiks' business networks religious reality and experience was framed and reframed by a dynamic interplay of knowledge, social hierarchies and regimes of truth (Cotoi 2011, 111; Reichmuth 2000, 64; Wuthnow 1989, 16), with former Islam students playing a key role in these processes. Driven by their moral activism which brought them to Dubai, as well as based on their authority as religiously educated Muslims, Tajik *kamak* workers and middlemen like Fazliddin and Saidullah secured the economic prosperity of fur business by developing a professionalism that was built on the transmission of Islamic knowledge and the monitoring of the inculcation of specific morals.

The chapter's first part is complemented by a compilation of competing debates about 'proper work' among my Dubai interlocutors. These debates reflect how Tajiks translated their work status and experiences into religious value, while making sense of both their economic profit and failure through references on existing cosmological orders. Arguably, religion proved to work as a translocative practice. While dwelling and crossing within and through highly differentiated socio-religious and economic worlds, Tajiks negotiated as well as articulated belonging not only to different Muslim traditions; they simultaneously located themselves in different socio-economic and cultural environments. However, the multiplicity of religious and economic positions also gives evidence that Tajiks involved in the religious economy of Dubai's business worlds in many different ways, just as the accumulation of economic, symbolic and other capital was highly uneven. Ultimately, I argue that both the multiplicity and flexibility of Tajik migrants' economic and religious positionings in Dubai's business worlds underlines the integrative force Islam can have in migratory contexts *in addition* to the simultaneous exclusionary effects of certain discursive positions which unfolded along the fault lines of regional, cultural as well as religious belonging.

To understand how these discursive positionings spatialized in the urban environment of Dubai, I shall now turn again to the migrant apartments and workplaces around Baniyas Square.

Da'wa Spaces

Saidullah's showroom at Baniyas Square has a small but fancy-looking shiny black desk in the back area, right opposite the door, so that incoming customers can be targeted immediately. As the place where he did his paperwork and book-keeping, the desk was the key site where his numerous business deals converge with his energetic *da'wa* activities. Whenever I visited him I found him mostly sitting behind his desk, chatting with people over a cup of tea while waiting for clients. Often, Saidullah would invite me to join in the conversation and so I was able to

watch him connecting people, arranging new deals, exchanging business knowledge, receiving guests from Tajikistan or Russia, instructing *kamak* newcomers, and in all these activities always including the dissemination of his religious knowledge acquired during his Islamic studies in Yemen. Sitting from early morning until late evening in the show room, his business conversations were only interrupted by praying times and by customers interested in his furs. Besides, in most of the conversation I joined the speech at some point turned to religious issues – be it to determine the Shariʿa compatibility of an economic action or to discuss family or other social matters. Apparently, many of his business partners turned to him to seek trusted religious advice. One day I met Saidullah in his office in an intense conversation with a long-time business partner from Russia. The surgeon, who had migrated to Russia from Tajikistan and regularly visits Dubai, had come to talk to Saidullah about a specific family problem in addition to business matters. When he asked how his family problem could be solved from the point of view of Islam, Saidullah routinely reached into the desk drawer, pulled out a black Quran with fine gold ornamentation, and began an impromptu instruction session that was to last more than an hour, during which he recited long passages from the Quran and surrendered to theological exegeses. As I myself have done countless times, his Tajik business partner sat before him listening mostly in silence to his speech, or, if religiously trained like Saidullah, would have engaged in lively theological debate.

Spreading knowledge about Islam (Arabic *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-n-nahy ʿan al-munkar*) is among the core obligations for any Muslim, but above all for those who possess Islamic knowledge, aiming to enforce Islamic norms and moral regulations within society. Accordingly, religious instruction in both the public and private sphere was articulated as both a religious duty (*farz,* Arabic *farḍ*) and an act of worship (*ibodat,* Arabic *ʿibāda*). This goes in particular for religiously-educated and reform-minded people such as Saidullah; for them *daʿwa* formed an important pillar of their Islamic life projects. Inspired by purist Salafism since studying Islam in Yemen, for Saidullah the scientific-knowledge-centered paradigm became a strong marker of his reformist piety and led him to relate his belief (*imon*, Arabic *īmān*) with an acquisition of book-based Islamic knowledge (*ʿilm*), that street broker who worked for Saidullah extolled to me as 'facts' and thus as real, credible knowledge (*ʿilmi haqiqī*) (see chapter one). For Saidullah, and also for his wife Mehrigul, whom we will meet in chapter five, spreading institutional Islamic knowledge and inviting other Muslims (and non-Muslims such as me, the ethnographer) to follow the principles of Islam were integral to what was pursued by reform-minded Tajik Muslims in Dubai as the good Muslim life. Being at the heart of many modern reform-oriented Muslim self-conceptions, *daʿwa* has been incorporated into the idea of Islam as a method (Arabic *manhaj*). In his book *The Making*

of Salafism, Henri Lauzière (2016, 216) describes modern Salafism as "a total ideology" and an "all-inclusive system of comprehensive reality" that transcends the idea of Islam as a religion in the narrow sense of theological belief, private prayer and ritual worship.[50] Accordingly, the term encapsulates an understanding of modern Salafism as "a total way of life with guidance for political, economic, and social behavior" (Lauzière 2016, 201, 216).

For Saidullah, who came to embrace Salafism as the most authentic and purist religious orientation within Islam, *da'wa* was a way of putting Islamic knowledge and his piety into practice. A road to moral self-advancement and spiritual improvement, for Saidullah spreading his book knowledge about Islam to his business partners and the *kamak* assigned to him was at the same time an effort to secure his salvation in the last day of judgement (*ruzi kiyomat*). Following the calculative economy approach, anthropologists has described as inherent to reformist Muslim piety (Tobin 2016; Mittermaier 2013; Schielke 2015a; Atia 2012), engagement in *da'wa* promises to ensure merits (*savob*, Arabic *thawāb*) for the hereafter. However, the possession of Islamic knowledge gained in a prestigious university in the Middle East is at the same time a double burden. Since graduates from abroad have to act as role models for the Muslim community, the omission of such missionary acts is considered sinful (*gunohgor*). In another reading, in their striving to pursue personal religious ideals, the former students of Islam I met in both Dubai and Dushanbe were very concerned about staying engaged with the Islamic knowledge they had gained abroad, that is to progress further instead of getting stuck at a particular stage of one's own piety, as chapter one has addressed. Saidullah's business partners therefore shared with the ethnographer the potential to either convert to or reorient themselves towards reformist Islam. As I sensed during our many conversations and in my observations in the fur coat show room, Saidullah felt a pressure on his shoulders to fulfil his religious duties as a Muslim knowledgable in his religion. His marriage to a woman, who comes from a highly-respected religious family (*makhsum*) and who helps him to expand his business contacts, could have obliged him even more to pursue *da'wa* as integral part of the couple's reformist Islamic life project to be realized in the Arab Emirates.

The entanglement of business and piety gets another twist in light of the restrictive politics in Tajikistan, which makes it hard for returned students of Islam to fulfill *da'wa* as a religious duty. This may explain the centrality of the concept of *hijra* in the recorded migrant narratives, as argued in chapter one. The lat-

50 The author here refers significantly to the pioneering work on modern Salafism by Daniel Bell. 1965. *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, New York: Free Press; and Bernhard Haykel. 2009. "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action" In *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer, 33–57, New York: Columbia University Press.

ter envisions Tajikistan as a non-Muslim place where religiously educated Muslims become sinners by the forced omission of religious obligations. In a striking contrast, due to its combination of economic and spiritual freedom Dubai's fur business sector offers a suitable environment for the likes of Saidullah to engage in an Islamic way of life that enable them to combine work and piety, and even more, to translate economic activities into religious and moral self-development.

The religious economy of Dubai's fur business has also another layer. Saidullah's *da'wa* activities secures both economic prosperity and his leadership position in the *kamak* business. It is through the religious institution of *da'wa*, that he consolidates the prevailing hierarchical relationship between him as the fur coat shop manager and the *kamak* working for him along a master-follower (*shaykh-shogird*) relationship. Such religiously defined relations build safety, trust and therewith support the stability of business networks in the volatile Dubai business life. However, such religious structures support safety networks also among Tajik migrants in Russia (see Roche 2018b). Saidullah's insistence on converting me to Islam, which he jokingly explained as a prerequisite for doing business with me, coincides with the often-heard refusal to "do business with *kofir* people (non-Muslims, unbelievers)". Clearly, belonging to the community of Muslim believers (Arabic *ummah*), formed crucial entry point into Dubai's fur business. But however, being Muslim very quickly differentiated further into belonging to different religious affiliations and discursive communities. With their strong integrative power, these discursive communities formed alternative forms of sociopolitical belonging and fostered social mobility, while they bonded people through shared cultural semiotics, indexes related to special clothing styles, language codes, the adoption of proper names, and as well through a scriptural understanding of Islam that put emphasis on the factuality of knowledge about Islam as provided by the Quran, Sunna and academic books. I have argued elsewhere that Tajik *kamak* workers draw on these discursive repertoires when displaying their newly gained piety during visits at home (Stephan-Emmrich 2017), or when disputing over topics such as religion, women, family and business in their migrant apartments, as shown in chapter two. Ultimately, *da'wa* operated also as a powerful disciplining principle to form young newcomers into proper *kamak* workers. The following section shows how this worked.

Money, Morality, Masculinity: Forming *Kamak* Subjects

Recent studies on the formation of Muslim migrant subjectivity in Russia have highlighted the crucial role religion can play in contexts of migrants' coping with precarious work conditions. Thus, Islam and Muslimness are described as an integrating

factor beyond ethnic identities, which enables participation in the host society and provides a resource for both status translation and making sense of humiliating experiences abroad (Roche 2018a; Roche 2014b, 2; Oparin 2017). The inclusive power of religion is also recognizable in migratory contexts that reveal the contingencies that shape Tajiks' working experiences in Dubai as an 'evil paradise'. As to be argued in this chapter, as a method of living (Arabic *manhaj*), reformist Islam provided a normative and moral repertoire for socializing newly arrived Tajiks into the ethics of *kamak* work. Thus, Islamic principles and moral values served as powerful disciplining tools to form newcomers into proper *kamak* subjects; i. e., street broker. A response to the volatility of economic prosperity in Dubai's fur business, in particular to the increasing competition for clients among Tajiks and also non-Tajik *kamak*, the intertwinement of Islamic knowledge and piety with work ethics also illustrates how Tajiks in Dubai tried to come to terms with their precarious mobile livelihoods. Finally, religious leadership, which found expression in the honorific title *shaykh* and was discussed in chapter two, in combination with a pious self-fashioning underpinned the successful pursuit of a higher position in the hierarchized fur business, for example as middleman or, in the case of Saidullah, as furs shop manager. With reference to the intersection of money, morality and masculinity, three aspects turned out as salient: the incorporation of specific work ethics and values such as solidarity, trust and reliability; coping with shame; and transition into adulthood.

About a year before I conducted my fieldwork at Baniyas Square, Jovid got involved in a knife fight with an Azeri *kamak* who had competed with him for the commission from a fur coat purchase. He ended up being seriously injured (his left kidney was lacerated) and needed medical treatment. His friends, most decisively Fazliddin, whom we met in chapter two, mobilized his *kamak* community to pool money in order to pay for Jovid's one-month stay in hospital. Later, Fazliddin and the *kamak* workers bound to him also took turns taking care of him and nursing him back to health when Jovid had to lie in bed in his accommodation for a few more weeks after returning from hospital.

The high value of solidarity, social support and reliability in this group of co-fellows was also evident in the following story of a fraud incident, which had shocked the Tajik *kamak* community at Baniyas Square just a week before my arrival, and which was recounted to me over and over again. Borrowing money from each other as well as collecting the profits of a co-fellow from his customers was common practice among *kamak* workers who shared clients, worked for the same fur coat shop, and often also shared a migrant apartment. Once, a young Tajik man – a relative newcomer in fur business – was entrusted with collecting the profit of a colleague from a customer who had bought several furs on one day. The result of a really big deal, he should have brought the money to the shared apartment for it to be stored there until another *kamak* worker would take it with him back to

Tajikistan. Ultimately, though, this guy duped his colleagues, took the money, left Dubai the same afternoon and was never seen again. His roommates were in a state of great agitation when he did not show up with the money that evening, and not only because of the loss of several thousand dollars. They were also concerned about the loss of their reputation (*obrū*) they had as reliable *kamak* in the urban district around Baniyas square.

"Not everyone can deal with big amounts of money," was Saidullah's reaction when we talked about the fraud incident. This comment is important as it underlines that the making of the moral self and the internalizing of specific work ethics formed crucial prerequisites for securing economic prosperity and a good social reputation in a business area that at the time of my research had become highly unpredictably and volatile. Since both prosperity and social reputation in Dubai's fur business was a collective matter that built upon trust and reliability, stealing someone else's profit was considered one of the greatest moral failures.

In more general terms, *kamak* work together with an associated sense of '*kamak*-ness' was expressed by Fazliddin, his friends and other *kamak* workers by the term *kamakkunī* ('doing *kamak* work'). Designating both a profession and a business identity coupled with a form of professionalism, the Tajik *kamak* workers I met in Dubai never used the term *kamakkunī* synonymous with the term *kasb* (in Tajik 'profession', 'occupation', or 'craft). They rather described their *kamak* activities as *kor*, that is simply 'work' or 'business', or was used synonymous with 'trade' (*tijorat*). Nevertheless, a professional self-image similar to that inherent to the concept of *kasb* in Central Asia was derived from their narratives, particularly with regard to aspects of specialization, institutionalization and apprenticeship (albeit in a shorter time frame), that guaranteed the acquisition of a clearly-defined body of special knowledge, habits, and skills through a master-student relationship (*shaykh-murid*, *ustod-shogird, murshid-murid*) (see Dağyeli 2011, 213–14, 226). Relying on polyglotism, sophisticated urban habits, higher education and, most importantly, the cultivation of a proven moral disposition in combination with a refined piety, these professional skills related not only to the ability to make huge profits in the short period of one tourist season. The professionalism inherent to *kamakkunī* was largely based on the competence to successfully manage the profit in the fur business, which was usually unpredictable and in the form of large sums of money[51]. Fazliddin therefore repeatedly emphasized that *kamak* work requires a strong character (*mardaki qaviiroda*) to manage large amounts of money. Moreover, engaging in *kamak* business properly required the ability to

51 While Tajik *kamak* workers made no profit at all on some days, they could earn between 5,000 and 15,000 dollars a day during tourist high season, usually around the turn of the year.

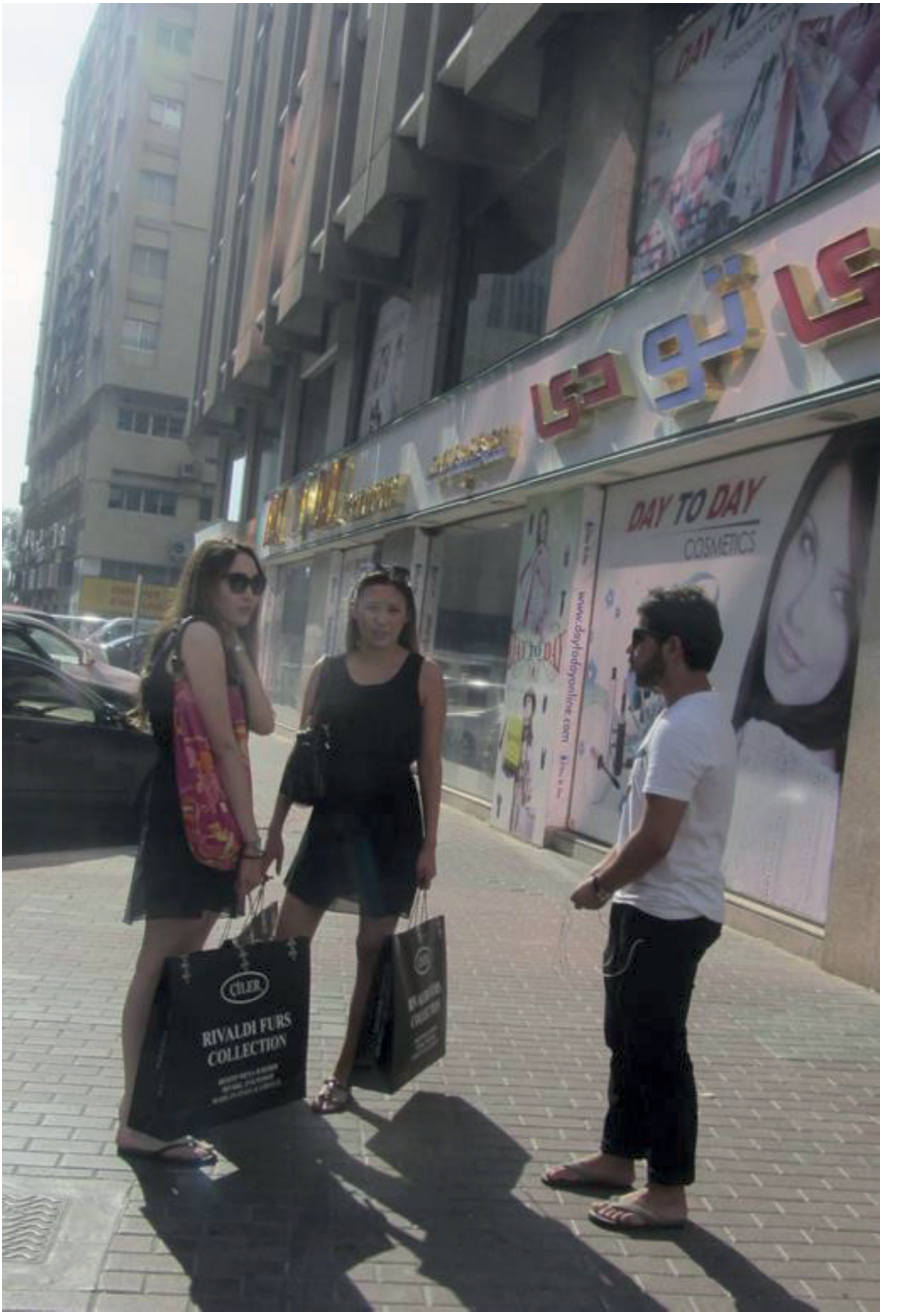

Fig. 5: A Tajik *kamak* invites potential customers to visit the fur store he works for. Photo: Manja Stephan, 2013.

make the money earned durable, or sustainable (*bodavom, ustuvor*); that means saving, remitting, or investing it wisely. Following that logic, Tajiks working in the fur business praised *kamakkunī* as a honourable work (*kori obrūi baland*), which could not be done by everyone, and which required the cultivation and embodiment of good morality (*odob*).

In her study on low-skilled Asian migrant workers in Dubai, Kathiravelu (2016) argues that the act of retelling one's own life story is an important site of expressing agency and creating meaning around individual migrant identities. When praising their work as something requiring high-skilled moral competency, Tajik *kamak* workers created a sense of self-esteem, which underlined their entrepreneurial spirit and fashioned themselves as both successful and important economic players in Dubai's fur business. Simultaneously, through emphasizing the exclusiveness of their work in combination with morality and self-respect, Tajik *kamak* workers were able to display masculinity and construct "their role as guardian of tradition and heroic male abroad" (Kathiravelu 2016, 110; see also Samadov 2023, 120–122). As shown in the context of Indian Gulf migration by Osella and Osella (2000), heroic notions of masculinity come along with properly dealing with Dubai money, just as it intersects with age and specific generations. This goes in line with the transitory nature of the stage of *kamak* work in the life-course of young Tajik migrants in the Gulf. Dubai is to a significant extent a male and bachelor city. As in other migrant communities, Tajik street brokers were between 20 and 40 years old. Most of them were unmarried young men who tried to profit from Chinese furs so as to contribute to the subsistence of their natal family, to support the educational careers of younger siblings or to prepare for their own upcoming wedding. Involved in a high-profit business and forced to manage large sums of money wisely, working in Dubai turned into a rite of passage for young Tajik men that, if successful, lead to maturity (Samadov 2023, 127; Monsutti 2007; Osella and Osella 2000). As Fazliddin's friend Abubakr, who, as the eldest son, took over the role of head of the family after the sudden death of his father and therefore had to abandon his Islamic studies in Cairo, explained:

> In Dubai, we all become men (*mardho*). Before that, we were dreamers (*khayolparastho*) and idealists (*idealistho*), and honestly, studying Islam abroad was, moreover, above all a big adventure (*hodisayu voqeai kalon*). It was this urge to be free (*ozod budan*) and try things out. Now, we are here to earn money for our families. We feed them. Now we have to behave like adults (*kalonsol*). It is the money that makes us strong (*qaviiroda*) or weak (*sust*). We must all learn how to deal with money.

This statement confirms the more differentiated spatial imaginary of Dubai as an 'evil paradise', as it circulated among Tajiks in Dubai. Such appellations refer to Dubai as a fantasy or a fake, as well as intimating a highly ambiguous place,

built upon a mixture of hope, at the one hand, and greed, success and failure, at the other hand (Vora 2009, 19). The imaginary of Dubai as a 'evil paradise' was closely linked by my research partners to the challenge of making the transition to adult status in the context of their Dubai migration. When Tajik *kamak* workers evoked Dubai's ambivalent image as an 'evil paradise', they emphasized the volatility and transience of success in Dubai's fur business. A central theme was thus also, that one could both earn and lose money very quickly if one is not strong enough to resist the many temptations that Dubai's shopping malls, spectacular leisure activities, lucrative illicit businesses or big fur deals offer (see chapter four). Following this logic, Dubai's fur business proved to be a highly volatile economic endeavor, while the hoped-for economic success was equally elusive. Accordingly, one could both succeed and fail in being a reliable business partner abroad, and a sound migrant family member at home.

In dealing with the volatile face of Dubai's fur business, Islamic ethics, moral dispositions, religious knowledge and the cultivation of a pious Muslim self formed important ingredients for professionalizing into a proper *kamak* worker. However, at the one hand, reformist piety provided moral orientation and disciplinary principles. At the other hand, the elusive ideal of living purist Islam as an all-encompassing principle of life management (*Lebensführung*), Tajik migrants' pious endeavors were challenged by moments of inconsistency and contradiction that shaped their everyday life abroad in general and the formation of migrant Muslim selves in Dubai's fur business fields in particular.

Situating the religious economy of Dubai's fur business in larger, translocal social fields, I follow Osella and Osella (2000, 124), who argue that returning home with either 'easy money' and the related conspicious display of wealth and consumption or with empty pockets, would both represent Dubai as a 'liminal place'[52] and the returning migrants themselves as ambivalent models of prestige, stuck in an unfinished transition into maturity. In line with this, Kathiravelu's notion of 'the translocal village' (Kathiravelu 2016, 122) points to the important part of the family and local community back home in sustaining a strong work ethic that shapes a neoliberal subjectivity abroad. In this context, cultivating *odob*, i. e., a good morality, is Tajik migrants' response to the precarious status due to the illegality of their work and the associated constant fear of arrest and deportation, which was part and parcel of undocumented street worker life in Dubai. Since deportation or returning home without a substantial amount of money was not only a shameful issue but also enmasculating, the fear of shame emerged as a powerful

52 As for the concept of 'liminal place,' see also Laszczkowsky 2011.

force for migrants' ethical self-formation and the proper handling of business profits (Kathiravelu 2016, 120).[53]

The forming of *kamak* subjects worked through disciplining newcomers' behavior by inculcating into their bodies a specific repertoire of cultural knowledge, social norms, moral values as well as Muslim virtues that formed integral part of the ethical tradition of Islam in Tajikistan and wider Central Asia. Grouped under the Tajik term *odobu akhloq,* this ethical tradition was transmitted and got incorporated in institutionalized processes of religious knowledge acquisition under the guidance of religious authorities (*shaykh*) like Fazliddin and Saidullah and cultivated in a religiously connoted master-pupil relationship (*shaykhu shogird*). In the course of this rather short period of apprenticeship, which lasted between a few weeks only and up to several months, leading principles of *odobu akhloq,* together with the religious knowledge acquired during *da'wa* sessions should be embodied and enacted through proper deeds (Arabic *'ilm wa 'amal*) in the *kamak* business. A crucial logic of this ethical philosophy, the cultivation of *odob* formed an important prerequisite for becoming both a 'complete' and thus 'righteous' human being (*odami komil*) and a proper Muslim (Stephan 2010). In addition to that, in the context of Dubai's fur business, proper '*kamak*-ness' based on the embodied enactment of *odob* as submission to social hierarchies in the business network, as well as it included the incorporation of Muslim values such as sense of responsibility (*bo ehsosi javobgarī*), reliability (*bovaribakhshī*), and solidarity (*hamfiqrī*).[54] Thus, Islamic ethics and moral knowledge provided a powerful repertoire for middlemen like Saidullah to tame youngsters and to morally integrate *kamak* newcomers into Dubai's fur business worlds. Fazliddin's thoughts on what the meaning of Islam is nicely illustrate how reform-minded and religiously trained Tajiks in Dubai connected Islamic knowledge with ethical self-formation as a sound basis for both becoming a good person and professionalizing oneself as a proper street worker:

> If you have *odob*, fear God (*khudotars*), I mean, if you are a pious person (*taqvodor*), you do not cheat your partners or waste your money. This is inappropriate because your provision (*rizq*, Arabic *rizq*) is given to you by Allah anyways. Thanks to God we are now all able to improve our knowledge of Islam. Islam is not about politics, not about *ḥajj*, or the length of your beard only. Islam is above all about *odobu akhloq. Odob* is the foundation of humanity. Going to the mosque, listening to sermons, reading books about Islam and doing good deeds (*kori*

53 On the significance of shame in the context of labour identities among Kyrgyz traders in Novosibirsk see Schröder (2018, 265–271).

54 In her study on the moral background of craftmanship in Central Asia, Jeanine Dağyeli discusses the relationship of embodied ethics to work, mastery in the context of sacred topographies (Dağyeli 2022, 284–285, 289–292, see also Dağyeli 2011, 119–120).

nek) – these are the best ways to become a righteous person (*odami komil*), and a good *kamak* worker.

While for Fazliddin *odob* was above all a crucial Islamic source of societal improvement and progress (*peshraftī*), other Tajiks stressed the importance of gaining *odob* as a source for self-control, discipline and a right balance in handling money, calculating profit and promoting social welfare. Blending with the ethic of self-governance, such a notion of *odob* fed also neoliberal narratives of the entrepreneurial self, which allowed Tajik *kamak* workers to fashion themselves as both economically and morally successful Dubai businessmen.

The multiple references made to *odob* in Tajiks' narratives about the value of *kamakkunī*, however, reveal a striking ambivalence. Rooted in the urban Persian and Sufi Islamic tradition, until today *odob* forms integral part of notions of proper Muslimness (*musulmonī*) and provides an important foundation for the making of religious, cultural, national and work identities in many parts of Muslim Central Asia (Dağyeli 2011; Stephan 2010). My research partners in Dubai praised the high value of *odob* as a specific, yet elitist cultural competence and form of urban sophisticatedness as integral part of their *kamak* professionalism. Through evoking the ethical principles inherent to *odob*, street broker like Fazliddin or Abubakr created a sense of being Tajik, by means of that they distinguished themselves from other Asian migrants as well as from other Muslims working in Dubai. Besides, this sense of Tajikness provided an important resource for sensing pride and gaining dignity in the everyday contexts of their migrant lives in Dubai, Russia and elsewhere, that were marked by peripherality, marginalization and racial discrimination.

Tajik street brokers' articulation of cultural and moral superiority, however, got another twist when some *kamak* lamented about a moral crisis that has gripped their home country's post-civil war and migratory society. A loss of *odob* was identified not only in the corruptive and nepotistic practices among Tajikistan's political elite. A moral crisis in the home country was also associated with the neglect of proper child-rearing in families, in which the father works (and often also lives) abroad (above all in Russia) and the mother had to take over all the daily family duties. Throughout our conversations, Abubakr expressed a strong concern about his long periods of absence from home as well as how worrying about his sons distracted him from doing his *kamak* business well. Once he told me about the emotional distance between him and his two sons, which he increasingly felt in telephone conversations with them. To compensate for this distance and to cope with the unpleasant feelings that kept coming over him in this regard, he intensified his religious studies and also that of his sons:

> I feel that my advice for good education (*tarbiya*) no longer reaches them. They evade, respond formally politely, or even laugh at me, so did my oldest son twice. This worries me a lot, because I don't want them to lose respect for their parents, while spending their time on the streets, doing drugs and bad things, like many other boys in their age. They need a good upbringing (*tarbiya*) even if I am often away from home. When I immerse myself in religious studies, I become calm (*orom*) and can get a good grip on my worries. Doing *kamakkunī*, you must always be attentive, constantly watching the road. Are potential customers coming, what are other *kamak* doing, are there street raids and so on. If you lose yourself in thoughts of your people at home, you miss your best deal and, in the worst case, get caught by the police and deported. This should not happen to me. So, I advised my sons to also start reading Quran. May God grant them *odob* through his words! My wish is to bring them to Dubai and send them to a school here. But that is very difficult to organize, so I will probably stop coming to Dubai sooner rather than later, I assume.

At the same time, incidents of fraud like those that shocked the street broker around Fazliddin were considered in view of a perceived loss of social morale among Tajiks in general. *Kamak* workers I spoke with sought to explain the poor reputation and low social status Tajiks are said to have not only in Russia but also elsewhere in the world as being due exactly to moral misconduct. Ilhom, an al-Azhar student from Dushanbe, whom I met during his short business trip to Dushanbe, confirmed the moral deficits among his compatriots abroad. For him, that the lack of good morals (*odob*) stems from the distance of his compatriots from their own religion. A legacy of the Soviet atheistic period, this distance from one's own religion and its moral values has created an ideal breeding ground for people's greed for quick money and personal gain. The lack of religious education, so Ilhom further, has made the people of Tajikistan 'crooked' (*kağ*). Crooked designates the opposite of 'upright' (*rost*), which is epitomized by *'Alif*, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, and which symbolizes for Ilhom sincerity (*halolkorī*) and honesty (*rostī*). According to the ethical philosophy around the concept of *odob,* sincerity and honesty are key virtues that form a morally complete (perfect) human being (*odami komil*). Ilhom's statement is consistent with religious positions in Tajikistan articulated in conversations with me, which blame anti-religious policies in Soviet times for not preparing people well enough for developing a morally sober positioning in the capitalist system that would need the incorporation of religious values. How this Soviet legacy trickled into the subjectivities of Tajik Muslims engaged in Dubai's fur business becomes evident in the close connection between sense of shame and collective responsibility as being Muslims from Tajikistan.

While educated Tajiks like Fazliddin and Saidullah are appreciated by Afghan, Iranian, and Arab business partners for their Islamic education, sophistication, and good manners, the collective reputation of Tajiks suffered great damage in the larger Muslim community due to the negative behavior of work colleagues

who, as discussed, cheat others out of their profits. Another case of collective guilt, and shame, was reported by Ilhom. He referred to an incident he witnessed two years ago during the sacrifice feast (Arabic *ʿīd al-aḍḥā*) while studying in Cairo. Standing in a long line of people participating in a public charity feeding like him, he saw two Tajik men trying to join the queue several times in a row to attend the charity feeding. After this was discovered by the organizers, all Tajiks had to leave the queue being accused of social misconduct towards the Muslim co-fellows around. For Ilhom, this was such a shameful experience that afterward he thought long and hard about adopting an Arabic name and denying his Tajik identity, as he stated to me emotionally excited:

> Someone who is God-fearing would never do such a thing. But many Tajiks are very distant from their religion. They travel to Muslim countries, behave badly and destroy our reputation. After all this time, I am still ashamed of this incident.

Once more, apparent contradictions regarding the moral assessment of Tajikness remind us that espoused ideals, here in the form of work ethics and professional identities, tell us more about how Tajik migrants tried to cope with these ideals in their daily work life abroad (see Schielke 2015b). A collective fear of loss of status and reputation as *kamak* worker is also reflected in the complaints about the uncultivated behavior of a generation of newcomers in the fur business, which has appeared with the economic crisis in Russia, and also in Tajikistan, in 2009. When more and more relatives of established Tajik *kamak* workers, together with deported migrant workers from Russia began to drift into Dubai's informal street economy in the years following 2009, Tajiks' *kamak* business became an arena of economic competition and politics of cultural identity. In due course, Muslim piety and belonging turned into signifier for a professionalized *kamak* identity, while simultaneously indexing an exclusive socioeconomic position.

During my stay in Dubai, Fazliddin and his friends were very concerned that their *kamak* business had begun to lose its exclusivity. In particular, the arrival of migrants from rural areas re-stimulated an old fear of 'ruralization' among urban and urbanized Tajiks in Dubai; i. e., a fear which was produced and cultivated among the urban elites during the Soviet time (Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016, 162 – 163, 170 – 171). Poorly skilled, inexperienced, lacking the necessary language proficiencies, and, finally, without the required apprenticeship, these newcomers faced difficulties in gaining a foothold in the established Dubai business world and eventually became prone to illicit practices, as the fraud incident has shown. Even more, established *kamak* workers complained about the youngsters' crude and ill-mannered behavior, as they hang around in large groups in front of hotels and shops and lack the work ethic of *kamakkunī* operating around Baniyas

Square. That would not only attract the attention of the local police doing their street raids to deport illegal migrants; established street workers like Fazliddin and his friends were also worried that the newcomers could frighten away Russian clients and jeopardize the good reputation that Tajiks had among Afghans and Iranians in Dubai. As the following statement of a middleman working as a *kamak* and tourist guide reveals, these anxieties were articulated along an urban-rural divide attached to the lack of education, morality and cultivated speaking, dressing and behaving manners:

> Many of us [Tajiks] came to Dubai in the hope to get respected, as Muslims, because Dubai is a Muslim place. [...] We worked hard to gain standing here. We are educated, have good manners (*odob*), well, we are urbanites (*shahry*), and some of us also speak Arabic. That's why Afghans, Iranians and even Arabs show us respect. They trust us and do business with us. But now these guys [the newly arrived Tajik youngsters] come directly from the villages. They've never lived in a city, they are not related to a *shaykh* or another knowledgeable person here. So, they are unable to deal with foreigners, and, most important, they aren't educated, they speak with loud voices and shout, are dressed like farmers (*dehqonho*), and they violate our rules [...]. As they lack of any *odob,* they will destroy our businesses and reduce our reputation (*obrū*).

As the concern of this middleman shows, precarity as a condition and experience of working in Dubai was not merely the result of exclusionary national governance that migrants try to cope with through their ethnic businesses. Uneven economic globalization processes induce unexpected shifts in migration flows that eventually result in competition and change within one ethnic business group. Both dynamics eventually jeopardized the hitherto successful professionalization of Tajiks' *kamak* business via ethical-moral principles and Muslim virtues. As a consequence, many Tajiks who used to work as middlemen in fur business sought to turn away from the ethnic *kamak* business and tried to increase their investment in Iranian, Afghan and also Arab connections that provided them entry into car spare part or other forms of business. In this context, identification with shame as a Tajik Muslim was increasingly detrimental to Tajiks' self-perception as economic middlemen in the Dubai business world. This has, so my argument, eventually led to a heightened identification as 'Muslims' rather than as 'Tajiks'. For those who remained in the fur business, reformist Islam worked as a marker of cultural distinction from unskilled and often rural newcomers, as well as it provided a moral reference to secure their good reputation as *kamak* workers.

Following Tajiks' dwellings and crossings within and across the entangled religious and economic worlds of Dubai's fur business, the key position that religiously-trained Muslims such as Fazliddin and Saidullah hold in this assemblage of economic prosperity, moral virtues, piety and social mobility deserve special

consideration. Building on their religious authority as knowledgeable Muslims, graduates from Islamic universities abroad acted as gatekeepers and moral guardians, instructing newcomers in the relevant work ethics and business rules.[55] Consider the following incident: When Hamid arrived at Baniyas Square for the first time to take up his *kamak* job in 2011, he was, like myself five months later, introduced by some Tajik street brokers to Fazliddin, the *shaykh.* The latter invited him to stay in his apartment and taught him the relevant *kamak* worker rules. Later, when Hamid reported his first successful fur coat deal, Fazliddin prompted him to deliver the money. When Hamid reacted in a hesitant way, Fazliddin explained (I use Hamid's words, who told me about the incident): "Give me the money. I shall keep it for you. In their first days on the street most *kamak* workers lose their money. They get cheated because they are unexperienced. Or they waste it in the mall." When Hamid discussed this incident later with his roommates, they reassured him:

> No worries, he is our *shaykh.* He collects the money to pay the rent, he brings new people and helps them to find a job here. Simply do what he says, just as you go to that mosque you're supposed to go to, by him. Just trust him.

Clearly, integration into ethnic *kamak* groups became institutionalized through a religiously defined master-pupil system (*shaykh-shogird*), which re-confirmed religious authority at home in Tajikistan, and which simultaneously defined concepts of religious leadership in migrant places abroad. However, given the fact that Fazliddin, a descendant of a well-respected religious family in his neighborhood belonging to the Qādiriya brotherhood, was also highly respected by much older *kamak* workers who raved about his profound Islamic knowledge, spiritual charisma and convincing abilities as a speaker, involvement in fur business in combination with religious knowledge provided a possibility for former students of Islam to realize a social career in Dubai and, accordingly, to forward their own successful transformation into adulthood through personal efforts.

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55 In her analysis of cosmopolitan convivialities in Ottoman urbanities, Ulrike Freitag (2014) addresses the spatial organization of so-called "alliance groups" by traders, merchants, and craftsmen in the form of guilds (Arabic *ta'ifa*). In the case of the city of Sana'a, today's capital city of Yemen, these social networks, which often crossed family, social, ethnic, and religious affiliations, were led by elected so-called *shaykhs.* Their tasks included regulating taxes and compliance with the norms and rules of the group, ensuring security. This was quite like the responsibilities that former students of Islam like Fazliddin and Saidullah, who were also called *shaykh* by *kamak* workers, took on in Dubai's furs business. In addition, in Ottoman urban guilds, *shaykhs* were also responsible for social tasks such as managing mutual aid or mediating in conflict situations (Freitag 2014, 381–382).

A religiously legitimized leadership position in the Dubai business world allowed position holders to combine their migrant entrepreneurship with charitable investments both at home and abroad. Saidullah, who employed several young *kamak* workers in his fur coat shop, was not only responsible for teaching them appropriate behavior and forming them into docile and proper acting workers via his *da'wa* sessions. He also stored their earnings in his office desk and was allowed to use their profit for his own purposes until the money's owner returned home. Since holding a bank account in Dubai was expensive, religious leaders like Saidullah often took on this job. A responsible task, such agreements contained a calculative spirit and were profitable for both sides, as they at the same time formed communities of trust through religious belonging (Freitag 2014, 381–382). Saidullah's *kamak* workers expected 'their *shaykh*' to be a moral role model who works properly with their money and in turn takes responsibility for their economic prosperity and general wellbeing. Fulfilling this role, Saidullah was able to transform his symbolic capital into economic success. With the money entrusted to his care, he invested in translocal trading businesses linking Dubai's markets with that at home, which also offered a possibility of continued employment for the *kamak* workers he was responsible for as well as also for their family members. Furthermore, Saidullah invested in charitable acts to support the Tajik community both in Dubai and at home. Combining morally proper and successful economic behavior with a reform-minded piety, Saidullah successfully displayed the popular image of a 'big Dubai businessman' I was confronted with so many times during my research in Tajikistan and as described in the Introduction. Summing up, with his key Dubai business position as shop manager, middleman, and s*haykh,* Saidullah confirmed a Salafist position established in the Dubai business world, which he himself also cultivated, according to which proper economic action in the realm of migrant entrepreneurship was a key to a successful translocal livelihood that combined well-flourishing business in Dubai and Tajikistan with developing Muslim society at home (Osella and Osella 2009).

'Proper Work' – A Contested Concept

Combining these inside perspectives with perspectives on *kamak* work from outside, the picture of how reform-minded Muslim piety and belonging intersects with migrant work practices becomes more comprehensive and nuanced. Following the controversial debates about notions of 'proper work' as they took place among Tajiks within and outside of Dubai's fur business, discursive religious positions formed around ethical concepts such as *odob,* as discussed above, *harom*/halal, as well along discussions about the economic dimension inherent to *savob*

(religious merit) and *baraka* (divine blessing). Thus, reformist Islamic discourses provided a suitable rhetoric Tajiks could evoke to position themselves in multiple and flexible ways in the entangled economic, social, and cultural worlds of fur business in Dubai. The multiplicity of discursive positions and the corresponding notions of proper work shed light on how reformist Islam provided an ethical repository for Tajik migrants' multiple translocations in Dubai's business worlds, working as an integrative and inclusive force in everyday migratory contexts. However, an overemphasis on the 'Islam-as-integrative-force' trope obscures the exclusiveness of certain religious positionings and their effects in creating new boundaries and producing new marginalities within the migrant community itself (see Oparin 2017). These positionings were constantly renegotiated in terms of social, cultural and other boundaries, as they were formed and articulated along the lines of difference and sameness. Simultaneously, moments of inclusion and exclusion within and beyond Tajiks' ethnic migrant networks were produced. Eventually, Islamic reform (*isloh*) appears as a highly heterogenous endeavor that in Dubai extended from an initially moral project into one of social mobility and distinction.

Among those Tajiks who left fur business or were never involved in it, *kamak* work may hold a strikingly poor moral image, which was propagated through references to various secular and religious narratives. Following these narratives, notions of proper work thus served as a marker of social distinction within migrants from Tajikistan. A common pattern of an outside-perspective, *kamakkunī* was mostly considered as 'bad' (*kori bad*), 'impure' (*nopok*) or 'forbidden' work (*kori harom*). The reason given was that the profit accrued was supposed to result from cheating business partners and clients (*fireb kardan*). Aziz, the youngest son of a wealthy Tajik merchant family, was studying Islamic law (*fiqh*) at al-Azhar university and usually went on vacation to Dubai during the semester breaks. When we met in winter 2013, he was 20 years old and came to Dubai to escape the call up to military service at home and to take a few days off. We met for a quick lunch, where he told me about an unexpected job offer he had just received from a Tajik acquaintance. Asking him, what the job offer is about, the following conversation unfolded:

Aziz: It's a job in the cell phone shop just around the corner. But I don't know! I don't think I'm going to do it.

Manja: Why not?

Aziz: The salary is too low. I don't feel like working. I get money from my father every month. I don't need to work.

Manja: Oh, you don't feel like working? Frankly, if it is just about mood and motivation, then you are in a pretty luxury situation to be able to say No, aren't you? Compared to the many Tajiks here I know who have to work as *kamak* to be able to afford their studies

at al-Azhar. For them, such an offer might be a real dream! Seems that you're on the sunny side, boy!

Aziz: Well, it is also, because I would never work as a *kamak.* This is forbidden work (*kori harom*)!

Manja: Okay, wait! What does the job in the cell phone shop has to do with the business *kamak* do here?

Aziz: Well, a lot of these guys hang out in the cell phone shop at Baniyas [square]. And Tajiks who work in these shops also do a bit of *kamakkunī* on the side. I don't want mingle with these people. *Kamakkunī* is not a reliable (*insofkor*) work because the guys cheat other people (*fireb mekunand*).

Aziz's evaluation is very much in line with critical positions that accused *kamak* workers of profiting from a business perceived as *harom* (Arabic *ḥarām*, forbidden), because the fur coats are Chinese imports which are sold in Dubai as 'made in Greece'. In line with another critical stance, *kamak* workers would benefit wrongfully from the surcharge the dealer adds to this fake merchandise to pay his people. Circulating between Tajikistan, Dubai and other migrant places, such evaluations put the fur business close to gambling, speculation, or illegal interest measures.

Tajik *kamak* workers, with whom I talked about these accusations responded to these critical moral evaluations by cultivating specific work ethics and a professional business identity, which, as we have seen, highlight the value of *odob.* While there was a sense of shared agreement among *kamak* workers that the sale of fake fur coats is a fraud and therefore in a strict sense forbidden (*harom*), they found contentious ways to avoid the obvious moral dilemma. Street workers I confronted with these ethical considerations distanced themselves from the business with controversial consumer goods, stressing that they do not deal directly with the furs, but rather with potential consumers. To quote a *kamak*'s response from my diary:

> We have nothing to do with the furs. That is not our business. They don't go through our hands. We only work for our boss. We approach tourists for him and collect our commission from him. Nothing more.

Other former *kamak* worker such as Ikrom, who moved from *kamak* work into formal employment as low-level manager in a tourist shop in Dubai Deira (see chapter two), instead gave up that sort of work because of strong feelings of shame that resulted in the inability to do the job at all. In this case, the move away from street brokerage was often explained with the fact that *kamak* work is built on the idea of making 'easy money'. For Ikrom, *kamak* money had no value in itself, as it was earned on a non-righteous way to only satisfy the needs of a single person. More than that, money earned from doing *kamakkunī* would not generate any value for societal well-being. Ikrom had the best philosophy about it:

> I just couldn't do it. It was unbearable work for me, not sincere work (*kori rost, sof*). I mean, somehow [...] the money you get is dishonestly earned. Also, I didn't like this work because you don't create anything with it, it doesn't create any value in itself. But work should above all benefit society, right?

The sense of inappropriate enrichment inherent to Ikrom's socio-critical reflections on *kamak* work corresponds with ongoing moral debates in Tajikistan, which refer to the publicly displayed wealth of the *nouveau riche* (*Tojiki nav*) and fuel discourses on social injustice in the country. These discourses also affect the image of Dubai businessmen, attaching a highly ambivalent moral notion to the money they bring in, despite the high social status Dubai businessmen hold in Tajik society. The rapidly accrued wealth of Tajikistan's new economic elite is suspiciously associated with the corruptive practices (*porakhūrī*) of the reigning political elite and thus amplifies the moral crisis of the legitimacy of the Tajik state and its representatives (Thibault 2018, 137 ff). Under the influence of the criticism of inappropriate enrichment, a moral stigma is also attached to profit generated from *kamak* business. This seemingly contradicts the notion of Dubai as a hub of a 'pure' Muslim and Shari'a-compliant economy (*iqtisodiyoti pok, iqtisodiyoti islomī*), as Karim's story in the introduction to this book suggests.

But the discomfort with *kamak* work Ikrom articulated also points to another aspect: the value of work. Thus, Ikrom has not so much questioned the value of trade (*tijorat*) itself, which includes *kamak* business. With a strong educational aspiration and a desire to work as a teacher, Ikrom experienced his work as street broker, as well as his subsequent work in retail, as not generating much value. One could also say, as not sustainable, because the work he did in Dubai, for him, did not generate any development potential either for himself or for society.

In addition to that, both Ikrom's discomfort and Aziz's assessment of *kamak* work as 'bad work' point to the undocumented status of this business in Dubai's economy, which involves, as highlighted above, various illicit activities. The negative image attached to informal work, however, results from a dynamic blend of various transnational migration regimes. According to one argument, *kamak* work may undermine the emirate's official work-residence regulations and therewith increased the threat of deportation. Besides, the inherent possibility of failure, and associated to that a loss of social status, resonated with old Soviet resentments against any kind of economic activity quickly labeled by state officials as 'informal economy'. The latter has been officially marked out as 'non-modern' (Steenberg 2016), and got stigmatized as a 'speculative' or 'shadow economy'. Although informal economic structures and negotiations became the backbone of livelihoods in the early years of the post-Soviet era, Central Asia's bazaar economy up to now has been associated with insecurity, disorder, chaos and yet also

with shame (Schröder 2018, 265 ff; Roche 2018, among others). Carried across to Dubai, both Soviet and post-Soviet legacies fed the association of *kamak* work with petty-trade or street work, which was viewed by Aziz and other Tajiks as cheating, tricky, black market and shady, and therefore as shameful (Alff 2013; Nasritdinov and O'Connor 2009; Kaneff 2002).

In Dubai, such negative sentiments were cultivated in particular among Tajiks who worked in salaried positions or performed more prestigious economic activities linked to business fields managed by Emiratis (Arabic *khalyji*) and other Arabs. Displaying their own progress that way, Tajiks active in the *kamak* business draw on theological positions as they circulated in the corporate environment of Dubai's new Islamic economy dominated by Arabs. Therewith, Tajiks also evinced a sense of cultural, religious and economic elitism that allowed them to differentiate themselves from the Tajik *kamak* community. Take Farrukh. I met him, a Tajik in his early twenties, by accident one a hot noon in November 2013 in one of the many bistros that offered business lunches on Baniyas square.[56] Starting a rather polite conversation in English first, we quickly turned to talking about the fur business. Introducing himself as a newcomer in Dubai, who had only been working in the emirate for a few weeks, he began to tell me his story of successful entry into the Arab business world.

With help from his older brother, who had been working in a Dubai-based charity organization since 2005, Farrukh got a two-year job contract in a real estate company close to Sheikh Zayed Road, where he shared his office with Arabs only. During our discussion, he insisted on not being called a Tajik and also pressed me to speak only in English. "I am Muslim," he often stressed during the several lunches we had together later, thus articulating his desire to belong to a new, global and elite class of Muslim professionals. Doing so, he distinguished himself from the *kamak* business, which, contrary to many other Tajik migrants, he was not dependent on for entering Dubai's business scene. In the following, I summarize his assessment of street brokering in fur business:

> My company works for international clients. I only speak English and started to learn Arabic as well. [...] Because in my office there are only Arabs. I don't come here [Baniyas square] much, only sometimes for lunch. My workplace is close to Sheikh Zayed Road. This is my world [...] I don't mingle with Tajik migrants (*migranty*) here. They involve in *kamakkunī*, that is forbidden work (*kori harom*), because of they get commission from the fur coat sales. According to Shari'a (*shariyat*), this counts as *riba* (Arabic 'usury'). For Muslims it is not permitted to engage in such kinds of work. But the majority of Tajiks doesn't know

56 This case study builds on an earlier publication on migrant cosmopolitanism in Tajik Dubai business (see Stephan-Emmrich 2018b).

> Islam very well. [...] Also, as many [Tajiks] don't have work permission they work illegally (*ghayriqonunī*) here.

The encounter with Farrukh forced me look beyond the business worlds around Baniyas square. Moreover, Farrukh's professional positionality made me realize that the assessment of proper work and the related professional locations had a clear spatial dimension. Framed by the dominant narrative of Dubai's rising urbanism as part of a new Arab Emirati nationalism that clearly materialized in the newly built business and tourist areas along Sheikh Zayed Road, the area around Baniyas Square and the work done there was above all associated with low-rated migrant work. When Farrukh spoke of his Tajik country-fellows as 'migrants' (Russian *migranty*), while describing himself as someone working with 'internationals', he challenged the professional self-image of Tajik *kamak* workers, who fashioned themselves as Muslim businesspeople but not as migrants (see chapter two). Even more, with his reference to a prominent jurisprudential debate in Islamic economy (particularly in Islamic banking) related to the ban on interest, Farrukh demonstrated his *savoir faire* in global Islamic discourses and therewith emphasized both his superior position and the successful urban career he was going to make as a Tajik Muslim in Dubai's Arab business worlds. Finally, his background as the son of a diplomat, who belonged to the regime-favored urban elite of the late Soviet Union, impacts his current mindset and reveals an urban fear of provincialism expressed in terms of the 'illegality' of certain work in combination with religious ignorance. This old Soviet mindset traveled with Tajiks and contributes to the value of doing business with Arabs in Dubai as an important marker for social mobility and socio-economic-cum-cultural distinction.

Puli Baraka: Economic Theologies and Uneven Prosperity

Among those former students of Islam involved, the moral reprehensibility of *kamak* work was gladly countered with reference to the vital role of business and trade (*tijorat*); economic activities that hold a prestigious position in the Islamic economic tradition. In that context, the biographical trope of the prophet Muhammad as a trader himself served as an authentic reference to confirm the natural connection between Islam and trade, and to attach a pious dimension in particular to middlemen activities that linked fur business with other business fields (tourism, care spare parts, mobile phones). A strong exponent of this position was Saidullah. Once, when hanging around in his office and waiting for new clients, our discussion came around to the question of proper work, and

I asked him for his opinion on the accusation that *kamak* work is built on cheating. Here follows an excerpt of our conversation from my research diary:

Manja: Some people say that *kamak* work is a forbidden action (*kori harom*) because it is based on cheating (*firebgarī*).

Saidullah: No, no. That's wrong. We do trading (*savdo, tijorat*), just like our prophet did. He himself praised trading as a good deed. That's the best work you can do, and it is permitted (*kori halal*).

Manja: Trading? But *kamak* people are not traders themselves, right?

Saidullah: Exactly, but they work for their bosses. Most of them are involved in trade like me. Well, they all do business (*tijorat, biznes*), in a way, one can say. Look, many Tajiks come to Dubai, like myself. Well educated, they want to earn good money. But not just! They also long for any kind of proper work (*kori pok*).

Manja: Explain what you mean by 'proper work', please!

Saidullah: That's what trading is, what our prophet (SAW) did! Many are. We are Muslims and, look, many of us are tired of just feeding our president's family. […] Bribes (*porakhūr*) here, bribes there. Doing trade, you can keep away from these forbidden things [like bribing].

Manja: So, there is no bribery in the trading business?

Saidullah: [Raises his hands theatrically and repeatedly taps the Quran on his desk with his right index finger while responding] Just as our prophet said: 'As long as we do not cheat, are righteous (*insofkor*), work hard (*kori mehnatī mekunand*), and increase our efforts to do our work properly (*harakat kardan*), we'll get a place in paradise.' If you try hard and do nothing wrong, you will get what God provides you (*rizq*). *Kamak* work is just one kind of work. They do business, serve their families, their community. What's wrong with it?

This conversation shows how Tajiks navigated between different theological, ethical, social, and cultural positions in flexible ways, while simultaneously connecting them. Thus, Muslim piety and belonging worked as translocative practices by means of which Tajiks positioned themselves multiply in Dubai's entangled business worlds. Using key terms (*insofkor* and *kori mehnatī*) from Persianate Islamic philosophy that are also integral to Sufi ethics and which up until now determine concepts of morality and civility (*odobu akhloq*) in the Muslim tradition prevailing in Tajikistan, Saidullah advocated a business-friendly position cultivated in his overwhelmingly Salafi-oriented Tajik, Iranian, Afghan and Arab networks in Dubai. Having already become socialized in Salafi thinking during his time studying in Yemen, in Dubai the trope of trade business as proper work intermingled with the neoliberal narrative of economic autonomy and self-reflexive personal mastery. Such a position enabled Muslims, who like Saidullah have experienced discrimination and humiliation at home due to their deviant religious orientation, to articulate an alternative form of belonging as a Muslim from Tajikistan. Moreover, engagement in such "regimes of truth" (Cotoi 2011, 111) produces empower-

ment outside the framework of the nation-state and authorizes specific religious positions.[57] With his value-driven interpretation of trade, Saidullah promulgated a positive image of Salafism and therewith underlined his own pious self-fashioning. The valuation of trade as proper work, meanwhile, got another twist, when put in relation to the corruptive environment in Tajikistan's state-led working sector. Explaining that he left Tajikistan for Dubai because of the emirate's business- and Muslim-friendly environment, Saidullah at the same time converted his migration to Dubai into *hijra,* claiming to having fled the corruptive environment in the state economic system at home. For him, the state has set up a regime that forces Muslims to engage in forbidden work (*kori harom*) – in other words, to serve corruption and nepotism in all parts of society and daily life and thus carry out sinful deeds. As Dubai offers a state-free zone of economic activity by definition, the emirate opened possibilities for Muslims from Tajikistan to engage in proper work, following the model of the prophet. Thus, Dubai was ideally suited as a spatial reference for Tajik Muslims like Saidullah, who according to their moral activism fashioned their Dubai migration by reference on the rhetoric of *hijra* into a meaningful movement, i. e., a form of Muslim mobility (see chapter one).

When our conversation progressed further, Saidullah formulated a theological position about the calculability of economic success, which went beyond the economy of *baraka* and *rizq.* At the heart of his reform-minded philosophy, it was not so much the type of work that decides the properness of an economic activity, but *how* it is done. For him, cultivating trade and business-related work ethics as a pious endeavor secures economic success. While *rizq* is, in line with the Quran, associated with a certain unpredictability (Arjomand and Martin 2003) that also characterizes *baraka*, in Saidullah's narrative economic success occurs, as per with Weber's ideal type of Protestant ethics, as the result of a divine intervention, which is negotiable, predictable and calculable on the basis of individual effort. In that reading, the litmus test for the Shari'a conformity of *kamak* work is, for Saidullah and his fellows, the sustainability of one's own profit and the related possibility to invest the earned money properly in both worldly and afterworldly affairs.

Working with the metaphor of Dubai as an 'evil paradise', for Tajiks in the *kamak* business success, or its absence, depended on the individual ability to convert profit into what Tajiks designated as *puli baraka.* The formulation refers to

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57 This resonates with Foucault's understanding of governmentality – not governance – as a special configuration of discourses and practices of knowledge and power. Accordingly, "regimes of truth" encompass "the ways in which various modalities of speaking the truth are formed, authorized truths designated, and areas in which, about whom and where, statements, discourses and practices rooted in truth are generated" (Cotoi 2011, 111).

money which is blessed by God and therefore beneficial, which means sustainable (*bodavom, ustuvor*). According to that reading, the two- or three-story houses that Dubai migrants build back home, the good educational opportunities they provide their children or the financial support they offer to their own parents' *ḥajj* pilgrimage to Mecca can be read both as evidence for the properness of economic activities in Dubai and for migrants' efforts to invest their Dubai money in godly ways. When these notions met with the calculative spirit of circulating reformist discourses on personal progress and development, *kamak* work became increasingly translated into a pious action that promises both economic success and spiritual salvation (Gauthier and Martikainen 2013, 8).

The way Tajiks framed the discussion about the properness of *kamak* work through cosmological references, and how they got involved in 'trading deals with God' (Mittermaier 2014) reveals the strong connection that was made by my research partners between economic success and Islamic reform. The assemblage of 'Islamic neoliberalism' or 'neoliberal piety' in Asia and the Middle East – which has recently become a new object of research in anthropology, Islamic Studies and business sciences (Botoeva 2018; Tobin 2016; Mittermaier 2013; Schielke 2015a; Atia 2012; Rudnyckyj 2010; Kuran 2004) – reflects the complex way in which Islamic discourses, piety and class sensibilities entangle with a neoliberal mode of calculative reason. What in the context of Max Weber's Protestant ethics occurred as 'the theodicy of good fortune and suffering' delineates how people understood themselves, and their social position, in relation to a correct relationship with God. Linking these cosmological reflections with the uneven experience of capitalism, for Saidullah, the gospel of prosperity that circulated in his successful Salafi-dominated business networks allowed him to display his own advantageous economic position, at least for the moment, when we met, because also Saidullah looked into the volatile face of Dubai's fur business due to his dependency on his *kafil*, as will be further elaborated in chapter five.

For other Tajiks in Dubai, who were less economically privileged, mobile and who got 'stuck' in the informal *kamak* world, or in badly paid work contracts in the formal sector, religion rather occurred as a language to cope with precarity and existential vulnerability, and to engage in the work of hope and dreaming (Makram-Ebeid 2016, 155). Firuz, an employee in a souvenir market in Baniyas Square, told me how he experienced a personal religious renewal while in Dubai. Influenced by former students of Islam in his social environment, he introduced himself to me as a devout Muslim who studied Quran and had given himself a proper, i. e., an Islamic name, that was Abdullah. Moving to Dubai with the expectation to make big money for his imminent wedding, he found himself 'stuck' in poorly paid employment and at the lower end of the social hierarchy (his three bosses were Arab, Iranian and French) with no prospect of fast financial improvement.

While Ikrom, who shared the experience Firuz made in the formal employment sector, cushioned his lack of economic success by continuing his religious studies on a self-initiated basis as an alternative road to progress, Firuz hoped that economic success, and thus the prospect of marriage and entry into adult status, would come when he invested even more in his piety.

Meanwhile, Fazliddin had a completely different approach to the relationship between work and piety. For him, things were not so clear as for Saidullah or Firuz. When I arrived in Dubai, Fazliddin's business had been anything but good.

Fazliddin: It's not going well anymore. I had really good times. But now I wonder what else I can do if I can't work. It's no use.
Manja: What's going wrong?
Fazliddin: Not sure. But it eats me up that I'm not making a profit for weeks! I can't make *puli baraka* with this business.
Manja: Well, what do you mean by *puli baraka*?
Fazliddin: You don't make any profit. Even if you've done a good deal and get a lot of money you lose it quickly. Visa costs, accommodation, food, gifts and – whoops! – it's all over the place, melting like the desert sand between your fingers. It neither stays nor increases, you understand? But I can't return home without money. I need money to finish my house.
Manja: Maybe you didn't try hard enough? I've heard people saying that in order to get your fair share you must put as much effort as possible into it.
Fazliddin: What more can I do than standing on the street all day looking for customers? I put all my effort in it. Is approaching two hundred potential clients a day not enough? But it does not seem to be pleasing to God. I should go elsewhere, maybe to Kiev. I've heard the working conditions are quite good, even though the work there is physically more difficult.

It is clear that despite efforts to increase one's commitment in work, economic success appears as much less calculable than Saidullah described it. In reaction, Fazliddin eventually started to doubt the properness of his economic activities and to look for alternative businesses elsewhere. Anthropologists working on Muslim piety have rightly pointed to the fact that studies on 'pious capitalism' and 'spiritual economies' mainly focus on the ethical aspect of the encounter between piety and business but fail to address its unethical aspects (Schielke 2015b, 118). According to Schielke's observations in Egypt, the revivalist project of having sound moral conduct is widely pursued by people whose livelihoods are based on rather 'immoral' economic actions covering bribes, trickery and shady deals. In that sense, the greater their sins and immoral economic actions, the more people engage in or pursue revivalist piety (Schielke 2015b, 116). Even more, we know from pre-Soviet Central Asia, that it was not uncommon to highlight the religious usefulness of certain professions and economic activities in order to upgrade their minor so-

cial prestige; particularly promoted by the work philosophy of the Naqshbandiya brotherhood (Dağyeli 2011, 236).

In line with this argument, the cultivation of suffering (from a lack of economic success, discrimination, or inertia and idleness) worked as a core discursive trope in the framework of Tajik *kamak* workers' moral disciplining and as such formed integral part of the religious economy of Dubai's fur business.[58] The main idea was thus to strengthen one's faith (*imon*) through dealing with difficulties. An expression of the conscious conversion from a sinful life before through the display of suffering as a pious virtue, unsuccessful Tajik *kamak* were able to articulate at least their successful religious transformation. Cultivating such a form of moral suffering eventually created a degree of predictability, as the calculation of progress and success shifted to the realm of the hereafter. This made, in particular, purist Salafism attractive for young Muslims like Firuz, who tried to cope with the unpredictability and ambiguity of their precarious daily life in the supposed 'evil economic paradise' (de Koning 2012–2013, 30–31.)

Such religious economies based on calculation are alien to Fazliddin. Stressing *baraka* in the assessment of his own *kamak* profit, he rather acknowledged that divine excess is just as unpredictable and irregular as capitalism itself. As in the case of Egypt's post-socialist economy, "the unpredictable and chaotic nature of global capitalism [...] makes both wealth and property often appear suddenly, unpredictable, even miraculous" (Schielke 2012, 141). Descending, like Ikrom, from a rural religious family with a longstanding tradition of local Sufi leadership, Fazliddin cultivated a Muslim piety closely related to his family's traditional peasant way of life. Accordingly, Fazliddin linked work (*kor*) above all with physical labor (*mehnat*) that for him traditionally aims to cultivate land (*obod kardan*) through farming (*dehqonī*), what his grandfather did, and therewith worshipping God.[59] In Ikrom's case, it is the intellectual work of a teacher who aims to improve society. From this perspective, Ikrom's above described interjection that *kamak* money does not create its own value becomes understandable. This economic philosophy also resonates in his ambivalence and lack of desire to put more effort (*kūshish*, *harakat*) into his *kamak* work. As Ikrom explained to me:

> It just didn't fulfill me if I had $6,000 in my pocket. Although important, the sometimes high amount of money at the end of a day didn't make me happy, were meaningless to me. As if it

58 Concerning suffering, compare the ideas of Beekers and Kloos in their *Straying from the Straight Path* (2017).

59 The Naqshbandiya tradition of work as worship is articulated in the common saying "Hand by work, heart by God" (*Dast ba kor, dil ba yor*). See also Jeanine Dağyeli's work on craftmanship, morality, and religious legitimation in Central Asia (2011, 213).

> were someone else's money in my hands. Money earned but that created no value. The others couldn't understand it any more than I could, just shook their heads when I gave up *kamakkunī*.

More significantly, Fazliddin and Ikrom suffered from a feeling of dislocation, i. e., an alienation from the work they were doing that stems from the replacement of highly valued and physically hard rural working tradition in the family (Fazliddin) and the well-reputated profession of a teacher (Ikrom) with a much less valued form of informal street business that both men were not familiar with but engaged in for the sake of progress in their lives. The two men's feelings of dislocation and estrangement in Dubai's business worlds remind me of how Richard Sennett (1998, 26–27) in his book *The Corrosion of Character* described the effects of flexible capitalism as a drift away from work ethics and work-based identities among post-migrant family business members in the USA:

> How can a human being develop a narrative of identity and life history in a society composed of episodes and fragments? The conditions of the new economy feed instead on experiences which drifts in time, from place to place, from job to job. […] short-term capitalism threatens to corrode […] character, particularly those qualities of character which bind human beings to one another and furnishes each with a sense of sustainable self.

Back to the two main questions that this chapter has discussed: first, how did it happen that in Dubai Tajiks become more religious, and second, how did Tajiks cope with their precarious mobile livelihoods as they were shaped by the contradiction between the expectation of economic success and the experience of closure, failure, uncertainty and stasis? The highly volatile and uncertain character of Dubai's fur business made religion work as an important source for constructing both meaning and sustainability. Thus, Tajiks dwelled in and crossed through the religious economies of Dubai business life through multiple translocations, producing thereby specific work ethics and facilitating self-mastery. Based on modes of calculation and rationalization of religious ideas and values, these religious economies both define and help to explain Tajiks' multiple and flexible positionings (belongings) in Dubai's business worlds via their individual relationship to God. As we shall see in the last part of the chapter, the complex 'work-and-piety relationship' eventually condensed into very individual strivings for the 'proper' and 'true' way of life (*Lebensführung*).

The multitude of economic theologies through which the people I spoke with in Dubai have sought to make sense of their economic positions in Dubai's business worlds show that reformist Islam is above all a discursive tradition (Asad 1986), which unfolds in different, and sometimes also divergent, discursive formations. Saba Mahmood's question of how one becomes the subject of a certain tradition

(Mahmood 2012, 225) ties both work and piety to the realm of (neoliberal) practices of the self. The moral activism of religiously trained Tajiks such as Saidullah and Fazliddin eventually aimed at transforming oneself, and others, into willing subjects of a particular discourse (Mahmood 2012, 225). Although, in the case of Fazliddin, his lack of success as *kamak* worker might also reveal his inability to be that flexible as neoliberal capitalism demands. Discourse thus subsumes not only "the written as well as the verbal [...] the gestural or ritual as well as the conceptual" (Wuthnow 1989, 16), but also, as I should add, the emotional and the aesthetical, as shown in chapter one and further elaborated in upcoming chapter five.

This multiple discursive positionings prompts me, at the end of this chapter, to reflect on the relationship between reformist Islam, work ethics and proper ways of living (*Lebensführung*).

With Saidullah and Fazliddin we met two religious authorities who represent two different Muslim traditions. In the Muslim worlds of Dubai's fur business, however, the boundaries between these two Muslim traditions got blurred, at least partially. This blurring of Muslim traditions in turn reflect the two men's different economic positions in Dubai's business worlds, as well as the very different ways of proper Muslim life both former students of Islam had pursued when we met. Two obviously divergent religious positions, the ways in which they interlace with specific economic positions and lifestyles indicate a clear urban-versus-rural divide. While Saidullah enacted an urban, cosmopolitan middleman and entrepreneurial role, and who had been socialized and religiously trained in Salafi networks in Yemen and Dubai, Fazliddin presented himself as both an influential *kamak* worker and a *shaykh*, whose piety had its roots in the rural, Sufi-based Islam of his natal village in the provincial surrounding of Dushanbe. While Saidullah invested in two parallel futures in Tajikistan and the Emirates, Fazliddin never considered moving with his family to the Gulf. Accordingly, the two dealt with Dubai's 'evil paradise' in very different ways.

Due to his extended business networks, Saidullah was able to translate his cosmopolitan orientation into a religious autonomy and flexibility; this allowed him to move across as well as to connect divergent Salafi and Sufi positions for the sake of economic prosperity. As we see, middleman and management positions in the Dubai business world facilitated flexible understandings of belonging that were used as a cultural repertoire "to accumulate capital for the purpose of mitigating against economic, social, and political uncertainty" (Studemeyer 2015, 565). Hence, multiple Muslim belonging not only provided flexibility but also made Saidullah embrace precarity as a possibility for entrepreneurship, social mobility and a different mode of professional subjectivity (see chapter two).

The situation is different with Fazliddin. An influential religious player in Dubai's fur business as well, he was not able to traverse the cultural coziness of his

Tajik networks, or was not motivated to do so. Based on his religious family tradition, which cultivates a certain disdain for profit-accumulating secular activities in favor of an ethos of modesty and spirituality (Dağyeli 2011, 249), he invested instead in his religious authority for the sake of social mobility, which eventually he could only pursue within the close-knit framework of his *kamak* community. Furthermore, he was not able to convert his religious status into economic success. The economic theology Fazliddin referred to reflects the religious tradition of his old, established extended *eshon* family. Doing so, he also reproduced existing social and religious hierarchies, which are reflected in the concept of *baraka.* In that sense, he was not like Saidullah able to cope with economic uncertainty by exploring new business fields within his transregional religious networks spanning Tajikistan, Dubai, Russia and Egypt. While Saidullah showed a flexibility in being able to move across and connect different discursive traditions in one place, that is Dubai, for Fazliddin flexibility resided in the possibility to leave Dubai, either by returning to Russia or back home to Tajikistan, or by moving further to Ukraine and other probably good places for work.

The methodical rationalization of faith and lifestyle as a signifier for status translation and social mobility is obvious in the case of Saidullah. But this middleman piety does not apply to Fazliddin. With his assessment of the *kamak* business as a type of work not pleasing to God, Fazliddin confirms his strong attachment to his family's rural, Sufi Islam-influenced peasant way of life, which he never considered leaving behind. Saidullah, however, invested in a puritan Islamic piety, which puts emphasis on personal action and individual responsibility. Thus, he preferred social mobility to established sociocultural hierarchies. Combining his scripturalist understanding of Islam and his individual striving for salvation with an investment in material success, Saidullah cultivated a religious ethos that reflects both an urban Islamic lifestyle and migrant middle-class sensibilities (see more on that in chapter five). This confirms the widely shared scholarly observation that purist versions of Islam are, as a specific work ethics, particularly appealing for urban merchants, since they enable legitimate economic success and transform it into social status (Beck 1996, 168–169, see also Waardenburg 1983). In that context, we observe the discussion about the proper and 'true' way of life inherent to modern Muslim reform movements as the possibility of differentiating oneself from one's own and others' peasant origin (Beck 1996, 173). At the same time, one can also argue differently: Fazliddin's religious family background creates a rootedness that Saidullah does not know, since he has no such family tradition. Saidullah developed his religious positioning himself through his Islamic studies in Yemen.

Concluding here, at the same time, it can be argued that religious ancestry can hinder flexibility in the global economy. Or does it only create a different kind of

flexibility, namely in the form of spatial mobility? For Fazliddin, his spatial mobility went hand in hand with constant reorientation and reinvestment, whereas Saidullah was mobile in a different way. With his mobility, Saidullah linked different business worlds within one place, Dubai. He accordingly was able to invest differently, and probably also more successfully, than Fazliddin. This tension between openness and rootedness resulted in very different flexibilities. Likewise, we are obviously dealing here with different types of translocations within the religious economy of Dubai business.

Chapter 4
Beyond Work: Making Dubai a Muslim Place

As shown in the previous two chapters, work, workplaces, and business networks emerged as key venues where economic activities converged with religious becoming, above all where Tajiks shaped as well as performed a Muslimness that allowed both a refashioning of identity and overcoming the peripheral status as Central Asian migrant. In this chapter, I will flesh out the idea that migration concerns more than just labor but is a complex human experience that gives rise to new forms of identification under the condition of global capitalism. Shifting the focus to everyday matters that go beyond work and are situated in the realm of leisure, or recreation (Russian *otdykh*), my spatial analysis of Muslimness and Islamic reform gets another twist when connecting Muslim piety and belonging to practices of embodied placemaking – covering how Tajiks experienced, understood, and thus made Dubai as the Muslim place they longed for. Arguably, an ethnographic analysis of embodied placemaking allows us to shift from the rather abstract idea of place to a more nuanced picture of how Tajik migrants created Dubai as a Muslim place out of space, while re-inscribing Dubai as a meaningful, or 'thick' place into their geographies of piety and belonging. Thus, focus is on those spatial moments that come into being through the interconnectivity of history, representation, and material practice (van Schendel 2015, 116).

In tackling the complex relation between place, space, and how migrant bodies engage with them, the emphasis is on the role of embodiment in processes of spatial production. I follow Sen and Silverman (2014, 5), who suggest "embodied placemaking" as a fruitful analytical framework to understand both "authorship and ownership of the built environment, and therefore, the human experiences that take place within it". Exploring how the mutually constitutive relationship between migrant bodies and place produced a sense of Dubai as a Muslim place as well as caused Tajik Muslims to become (more) religious, I draw attention to 'making' and 'doing' as techniques of being and becoming, through which Tajik migrants engage with the material world of the city in bodily, cognitive, and performative ways (Naji and Douny 2009, 412). Hence, senses, emotions, and the aesthetics of materiality played a crucial role in how the city was experienced, and how Tajiks situated themselves in larger social, cultural, and political contexts. This approach works twofold: It draws attention to Tajik migrants' agency in the social construction of Dubai as a Muslim place. But with the concept of embodiment I simultaneously refer to the act of incorporation and thus acknowledge the powerful ideological role played by place and the larger socioeconomic and political structures that frame everyday life in the city (Low 2017, 7, 22–23; Kathiravelu 2016).

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Following Tajiks' encounters with Dubai's mosque communities, tracing their engagement in charity practices and discourses on proper naming, as well as accompanying my research partners to ethnic eating places, this chapter yields insights into how dwelling in and crossing through Dubai's Muslim places intertwined with the formation of knowledgeable and pious subjects. Furthermore, I shall attend to the spatial management of urban diversity, difference, and danger and, finally – following up the discussion in chapter two and three – to the imagination and performance of forms of alternative sociopolitical identification and belonging among Tajik migrants in the Gulf that move beyond the common state–citizen–migrant nexus of power.

Mosques and Endowments

Walking through the area around Baniyas Square, I inevitably would meet a Tajik *kamak*. I would be on my way to the supermarket to get some basic provisions, and one of Fazliddin's people or even those *kamak* workers who had simply heard of me would wave and invite me to have a brief chat to kill time, catch up, or share news. These daily chats became the core of my fieldwork in Dubai, familiarizing me with working routines and how these were adjusted in light of religious practices, above all to fit around daily prayers (Tajik *namoz*, Arabic *ṣalāh*). Our street talks were frequently limited in time and we therefore arranged longer meetings over lunch, to continue a particular discussion outside the workplace. Thus, meetings were usually organized around prayer times, so that my interlocutors would be able to pop into a nearby mosque (Arabic *masjid*) or one of the many praying rooms (Arabic *muṣallā*) available in the commercial centers around Baniyas Square to perform their prayers. Furthermore, I often got into conversation with street workers while waiting for Fazliddin's people to return from their prayers. While daily prayers were individually handled, Friday prayers were an obligatory social event and Fazliddin shared these with his companions or roommates.

Occupying a central place in Tajik migrants' geographies of piety and belonging, Dubai's mosques provided a comfortable setting for engaging in projects of religious reform (*isloh*), as they set a normative framework for how piety was debated and evaluated vis-à-vis the appropriate relationship of the individual to worshipping practices (*ibodat*). According to Fazliddin, Islam is not only about duties and norms, or as he put it "about *namoz*, *ḥajj*, or the length of your beard". Rather, "above all, Islam is a societal religion (*dini islom dini jomea ast*)". In that sense, the obligatory Friday mosque visits enabled Tajik migrants in Dubai to undertake charitable acts such as almsgiving (*sadaqa*), therewith strengthening the Muslim community and simultaneously making themselves part of it far away from home.

According to official statistics, 1,418 mosques were registered in Dubai in 2012.[60] As the emirate has grown as a business and tourist hub, the government has matched the religious services infrastructure needs of Muslims.[61] Between 2008 and 2012 alone, 400 mosques were built. Witnessing the mosque construction boom has influenced Tajiks' assessment of Dubai as a Muslim-friendly place that guarantees recognition as Muslim subjects, to experience individual autonomy (*ozodī*), and that provided Muslims with structural facilities to pursue religious demands.

Fig. 6 und 7: Two mosques in the area around Baniyas Square. Photo: Manja Stephan, 2013.

While in common understanding the term 'place' generally refers to a physical location, its existence can be either real or imagined. Just as the meaning of a place is neither static nor neutral. In contrary, the meaning of place is constantly reinterpreted and reclassified, because it is experienced, transformed, and reproduced physically and socially in relation to our memories and past experiences as they arise in the context of mobility. Place is therefore a relational category (Sen and Silverman 2014, 4; Cresswell 2009, 8; Massey 1991, 244). As a confirmation, when Tajik *kamak* workers evaluated Dubai's religious infrastructure, they mostly

60 Dubai Statistics Center and the Islamic Affairs and Charitable Activities Department (IACAD).
61 Hanif, "Dubai builds 375 mosques in five years," *The National*, March 3, 2013, https://www.thenational.ae/uae/dubai-builds-375-mosques-in-five-years-1.288650. Last access: December 18, 2023.

drew comparison with the worse situation for Muslims involved in trade or business in Tajikistan, as the following statement shows:

> In Tajikistan you can't be a good Muslim. If you're serious about the Quranic call for five daily prayers, you're gonna have to drive halfway through town to get to a mosque and pray. But if you work on the market or in a shop, how can you leave your business at noon, run to a mosque and return one hour later? That's impossible.

This criticism of the poor mosque infrastructure back home was related to the overall restrictive conditions for observing religious duties in public due to the recently modified "Law on Religion and Religious Organizations in Tajikistan" (see chapter one). On one occasion, I arranged to meet Abubakr after Friday prayers. When I arrived, the area was overcrowded with people who had come running, unfolding their prayer rugs and praying wherever they could find room in the small streets and walkways around the mosque. Dozens of late-arriving worshippers' cars were parked nearby; this led to traffic jams and caused outbursts of fury among still later worshippers who were hindered from starting their prayers on time. The chaos increased again after the prayers as everyone rushed home – and this fully absorbed the ethnographer, who eventually missed Abubakr. Later, the latter commented on the scene:

> On Fridays, mosques in this area are always overcrowded. People just pray on the street. Those who arrive late from their offices or construction sites won't find room inside the building and just take the next best place outside. No one cares! Have you ever seen this sort of thing in Tajikistan?

Discussing such a phenomenon in reference to the strict regulations around public prayer in Tajikistan, I remembered a conversation I had had the year before with Sharif, a returnee from his Islamic studies in Pakistan who at that time worked as a freelancer for a weekly newspaper and whom I met in a teahouse in Dushanbe. When his smartphone reminded him of the call to evening prayer, Sharif left for a couple of minutes to perform his religious duties. Later, when he returned to our table, he complained:

> These days, the government prohibits us from doing our prayers in public. Here in Dushanbe, we can't even pray in a restaurant or café. I went into the store room, so as not to be seen by anyone. The government has forbidden praying in public. Imagine, in a Muslim country, a Muslim president prohibits Muslims from performing their prayers in public!

When I confronted Abubakr with this statement, he responded:

> We enjoy the conditions that Dubai offers for observing our prayers whenever and wherever we want. Dubai is a good place, a Muslim place. But even in Moscow, Muslims pray on the streets [...] during Ramadan. The streets are full of praying people. [...] Tajikistan is not a Muslim place at all, although the majority of people there are Muslims. Well, our government advocates a democracy that does not serve the Muslim people in our country (laughs).

Joking about the political situation in Tajikistan, democracy – and the related promise of freedom, tolerance, and recognition – was a crucial point of reference for my interlocutors to evaluate a place as Muslim friendly or not. Thus, the positive assessment of religious services in Dubai went hand in hand with how Tajiks encountered and interpreted religious diversity and tolerance within the praying community.

Dubai's many mosques are places where Tajiks could experience themselves as part of something larger, which was above all the *ummah* as a community of faith made up of migrants, businesspeople, merchants as well as long-term residents with highly diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Fazliddin and his friends engaged and evaluated the cosmopolitan environment of Dubai's mosques relative to their experiences with national politics toward Muslims and Islam back home. As a religious practice of location, mosque prayers enabled individual and collective engagement in forms of belonging alternative to Tajikistan's rather tight identity framework inherent in national Tajik Islam. I joined the following discussion between two *kamak* from Fazliddin's group about individual preferences for mosques in Dubai:

> Kamak 1: All mosques are the same. There's no difference.
> Kamak 2: Wherever you go (in the Emirates), you'll find Muslims from all nations praying together, side by side [...] everyone prays according to the tradition of his homeland, Salafis with Hanafis, Shafii, Africans with Azeriis, Shia people. No one minds.
> Kamak 1: For Muslims, Tajikistan is like a prison (*zindon*). They [the government] have built walls everywhere. At home, we have only one single right Islam. If you pray differently, you'll run into trouble. (Acting out a scene with gestures): Eh, why don't you pray like this or that? Are you a Salafi, brother, hey? Here, all Muslims pray in peace and harmony. No shouting, no suspicion, no exclusion.

Although including idealized harmonious relations between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Dubai's business worlds, such statements reveal that Tajiks embraced diversity and tolerance within the *ummah* as manifestations of the perceived high stage of development and progress of the Emirati state and society, which goes beyond the dominant framework of secularism and is rather built on Islamic values and Muslim leadership. Hence, the cosmopolitan environment of Dubai's mosques

that Tajiks immersed themselves in was above all interpreted, in moral terms, as an achievement of Emirati governmentality. Disenchanted with national politics at home, Dubai's religious service infrastructure promoted a reversed enchantment – or re-enchantment – nurtured by visual representations of the Emirati model of proper Muslim leadership. The latter was seen as determined by a paternalistic care for the common good and by Emirati leaders' efforts to improve Muslim society in all spheres of life (see Fig. 2). Thus, the associated investment in the spiritual well-being of the *ummah* was experienced by Tajiks as integrative, embracing both Emirati citizens and migrant subjects.

Coming back to Sack's argument in his book *A Geographical Guide to the Real and the Good*, according to which 'the good' is a product of context and place and as such represent "a form of situated knowledge" (Sack 2003, 37), the qualities of 'the good' are always relative to what is real, or in other words, what is experienced or represented as real. Praising the tolerant and inclusive atmosphere of Dubai's mosques was a channel through which Tajiks in Dubai critically evaluated the condition state and society in Tajikistan had set for engaging in projects of Islamic reform. There, national, ethnic, or regional identity markers framed politics of belonging in political, social, and cultural terms. But the resulting processes of inclusion and exclusion did not just influence everyday life in post-civil war Tajikistan (Roche 2013; Epkenhans 2016). They also determined migration routes, the composition of diaspora communities such as that of Tajiks in Cairo's Nasr City district or in Russia, as well as the operation of business networks in the Emirates, in Russia, and other migrant destinations.

Spatial practices such as mapping moral geographies were not only determined by migrants' agency. The location of fear and disorder outside the realm of the nation state – as it is associated in Tajikistan, for example, with the Muslim Middle East – is integral to hegemonic discourses on stability and instability through which Central Asian states produce the political Other and enhance their image as guardians of peace, order, and stability in the post-Soviet era (Koch 2018, and chapter one). From the point of view of student returnees from the Middle East, who, like Karim or Ikrom, experience social exclusion and political discrimination at home because they were associated with places officially associated with disorder, Dubai's cosmopolitan praying communities allowed Tajik Muslims to transcend, at least temporarily, the stigmatizing regimes of the tight framework of national, ethnic, or regional identity back home, and hence to feel at home abroad.

Back to the idea of place as a social concept. Place is something that is created by people through practices and relations; and so is the assessment of place always multiple situated. Put differently, there is more about the making of Dubai a meaningful place than just the securitization of Islam in Tajikistan, that mobilized pious

Muslims to leave the country. The idea of Dubai as a properly Muslim place at the same time blended with circulating visions of an ideal religious community and an ideal state, the latter setting the conditions for both economic growth and a just society. Such imaginaries were used by my Tajik research partners to articulate an antidote to moral decline, economic deprivation, and corruptive practices in politics and society, which has far-reaching effects on social participation in their home country. In addition to that, experiences with xenophobia and an exclusionary Russian nationalism that framed how Tajiks remembered their migrant daily life in Russia were further major points of reference.

In Dubai, Tajiks were able to cushion their suffering from a peripheral migrant and Muslim position at home and in Russia by immersing themselves into an urban 'experience economy' (Klingmann 2007). Blurring the boundaries between iconic urban architecture and mass media, an apparent experience economy has turned the emirate into a 'brandscape' (Klingmann 2007) and advertisement site for Dubai's cosmopolitan modernity driven forward by the political elite as a national project (Kathiravelu 2016, 34; Vora 2013, 47–55). As an outcome, Dubai's brand of an autocratic Islamic government in combination with a neoliberal economy based on Arab nationalism was, as we will see, more compelling for my reform-minded Tajik research partners in Dubai than the post-Soviet model of Tajik state and statehood (*davlatdorī*) (Epkenhans 2017, 188–189). Tajiks unquestioningly assumed the contested nationalist narrative of Dubai's development as an achievement of purely Arab merit. While stressing Muslim cosmopolitanism as an outcome of effective Emirati governmentality, their accounts followed the official claim to reverse the socio-economic and cultural hegemonic order in the Gulf region (Bromber et al. 2014, 1) and to purify the rich cultural and economic heritage of the region from 'foreign' elements, and therewith overlooked the crucial historical role of Persian-speaking Muslim and other, also non-Muslim, diasporic and trading communities in the region in shaping interregional and cosmopolitan environments in the Gulf (see Vora 2013, 44, 51–64; Ahmad 2012b).

In order to understand the compelling mechanism of place-branding in Dubai and the wider Gulf, the interplay of architectonical sites and bodily sensations can work as a suitable vantage point from which to explore the material politics and aesthetics of religious world-making (Koch 2020, 21–24; Birgit Meyer 2013). Thus, I shall now draw attention to how the material environment of those mosques that also operate as tourist sites and national monuments, together with the experiences they invoke when Tajiks visit them, gave rise to new forms of identification and alternative imaginations of Muslim belonging. Above all, it is the persuasive aesthetics of what Nasr (2010, 31) describes as the pleasure and joy of Emirati "five-star mosques," with their spectacular architecture and air-conditioned, high-technology environments that materially represent Gulfian bourgeois Islam

blending with Arab nationalism. Arguably, these spectacular mosques shaped Tajik migrants' religious experiences and fostered processes of post-national identification and sensing belonging 'abroad' that transcended ethnic, regional and other forms of identity and belonging.

Once I was walking along Baniyas Square on my way to the hotel, my home base during my fieldwork in Dubai, Fazliddin waved to me from the other side of the street, where he was waiting for Russian clients. He seemed excited and, my curiosity piqued, I went over to see what was going on. He told me that later that day he was expecting an old friend from Cairo who was coming to relax and do some business in Dubai before moving on to visit relatives in Dushanbe and Moscow. Fazliddin invited me to join them and added with a broad grin: "We're planning to do some sightseeing, I've even organized a car". Later, cruising through the city in a friend's car Fazliddin arranged for this afternoon ride, we eventually stopped near one of Dubai Deira's spectacular new mosques. Fazliddin asked if I wanted to see "one of the most beautiful mosques" I would ever encounter. I waited in the spacious entry hall while the guys went about their ablutions and performed their prayers. Later, Fazliddin asked the warden's permission to show me the prayer hall, and we entered a magnificent room which was roofed by a massive dome made from white marble, replete with golden decorations and adorned with a glorious chandelier. I was clearly overwhelmed by the mix of luxury, splendor, and the brightness of the hall. Ilhom, another friend of Fazzlidin, who had just temporarily interrupted his studies at al-Azhar in Cairo for a short business trip to Dubai and who also joined us, noticed how awestruck I was and said: "See, this is what Arabs do for their people." "What do you mean?" I inquired, and another *kamak* jumped in to explain: "Emiratis are all rich, and they donate money for good things like this beautiful mosque." "In doing so, they not only express their devoutness (*imon*), they also show the wealth of Islam (*boygarii dini islom*)" added Ilhom. "Do they build these mosques for God then?" I wondered, and he continued: "Well, for God, and for the people. For us, all Muslims, and non-Muslims, for tourists too; everyone can come here to pray and enjoy the beauty of the place."

Later, back in the car, there was a lively discussion about Arab piety and wealth. The benevolent attitude of Emirati citizens and their investment in the spiritual well-being of the Muslim community (Arabic *ummah)* was contrasted with how the political elite and Tajikistan's new rich handle their wealth. Accordingly, charitable acts at home were evaluated as fake, that is, just public displays of social prestige and limited rather to the needs of relatives instead of serving the well-being and development of wider society. Fakeness and a lack of authenticity were also highlighted, when the group evaluated the Islamization of national politics in Tajikistan. When our conversation turned to the current presidential project to

Fig. 8: Insight view of a newly-built Friday mosque in Dubai. Photo: Manja Stephan, 2013.

construct the biggest mosque in Central Asia on the outskirts of the city center of Dushanbe, it was observed that "the mosque it not for the people", thereby exposing the performative and superficial character of Dushanbe's transforming urban landscapes, which are viewed by many Tajiks I met both at home and abroad in terms of what is designated in critical media accounts as "dictator chic" (Parshin 2012). This tallies with Koch, Valiyev and Hazmi Zaini's observation that monumental mosque projects in Central Asia are critically assessed by the people due to their ambivalent symbolic meaning as politized edifices that aim to strategically "buttress state-based elites' claims that they support religious freedom," while these very elites are "simultaneously cracking down on smaller, more organic or democratic places of worship or religious practices outside the state's managerial control" (Koch, Valiyev and Hazmi Zaini 2018, 196). At the same time, the positive moral assessment of Emirati leadership is understandable against the background that, in both countries, state and economy are concentrated in the hands of a single family. In other words, the ruling class is also the economic elite, which owns the largest businesses and heads the most important state-led corporations (Kathiravelu 2016, 29–30; Özcan 2010).

"But don't the luxury mosques in Dubai also have a showy aspect too, boasting Gulf oil money?" I asked my companion with a skeptical tone. "Well, yes", Fazliddin's guest replied, "but here in Dubai, rich Muslims actually do good for the people. In Tajikistan they just do good for themselves, and for their families." Still unconvinced, I referred to the many so-called 'Arab mosques', particularly visible in

Tajikistan's countryside. Built using the money of rich Tajik Dubai businessmen, with their blossom-white, clean architecture they symbolize a new, economically vital, business-friendly Islam dovetailing commerce with religious purity and generosity. Again, the group commenced an energetic discussion of the 'fakeness' (*durūkhī*) and 'inauthenticity' (*nopokī*) of publicly displayed piety among Tajikistan's new rich. Ilhom took the floor and recalled a recent incident in a Cairo charitable center during Ramadan, already discussed in chapter three. According to his story, he witnessed two Tajiks standing in line with him to get their share of the donated food, but the two men tried to trick the aid workers by queuing twice and more. When the deception was discovered, all Tajiks were expelled from the line. While the tour group present critically assessed this collective punishment, which was as a response to the moral offence of his compatriot, as an example of how Tajiks are racialized and discriminated against even in Muslim countries, Ilhom's main point about this incident was differently. He referred instead to the issue of low moral awareness combined with lacking Islamic knowledge and piety, among Tajiks:

> As you can see, we are not ready for this. We don't have the same level of civilization (*davrai madaniyat*) as Emiratis. Tajiks just copy it. It's all just for prestige, but that's not a real act of godliness (*khudotarsī*). We are Muslims, yes, but on a very low level. There's no morality (*odob*) among our folk. I always feel ashamed (*sharm medoram*) in Cairo for being a Tajik because of this incident.

When engaging in discourses on religious authenticity that centered around material manifestations of an Emirati version of an elitist or a bourgeois piety, Tajiks conjured an orientalized image of Arab Islam that conflates religious purity with wealth and benevolence. Correspondingly, when experiencing the philanthropic and integrative atmosphere radiated by the built environment of Dubai's prestigious mosques, Tajiks embraced their inferior position as Central Asian Muslims and, in line with this, articulate 'real' (*haqiqī*) or 'pure Islam' (*islomi toza*) as a religious ideal closely associated with good Muslim governance that can only be found abroad; i. e., in places belonging to what they term as *Arabiston* or 'Arab land' and perceive a central place in larger geographies of Muslim mobility and connectivity (see chapter one).

The material turn in the study of religion has shifted scholarly attention to how religious experiences and feelings are organized around forms of sensation that invoke and enable access to the transcendental, and that are subject to social construction and dominant power structures. As Meyer states, "religious feelings are not just there, but are made possible and reproducible by certain modes of inducing experiences of the transcendental" (Meyer 2008, 707). In line with that, the spectacular nature of Dubai's mosques shapes certain types of sensation that mediate and hence produce the religious and make it tangible – all in a highly aesthet-

ic and appealing material form. Thus, during their worshipping, Tajiks incorporated the emirates' religious architecture and its "focalization effect" in symbolizing both nationalistically defined values such as tolerance and diversity (Koch, Valiyev, Zaini 2018, 185) and an elitist notion of a bourgeois piety. Besides, they consumed this spectacular materiality when visiting the mosques as tourist sites in their spare time. In this context, the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in the south-eastern outskirts of Abu Dhabi may serve as suitable example of how Tajik migrants perceive and interact with these places.

"You have to go to Abu Dhabi, it's a must!" This was a recommendation I have often heard during my fieldwork in Dubai. When relatives from Tajikistan came to Dubai, Tajiks visited the biggest and most impressive mosque in the region, which hosts the mausoleum of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, the founding father of the United Arab Emirates. "You should go there, really! It's the most beautiful place in the world," *kamak* workers I met insisted while showing me photos of the mosque on their smartphones or inviting me on sightseeing trips to Abu Dhabi. Such photos, together with personal accounts of experiencing this exceptional place, circulated in Dubai, Russia, Tajikistan, and elsewhere. While these images fueled the idea of Dubai as a Muslim place and an alluring destination for pious Muslims from Tajikistan, in Dubai itself these images promoted an intensification of Muslim consciousness and informed discourses around piety and proper Muslim leadership.

Recent comparative studies on monumental mosque architecture in Asia and the Gulf show how nationalist practices are performed through the built environment of capital cities. These studies explore how mosques serve as core venues for Muslim leaders to claim political legitimacy and assert sacred authority (Koch 2016; Koch, Valiyev and Zaini 2018). The Sheikh Zayed Mosque stands out as a particularly impressive site. Its opulent interior and aesthetic outlook create a sense of exceptionality that perfectly caters to nationalist narratives inherent in the idea of the Arabian Gulf. Following Koch's analysis of the iconic monumentality of mosques in the Gulf, the special architectural features of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque as well as its great variety of construction materials and decorative styles manifest the political leader's commitment to internationalism, and express his admiration for Islam as a faith that embraces peace, tolerance, and the diversity of its worshippers (Koch 2016, 349 – 350). This observation links directly with migrant embodied placemaking. When Tajiks went to visit this and other mosques in Dubai or Abu Dhabi or shared images of such sites, they consumed the cosmopolitan narrative that these mosques represent and tried to find their place in this narrative. When stating that "this mosque was also built for us," Tajiks read the symbolism of religious sites as an invitation to participate in the project of creating the Arab

Emirates and hence make the hegemonic narrative of Arabs' generous piety and national prosperity their own.

Along with religious tourist sites, the Emirati version of a bourgeois Islam was also spread through the many high-quality copies of the Quran that Tajiks got for free from Dubai's various charitable associations (Stephan-Emmrich 2021). In their quality as religious things, these Quran copies mattered as they induced and reproduced religious feelings through their aesthetic impact and their sensational form. In this respect, these Qurans were not simply benevolent gifts. Receiving and using such objects for their religious advancement, Tajiks connected their Islamic reform projects with the hierarchies of wealth, race, and class integral to the working mechanism of charitable funds both within and outside the Emirates. These hierarchies became sacralized in the form of lavish editions of the Quran.

My research partners confirmed that they frequently visited Islamic centers run by either the General Authority on Islamic Affairs and Endowments (AWQAF), the powerhouse of the Emirates' official religion, or independent ones, to pick up Islamic literature or to request religious advice, to attend public events during Ramadan, or to listen to famous visiting Muslim preachers such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi or Sheikh al-Arifi; both Islamic authorities were very present in the narrations of Tajik *kamak* during my research in Dubai. Together with mosques, charitable associations were key places in the Emirates for the facilitation of migrants' encounters with global Islam, as they link Tajiks – as recipients – with Islamic discourses on 'reform', 'modernism', and 'development'. Thus, donated copies of the Quran worked as material icons that blended global Islam with Arab wealth and a purist piety, thus reproducing power disparities between Arab donors and Central Asian recipients. The following conversation with Mahyar, whom we already met in chapter two, nicely illustrates this.

Mahyar brought me two Quran copies from an endowment (Arabic *waqf*, in Dubai in the plural is *awqāf*) in Al Mamzar, a city quarter in Dubai. The copies were a donation from Abdullah ibn Abd al-Aziz, the former King of Saudi Arabia (d. 2015). Mahyar praised the quality of the printing and the beautiful golden decoration on the front cover, then pointed to the combination of the original Arabic text with a German translation. "That's for you and your students," he said and handed me the copies. He explained further:

Mahyar: It's a really good translation.
Manja: How do you know?
Mahyar: Well, they are professionals there (in the Al Mamsar endowment), well trained in Islamic knowledge, and they have good translators.
Manja: How did you get the copies?

Mahyar: My brother – you know, the one who studied in al-Azhar – he has good contacts with the *awqaf* people in Al Mamsar, because he's working for an Arab company at the moment.

Mahyar then took a copy and caressed the cover reverently, saying "Just feel the quality of the book. The golden typeface looks great. What a difference to the low-budget books you can buy at the marketplace [in Tajikistan]." I asked Mahyar if I could pay for the copies, as they really looked expensive but, slightly offended, he refused: "No, no, it's a gift". He went on:

Mahyar: You should know that they have copies in all languages. The German and English editions are for Europeans. But they have also Russian Qurans (in Russian translation). You can go and ask for a free copy.

Mahyar then referred to two groups who in his view enjoyed a special and exotic status: European converts and Central Asian Muslims.

Mahyar: They like us Central Asians, we are exotic Muslims (*barodari ajoib*) for them, just like Muslims from Europe, converts. And some of us do speak Arabic. So, if you go and say that you are Tajik and you want to increase your knowledge of Islam and share it with your brothers and sisters at home, you can easily get a free copy that way too.

Manja: Why do Tajiks do that?

Mahyar: Well, in Tajikistan Muslims have very little knowledge about their religion. It is because of the Soviet times, as you know, but also today the quality of Islamic education is very low. Arabs want to spread their version of Islam, and they want to delight their poor Central Asian brothers and sisters, I guess.

These last remarks were delivered by Mahyar with a derisive undertone and mocking smile.

As with these two examples, dozens of free copies of the Quran from Dubai's Islamic endowments travel back home with migrants as gifts and souvenirs and in this way find their way into Tajik homes. As they circulate in migrant dormitories or receive praise on social media, these sacred objects co-produce Dubai's image as a proper Muslim place, where one can "find Islamic knowledge on the street", as many Tajiks stated during my fieldwork. Thus, Tajiks not only accept their inferior position as ignorant Central Asian Muslims and the inherent orientalization by Arab and other Muslims that frames charity giving in the Emirates, but they also play with these cultural associations in a creative way (Stephan-Emmrich 2021, 67–69).

Understanding Gulf charity as a strategical way to instill and reinforce hegemonic relationships on both domestic and international scales, the donation of free Qurans may serve as a symbolic act through which Emirati leaders seek to establish an international perception of Dubai as both a center of wealth and Islamic giving (Parkhurst 2014, 345, 347–348). In that sense, charity is key to the mediation

of capital and Islam or, as in this case, Islamic knowledge. Accordingly, charity cannot be separated from elite legitimization (Li 2014, 378).[62] When visiting Dubai's pious endowments, Tajiks experience Emirati philanthropy. But this experience is filtered through the fraught cross-cutting of race and wealth that frames the specific relation between donors and receivers and underpins the performative dimensions of bourgeois piety. Studies on development and aid work critically examine the disparities in lifestyle and power between "a jet-setting, cosmopolitan class of aid workers and the populations they ostensibly serve" (Li 2014, 379). In a similar way, Islamic charity in the Arab world has become entwined with the engagement of the new urban middle classes in public morality and sociality that manifests itself in a pious neoliberalism promoting self-improvement, productivity, and entrepreneurship in the individual relationship with god (Atia 2012). Tajiks studying and living in Cairo became part of the target group to which this religious activism applies. But also in Dubai, mosques and pious endowments operate, just like Afghan- and Iranian-dominated business networks do, as spaces of Muslim encounter determined by hierarchical power relations. Socioeconomical and cultural in nature, these power relations framed how Tajiks experienced, assessed, dwelled in and crossed through Dubai as an explicitly Muslim place. Returning to the relationship between body, self and place, the important role of place in the religious transformation of human subjects as well as that of the body to index a certain religious position, or emplacement, becomes also tangible in discourses on proper naming. In the following, we will turn to a translocative practice that was popular among Tajiks working in the fur business; i. e., that of adopting a Quranic name.

Adopting Arabic Names

Discourses on proper naming are not spatially fixed in Dubai but also show up in the growing trend of Arabic naming at birth in Tajikistan that I observed during the time of my fieldwork. Many Tajiks I met already bore Arabic names that they had been given by their parents. An expression of heightened orientation toward an Arab version of Islam, the adoption of Arab or Quranic names among Tajiks in Dubai both marked the intention (*niyat,* Arabic *nīya*) to engage in personal Islamic reform and served to publicly confirm progress in one's pious endeavors. A meaningful embodied performance, renaming has emerged as an integral aspect of pi-

62 See also María Carballeira Debasa (2017), "The Use of Charity as a Means for Political Legitimation in Umayyad Al-Andalus" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 60(3).

ousness, above all for those of my interlocutors who had Persian-sounding names such as Mahdi, Anushehr, Arash, Farhod or Bakhtiyor.

Related discussions about the Islamic appropriateness of names occurred in business networks, in migrant guesthouses, above all introduced by former students of Islam, or during visits to Islamic charity centers. As a consequence, my interlocutors associated Arabic names with Islam and the Quran, which made them more authentic (*haqiqī*, *asil*) than their own names, which were given to them at birth by their parents or grandparents and usually derived from the Persian cultural tradition. Persian-sounding names were linked with Shiism or Sufism by Arab Muslims in Dubai. Such associations triggered a critical self-reflection and a re-evaluation of Tajiks' own naming practices, as they build on Central Asia's Muslim traditions, but were also attributed to politically enacted ignorance about Islam as a legacy of the Soviet past. Adopting Quranic names, as well as the intention to do so, was therefore a proper way for Tajiks to cope with their peripheral role as Central Asian Muslims in Dubai's business community, to secure themselves a place in Dubai's vibrant trading and business worlds, as well as to incorporate the bourgeois piety inherent in material manifestations of Arab Islam into their own religious biography. With this form of embodied placemaking we return to Mahyar and his naming story.

Mahyar's name was chosen by his mother, who like many others in the time of Mahyar's birth in 1987 was influenced by the country's cultural turn to Iran and Persian Muslim identity that started in late Soviet times and peaked in the first years of independence. Mahyar, from a Sunni Muslim family, never really thought about his name until that day, when some Arab Muslims at an Islamic center (*awqaf*) he often visited reacted negatively to it, suspecting him to be Shia or, even worse, a Sunni Muslim who had converted to Shia Islam. While conversion from Shia, or Ismaili, to Sunni faith is seen as god's blessing by the Sunni community (Stephan 2006), the suspicion of being a converted Shia Muslim troubled Mahyar and compelled him to inquire about the rightness of his name. He consulted several authorities in mosques and endowments in Dubai, all of whom recommended that he change his name. Later, he also approached Eshon Nuriddin, an influential Islamic figure in his home country (see Epkenhans 2011b), via his official website. The latter advised him to keep following the Muslim tradition prevailing in Tajikistan, even while abroad and in the environment of other Islamic influences. Baffled by these contradictory statements, Mahyar consulted various internet sources, but finally became suspected by his *odnoklassniki* community fellows of being a Salafi because he was casting doubt on Eshon Nuriddin's response.

I met Mahyar in the midst of his emotionally challenging search for an answer to all this – that he should be mindful of showing obedience to orthodox interpretations of Islam, but also be respectful of the Muslim tradition in Tajikistan that

places decisions about proper names in the hands of the family or elders in the community. Unhappy about the Iran-Shia connotations of his name that constantly confronted him at his Arab-dominated workplace in a clothing store in Sharjah, at the same time Mahyar was hesitant about changing it, to avoid affronting his parents. "If you are around Arabs the whole day they keep thinking of you as a Shia. But if I adopted an Arabic name, I would disrespect (*hurmat nakardan*) my parents' will."

In his ethnography on language and identity in Indonesia, Joel C. Kuipers reads Arabic naming as a way of presenting the Islamization of own's own identity and one's orientation toward the standards of normative, orthodox Islamic belief and practice (Kuipers 1998, 45). But naming practices are not only a strong indicator of piety; they are also an expression of belonging to, or longing for, a particular discursive tradition – and I would add a specific performativity – that, following Bowen (2012, 50–52), indexes an exclusive socio-religious status, in this case a person knowing Islam and being successful in Dubai business because of working with Arabs. In this reading, adopting an Arabic name is a signifier for progress, as it can be read as symbolizing an act of conversion that is marked by a sharp break with the past. Adopting an Arab name, or playing with the idea to do so, Tajiks engaged in the construction of modernity (Brenner 1998), while simultaneously turning their pious agency into a locus of social conflict.

Mahyar's story however also exemplifies that Tajiks did not blindly follow religious authorities while abroad but instead used a wide repertoire of approaches to legal Islamic positions and discourses in order to form personal opinions and locate themselves within the strongly hierarchized worlds of Dubai business. Navigating a heightened diversity of Islamic authority, Tajiks like Mahyar thus tried to come to terms with the discrepancy between orthodox or universalist positions associated with Arab Islam and those of authoritative adherents to local Muslim traditions, also claiming the sole interpretation of proper Muslimness for themselves. Inconsistencies and incoherence in daily life were not only approached through the lens of moral failure, as we will see later; they simultaneously underpin a flexibility and mobility within and across different religious traditions that formed part and parcel of Tajiks' translocal livelihoods.

When I first met Firdaus, an employee in a souvenir market in Dubai Deira, he asked me to call him Abdullah. "It's a beautiful name, the best, because it means 'slave of Allah' (*bandai Allah*)," he explained. When I asked him, what was wrong with his given name, Firdaus replied: "I'm a Muslim, I started to pray regularly, I read the Quran, but only a little bit because I am not trained in Arabic". He went on to tell me that his name was that of a neighbor, a famous artist. "It was my mother's choice, because she liked his voice. But it's a Persian name, not a real Muslim name." While working on the souvenir stall with some

former Tajik students from Saudi Arabia, and having a close friend studying in Pakistan, he learned that in order to be a good Muslim one should have a proper name, i. e., an Islamic name (*nomi islomī*), taken from the Quran, not a name from an artist or other public figure. When I wondered about the reaction of his friends to his renaming, he replied: "In Dubai, my friends call me Abdullah, but in Tajikistan they ignore my wishes and just keep calling me Firdaus."

The social consequences of renaming aside, adopting an Arab name officially entails the bureaucratic act of changing one's identity card. This is not only costly but may precipitate serious political consequences. The latter mattered in particular in the context of a state security discourse in Tajikistan that attempts to regulate appropriate religious beliefs by officially banning not only veiling, uncut beards and madrasas schooling in the country but also Arabic-sounding names. Referring again to Kuipers' ethnography on naming practice in Indonesia (1998, 28–29, 31), naming practices are an expression of fluid identities, not enforced through inflexible passport systems of the nation state, and as such go beyond national identity and biopower. For this very reason, changing the name in one's passport is seen by many Tajiks to be a big obstacle, as it symbolizes not only a break with family traditions but also a transgression of national identity. Especially since 2016, when the government's attempts to securitize Islam in Tajikistan expanded to considering a ban on Arabic-sounding names for newborn ethnic Tajiks in order to secure Tajik culture from alienation, and more precisely Arabization,[63] adopting Arabic names for adults has become a highly politicized act. While Firdaus was rather worried about the great expense of this, as well as conflict with his parents and relatives at home, Mahyar pointed to the expected negative implications of an official name change for his future in Tajikistan. "Frankly, I would be [seen as] a troublemaker, a Salafi," he predicted, and further explained:

> With an Arab name you can do good business in Dubai, but not at home, unless you work in the embassy of Qatar [...] I would do it (name changing) if I had a definite future in Dubai. But things here change fast, and no one knows how long they might be able to stay.

Calculating the consequence of the social and political risks of adopting an Arab name, coupled with the volatility of Dubai's business worlds that forced migrants to invest in two parallel futures – one at home and another abroad – the Tajiks I met in Dubai were often flirting with the possibility of adopting Arab names, rather than committing themselves. As a form of pious self-fashioning, Tajiks

63 https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-ban-arabic-names-marriage-between-cousins/27486012.html, see also https://www.economist.com/asia/2017/09/21/tajikistans-crackdown-on-observant-muslims-intensifies, last access on December 19, 2023.

like Firdaus creatively played with individualized religious identities and thus made Dubai into a place that allowed at least temporarily to circumvent social norms and national policies at home and to engage in alternative forms of belonging. However, just as with Islamization itself, the practice of naming was not only a religious or spiritual matter but overlapped with economic, social, and political processes. As a spatial practice of relational placemaking, Tajik projects of reformist piety were embedded in configurations of power that above all materialized in Dubai's hierarchical business relations. Accordingly, adopting Arabic names and the discourses on proper Muslimness attending this issue manifested as a contested practice abroad too, reflecting the inferior position of Tajiks in Dubai business despite their successful economic and social careers. Yet, Firdaus, Mahyar and other Tajiks working in Dubai did not embrace Quranic fixity and orientation toward an unfiltered Arab Islam in order to express Muslim identity beyond the framework of ethnic, regional, cultural, or national identity that shapes notions of 'Tajikness'. Their references to discourses on proper Muslimness were instead deeply affected by a hegemonic relationship to Arab culture and religion, which, entangled as it was with economic power and asymmetric work relations, put Arabs but also long-term Iranian residents of Dubai at the top of the business hierarchy. Regarding Firdaus, trying to avoid conflict at the workplace, he accepted that his employer, a Dubai-born Iranian, was insistent about using Firdaus's Persian name. Adopting Arabic names, or at least considering doing so, can be read as a form of positioning towards the dominance of Arab Islam and culture and the economic power of Arabs and Iranians in Dubai's business worlds. Thus, just like clothing oneself in Arab fashion, naming practices arise as a form of embodied placemaking through which Tajiks tried to overcome their peripheral position as Central Asian Muslim migrants in the Emirates. This is also obvious in the embodied performance of eating out.

Lunchtime Talks

Carrying out ethnographic research on street workers in Dubai's fur business was a challenge. Even though I easily got involved in chats and was able to share the everyday joys and sorrows of their street work life, while talking to me my *kamak* research partners were always busy scouting for potential clients, approaching tourists, or looking out for police and sudden street raids. Always being ready like this, as well as the anxiety about missing a good deal or being caught by the police set the conditions for my translocal ethnography and its resultant knowledge production. Furthermore, over midday and in the evening, the only times available for longer breaks, Fazliddin's *kamak* group returned to their apart-

ments for communal lunch and dinner, which was prepared by a cook employed by the landlord and paid from the *kamak* workers' monthly rent. The apartments being overcrowded and without any privacy, my presence was a serious intrusion into their intimate bachelor spaces as well as required the agreement of both the landlord and the other roommates. While gender segregation was obviously much more of an issue in the migrant apartments than on the street, Fazliddin and Abubakr also hesitated to invite me for communal lunch in their place because of the lodge's poor living conditions, which made it feel impossible for them to keep to the rules of good hospitality (*mehmondustī*). Most of the more intensive conversations with *kamak* therefore took place in restaurants or bistros around Baniyas Square, near to their workplaces, where we met to talk about their life and work and elaborated on philosophical and theological issues regarding Islam and piety.

Eating out was not a daily occurrence for Tajik *kamak*. Trying to save their hard-earned money, restaurant visits were reserved for weekends and holidays only, or when business deals clashed with the fixed lunchtimes in their lodges. In addition, eating out required knowing where to find good places. Accepting the unusualness of the many lunch and dinner talks I had with Fazliddin, his friends, and other *kamak*, these meetings shed light on how Tajiks incorporated Dubai as a Muslim place through consuming food in places assessed as proper places (*joyi khub*). Thus, the meaning and symbolism of eating out worked twofold: The selection of dining places perceived as good (*khub, naghz*), authentic (*haqiqī*), clean (*toza*), or quiet (*orom*), as well as the experiences of eating at them were crucial for how Tajiks mapped, appropriated, and sensed Dubai as a Muslim place and hence spatially managed difference and avoid danger, as well as how they sensed belonging to the city. At the same time, making sense of the choices of location for our lunch and dinner talks played an important role in how Tajik migrants fashioned themselves in front of me, the researcher, as pious Muslim businessmen.

As a cultural practice, eating can be understood to be a material, moral, and mental form of communication with the world (Sen 2014, 98). In migratory and diaspora contexts, food, eating places, and eating occupy a central position in processes of group formation, renegotiating identity, articulating and sensing belonging, or making aspects of a place travel elsewhere (Raman 2015). Furthermore, the literature on transnationalism supports the idea that ethnic restaurants and eating together are core practices of migrant socializing and conviviality that facilitate bonding with the homeland or allow the reconstruction of home abroad (Zanoni 2019, Varshaver and Rocheva 2018). Other scholars also confirm the crucial role of food and eating for maintaining and reconstructing 'authentic' cultural and national identities (Fischer 2009).

My ethnography both bolsters and extends these studies. My findings concur with Sen's spatial ethnography of ethnic restaurants in Chicago. When Tajik *kamak* workers ate out they made a place for themselves in Dubai's culturally diverse urban spaces. Doing so, they reshaped and maintained complex social, cultural, and religious identities but at the same time retained their freedom to move between them (Sen 2014, 98). Ethnic restaurants, like any other place, hold different meanings to different individuals and social groups, and in a single space they reproduce multiple worlds which are not always visible to the beholder (Sen 2014, 97). Three aspects related to this will be discussed: Following the complexity and multilayered symbolic dimensions inherent in "eating out in Dubai as a Muslim place,"[64] my lunchtime ethnographic talks shed light on how joint food consumption served as a culturally nested way of connecting with the wider Muslim community abroad. Choosing preferably Afghan or Sunni-Iranian restaurants, Tajiks reproduced a sense of Persianness in terms of cultural proximity and extended ethnic belonging (see more in chapter two), by means of that they made a home abroad and connected themselves with Dubai's transregional Muslim trading and business worlds. But the Afghan and Iranian restaurants around Baniyas Square offered something else too. Associating the street as their workplace with dirt, impurity, and moral temptations, practices of eating in and out became part and parcel of Tajiks' spatial management of urban diversity and danger. As with visiting mosques and adopting Arabic names, eating out becomes an embodied performance of Muslim placemaking, which built on the affective, sensorial, and aesthetic dimension of ethnic restaurants and other eating places in Dubai, through which Tajiks related themselves to the city in moral and religious terms. In addition to that, eating in and out was embedded in larger halal (Tajik *halol,* Arabic *ḥalāl*) narratives linking Tajiks with consumer practices and discourses that signify new middle-class sensibilities in Dubai, and beyond. Some Tajiks carried these halal narratives from Tajikistan, where a small but growing market for halal products could be observed in the early 2000s, at least in larger urban centers, while others came across the halal consumer world in Russia (Benussi 2021). As a last point, considering Afghan and Iranian restaurants as part of (or as extension of) Tajiks' business networks in Dubai, the choice of these locations was also and above all based on trust. Operating as 'safe spaces', the following example illustrates that some of the Afghan and Iranian restaurants situated around Baniyas Square guaranteed protection against street raids by the police.

64 I use the term analogous to Sen's (2014) "eating ethnicity" or Crowther's (2013) "eating culture".

Afghan Restaurants

My first lunchtime talk took place in an Afghan restaurant. In company with other *kamak* workers, Fazliddin and Abubakr led me through a crowded entry hall full of Afghan, Arab, and Iranian guests to a separate, rather hidden, air-conditioned room in the first floor. The waiter, an Afghan like the restaurant owner himself, brought mats and cushions and Fazliddin and the other *kamak* immediately dropped into the soft seats and began to relax. Then the waiter came back with a decorated brass jug of water and fresh towels to start the handwashing ritual. "So, how do you like the place?" Fazliddin opened the conversation after the waiter had left the room; a discussion of the advantages of this particular eating place ensued. Above all, the *kamak* around stressed the possibility it offered of a temporary escape from the workplace they associated with heat, stress, and car noise, but also with dirt and the presence of strangers. Food consumption in public places is, however, not only a joyful experience. It is a risky thing too, especially for Tajik *kamak*, who are in constant danger of being deported due to their vulnerable position as undocumented migrants doing illicit street work. Accordingly, the privacy of separate and more secluded rooms in restaurants reproduces that of migrant apartments and hence has a protective function. When I asked Fazliddin why they preferred not to eat in the main hall, he explained:

> We do, but the police have now started to also raid restaurants. But as we know the staff [of this restaurant], they always let us come up here where we are safe. We also sit in the main room sometimes and they warn us if the police come and we can hide up here.

Assessing an eating place as 'good' for Tajiks obviously depended on familiarity and trust – two essential aspects for mapping Muslim places in Dubai's public space. A place they liked to visit after their Friday prayers, this Afghan restaurant where we were sitting and chatting was considered a favorite one among Tajiks. When I asked why, my neighbor opined: "The best place to eat out is where you can trust the cook," and another added: "Afghan, Arab, Iranian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Tatar – there are many places around Nasr Square where one can go, as long as the cook is a Muslim".

In his study on Muslim space-making in London, Fischer argues that through the production and consumption of food members of the Malay diaspora create both social spaces for networks and identities and cultural spaces through interaction among themselves and with the wider Muslim community (Fischer 2009, 4). In this sense, eating in Iranian and Afghan restaurants created a conviviality, through which Tajiks reproduced culture, made home abroad, and where they could simultaneously immerse in Dubai's cosmopolitan Muslim business worlds and sense be-

longing. All this was possible on the basis of trust, which was guaranteed by Persian-speaking migrant networks, and moreover, facilitated Tajiks engagement in embodied placemaking through, following Thomas Tweed (2006, 82) spatial metaphor of 'dwelling', included inhabiting, adopting, and building place and space.

Apart from their bodily presence, Tajiks were rather invisible in Dubai's public spaces. This was not only due to the fact that some of them preferred to dress like Arabs and adopt Arabic names. Unlike other Central Asian migrants such as Kyrgyzs and Uzbeks, who shaped Dubai's physical and linguistic landscapes through their own Turkish-named ethnic restaurants, Tajik-owned restaurants were completely absent from Dubai during the time of my fieldwork. The reason for this can be traced to the different degrees of sedimentation, or institutionalization, of Central Asian migrant networks and community life within the emirates, particularly when compared with the dynamic Tajik restaurant culture in Moscow.[65] Moreover, running a restaurant was expensive and requires the approval of a *kafil*, which was difficult to realize, as the majority of Tajiks worked in Dubai business without an official working and residence permission. Finally, the lack of Tajik visibility in Dubai's urban landscape may reinforce my previous argument that the disguising of their ethnic and national identity went hand in hand with the need to deny their inferior status as Central Asian migrants and thus to gain recognition through claiming belonging to Dubai's international Muslim business community. In this way, Afghan and Iranian restaurants formed places where sameness but also differences were produced and consumed (Sen 2014, 97). The latter, as we shall see, is closely related to halal narratives.

"We Only Eat Halal!"

Our lunchtime meeting in the Afghan restaurant got another twist when, after the food was served, one of the *kamak* around stated "We only eat halal (*halol*)". My request for clarification sparked a discussion about the proper meaning of the term halal (Arabic *ḥalāl*, designating what is 'lawful', 'permitted' in relation to the opposite Arabic term *ḥarām*, designating what is 'unlawful' and 'forbidden'), which was eventually summarized by my seatmate with an enumeration of the following indicators of Shariʿa-compliant food consumption that the group agreed upon: Food must be prepared by Muslims, it should not include pork or al-

65 Compare this with the situation in Russia, where Tajiks are very visible in Moscow's urban food scene. See https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/how-central-asian-plov-became-a-russian-favorite-42978 .

cohol, the meat should have been properly slaughtered, and the eating place must be Muslim only.

Spatially enacted identity claims concomitant with food consumption do not occur in a vacuum. As Vásquez and Knott (2014, 340) argue, the "locative work of religion involves navigating the religious and secular ecologies in which migrants settle". Thus, the authors point to the entwining of religion with spatial regimes and biopolitics, particularly with national and local modes of governmentality (Vásquez and Knott 2014, 343–344). Understanding both governmentality and biopolitics in a broader sense, I contend that Tajik migrants' practices of locating themselves through pious self-fashioning has to be reconfigured in the context of the Emirati government's attempts to promote Dubai as a global player in the halal industry and therewith brand the emirate as a tourist site appealing not only to Muslim visitors but also to long-term residents and temporary migrants (Schuss 2023). Besides, and as briefly mentioned above, many Tajiks were already familiar with the booming halal sector in Russia through labor migration to the country. Affected by this strategic communication, Tajiks were confronted with, and consumed, halal advertising campaigns already when arriving at Dubai International Airport, when watching Dubai TV, visiting shopping malls, or when looking for good places to dine.

Returning to Fischer's (2009) study, Muslim space-making in London illustrates how the term halal is displayed and involved in the production, organization, and contestation of city spaces in a diasporic context. But while Fischer's Malay protagonists dine at certificated halal restaurants and therewith reproduced a sense of national identity, the places Fazliddin and his friends frequented for lunch out did not advertise themselves explicitly as halal. It was the Tajiks who marked these places as trustworthy in this way. Moreover, visiting Afghan and Iranian restaurants, Tajiks dwelled in a Persianate world through food consumption and that way transcended the idea of cuisine as national symbol. Besides, the group demurred from going to halal-labeled branches of Kentucky Fried Chicken that opened in Dubai Deira during my fieldwork precisely because these places were perceived as tourist meeting points and therefore as full of strangers. What struck me most was that Tajiks did not care too much about labels. They rather preferred to engage with the idea of halal to articulate Muslimness. Thus, they traversed and reorganized urban space, and in this process mapped their geographies of Muslim piety and belonging in the city. As one *kamak* stated:

> In Tajikistan it doesn't matter where you eat. You know they don't serve pork in restaurants. Halal (*halol*) or not, it doesn't matter.[66] But there are all kinds of people here in Dubai, Muslims, non-Muslims. You have to be careful and need to know where you can eat the Muslim way.

Recalling the leading question of this chapter – that is, how does it happen that Tajiks become religious or proper Muslims in Dubai – this statement from a Tajik street broker illuminates how religious agency was produced in spatial processes of mapping symbolic landscapes and constructing a symbolic dwelling as a form of embodied placemaking (Vásquez and Knott 2014, 338), all in order to manage encounters with the Muslim and non-Muslim Other. In this light, pious consumption of food and eating places becomes a significant spatial practice in contestation over the meaning of urban place. While the trope of Dubai as a Muslim locale was reproduced in Tajiks' narratives about the 'good elsewhere' (see chapter one), the Muslim identity of the very place was not necessarily also sensed fully while being there. Instead, the assessment of the city's public places as sites full of strangers, and above all non-Muslims, as confirmed in another statement by a *kamak* – "We dreamed of Dubai as paradise (*bihisht*), but here we move in places full of strangers (*begona*) and sin (*gunoh*)" – required a religious intervention, a creative act of translocating in a superdiverse as well as a secular environment through producing Muslim space and place (Nasritdinov 2018).

At the same time, halal narratives linked Tajiks in Dubai to ongoing Muslim middle-class matters. The emergence and diversification of consumer practices on a global scale has given rise to a new discursive field, where Islam is objectified and the meaning of Islam and Islamic practice debated with some controversy (Fischer 2009, 7). While halal consumption became first compulsory for Muslim middle classes in Southeast Asia (Fischer 2017), the halal market became globalized and engendered a new food and lifestyle market in the Gulf, in Russia as well as increasingly shaped also social and cultural distinction in urban Tajikistan.[67] With statements such as "We only eat halal (*halol*)," Fazliddin and his friends were creating an Islamized experience of consuming ethnic food and the materiality of ethnic eating places in Dubai. Hence, when adding a religious component to public

66 This reflects the introduction of halal standards in Tajikistan around the year 2013. See http://halalfocus.net/tajikistan-certifies-halal-food/.

67 The development described in Tajikistan is based on my own observations in Dushanbe between 2012–2015. For the year 2013 see also https://halalfocus.net/tajikistan-certifies-halal-food/ last access December 19, 2023. Recent trends in Tajikistan's halal sector are described in the following online article on Tajikistan-Dagestan cooperation in the halal industry, see https://www.specialeurasia.com/2023/06/02/tajikistan-dagestan-economy/ , last access December 19, 2023.

consumption of food, Tajiks performed modernity as a style and an aesthetic of consumption, self-presentation, and a way of living that indexes bourgeois notions of urban taste, education, and competencies, as well as other forms of cultural capital. In that sense, 'eating halal' promoted social mobility beyond one's economic means and helped Tajiks in Dubai to claim religious authenticity through elaborated references to Shari'a (Tobin 2016, 9–10). Arguably, through claims for proper consumption, reform-minded Tajik Muslims like Fazliddin and Abubakr expressed their desire for a larger religious narrative, in which they could find their place, and that went far beyond the cultural nestedness, or coziness, of their Persian-speaking business networks.

As the following incident illustrates, Tajiks also employed the concept of halal as a signifier for cultural distinction. Forming part of a larger rhetorical repertoire of social and moral distinctiveness, references on halal were integral to Tajiks' efforts to position themselves in Dubai's hierarchical business worlds. Once I suggested one of my favorite Indian restaurants near Baniyas Square for a talk over lunch with two of Saidullah's street workers. "Are you really going there?" one of them asked, obviously shocked. They declined and then the following conversation occurred:

Kamak 1: No, don't go there! Better stay away, these places are forbidden (*joyi harom*)!
Manja: What's *harom* about it?
Kamak 1: Indian restaurants are dirty places (*joyi iflos*). The food is cheap, the kitchen is dirty and you can't trust the cook. None of us go there.
Manja: Why no trust in the cooks there? Indians might be also Muslims, right? And there are lots of Pakistani people around.
Kamak 1: Yes, but you know, they are migrants (*migranty*) doing dirty work
Manja: Dirty work?
Kamak 2: … working on construction sites, or in hotels they must do the laundry. Some of them are kept just like slaves (*banda*). God forbid! We don't mingle with them.

This rejection of Indian and Pakistani restaurants as proper places for eating out may be read as a direct reaction to the visibility of South Asian migrants and residents around Dubai Deira and Creekside (Vora 2013, 67–74; Elsheshtawy 2010, 90 ff) and their resulting permanent co-presence at the workplaces of Tajik *kamak* workers. Working as port-carriers, hotel staff, and market workers, migrants from India and Pakistan in Dubai Deira did not match up with the success story that Tajiks working in Dubai preferred to tell. At the same time, the disdain for South Asian eating places in Dubai Deira might be also a response to Indians' and Pakistanis' successful expansion into the fur business since the early 2010s (see chapter two).

But there is more symbolism to be picked out of the avoidance of South Asian restaurants. In associating these places with dirt and impurity despite the possible Muslim identity of their owners, service staff, and guests, Tajiks adopted, rather implicitly, hegemonic discourses on the low-skilled migrant labor force in the Emirates that overlay divisions of race, nationality, and class and generate a complex web of hierarchies as they intensify the existing cultural and socioeconomic differences between and across Emirati locals, long-term residents, and temporary migrants (Kathiravelu 2016, 62 ff). In that reading, the sense of Muslimness that Tajiks displayed through evoking a halal rhetoric emerged as an elitist concept closely linked with the valuation of proper work, through which Tajiks distinguished themselves from other Asian migrants working in the unskilled and low-income labor sector in the emirate. That all people from the Indian subcontinent, including Pakistanis, in Dubai were rather undifferentiatedly associated with low-skilled labor reflects the rather limited state of knowledge among my Tajik research partners about the highly complex and dynamic work- and class-related realities of Indian and Pakistani residents in Dubai and the wider Gulf.[68] Such one-dimensional categorizations of valuable work and social status based on ethnic or national belonging testify even more to the rather narrow radius both spatially and temporally, within which Tajiks dwelled in and moved through Dubai's business worlds and their deeper history at the time of my research.

However, as a performative act of drawing social and cultural boundaries through reference to key Islamic concepts, the rhetoric of halal played an important role in Tajik migrants' self-fashioning as knowledgeable, urbanly socialized, and cosmopolitan Muslim businesspeople in a way that differentiated them from other Asian migrants (more on this in chapter five). This form of religious locating also worked apropos the Tajik migrant community itself. Engaging in discourses and practices of proper eating, Fazliddin and his friends took a religious-cum-socioeconomic position within the contested field of 'real' or 'authentic' Islam, while with their rather elitist notions of Muslimness they differentiated themselves from the increasing numbers of uneducated, rural Tajik migrants that challenge the exclusive image of Tajik Dubai business (again, see chapter two and three).

68 Neha Vora gives an impressive and thick description of the Indian diaspora in Dubai in her book *Impossible Citizens. Dubai's Indian Diaspora*, 2013. Gennaro Errichiello provides a nuanced insight into class belonging in the Pakistani diaspora in Dubai in his article "Making Middle-Class Lives. Diaspora and Belonging among Pakistanis in Dubai", In *Routledge Handbook of Middle Eastern Diaspora,* chapter 19, London: Routledge.

"*Otdykh!*": A Car Trip to an Egyptian Restaurant

Eating out constitutes, as I have shown so far, a crucial spatial practice through which Tajiks consumed, as well as made and dwelled in Muslim place and space in Dubai. As sites, in which Tajiks could find cultural familiarity and engaged an elitist global Muslimness, Afghan and other Persian restaurants provided trust, comfort, privacy, and a sense of homeliness and belonging within a public urban landscape full of strangers, just as they simultaneously warranted temporal protection from deportation regimes. Shifting now the focus to Arab restaurants, public food consumption served not only to spatially manage urban diversity, difference, and danger. When eating the Arab way, Tajiks at the same time performed spatial memories of ideal pasts that emotionally attached them to Muslim places located outside of Dubai. These were above all the places they resided in when studying Islamic subjects in Arab countries and that therefore signified meaningful itineraries in their journeys of religious becoming. Linking space and place with nostalgic memories of joyfully lived pasts, Arab eating places formed landmarks in the emotional geographies of Tajik *kamak* workers in Dubai that connected the experience of leisure, recreation and urban mobility with physical and spiritual well-being. Transferring the meaning of leisure and travel in modernity (Williams and Kaltenborn 1999) and the related idea of consuming place (Urry 1995) to the practice of eating in Arab restaurants, the following ethnographic vignettes illustrates how Tajiks engaged in efforts to reclaim a sense of spatial authenticity, but also to fashion an exclusive religious belonging to the Arab Muslim world that was otherwise elusive and enclosed in past experiences and memories related to Muslim places elsewhere.

Three days after Fazliddin's *kamak* group got a new roommate, named Omar – a university graduate from Sudan looking for a job in Dubai – they decided to take a rest and get out of Dubai Deira with their new friend. It was a Friday, four days before Christmas, when we met at 'their' street corner; i. e., the place where they wait for Russian clients every day. The tourist season had reached its peak and the fur business was going at full pelt. Euphoric at the possibility of making a lot of money, Fazliddin and his friends had been working ceaselessly. Being busy with recruiting customers, there was almost no time for small talk with me, the ethnographer. The tension and strain associated with the Christmas season had deeply inscribed themselves in the bodies and faces of Tajik *kamak* workers.

Looking overtired and seemingly restless, Fazliddin called me in the early afternoon. Straight after Friday prayers, he, Abubakr, Omar, the new guy, and me got in a car organized by Fazliddin and drove off. The mood was good. Abubakr, who had secured a big deal and got commissioned for two fur coats that day, lounged next to me in the back, playing with his mobile phone, joking with his friends,

and then whistling a song. Fazliddin was driving, all the while trying to be a good host for both me and Omar by pointing out any sights as passed; he got infected by his friend's exuberant mood and tuned into the song. "You'd love to have a customer like that every day" he said, accelerating the vehicle. We left the daily hustle and bustle in the streets of Dubai Deira behind us and drove into the unknown. With every mile we felt freer, lighter, and more cheerful and let ourselves be lulled by the Quran recitations of a Saudi-Hofiz, a cassette Fazliddin was playing on the car radio. Suspecting Fazliddin to have chosen this to impress the new roommate, with whom he was trying to speak Arabic all the time, I asked him why he had selected this music. "I like this tape. The guy has a great voice." I asked him if he listened to it often and he replied, "Well, you have to be in the mood for it. It makes me calm and lets me shake off all the worries I carry around with me. Money, police, my family at home … Well, this *kamak* work is eating me up. Look, I'm already quite thin", Fazliddin joked and pointed to his belly, which bulges clearly under his shirt. General laughter followed promptly. "Friday afternoon is the only time in the week where we can really relax (*otdykh*) and try to get rid of all our worries", added Abubakr and, turning to Omar, he joked: "You'd better not start working as *kamak* like us. That's not for you." Later, a discussion developed about what to do with the remaining time and Fazliddin decided to take us to one of the two friends' favorite restaurants in Dubai, an Egyptian place praised by him for serving authentic (*haqiqī*) Cairo food. When we arrived, Fazliddin and Abubakr asked for the boss, negotiated a good place to sit, and ordered. Sitting over our food, a traditional Egyptian dish made of dried fava beans (*ful*) mixed with vegetables and rice, Fazliddin explained: "As students in Cairo, we used to eat this a lot. This is typical food for Cairo. I love to come here and eat because it reminds me of our student days." The rest of the day was filled with anecdotes from the two guys' Cairo years and small talk with Omar until Fazliddin's phone rang. "A client, let's go", he explained after a short phone talk and we left in a bit of a hurry to drive back. The mood was no longer as joyful, we all indulged our thoughts and digested the beans while the Hofiz filled the car again with his recitations. While Fazliddin thought about his customer waiting for him and Omar slept in the front, Abubakr showed me some apps on his phone that he was using to download Quran recitations and the online forums he frequented for religious advice. When we arrived in Baniyas Square and bid our farewells, I knew the biography of the Saudi-Hofiz and pretty much all the links on the internet that could inform me on the 'right' knowledge about Islam.

In his seminal phenomenological account of place, Edward Casey illumines the entangled connections between remembering, placing, and the self. In line with other philosophers, he sees this as a crucial basis for the thinking around being. Accordingly, remembering can be read as a form of transtemporal movement

that intimately links the human body and the self with place (Casey 2000; Cruz-Pierre and Landes 2013). However, while Casey's focus is more concerned with how practices embed people in (a given) place, Nathan Light (2018, 11), together with others, posits a heightened awareness of the vital role played by spatial agency through movement and the work of imagination in the constitution of place. Converging these anthropological and philosophical approaches, the nexus of place, imagination, and memory reveals translocal and transtemporal connectivities that shaped how Tajiks dwelled in and crossed through the moral and emotional geographies in which they situated their mobile Islamic reform projects. Take, for example, activities such as remembering – they reveal that engagement with movement can also happen while being or remaining in one place. I find these considerations helpful since they allow me to tackle the complex interplay of embodied placemaking, belonging, and piety as translocations; i. e., dynamic spatial practices of dwelling in and crossing through past, present and future, which are ongoing, elusive, and always relational to mobility, movement and the associated mutual spatial experiences of displacement and emplacement. As the car trip episode reveals, the idea of Dubai as a Muslim place is not bound to a fixed physical territory, where Tajiks went and located themselves. Making, sensing, and dwelling in Dubai as a Muslim place may also include the emotional attachment to other, far away but also meaningful places. Embodied placemaking in Dubai as a Muslim place may also include the cultivation of nostalgic memories that trigger feelings of belonging experienced in the past, but that allowed Fazliddin and his friends to attach themselves to the present that gets a spatial fix in Dubai's multiple leisure sites. In line with Massey's idea of 'a progressive sense of place' (1993) as relational and constituted by mobility, Dubai as a Muslim place is produced through its connectedness with other parts of the world. More concretely, through eating out in Arab restaurants, Tajiks connected Dubai with and thus located the emirate within the Arab Muslim world. In this reading, spatial leisure practices like eating out in Arab restaurants can be understood as translocative practices that bases on different forms of movement through space and time, through which places here (Dubai) and there (Cairo) get interconnected and therewith made meaningful. Thus, it was the combination of urban mobility and nostalgic remembering, that created meaning. Even more, as a form of embodied placemaking eating out in Arab restaurants also encompasses processes of re-territorialization of locality (Adey 2017, 98 – 99) on multiple scales.

Drawing attention to Tajik *kamak* workers' urban mobility, leisure experiences clearly also have a place for religion, which I will discuss in the rest of this chapter with reference to Thomas Tweed's theory of migrant religion as a practice of dwelling in and crossing through both space and time. Being equipped with a car was an important precondition for making an urban career, that is, to improve

one's business through enhanced mobility within the city (see chapter two). But having a car, or at least access to one, also opened up possibilities to pursue well-being beyond material success. Crossing the boundaries of close and distant urban space, at least temporarily, the positive experience of car-based mobility as a way of making leisure possible fed into Tajiks' mapping of emotional geographies in the city. Building on personal biographies and a shared religious past, Fazliddin and his friends made sense of eating in Arab restaurants through spatializing relief from work or distraction from homesickness, or through coping with uncertainty and fear while remembering joyful moments of intense piety during their time studying Islam abroad (see chapter five). Besides public food consumption as a form of nostalgic remembering, the calming effect of Quran recitations played on the car radio confirms Tweed's metaphor of religions as organic-cultural flows that may "intensify joy and confront suffering" (2006, 168). Following Tweed's tropes of 'dwelling' and 'crossing' and setting them in relation to the two themes of *close* and *distant*, Vásquez and Knott (2014, 338) in their study on migrants' religious placemaking rightly point to the fact that religion is fundamentally about memory and "topophilia" – a term borrowed from Hervieu-Leger (2000) to underpin the emotional and visceral attachment to particular places. Just as religions are in some way about making a home abroad (Tweed 2006, 80–85, 169), dwelling – here envisaged as emplacement through remembering[69] – induces attachment and belonging to different locations simultaneously.

But Tajiks' urban mobility is also about moving across boundaries and horizons. Thus, the car trip to the Arab restaurant combined different kinds of crossing. One is what Tweed terms "terrestrial" (Tweed 2006, 124–136), including the traversing of boundaries of urban spaces and places associated with work and leisure, or social boundaries as they became manifest in the temporal appropriation of a distant and exclusive Arab world. But crossing is also a change of condition that may lead to purification, healing, or insight (Tweed 2006, 152). In that sense, the car trip afforded Fazliddin and his friends a chance to cope with moments of emotional complexity and limitation in their precarious embodied existence. As such a momentary escape, the car trip condensed suffering, nostalgia, fear, or, as we will shall see in a moment, moral imperfection. However, such "corporeal crossings" also encompass traversal of the normal lifecycle, through which Tajiks reconnected with their joyful but departed youth (Tweed 2006, 143–150). Finally, the metaphor of crossing helps to understand that piety, or moments of intensified engagement in piety, is not reducible to the sphere of work, or to physical urban

69 Anthropological studies clearly point out the strong link between food, diaspora, and nostalgia (Berger 2011, 7).

sites such as mosques and endowments. Tajiks' pious agency may also involve as well as become feasible in urban spaces, temporalities as well as in moral struggles associated with leisure.

Pleasures and Piety in a Tempting Paradise

Completing my discussion about the translocative practices Tajik Muslims engaged in the context of embodied placemaking, I will now turn to the moral ambivalence inherent in Dubai as an ideal Muslim place and how this ambivalence constituted a potential ground for Tajiks' ethical self-formation. Providing good facilities for worshipping (*ibodat*) and improving one's own piety, Dubai at the same time offered multiple possibilities of being distracted from it, and from the expected religious merits (*savob*). Thus, gambling or conspicuous consumption in Dubai's shopping malls were as tempting and easily accessible as the possibility of having extramarital sexual relationships abroad. For some of the bachelor Tajiks (some of them at least temporarily) I met in Dubai, extramarital relations were easy-accessible and therefore very tempting. Flirting with female tourists, visiting Dubai's many nightclubs, and prostitutes were all accessible pleasures that could readily distracted from strenuous street work, sexual abstinence, and loneliness. Obviously, migration is not only a strategy to escape political regimes but also a way to circumvent social norms, at least temporarily. However, Dubai was not only conceived as a place where one can enjoy pleasure, luxury, and being a good Muslim at the same time (Nasr 2010, 31). As quickly as money was earned it could lose its blessing (*baraka*) and thus its sustainability, as discussed in chapter three; adultery (*zino*) was seen as a sinful action that led reform-minded Tajik Muslims in Dubai astray from the straight path (*as rohi rost daromadan*). These moral hazards were also reflected in Tajik migrants' assessment of Dubai as both paradise (*bihisht*) and hell (*duzakh*). This imaginary points to the ambivalence inherent in the city as a moral space and articulates in assessments of Dubai as the 'evil paradise' (see chapter three). Hence, moral imperfection was not seen as a contradiction of the prevailing narrative of Dubai as an ideal Muslim place to pursue reformist Islamic life projects, but instead formed a crucial part of it. As the story of Wasim, whom we first met in chapter two, reveals, a sense of moral failure both threaten and invigorated Tajik Muslims' faith, as narratives about it constituted a productive ground to reflect and work on one's pious Muslim self (Beekers and Kloos 2017b, 10). In this context, the idea of Dubai as a site for divine tests played a central role.

Being separated from his family for months was a big challenge for Wasim. "Sometimes I drink alcohol or go with women to kill time. But then I feel bad

and try to keep away from it," he confessed to me during one of our conversations on the Dubai Creek side as well as complained about the Tajik *kamak* whose company he regularly sought. His workmates were not great supporters of Wasim's attempts to withstand temptation, but instead kept inviting him out to nightclubs to disperse his gloomy thoughts. Besides free time, his work as a tourist guide also offered opportunities for moral lapses. Organizing one-day sightseeing trips for Russian tourists in his private car, Wasim confessed to hoarding phone numbers of female customers, which he sometimes used. Eventually, his sinful behavior as a husband with a wife and two children at home raised serious doubts in himself about his piety, while his critical self-evaluation further fed on his status as a former Azharite – that is, a person who knows Islam and should therefore act as role model for others in his social environment. As he explained to me, a person who has studied Islam abroad is obliged to spread knowledge not only with his mouth but should also embody this knowledge through proper deeds (*da'wa ba dahan va amal*). But while other Tajiks in Dubai Deira appreciated his *da'wa* activities because of his ability to speak well and convince people, Wasim himself suffered from a sense of the incompatibility of his religious ideals with everyday life in Dubai:

> I learned to read the Quran in Cairo. During that time, I became enthusiastic about Islam. But only once here in Dubai did mosque visits, prayers, and conversations make the Quran and all that is written in it touch my heart deeply (*dili man ba islom sukht shudagī*). All that made me understand (*fahmish*) what I'd learned in theory [...] Islam, the Quran, that's the most perfect thing. But I don't follow it. I am weak (*zayf*) [...] a sinful person (*gunohkor*).

Struggling with the lack of coherence to his actions, Wasim attributed his sense of moral failure to his own personal shortcomings and articulated a strong feeling of shame (*sharmginī*). Also, his feelings of shame prevented him from talking to other people about it but instead made him hold on to his role as a good example for his community. To channel these uncertainties, however, Wasim also linked his moral imperfection to the sinfulness inherent in Dubai's urban diversity and temptations, interpreting his related emotional upheaval as a divine test (*imtikhoni khudo*), explaining that "God sent me to Dubai to check my fear of God (*taqvo*, Arabic *taqwā*)".

In their fine-tuned works on the ambivalent relationship between the pursuit of religious coherence and experiences of moral fragmentation, anthropologists have acknowledged the impossibility of perfection and the primacy of the incomplete and inconsistent as the ontological stances from which to understand piety as an ongoing and partial process of becoming (Schielke 2015b; Schielke and Debevec 2012, among others). Accordingly, the anthropology of piety has recently begun to shift its focus to the sense of failure as a productive and important entry point for

the study of lived religion, understanding doubt and moral imperfection as co-constitutive parts of religious commitment and modes of self-fashioning (Beekers and Kloos 2017a; Pelkmans 2013b; Marsden 2005). Approaching piety as a highly ambivalent and emotional practice, these works pay attention to moments in life marked by conflict, crisis, and contradiction as the constitutive units of moral subjectivity (Beekers and Kloos 2017b; Schielke 2009; Simon 2009; Bowen 1993). I embrace the sharpened focus on the contingency of religious practice but further argue that when locating these moments of conflict, crisis, and emotional upheaval in the migratory experience of Tajiks working and living in Dubai, and in particular in the travel biographies of my interlocutors, narratives of doubt and moral failure are part and parcel of religious emplacement, or embodied placemaking, in the urban spaces of Dubai.

Following theories of religion as location, Tajiks' narratives about Dubai as both a sacred and a sinful city are aspects of religious mapping. Rendered as meaningful, Dubai was thus framed within larger projects of personal reform and renewal as well as situated in geographies of piety that locate emotions in space, particularly in the affective atmosphere of city space, and spatialize belonging and subjectivity (Low 2017, 145 ff). I will discuss the role of emotions and affect in the creation and interpretation of space and as constitutive components of relational placemaking more extensively in chapter five. For now, let me posit, with Setha Low's 'spatializing culture' approach, that a focus on emotions may yield insights into what happens to people in a specific place and into how they experience and interpret the places they dwell in and cross through (Low 2017, 145 ff).

An alluring site of moral depravity, Wasim assessed Dubai as a terrain of necessary religious intervention, above all through individual religious practice. At the same time, religious performances are themselves emplaced, as they happen within and respond to the spatial configurations in which they are embedded (Vásquez and Knott 2014, 336), here: in Dubai's diverse urban landscape. Through mosque visits, extra prayers, and almsgiving (*sadaqa*), Wasim tried to come to terms with his self-perceived sense of moral failure. A self-disciplining practice, praying was for him both an investment in his moral self-improvement and a practice of deliverance and protection from the false pathways of adultery (Beekers and Kloos 2017b, 12–13). Praying helped him to find tranquility (*oromī*), to correct his sinful behavior, and, as he explained, "to pull himself together (*sakht kapidagī*)". Thus, his religious performance reveals an assembling of internal and external patterns, according to which Wasim attributed sinning to his own personal moral shortcomings (internal) and simultaneously to external temptations (Beekers and Kloos 2017b, 12–13), when he stressed that "in Dubai, the devil lurks at every corner (*shayton kasero dar har jo intizor ast*)". Vásquez and Knott (2014) argue similarly. Applying migrants' prayers to missionary attempts that are not only a dialogue

with the divine but also an exchange between the material and non-material spheres of the urban, religious performance "generates a sacred energy that the believer can harness to purify, discipline, convert and protect the self from the temptations of the flesh," and from the "demonic powers" that dominate Dubai's super-diverse city spaces (Vásquez and Knott 2014, 333).

The same applies to almsgiving. Offering charity after a moral transgression follows the logic of personal rationalization and thus gives meaning to almsgiving as act of repentance and cleansing (Parkhurst 2014, 341). With his charitable acts, Wasim may therefore had also been responding to a sense of embodied spatial impurity. With reference on Mary Douglas's (1966) analysis on the social construction of impurity, Parkhurst in his study on charity in Dubai approaches the notion of dirt, or uncleanliness, through the lens of symbolic systems of order that allow him to connect giving, purity, and the body with the restitution of sins. Hence, for him charity is not merely an act motivated by selflessness mandated by religious doctrine. In line with Marcel Mauss's sentiments that gifts are never free, it is an act that constructs a "ritualized purity" (Parkhurst 2014, 342 – 343), which – as I would like to add – also works in the highly tempting and sinful urban environment of Dubai.

Concluding this discussion, the spatial management of moral im/perfection and im/purity can be read as a form of embodied placemaking. Wasim's struggle with his moral failures illustrates how Tajiks dwelled in – that is, inhabited, mapped, and built – Dubai as both a sacred and sinful place. Understanding such narratives of doubt and moral failure through the prism of Elaine Pena's notion of "devotional capital", Tajiks made Dubai meaningful as a Muslim place through the religious work they invested in the form of praying, mosque visits, and charity. Thus, they "inscribe[d] their histories, beliefs and aspirations on the environment" of Dubai's city space (Pena 2011, 43). Doing so, religion at the same time served as a key medium through which Tajik migrants negotiated urban diversity and temptation in their everyday life. They used religion (here: reformist Islam) as a resource through which to craft moral maps that reflect, bolster, as well as challenge the logics of these very spatial regimes (Vásquez and Knott 2014, 327). At the same time, narratives of moral failure fed into the cultivation of religious weakness as a way to participate in discourses about sincerity (*ikhlos*) and authenticity (*haqiqī*) as they circulated in Dubai's multiple business worlds (chapter three) as well as in the Muslim neighborhood spaces some Tajiks resides with their families (chapter five). Thus, narratives about moral weakness and failure became integral to Tajiks' self-fashioning as pious Dubai businesspeople instead of contradicting it.

From Embodied Placemaking to Alternative Belonging

Zooming into everyday practices of Tajik street workers' embodied placemaking in Dubai, this chapter has provided an ethnographically based spatial analysis that yields insights into how Tajiks understood Dubai as the city they lived in, how they made sense of it, defined it, and yet rendered it a Muslim place. Situating piety and the negotiation of Muslimness in the wider field of Tajiks' leisure and recreation activities and related forms of consumption, two different modes of envisioning religion (i. e., reformist Islam) become apparent. The attempt to locate piety and Muslimness within Tajiks' experiences of mobility leads to conclusions about how religion was embedded in the dialectic relation of migration, or movement, and embodied placemaking and, about how religion was co-constitutive of associated individual and collective identities and practices. Secondly, religion itself emerged as a practice of translocation through which Tajiks responded to and coped with the dynamic social, political, and economic configurations that shaped the city they dwelled in, and through which they situated themselves in larger narratives of Islamic reform and renewal, Muslim cosmopolitanism, global modernity, and a bourgeois Islam.

If we take piety as a translocative practice that covers both moments of dwelling in and crossing through multiple Muslim worlds, we see that religion can provide an important resource for Tajiks to engage in modes of belonging while in Dubai, that are translocal as well as transtemporal. This involves the crafting of morally and affectively shaped geographies that grounded Tajiks morally in the city and created new patterns of coexistence as well as of cultural boundary-making in highly diversified and tempting urban settings. Moreover, understanding leisure as going beyond the realm of business, or production, and drawing attention to processes of consumption, embodied placemaking in Dubai at the same time informs what religion *is, a*nd even more, how religion became tangible to Tajik Muslims. As the practices of visiting monumental mosques and eating out have shown, the spatial management of difference is embedded in moral endeavors that, through leisure and other consumer practices, may turn Islamic reform (*isloh*) into social projects, which translate Muslim piety into a signifier for urban middle-class belonging, and through which Tajik Muslims positioned themselves in larger fields of identity politics. Thus, Muslimness was employed as a multi-scalar category to articulate multiple forms of belonging, ranging from the emirate's vision of a global future over the international Persianate business community up to the global Muslim community (Arabic *ummah*).

Following Kathiravelu (2016, 28), the operating regimes of spatial representation that idealize and essentialize Dubai as neoliberal corporation, global city, and a metaphor for hope underpin migrants' experiences and frame how Tajiks

sensed, made, and dwelled in Dubai as a Muslim place. Switching the gaze to the identity of place, the idea of Muslim Dubai emerges as the product of multiple spatial stories in de Certeau's sense (de Certeau 1980, 115–130), by means of which Tajiks traversed and organized urban place and space by linking them together in a new and meaningful way (Fischer 2009, 3). Furthermore, places are always sensed differently due to varying personal, historical, political, and other contexts. The narrative of Dubai as a Muslim place therefore opens up a specific situated 'Tajik' perspective on Dubai migration and the role that religion played in it for the Tajiks with whom I have talked during my fieldwork. For Muslims in Egypt, for example, Dubai, and the wider Gulf, is a site associated with highly contradictory sentiments. While a familiar space due to its Arabness and therefore attractive for women's migration, for pious male Egyptians Dubai is rarely an ideal destination as it is associated with immoral hypocrites, ruthless exploitation of workers, as well as with individualistic and materialistic features (Schielke 2012, 180). In general, studies on Gulf migration hardly acknowledge faith and piety as a resource for either mobilizing or preventing migration, or for building alternative forms of identification and belonging in the region. Only as a very recent response to that lack of research, the ethnographic gaze has switched to practices of religious conversion in order to tackle how Asian and European residents experience Dubai and other places in the Gulf beyond the framework of labor, and how with religious conversion they engage cosmopolitan sensibilities that give rise to notions of belonging that are not locally rooted but rather globally oriented (Ahmad 2017; Schoorel 2016).

In a similar way, this chapter has shed light on the still underexplored role of religion in migrant placemaking, above all as a key medium for migrants to negotiate translocal political regimes and various accompanying forms of governmentality in their everyday life (Vásquez and Knott 2014, 327). Therewith, the ethnographies presented here also speak to an evolving body of scholarship that focuses not only on religious dynamics. This book rather seeks to approach Gulf migration beyond the framework of labor (Ahmad 2012b). More precisely, my spatial analysis of the religion–migration nexus broadens the discussion about alternative forms of identification and belonging in the Gulf that moves beyond the common state–citizen nexus of power. These alternative belongings transcend conventional analytical approaches which consider migrant experience in the Gulf merely through the lens of working regimes and the related conditions, thereby reducing the presence of foreign residents just to the labor they carry out and to the non-citizen status they hold (Ahmad 2012b; Vora and Koch 2015).

Coming back to the argument elaborated in chapter two, Tajiks in Dubai challenge conventional analytical categories on the basis of which Gulf migration is predominantly studied. As *kamak* workers, middlemen, traders, Muslim business-

men or small-scale entrepreneurs, Tajiks stand outside the mainstream of technologies and mechanisms of the Gulfian migration industry (Gardner 2012), as they do not fit into the dominant category of contract workers or migrants. At the same time, acting overwhelmingly outside the *kafāla* system of migrant sponsorship, Tajiks hardly had any access to the related set of relationships that fundamentally shape foreign residents' experience in the Gulf. Accordingly, mosques, endowments, and ethnic restaurants served as sites of possibility for encountering Arabs and engaging in notions of Arabness alternatively to the *kafāla* sponsorship system. These rather exceptional everyday sites provided a limited, yet filtered access to Arabs' worlds in Dubai and hence set the conditions for how Tajiks engaged in the orientalization of Arab Islam, culture, nation, and Emirati governmentality, as argued in chapter two. The associated idealization of Arabs, as the better Muslims, again framed how Tajiks perceived and constructed Dubai as a Muslim place. Furthermore, it framed how they desired to belong to this Muslim place alongside the everyday worlds of work they dwelled in and crossed through, in which they, as we have seen so far, merely relied on Persian-speaking business networks. In other words, eating in Afghan restaurants was what they do, while belonging to the Arabs' world was what they desired, dreamed of, and talked about.

As anthropological studies illustrate, even though Dubai's foreign residents have no access to citizenship, they engage in alternative forms and claims of belonging and identification in the Gulf that are not articulated through labor alone. These forms of belonging are either based on the Gulf's cosmopolitan past (Ahmad 2012a; Osella and Osella 2012), or they are linked to the ideology of contemporary Gulf nation states. Vora and Koch, for instance, set out a nuanced view of forms of sociopolitical belonging in the Gulf that they term "everyday inclusions" or "belongings *despite* exclusion", and which they understand not merely as a form of urban belonging but as a scaled-up type of state-based affinity (Vora 2013, 540; Vora and Koch 2015, 544, 547). By reference to national spectacles and cultural investment in art and museums – one could add monumental mosques – the authors question the idea that Gulfian nationalism is only for nationals and speak of a "civic nationalism" that aims to "instill a sense of gratitude for the opportunities for personal advancement that the local leadership is said to grant non-citizens," as it invites these non-citizens in the Gulf to imagine or feel a state-based territorial belonging in the region (Vora and Koch 2015, 547–549; see also Koch 2016). Non-citizens are therefore integral to the production of national imaginaries that rely upon the idea of a citizen 'self' purified from the non-citizen 'Other'. In this reading, when engaging in leisure activities such as public food consumption or visiting religious tourist sites, Tajiks actively contributed to the naturalization of racial, national, and other categories that circumscribe the politics and geographies of identity and belonging in the Gulf.

These discussions confirm belonging as a more flexible concept than identity, while their focus is on the elusive desire to really and truly belong (Probyn 1996). However, the majority of studies on alternative forms of belonging in the Gulf refer either to communities and places with longstanding connections in the region, predating the oil boom, for example through trade, kinship ties, and marriage relations (Osella and Osella 2012; Ahmad 2012a), or to the negotiation of diaspora identities among middle- and upper-middle class South Asians in Dubai (Vora 2013). Tajiks, in contrast, have no direct recourse to thick or sedimented historical connections in the region that might link them to exclusive Arab business worlds. Instead, they rely on Afghan and Iranian mediators. Accordingly, and understanding embodied placemaking with Vikki Bell (1999, 3) in terms of working or investing to achieve a certain sense of belonging, the spatial stories presented here reveal Tajiks' "longing for belonging" (Bell 1999, 8). The notion of Muslimness Tajiks sensed when visiting spectacular and other mosques, or when they went out for public dining generated a horizon of aspiring and feeling of belonging that inherits a cosmopolitan perspective. Albeit fragile, according to Beck the latter inspires an "alternative imagination, an imagination of alternative ways of life and rationales, which include the otherness of the other" (Beck 2002, 18). I would go further and state that the cosmopolitanism Tajiks engaged in while in Dubai through practices of embodied placemaking did not only include the otherness of the Other but first of all embraced their own 'peripheral otherness'.

Another practice of material mediation, just as important as consuming food and visiting eating places, engaging in charity, or adopting Arab names, is housing. This will be in the main subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 5
Housing, Home, and the Good Muslim Life

Spatial reconfigurations of Muslim piety and belonging in Dubai's multiple business worlds can only be partially understood if we focus our analysis primarily on male workspaces in Dubai Deira. As this chapter will reveal, the organization of work in the fur business, related work ethics, and professional identities tied to notions of Muslimness closely resonate with Tajik migrants' residential practices and family lifestyles in the UAE. Put differently: Housing preferences, home-making practices, and neighborly cohabitations are closely intertwined with the cultivation of business networks, the formation of pious subjectivities, and the fashioning of migrant identities. Arguably, social integration into Dubai business life is largely made possible through Tajiks' participation in neighborhood sociabilities in the UAE. This observation places Tajik migrant women and their embodied religious placemaking at the center of research. Arguably, through homemaking in the UAE, Tajik migrants gain spatial agency. They actively participate in the shaping of Dubai as the place they imagine it to be, namely an ideal Muslim place to live a good Muslim life.

Exploring migrant experiences of dwelling, this chapter takes the transitive nature of 'home' abroad and its related volatile Muslim identity as the point of departure. As will be shown, while Tajiks in Dubai tried to moor their Muslim homing desire through housing preferences in the UAE, the related translocative practices of 'dwelling' and 'crossing' are grounded in a spatial context that is marked by political and economic precariousness, and by an ambivalent and contingent cosmopolitanism caused by rapidly changing urban neighborhoods with a culturally and socially diverse population. Accordingly, Dubai forms only one temporal fixed point among other places in the moral and emotional geographies in which Tajik migrants have situated their personal projects of Islamic reform.

Extending the discussion on *hijrah* in chapter one, Muslim mobility implies not only spatial movement, but also settlement. In the context of Dubai migration, Tajik Muslim families' re-settling in the UAE is determined by a strict migration policy rooting in the *kafāla* system, which limits the integration of non-citizens into the economic sphere. Speaking with Nera Vora (2013), Tajiks are tied to the status of 'impossible citizens', as they can only settle temporarily and depend on the usefulness of their labor. While the *kafāla* system creates highly uneven living and working conditions as well as hierarchies of migrant status (Kanna 2011), all non-citizens in the UAE share the state of "permanent temporariness" (Vora 2013, 3). UAE's migration regime goes hand in hand with an official rhetoric that promotes a highly ambivalent cosmopolitan image of the Arab Emirates (Vora

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111343518-008

2013, 36–64). While emphasizing diversity, tolerance and happiness as characterizing Dubai's and the entire UAE's cosmopolitan nature, the notion of the UAE as "second home" or "a home away from home" points to the temporariness of non-citizens belonging to the Arab Emirates (Pagès-El Karoui 2021, 175; Elsheshtawy 2020). Arriving in the UAE, Tajiks in Dubai therefore embarked on highly elusive endeavors of placemaking. The new Muslim home abroad is temporary from the outset and therefore in any case precarious and transient. Accordingly, how was community-building and belonging pursued, sensed, and shaped in the transitory context of everyday migrant life in the UAE? How did Tajiks forge and experience social integration despite the UAE's official exclusion of non-citizens? And, setting out with a notion of *hijra* as relocation from and to contexts where identity politics are highly spatialized, how did Tajiks manage social integration and construct an alternative sense of belongings despite their official non-integration? Answering this question, Tajik women's engagement in multiple forms of emotion work provides a productive lens to trace how migrant homemaking links ethical self-formation with place, piety, and class. The reconfiguration of Muslim identity and the construction of alternative migrant ways to sense belonging are considered here as relational processes. Arguably, when Tajiks engaged in alternative ways of belonging in Dubai, this was their response, firstly, to the official branding of Dubai and the wider UAE as a cosmopolitan place; secondly, to the exclusionary migrant regime and migrant hierarchies in the UAE; thirdly, to previous experiences of racial discrimination of Tajik migrants in Russia; and finally, to a secular regime at home that criminalizes deviant Muslim practice.

Women's Worlds

Focussing on Tajik women's everyday life experiences and their pursuit of the good Muslim life in the UAE, this chapter complements academic representations of Dubai migration based on male migrant experiences alone and which predominantly address male issues. Without question, Tajik businesses in Dubai are mainly driven by men's mobility. In the early 2000s, the majority of Tajik migrants were seasonal workers; bachelors who tried to earn as much money as possible in the fur business in a limited period of time in order to finance their upcoming marriage or the house they were building for their families back home. A closer look, however, reveals that Tajik women were creative actors in Dubai's business fields, too. The women I met in the Arab Emirates were primarily occupied with setting up a new home for themselves and their families. While this required a high degree of emotion work to manage one's own feelings in order to build a personal relationship with the new place of living, and while this was associated with

activities in the area of affective labor that aimed at building social relations and shaping collective subjectivies, in the course of their homemaking endeavours, these women crossed multiple boundaries, connected separated worlds, and mediated between the worlds of work and living. In a nutshell: Building affective communities of shared belonging, Tajik women acted as 'middle women' and contributed to their husband's Dubai business. The Tajik women I met in the UAE were either older women involved in long-distance trade between China, Turkey, Russia, and the UAE, those who came to Dubai only for short-term business trips, or women who traveled with their families to Dubai as tourists. Women with a longer residence perspective were those who had followed their husbands to Dubai to manage family life abroad. This chapter is about the lifeworlds of this last group of women.

A formal employment contract entailed temporary residence permits and provided access to the Arab Emirates' housing market. Tajiks whose Dubai businesses were prosperous enough invested their profits in rent for a family apartment in the neighboring emirates of Ajman, Al-Ain, and Sharjah, where at the time of my fieldwork property prices for two or three-room apartments were more affordable than in Dubai. Obviously, economic success enabled investment in livelihoods that encompassed, not only economic goals, but also the realization of family well-being. As a result, many Tajiks in Dubai invested in coordinating business and family life, thus opening up translocal spaces for realizing a good Muslim life abroad, while at the same time staying connected with their Tajikistani home through business and family relations (Mirzoev and Stephan-Emmrich 2018, 107–109). Take Saidullah: After buying an apartment in Sharjah in 2007, he relocated his family there from their previous home in the outskirts of Dushanbe. However, while working as a manager and middleman in the fur business in Dubai Deira, he maintained his connections to family members and relatives back home. Saidullah expanded his side job, working for a tire care company, to local markets in Tajikistan, engaging close relatives as middlemen and business representatives in his home country. In addition, the family visited their relatives at home every year during the hot summer months and the Ramadan month (*mohi ramazon,* Arabic *ramaḍān*). Close ties with family members left behind were also maintained when pregnant wives returned to the parental household to give birth, as in the case of Saidullah's wife, or when medical treatment was needed in the event of an unfulfilled desire to have children.

Providing an opportunity to pursue the good Muslim life abroad, bringing the family to the Arab Emirates also created new uncertainties and vulnerabilities due to the increased dependence on migration regimes, compounded by global labor market fluctuations in the Arab Emirates. Arriving in the new place, the accompanying wives had to re-locate themselves and their families in these contingent

translocal lifeworlds, reconfiguring their perception of home, Muslimness, womanhood, and family. Following Tajik women's efforts to make Sharjah a new home for their families, this chapter traces the multiple ways in which women's emotional attachment and moral binding to past and present places and communities intertwined with their striving for ethical self-formation, articulation of belonging to different places, and formation of pious subjectivities. Arguably, Tajik women had to negotiate their religious aspirations, emotions, and experiences along other needs and pursuits in everyday life, including consumption, urban middle-class sensibilities, and the articulation of class belonging.

The following accentuation on the formative role of women in Dubai business sharpens a critical view of how women have been portrayed in studies on Gulf migration to date. If at all, the experiences of migrant women are discussed almost exclusively with a special focus on trafficking, sex work, and forms of domestic care such as elder and childcare, representing women from Asia as passive and exploited working bodies (for a critical discussion of these representations see Mahdavi 2011). Studies on Gulf migration in general are mostly limited to the realm of labor, while ignoring other activities and concerns that shape migrant life, status, and experience in the Gulf (Ahmad 2012b, 21–23). As accompanying housewives, Tajik women were less involved in forms of gainful employment, but instead engaged in affective labor, which, in addition to maintaining social relations in and outside the family, directly involved the building and shaping of communities and collective subjectivities (Hardt 2015, 425). Centering around spatial practices of housing and homemaking in the UAE, affective labor provided the main context in which Tajik women pursued their Islamic reform projects and crafted their pious Muslim selves.

This focus is a critical response to the observation that in Gulf studies the realm of migrants' social production, which covers activities carried out mostly by women such as domestic work, child care, or, particularly in the case of translocal family lives, affective labor, has been ignored so far, and is only slowly establishing itself as an independent field of research (Ahmad 2012b; Osella 2010, Osella and Osella 2008). The same goes for migrant women's engagement in cosmopolitan religious practices and communities. Attiya Ahmad's recent (2017) fine-tuned ethnography on everyday conversions among South Asian women in Kuwait has revealed that women's experiences in the Gulf are shaped by a broad set of processes that extent beyond the realm of migrant labor and are embedded in larger fields of transregional Islamic reform movements. Arguably, the realm of affective labor provides a differentiated picture of Tajiks' translocal livelihoods in Dubai, of practices of female domesticity and respectability, and of women's striving for ethical self-formation, in social, moral, and spiritual terms – all aspects crucial to under-

standing how the 'good Muslim life' was imagined, pursued, and assessed by Tajiks living and working in the UAE.

I shall take Tajik women's self-fashioning in response to the uncertainties that shaped their everyday life in the Emirates as a starting point to illustrate how the cultivation of pious selves was entwined with spatial practices of making a new home in Sharjah. Homemaking, I would argue, enabled Tajik women to pursue moral and spiritual progress and simultaneously articulate a sense of belonging and attachment to the Muslim neighborhood spaces they dwelled in. Thus, I employ *mapping*, *building*, and *inhabiting* as the three overlapping spatial processes of what Thomas Tweed (2006, 80) in his theory on migrant religion has termed the "kinetics of homemaking" (*dwelling*) and "of itinerancy" (*crossing*). Following key readings in the study of migrant religious placemaking, main attention is given to Tajik women's multiple embedding across networked spaces and their spatial management of urban diversity, difference, and belonging (Vásquez and Knott 2014). Two findings are guiding here: Firstly, Tajik women's experiences in the Gulf were not limited to the private space of home. They actively participated in and shaped the urban public space through involvement in self-organized migrant sociabilities centering around religious infrastructures like neighborhood mosques. Thus, Tajik women's religious placemaking intertwined the domestic and neighborhood space in Sharjah (i.e., the women's world) with the realm of work and business in Dubai (i.e., the men's world). Secondly, the common narrative among women in Dushanbe who returned from Dubai, "In Dubai, I became an Islamic woman," reveals that migrant women's religious self-fashioning was embedded in cosmopolitan moments of shared neighborly sociabilities in which reformist Muslim piety was re-configured as a signifier for class-belonging.

Places More Muslim Than Dubai: Sharjah

We reached Saidullah's new home late at night. Wrapped in darkness, three twenty-story apartment blocks no more than four or five years old, crowded close together next to a busy road lined by a construction site on the left and a spacious park with green areas and playgrounds on the right. Following the invitation of Saidullah's wife to visit the family's new home, I found myself in one of Sharjah's typical residential housing complexes, quickly built out of the desert ground in order to satisfy the hunger for affordable housing for the increasing number of foreign residents who tried to find their place in Dubai's booming economy. Directly opposite the buildings rose the slender and spotlighted minaret of a small mosque. "Here it is," Saidullah explained, and pointed to the illuminated windowfront directly opposite the mosque as he parked his car in front of the house entrance. In

the marble paneled foyer decorated with golden stucco we walked past the porter, who greeted us in a friendly manner, to the elevator, which, it seems, was already waiting for us. Buzzing quietly, it took us to the 17th floor, where Mehrigul, Saidullah's wife, and their two sons awaited us curiously. After a friendly welcome, I was invited into a comfortable apartment equipped with three bright, spacious rooms, a modern kitchen with a dishwasher and electrical kitchen appliances, and a bathroom with hot running water, bathtub and washing machine. While showing me the rooms, Mehrigul raved about the modern look of the apartment, above all the new furnishings and the technical equipment in kitchen and bathroom that, I thought to myself, their relatives and many other families in Tajikistan could probably only dream of.[70] Later at dinner, when I asked why they had decided on this apartment, Mehrigul explained that the decisive factor had been the appealing location of the residential area in a majority Muslim neighborhood with a mosque nearby that had prompted her husband to rent the apartment and shift the center of the family's life from his home village in Tajikistan to that urban neighborhood in Sharjah: "Almost only Muslims live here. We can live a godly life here. My husband is trading (*tijorat*) in Dubai, the children study in a Muslim school (*maktabi musulmonī*), with many mosques nearby, and our neighbors are Muslims too. Nobody bothers us here!"

The family's lifestyle followed a general housing trend, which had tied the two neighboring emirates closely together in terms of demographics, transportation, and infrastructure. While Saidullah spent most of the day in the showroom of his fur shop at Dubai's Baniyas Square and commuted by car between his business in Dubai and family life in Sharjah, his wife Mehrigul stayed with the two sons in Sharjah. When the influx of foreigners into Dubai inflated rental prices in the core city area, foreign residents soon found apartments in the neighboring Sharjah and Ajman emirates just as appealing as in central Dubai. There had been an ebb and flow of residents between Dubai and Sharjah based on rents.[71] Simultaneously, infrastructure in Sharjah had improved as a result of investments in road connectivity and new tourist attractions. Sharjah eventually transformed from the 'bedroom' of Dubai into a core part of an all-inclusive urban conurbation of the Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman emirates.[72]

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70 Not all Tajik families living in Dubai could afford such generous living conditions. However, the modern equipment of the apartments was similar.

71 When rents rose in Dubai, people moved to Sharjah and when they dropped they moved back to Dubai. See https://www.agbi.com/articles/dubai-residential-property-prices-surpass-2014-peak/ last check December 18, 2023, as well as https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/property/sharjah-rents-level-off-after-increases-as-dubai-market-cools-1.115474, last check December 18, 2023.

72 http://blog.euromonitor.com/2014/03/what-is-the-true-size-of-dubai.html.

The dynamic entanglements between the two urban places aside, what made Sharjah so attractive as a place of residence for Tajik migrants pursuing a good Muslim family life?

According to studies on urban living, the pursuit of a good life is often attached to physical environments and infrastructures that support activities important for social connection, self-fulfillment, security, as well as emotional well-being, including religious sensibilities (Çavdar 2016). Sharjah offered all this together, and more. It was above all the Islamic identity of the emirate that had been successfully branded by the political elite in the course of urban investments and strategic development projects, and that attracted reform-minded Tajik families to dwell there. Regarded as the UAE's cultural capital, Sharjah was elected as the Islamic culture capital in 2014. The emirate hosts the Sharjah Museum of Islamic civilization and the newly built Islamic theme park.[73] Besides, strict regulations of alcohol consumption, a strong decency law, as well as strict dress codes in the public sphere resonated with the Muslim majority residents in the area and underlined the Muslim identity of that place. But Shariʿa-compliant public life also helped Sharjah increase the number of Islamic tourists visiting the Gulf.[74]

Tajiks followed these developments closely and embraced both the narrative of Dubai's global cosmopolitanism and Sharjah's Islamic identity, although they did so in situated and highly selective ways. On the one hand, Tajik families engaged in shopping activities, visiting spectacular Friday mosques that also operated as tourist and heritage sites, and consumed other urban lifestyle offers in both emirates. On the other, in pursuit of a good Muslim life abroad, Tajik migrants praised the neighborly, relatively homogeneous Muslim environments that Sharjah considered more morally safe than the culturally and ethnically diverse and tempting urban spaces of Dubai's Baniyas Square. In addition, with their dense religious infrastructure including multiple Friday and neighborhood mosques, AWQAF-sponsored Islamic learning centers, as well as Muslim migrant schools, Sharjah's Muslim neighborhoods created perfect conditions for engaging in an urban Islamic lifestyle, which Saidullah and Mehrigul could realize neither in Tajikistan nor in Dubai. At the time of my field research in the UAE, it was particularly members of *makhsum* families like Mehrigul who were attracted to Sharjah and settled in the close vicinity. Another case was 23-year-old Ramziya, who with her two sons had followed her husband to Dubai, who had gained a foothold in the second-hand car business, to arrive recently in Mehrigul's neighborhood. The two women became close friends. During a joint afternoon meeting in Ramziya's still almost

73 https://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/general/sharjah-s-islamic-park-becoming-popular.

74 http://www.khaleejtimes.com/article/20140503/ARTICLE/305039925/1002.

empty new apartment, a conversation developed about the presence of many *makhsum* families in the neighborhood:

Ramziya: Yes, we [*makhsum* people] are many here, because here the government does not force us to do forbidden things (*kori harom*).

Manja: Forbidden things, what do you have in mind?

Mehrigul: Most of us come here to do trade (*tijorat*). This is the best form of work as the prophet Muhammad himself was a trader.

Ramziya: Well, trading is proper work as there is no corruption (*porakhūrī*). But we came here also because they have good Muslim schools. I really want to place my sons there, later.

Mehrigul (explaining to me, the ethnographer): Our sons go to a Muslim school for migrants. Girls and boys are taught separately there. At home in Tajikistan, we were forced to send our daughters to schools where they sit in the same room with boys. This is against the rules of Islam, and that is why my father took me out of school and taught me at home when I was young.

As argued in chapter one, Islamic reform among Tajiks was above all an aspirational project of proper Islamic education. Saidullah and Mehrigul had found in their son's Muslim migrant school an institution that offered the 'right' knowledge in terms of good-quality textbooks and Arab teachers from Egypt and Syria. Sharjah's schooling infrastructures also provided their two sons with a modern education, combining secular and religious subjects and offering international language classes such as English and Arabic, together with elementary courses on Islamic religion.

Mehrigul's comment on the lack of government interference was not limited to not forcing them to do religiously forbidden things, such as involving them in corrupt practices or disrespecting gender segregation in public spaces. Her comment also implied a critique of Tajikistan's state secularism and strict policy against private Islamic teaching in Muslim households (*sabaq*), as described in chapter one. The new "Law on Parental Responsibility in Bringing Up their Children" (Jumhurii Tojikiston 2011) hit religious families hard, since for them the transmission of knowledge within the family and wider kin group provided the fundamental basis for the preservation of collective religious identity, a family's religious heritage, along with social and symbolic capital, together with a modest but stable income (Abashin 2006, 273). As a consequence, the fulfilment of the religious obligation to pass on Islamic knowledge to family members and the wider community had been shifted to the new home in Sharjah; a form of translocation of religious practice that enabled Mehrigul to teach Arabic language and Quranic recitation (*tajwīd*) to the daughters of other migrant women in their new neighborhood. In Tajikistan, she could only have done so at the risk of imprisonment; a political cir-

cumstance that has motivated many reform-minded Muslims in Tajikistan to migrate to Dubai.

The conversations I had with Tajik women in Sharjah revealed once more that their assessment of place was always relational. The 'Muslimness' of Sharjah was constructed, not only in relation to the restrictive conditions at home in Tajikistan; Dubai was another important point of reference.

What struck me most during my multi-sited fieldwork was that in their narratives about Dubai migration, Tajiks did not differentiate between the two locations Dubai and Sharjah, unless it was about the evaluation of the two sites as Muslim places suitable for the pursuit of Islamic life projects that involved the whole family. Tajik migrants did not entirely embrace Dubai's image as global cosmopolitan city. The image was cracked precisely where the official narrative promoted diversity, openness, and tolerance as promising features of Dubai's urban superdiversity. A more ambivalent assessment of Dubai's identity was obviously part of a religious narrative that served reform-minded Muslim sentiments when Tajik men and women portrayed Dubai as an untamed, liminal and therefore morally dangerous urban site (see chapter four). A good place for prosperous business activities in a cosmopolitan economic environment and a good place for men to work, Dubai's cosmopolitan urbanity was associated with unpredictability caused by strangers, prostitutes, and spatial impurity, and was therefore to be avoided by wives and children.

In contrast, the good infrastructure of Sharjah's residential areas (mosque, parks, shopping malls, halal shops nearby) and their relatively homogenous neighborhoods supported the feeling of living in a secure (i. e., morally safe) urban Muslim space in which Mehrigul's and other Tajik families could move freely outside the apartment, use urban lifestyle facilities, and fully engage Islam as a method (Arabic *manhaj*), i. e., an all-inclusive system of comprehensive reality that allows the pious to transform their whole way of life accordingly (Lauzière 2016, 201). While Saidullah was involved in the religious economies of his fur business in Dubai, the family's new life in Sharjah allowed Mehrigul to dedicate herself to Islamic reform as an integral part of her daily domestic work and efforts in making a home for herself and the family in a foreign urban place.

In this context, mosques and their related social environments provided a major anchor point where the moral and emotional geographies of Tajik women's homemaking in Sharjah came together. Approaching reformist Muslim piety as a spatial practice of mooring in the context of volatile, transient projects of making home abroad, the next subchapters explore Tajik women's involvement in the production and cultivation of strong affective attachments to places in Sharjah and beyond. Sharing specific Muslim sensibilities played an important role in the women's mooring: They fostered communality, affirmed their lifestyle, and en-

compassed a sense of belonging based on 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011). This in turn articulated a sense of belonging to the middle-class. Three aspects stand to be explored: How did Tajik women spent their free time properly, i. e., religiously meaningfully? How did they stayed tuned to their religious studies? And how was women's affective labor framed materially in the context of neighborhood sociabilities?

Mosques and Mooring

After my first night in Saidullah's family, I was awakened in the early morning by the soft melodic voice of the muezzin of the neighborhood mosque directly beneath my window. His call to morning prayer (Arabic *ṣalāt al-fajr*) carried up to the 17th floor, put me in a pleasant dream state and let me feel safe and sound. Muffled noises from the bedroom reached my ear. Saidullah got up, went to the bathroom to perform the ritual ablutions, while Mehrigul woke the two sons. Like every morning, the boys prepared to go to the mosque together with their father to perform the morning prayer before they left for school. Meanwhile, Mehrigul prayed in the apartment and used the time between morning prayer and breakfast preparations to immerse herself in the recitation of some Quranic verses she needed to prepare for the lessons she had been taking in the adjacent mosque. After having returned with her husband from their Islamic studies in Sana'a, she was no longer able to increase, or even maintain, the advanced level of her Quran recitation abilities, which was very upsetting for her, as we will see later. Saying goodbye to both sons, who accompanied their father to the nearby bus station, from where the school bus took them to a school for Muslim migrants, Mehrigul went to bed to sleep until shortly before noon prayer (Arabic *ṣalāt al-ẓuhr*). When she got up to look after me, the meanwhile hungry guest, Saidullah had already been working in his fur shop at Baniyas Square for one or two hours before attending noon prayer with his business partners in a prayer room near his fur coat show room. After a little chat with me at the kitchen breakfast table, Mehrigul continued the Quran studies she had started earlier in the morning, and later prepared a hot meal for her sons, whom she expected to return from school in the early afternoon.

In the context of mobile lives, housing is imbued with the need for mooring, which bears a strong meaning of home. A process involving practices of placemaking, the feeling to be at home is an achievement that constitutes itself through multiple lived and imagined relationships between people and places. These relationships create a sense of belonging and attachment (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 1). In this context, emotions matter, as they are integral to the way we imagine, sense

and constitute the places we dwell in, move through and that form our mobile selves (Conradson and McKay 2007, 169). Taking the co-constitute relationship between mobility, subjectivity and home as anchor, we can think both Muslim piety and belonging as emerging from as well as are being shaped through affective attachment to migrant places.

For women like Mehrigul, Zamira and Ramziya, who followed their husbands from their (mostly rural) homes to a fully new and strange urban environment, lacking feelings of familiarity, safety, and comfort were cushioned through a heightened engagement with religious practice, drawing on an easily accessible urban infrastructure. All four Tajik families I visited during my fieldwork in the UAE inhabited apartment blocks in Sharjah closely situated to a mosque. During a walk with Ramziya through her new neighborhood, we passed two neighborhood mosques. Ramziya praised the new living situation, which allowed the family to organize their daily routine around prayer times, but later admitted that she would have preferred an apartment near the park because of the children. But Iskandar wanted to be near a mosque, so that the children would get used to praying at an early age. Obviously, a crucial prerequisite for living a good Muslim life, a mosque at a walking distance allowed the pious to fully align the daily rhythm of family and work life to the five prayer times – a lifestyle that was difficult to realize in Tajikistan due to the lack of a dense mosque infrastructure and a secular policy that securitizes Islam by restricting the performance of prayer in public spaces and prohibiting children under the age of 18 from attending mosques.[75] Meanwhile, I found out only later that religious ideals and daily life did not always coincide, when Ramziya complained that her husband had not managed to go to the mosque with his two sons even once so far, and that the entire upbringing was on her shoulders alone, with no playground nearby.

Infrastructures evoke ideas of inclusion and integration and are thus an effective means to serve the common good (Di Nunzio 2018, 1). For migrant women like Mehrigul and her friend Zamira, Sharjah's neighborhood mosques facilitated active participation in urban public life and socializing with other Muslim residents in the neighborhood. Quranic courses in the neighborhood mosques were thus crucial for women to achieve a sense of belonging despite the unfamiliar urban environment. In short: The neighborhood mosques were where the women moored their elusive desire for a Muslim home. However, if one thinks infrastructure as an assemblage of people, practices, objects, ideas, and institutions on which both "the realization and distribution of pattern of connectivity, movement, flow and presence are dependent"

75 See the "Law on Parents' Responsibility in Bringing Up their Children" (Jumhurii Tojikiston 2011).

Fig. 9 und 10: Two neighborhood mosques in Sharjah located in close proximity to apartment blocks. Photo: Manja Stephan, 2014.

(Di Nunzio 2018, 2), 'crossing' becomes obvious as a central spatial practice of migrant mooring. Take Mehrigul's engagement in Quranic piety as a translocative practice, through which she, like other Tajik women, situated herself in the emotional and moral geography of her homing desire. Thus, the making of pious subjectivities happened in relation to the contingencies, ruptures, and emotional upheavals of Dubai migration. Coping with loneliness, strangeness, and homesickness, the continuation of her Quranic studies became crucial for Mehrigul to keep up the high level of pious engagement with religion she had experienced back in her natal home and later during her Islamic studies in Yemen. Taking Quranic piety as a process that creates meaning through 'crossing', two factors are relevant: first, the transtemporal dimension of mooring by connecting the new home with homes inhabited in the past, and second, leaving the comfort zone of one's own cultural self by participating in public urban life. Both processes form part of migrant women's emotion work, providing the foundation for these women's engagement in affective community building and shaping collective subjectivity among Muslim migrant women in Sharjah.

Having grown up in the rural multi-generation household of a *makhsum* family highly-respected in her village, Mehrigul was constantly surrounded by rel-

atives and her father's and mother's disciples, as both gave Quran lessons in their house. She also recalled her time in Yemen, where she studied with Saidullah after they got married, as one in which she was constantly surrounded by fellow students while engaging in Quranic piety. Against this background, her sudden feeling of loneliness in the new place of residence became a crucial emotional challenge that she was able to overcome by joining neighborly women's Quranic study circles:

> In the first weeks here (in Sharjah), I felt incredibly lonely, and so scared. My husband leaves early morning for work and returns very late the evening. The children are at school. Suddenly I felt alone at home. For the first time in my life. I have suffered terribly and got depressive. Eventually, I went to the mosque across the street. For quite a while I watched the women from the window going in the mosque. First, I dared but then went, all alone, imagine, and started to attend a *tajwīd* (Quranic recitation) course. I love to go there two times a week. It helped me get back my serenity. I feel so much better now. Lighter. And I can concentrate more intensively on my faith (*imon*).

Ramziya's memories of the early days after moving to Sharjah were characterized by similar experiences. However, her narrative emphasizes her hope that in Sharjah, and because of the free time she was promised by other Gulf-experienced women in Tajikistan, she would have the opportunity to continue to engage in religious studies as intensively as she had done in Egypt. Sent by her mother to a madrasa in Cairo for five years to gain a firm grasp of Islam (*islom-ro sakht kapidagī*), she studied Arabic language (*lughati Arabī*), Quran, *tafsīr* and *tajwīd* there until her marriage to Iskandar. Like Mehrigul, Ramziya remembered that stage in her life as an extraordinarily intense time that helped her to increase her piety. "We were kept very strictly, there were no distractions like music, miniskirts, or shopping", she enthused, while realizing that raising her two little sons (two and three years old) alone in her new place of longing, Sharjah, was a new challenge to her pious life project.

In his work on Cuban migrants in Miami, Thomas Tweed illustrates how religion as a locative practice orients pious migrants in and across time and space. For him, religions function as a watch and compass and, involving organic processes and cultural practices, allow devotees "to map, construct, and inhabit ever-widening spaces: the body, the home, the homeland, and the cosmos" (Tweed 2006, 83–84). Tweed's theory is helpful in understanding how Mehrigul's and Ramziya's Quranic engagement relates to the moral, emotional, and spiritual geographies of home and homemaking in which the two women situated their and their husband's Islamic life projects. The migrant projects of Islamic reform meanwhile did not unfold along a unilinear path. Instead, pious subjectivities become structured around ambivalences, contradictions, and uncertainties, and are often relat-

ed to specific moments in life; especially those marked by suffering, crisis, or doubt (Beekers and Kloos 2017a, 10 ff; Schielke 2009, 37; Simon 2009, 270). So religious ideals are articulated above all in situations marked by ruptures, shifts, or distortions; all situations that indicate displacement as an existential experience of mobility (Ahmed 1999).

Focusing on the nexus of migrant memory and emotion, Svašek in her work *Affective Moves* explores how mobile actors form relational multiple selves through memory and emotions that are often attached to distant people and places. Multiple selves "'carry along' memories and feelings from earlier times and places, and are to some extent conditioned by emotional discourses and practices already learned" (Svašek 2012, 13). Mehrigul's engagement in religious studies via the nearby mosque provided her a sense of continuity in life, connecting her present life in Sharjah with the youthful past in her natal home. When I told my host about my strange nightly experience, how hearing the soothing voice of the muezzin coming through my window from the nearby mosque had affected me, she responded by confirming my feelings of comfort and tranquility with regard to her own experiences of the first weeks after moving to Sharjah.

Spending her childhood in a domestic environment marked by the daily occupation of the family with religion explains Mehrigul's strong emotional attachment to the voice of the muezzin. For her, the voice of Quran triggers nostalgic childhood memories and puts her in a spiritual mood that helps her to cushion feelings of loneliness and homesickness:

> Because of my parents were teachers of Quran (*qori,* Arabic *qāri'*), we had always students at home. Someone always recited from the Quran. I grew up with these recitations. They were my music. We didn't have a TV at home. And I didn't need any other occupation. Either I did my own studies or I listened to my parents' students.

Together with the muezzin's call the weekly *tajwīd* classes helped Mehrigul to structure her day and reconcile her religious studies with domestic and family work. Strengthening self-control went hand in hand with control over her environment (Bowen 2012, 48). Thus, she was able to cultivate a proper physical and emotional attitude that allowed her to continue her Quranic engagement independently at home. Accordingly, a good day for Mehrigul was one in which she managed to do the housework quickly after returning from the Quran course, to complete the course homework and then, in the afternoon, to teach her two sons in Quran recitation herself or help a neighbor's daughter to improve her Arabic language proficiency. Filling her days with meaningful actions, Mehrigul fully dedicated her daily life to religion, or as she put it: "God forces me to keep busy! With *ibodat*, instead of indulging in musings or killing time with gossiping or watching TV."

Concerns about spending time properly was never an issue for Mehrigul at home in Tajikistan. In Sharjah, by contrast, unfamiliar daily routines and the sudden surplus of free time otherwise spent on everyday life in a large family household, brought by the new urban lifestyle, were fraught with uncertainty. With their anxiety about wasting time, e.g., through the lure of shopping or watching soap operas, Tajik women tied directly into discourses on piety, femininity, and virtue that signify middle-class sensibilities as cultivated in Sharjah's neighborhoods. Just as women involved in discourses on middle-classness in Indonesia (Jones 2012), Tajik migrants' sense of middle-class belonging unfolded around the transsubstantiation of leisure into morality through practices that "reveal the relatedness of consumption and religion," as well as time, as "a form of labor that can be especially acute for feminine subjects, an affect that generates not only privilege but also anxiety" (Jones 2012, 147).

"She is lovely, but weak in her belief (*imon*)." This assessment aptly describes the ambivalent relationship between Mehrigul and her Tajik friend Zamira. Almost daily, Zamira came by and stayed for one to two hours in Mehrigul's home, until her children returned from school. Both women know each other from Yemen, where they studied together at al-Imam University in Sana'a and lived with their families in a university-sponsored student apartment. The two women's husbands, close friends since studying together in Yemen, helped each other to find work and accommodation in the emirates. Both families often went on weekend trips to the desert (*safari*), to the mosque on public holidays, and socialized with other Tajik families that lived in the same neighborhood and belonged to the men's business networks. Zamira, who lived just a few blocks away, enjoyed Mehrigul's proximity as an opportunity to escape from boredom and to avoid being alone at home. Since housework was limited, unlike at their natal home in Tajikistan, the women spent their time chatting over tea and cookies in the kitchen, tampering with their smartphones, leafing through advertising shopping catalogues, or talking about their children and husbands. Mehrigul enjoyed Zamira's quest for conviviality, but in my presence, she often lamented her friend's laziness towards religion, which in the end also distracted Mehrigul from her daily religious studies.

Mehrigul: She loves the city life, shopping, strolling around in the park, television, or chatting; all the things that keep her away from her religious duties (*ibodat*). She is an educated woman (*khondagī*). But she doesn't care about *isloh.* She is too weak (*zayf*). She was in class (*tajwīd*) with me for only two months. Then she gave up.

Manja: But what's so bad about enjoying life here? In Tajikistan it wouldn't work like that, right?

Mehrigul: You get too distracted here. At home you always have work. But here? God has given us so much time here. Shouldn't we use it to serve Him, instead of spending

our husband's money on fashionable things or losing ourselves in amusement parks, Manja?

Manja: But the park here is really nice, or take al-Majaz, the promenade. Don't you like being there?

Mehrigul: Yes, of course! But it's better not to like these things too much. Better to stay at home or to visit these places together with the family.

Debates among Tajik women in Sharjah on how to live a proper Muslim life in Sharjah were often connected to notions of Muslim womanhood and being a good wife. Thus, modesty (*khoksorī*) and restraint (*khuddorī*) in dealing with consumption and urban mobility appeared as central tropes in women's pious self-fashioning. While Zamira grew up in Dushanbe city, urban lifestyles in the Gulf are completely alien for women like Mehrigul who moved directly from their rural homes to Sharjah. Eventually, Mehrigul found herself pursuing her Islamic life project in an urban environment that with its religious infrastructure supported her engagement in Islamic reform, but also unfolded as an urban site full of tempting, enjoyable leisure activities that seduced and distracted the pious, inviting them to leave the proper path to a good Muslim life. Mehrigul responded to the contradictory sensibilities of her new home by adjusting the moral geography of her Islamic reform project. Accordingly, Sharjah's Muslim identity did not consist of having an urban environment given to be consumed. Sharjah was a Muslim place insofar as it provided urban opportunities as well as challenges to perfect the pious self.

This can be linked to the shifting notion of suffering prominent in the *hijra* narratives of my reform-minded interlocutors. While political discrimination and social marginalization triggered their imagination of ideal Muslim places elsewhere and eventually mobilized them to leave in search for a new home, on arriving at the desired destination, Tajiks re-translated the religious motive of suffering into striving for attachment and belonging in their new home. Strikingly, in their narratives, the notion of suffering from being a lone stranger as a sign of divine selection and superiority (Stephan 2006) shifted to an understanding of suffering from the urban temptation of wasting time as a divine test (*imtikhon*) of one's own belief (*imon*) and piety (*taqvo*). Like Wasim, whom we met in chapter four, Mehrigul engaged in narratives of urban conversion centering around the trope of the city as the only place to be and become pious (Vásquez and Knott 2014, 332–336; Penta and Schiffauer 2011; Orsi 1999). Such narratives circulated, not only in reform-minded Muslim business networks and migrant apartments, but also in neighborhood mosque spaces in the Arab Emirates.

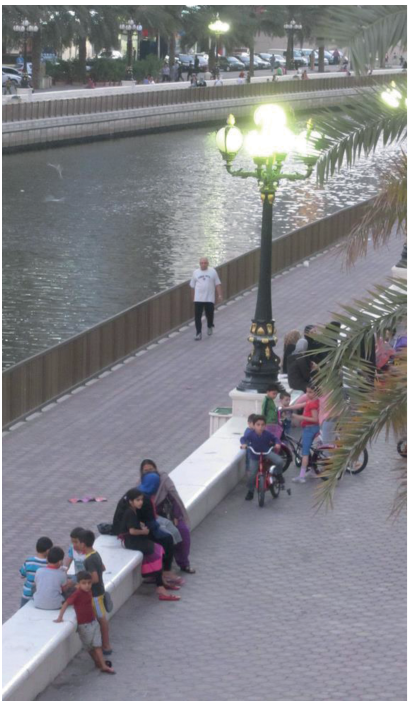

Fig. 11 und 12: Evening scenes on al-Majaz waterfront in Sharjah. Photo: Manja Stephan, 2014.

The Aesthetics and Ethics of Neighborhood Sociabilities

Quranic piety provides a productive analytical lens to explore how homemaking as a translocative practice is entwined with migrant women's moral and pious self-fashioning. Following the works of Saba Mahmood (2005), Lara Deeb (2006), and Anabel Inge (2016), among others, Muslim women play an important role in the organizational structures and recruitment successes of strictly observant religious movements. However, as the ethnographic vignette about Mehrigul and her friend Zamira illustrates, women are also core agents of reformist Islamic movements in transnational and cosmopolitan migration contexts, where they play a vital role on the formation of mobile subjectivities and social relations (Ahmad 2017, 2012a). Combining devotional aspects with a social dimension, Quranic engagements promoted Tajik women's immersion into everyday migrant sociabilities and their multiple embedding in the networked spaces around mosques and Quranic courses attended by other migrant women.

I propose 'sociability' as a conceptual hook to capture the domains of voluntary everyday interactions and relational practices that form communities and social associations in migrant contexts, and which can therefore also be subsumed under the above-mentioned concept of affective labor. In line with Anderson (2015, 101), sociability works as a heuristic device akin to social relationship and personhood rather than as a normative category. In keeping with the analytical interest of this book to understand how social community building, belonging and the transformation of personhood take place in contexts of Muslim mobility, sociability directs the focus towards everyday processes of social interaction and their relational, ambivalent, and fragile nature, and not on fixed rules, customs, or structures that determine society, culture, or citizenship as limited concepts. Ranging from educational and charity offerings by the nearby neighborhood mosque, self-organized neighborly visits and support, rotating women's gatherings, joint family activities such as weekend safaris, shopping and visiting urban parks, to the communal attendance of Quranic classes: these forms of migrant sociability allowed Sharjah's neighborhoods to be sensed and inhabited by Tajik women as an intimate space and an extension of the family home. Tajik women appropriated, shaped, and moved in the urban public spaces because they provided social integration and moral security. This sense of spatial inclusiveness also worked because of the women's mastery of several languages, including Persian as a migrant lingua franca, but also Arabic and a bit of English. Finally, fostering social exchange, community-building, and the emergence of new civic publics, neighborhood sociabilities in Sharjah enhanced Tajik migrant women's "social well-being by generating a sense of cooperation, communality and belonging" (Anderson 2015, 99, 101, 103) across and beyond kinship ties, national or ethnic identity. In line with this, Tim Ingold emphasizes the affective and sensual dimension of sociability, which for him comes to bear in the "resonance of movement and feeling" as well as in an "perceptual monitoring and mutually attentive engagement in shared contexts of practical activity" (Ingold 2000, 196).

Starting from here, I will turn now to the social, moral, and aesthetic dimension of neighborly gatherings, which I joined in Tajik migrant women's homes in Sharjah. As the following subchapter will unfold, by participating in aesthetic formations, Tajik women engaged in larger processes of moral binding and belonging that crossed ethnic, national, and linguistic identifications and allowed moments of cosmopolitan openness to emerge. Thus, the affective and aesthetic dimension of migrant women's sociabilities in Sharjah reveal two things: Firstly, Tajiks' housing preferences and practices of home-making intertwined with the economic worlds of Dubai's fur business. Secondly, Tajik women's fashioning of migrant identities and urban belongings grounded in Muslim sensibilities the women shared with other migrant women in their neighborhoods. These sensibilities con-

firm the class dimension inherent to Tajik migrants' religious placemaking in Sharjah and form an important element of social distinction.

If we approach housing and homemaking as translocative practices that encompass both being in place, i. e., 'dwelling', and moving across, i. e., 'crossing' and 'connecting', as two interrelated modes of living together in dynamic and diverse urban contexts, the following questions emerge: What was it that created senses of communality and belonging in Tajik migrant daily life in Sharjah, and how did it work? When and how did boundaries between in- and out-groups matter? Which social aesthetics and ethics of communal living were used to legitimize the drawing of social and cultural boundaries? And how were qualities of good living together such as affect, care, intimacy, social comfort, solidarity, and trust created, perceived and maintained?

I will begin with a moment of neighborly sociability I shared with women from Tajikistan and Afghanistan in Mehrigul and Saidullah's apartment in Sharjah. One morning, I found Mehrigul busy in the kitchen with Zamira. The women were baking cakes and preparing salads with mayonnaise, tomatoes, and peas. Seeing my questioning look, Mehrigul explained: "Today we are having guests," and instructed me to go and buy her favorite napkins in the nearby mall: "Bring those with the gold rim, you know, the ones that go so well with the new crockery." Later, I spread the cloth on the floor in the living room and arranged the dishes with Zamira, as usual in Tajikistan when guests are expected. "Why a *dasturkhon* today?" I asked, and Zamira, smiling, pointed her head towards the door, where Mehrigul stood with a colorfully patterned traditional Tajik dress explaining, "the guests are eager to learn how we Tajiks live." This was the first time I had seen Mehrigul in traditional Tajik women's clothing, as she otherwise preferred an Arabic style of clothing; that is plain cloth in a rather muted color, over which she wears a black *ʿabāya* and *niqob*, like Zamira, when she leaves the apartment. Mehrigul explained: "We are about ten women (in the *tajwīd* course), from all nationalities (*millat*): Tajiks, Afghans, Arabs, one from Sri Lanka, one from India, and the Sudanese woman, she's newly arrived." While Mehrigul did have closer contact with some of the Afghan coursemates in particular because of their shared Persian language, in the two years Mehrigul had lived in Sharjah, a solid core of women had formed who socialized on the basis of their Persian as well as their more or less available Arab language proficiencies. Mehrigul explained: "We regularly visit each other. Last time we visited the Afghan woman's place, maybe next time we go to the Sudanese woman's place." Zamira complemented jokingly: "We are international (*baynalmilallī*)!"

When the doorbell rang in the early afternoon, Mehrigul invited her guests in. As she showed the women around her flat, they praised the style of furnishings and examined the modern kitchen appliances and compared them to their own.

Later the women gathered in the dining room and made themselves comfortable in the soft new *kurpacha* that Saidullah had brought from Tajikistan. Over tea after dinner, a conversation unfolded about clothing preferences after a guest praised Mehrigul's colorful dress. "Tajik women love colors and flowers," Mehrigul responded and while searching her smartphone archive for photos from Tajikistan, continued: "But I prefer Arab style dresses. I got used to that when I was in Yemen. Even at home, in Tajikistan, I prefer to wear Arab style dresses, unless there is a wedding celebration (*tūy*)". Then, Mehrigul's Afghan friend took over the conversation. Pointing to her daughter dressed in a fashionable overdress that combined a wide Arab cut with colorful embroidery and saying: "Look, this is Afghan style," she explained and advertised the new collection by a relative who owns a tailor's workshop in Dubai Deira and produces fashionable women's clothing for the Afghan market in the Arab Emirates and in Afghanistan. The women marveled at the glittering embroidery, commenting, "Oh, that's very stylish!" or "Wow, that looks so beautiful, like the princess in that Turkish series, what was her name again?", and sharing their preferences in fashion, popular TV series, and taste.

How Female Is Tajik Dubai Business?

Later, the conversation turned to the husbands' businesses and hooked on to the recent collapse of the ruble and Russia and the resulting lack of Russian tourists. Suddenly, the older Afghan woman sitting to my right took the floor and asked Mehrigul how her husband's fur business was doing. Mehrigul then reported very concerned about the last conversation Saidullah had had with his *kafīl*: "They didn't sell enough furs last season," whereupon another woman interrupted indignantly: "How can they do that when tourists stay away or prefer to save their money?" Mehrigul continued: "Exactly! But the owner of the shop where my husband works was struggling to pay him a regular salary. So, the *kafīl* advised him to send our family home to reduce the cost of living here". When one of the invited women interjected that this might be a good temporary solution, Mehrigul exclained indignantly: "My dear! We will never go back to Tajikistan. Even if Sharifjon (this is how she calls her husband when she talks about him) loses his job; we wouldn't go back. Never! This is *kofir* land," and after a short break: "We know so many people. We can go everywhere." Then, Mehrigul's Afghan friend, who had helped Saidullah through Mehrigul to expand his tire trading business into her own husband's transregional business networks, suggested connecting Saidullah with her two younger sons, who run a successful jewelry shop in Amsterdam. Mehrigul responded by referring to the family's status as *muhojir*, migrant Muslims searching for a Muslim-friendly place to live: "My dear, I appreciate your offer.

You have helped us so many times. But believe me, my husband would never go to the land of *kofir* people. Out of the question! We instead think of going to Saudi Arabia. It's best there. Only Muslims, like us. So, if any of you know anything about…"

This ethnographic vignette is revealing relative to the question of how Tajiks managed to become involved in Dubai's well-established Persian-speaking business worlds. It was not only the male space of the migrant apartments where business contacts were made. Women's private gatherings and the social integration that these neighborhood sociabilities provided played a crucial role, too. Acting as intermediaries, yet middle*wo*men, Tajik women capitalized on their mosque-based networks to contribute to the prosperity of their husbands' businesses and thus helped to ensure the realization of the good Muslim life abroad. This was possible because the women supported each other. With the help of an Egyptian classmate from the *tajwīd* course in the mosque, Mehrigul was able to place her two sons in a migrant school in the neighborhood. The Egyptian classmate's husband worked as a teacher for English and Arabic at this school. Additionally, Mehrigul's close friend, the older Afghan woman among the guests, helped Saidullah to expand his care tires business by connecting him with her own husband's transnational business networks, while another Afghan coursemate connected Mehrigul with a Tajik family from her home region that had recently moved close to Mehrigul's apartment block and thus paved the way for a new business partner for Saidullah. In return, Mehrigul agreed to teach the daughters of her Afghan friends how to recite the Quran.

Summing up, through their commitment to the realm of housing and homemaking in the Arab Emirates Tajik women appeared as a driving force in the formation of cosmopolitan Muslim spaces of interaction, transfer, and exchange, where family, religion, and business matters were conflated. Moreover, through Muslim women's neighborhood spaces Dubai's business worlds and the related circulation of material and immaterial goods were linked to households, mosques, and markets in Tajikistan and elsewhere. Although gender norms continue to determine how Tajik women experienced cross-border mobility and formed mobile subjectivities in the Gulf; their role as a link between the space of home, family life and their husbands' business realm testifies to their creative and entrepreneurial role in the global economy (see also Turaeva 2019; Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016; Kuehnast 1998). Apparently, Tajik migrants who were able to realize family life between Tajikistan and the Arab Emirates expanded the religious economies of Dubai business to women's cosmopolitan Quranic study-based networks. Engaging in a religious placemaking that combines both dwelling and crossing, Tajik migrants were thus able to release themselves from dependency on both kin- or ethnicity-based business relations and work-related hierarchies established through

the Emirati sponsorship system. Housing preferences thus occurred as integral to middlemen strategies of multiple positioning and strategic belonging that helped Tajik migrants to engage and pervade various regimes of regulating movement as well as dwelling. At the same time, such spatial strategies give insight into the complexity of religious and moral subject making, as they show how this process is entangled with the making of economic identities in the context of global capitalism (Ong 1999, 243).

Affective Binding Through *Ḥajj* Stories

Belonging in the context of Dubai business life, however, is not exclusively a strategic matter, but has an important affective dimension, as well. This becomes evident in Tajik women's involvement in 'aesthetic formations', a concept used by Birgit Meyer to stress "the importance of taking into account the role of bodies, the senses, media, and things in the making of religious subjects and communities" (Meyer 2009, 2). Thus, it is through narrative performance that Tajik women created new forms of binding and belonging that worked through sensational forms. During the neighborly meetings, migrant women also exchanged stories about their *ḥajj* pilgrimage. An integral part of the good Muslim life in the Arab Emirates, references to the Mecca pilgrimage provided an important resource for Tajiks to fashion their Dubai migration as Muslim mobility that facilitates spiritual advancement and perfecting the pious and moral self abroad.[76] Even more, as *ḥajj* and *'umrah* were often performed in combination with a holiday or business trip, when sharing religious experiences from the Mecca pilgrimage, Tajik women displayed the success of their migration endeavor to Dubai. More than that, *ḥajj* stories can be understood as a translocative practice through which migrant women re-located themselves in their mobile lifeworlds and reconfigured their perception of home, Muslimness, womanhood, and family. Attaching themselves affectively to sacred places visited in the past, Tajik women situated themselves in the emotional and moral geographies of their Dubai migration. Thus, the performative practice of storytelling was often supported by smartphone features that evoked memories and reinforced processes of remembering (Stephan-Emmrich 2018a). The sharing of links, likes, and private digital photo archives created a specific form of affective binding and belonging through persuasive aesthetics that helped the women to

76 Part of this subchapter is taken from an earlier publication entitled "In Mecca with the Second Wife: Scripted and Unscripted Hajj Stories of Tajik Migrant Women in the United Arab Emirates", in: *The Written and The Spoken: Festschrift for Ingeborg Baldauf*, edited by Redkollegia, edition-tethys, 2022.

organize past religious experiences and mediate them in a sensational form so that they became present and jointly tangible. Sharing stories about the Mecca pilgrimage, Tajik women linked their religious aspirations, emotions, and experiences to other needs and pursuits in their everyday migrant lives such as moral safety or the desire for middle-class lifestyles related to consumption and mobility (Al-Ajarma 2021).

Let's return to Mehrigul's neighborhood party. As, amid the spreading afternoon doldrums, one of the guests circulated a selfie of herself in front of the Ka'aba in Mecca, the lethargic mood immediately disappeared. "Oh, you went to *ḥajj!*" exclaimed one woman, and they all began to share their *ḥajj* experiences. Digital photo archives were searched and favorite photos from the Mecca pilgrimage were passed around via the women's smartphones. Obviously, the sensational and aesthetic dimension of the digital images mediated the immediacy of past experiences these women shared as Mecca pilgrims and triggered emotional exclamations like "Oh, how lovely" or "I know, this is so touching." Then, Zamira became the center of attention. She had downloaded photos of the Ka'aba from the internet and reworked them via Photoshop with roses, glittering stones, and twinkling stars. Enchanted by the romantic effects, the women commented on the photos with "So beautiful," or "This makes me want to cry," while Mehrigul, visibly moved, touched my hand and said in my direction, but for the other women to hear: "Oh, I wish to go again, so much." "Yes, preferably every year," one of her guests confirmed.

While commenting on the circulating *ḥajj* images, Mehrigul's guests stressed their pilgrimage as a highly emotional experience; a time of heightened spirituality, piety, and sensitivity for the transcendental that brought them closer to God, strengthened their faith, and made them feel like better Muslims. Following a well-practiced and authorized script, the women emphasized the 'extraordinary' and 'sensational' of the *ḥajj* as a life-changing experience they positioned outside the imperfections of their everyday lives (Buitelaar 2021, 182; McLoughlin 2015, 50–51). Thus, it was the aesthetics of the digital photos as well as the embodied performance and emotional involvement that bridged the women's spatial and spiritual distance to Mecca and made the sacredness of the place immediate; tangible and relivable for all present in the room, including me, the researcher. While remembering the sensed extraordinariness of the Mecca pilgrimage, the women relocated themselves in a sacred time they longed for and wanted to experience again. Against the background of the aspirational piety projects Tajik migrants in the Arab Emirates were involved in when I met them, the women described the immersion in the rhythm of the sacred time during their *ḥajj* as lifting them up out of everyday life; providing space and opportunity for the acquisition of religious knowledge. One of the newly arrived Tajik women expressed her wish to

relive intensive sacred time off from family duties, which she had enjoyed both in Mecca, and during her studies in Cairo. Alone in a new place and without any family support, household and childcare were now her sole responsibility and took up the entire day. Accordingly, she described her time in Mecca as a gift from God that enabled her to fully dedicate herself to worshipping, reciting the Quran, and thus finding herself in full harmony with God:

> Oh, how great it was in Mecca. I did the circambulation every day, several times. I then went home and was only with my books. Reading, praying, reciting the Quran, only myself with God. I felt so complete (*komil*), so light (*sabuk*). The last time I was in this condition was during my studies in Cairo. But here in Dubai, it is so hard to concentrate on my studies. The children, a lot of housework, often feeling lonely and homesick. All this distracts me, keeps my mind off learning. Since I have been here [in the UAE] I feel so weak (*sust*), so incomplete (*nokomil*).

Being part of processes of ethical formation, failure, and doubt constitutes "productive grounds" for the women "to reflect and work on their moral selves" (Beekers and Kloos 2017b, 2, 10). In that reading, the affective labor around *ḥajj* memories is part of migrant women's moral reasoning and their shaping of pious subjectivity. Mehrigul and the other women cultivate emotions as part of a shared religious habitus that indexes belonging to a specific 'community of sense' that is collectively shaped by common feelings (Rancière 2009). With such a "public emotionality" (Meyer 2006, 11), the women cross ethnic and national boundaries, transcend their Tajikness and related experiences as deviant Muslims or discriminated Central Asian migrants, as well as they feel themselves part of something larger. Obviously, the Muslim sociabilities Mehrigul and the other migrant women immerse themselves in and co-shape, mobilize the body as a sensorial and material ground of religious experience and sensation (Meyer 2013, 9). Thus, the aesthetics and sensational effects of the *ḥajj* photos being shared cannot be separated from the middle-class sensibilities Tajik migrants are able to share with other migrant women in the contexts of cosmopolitan sociabilities. These considerations lead directly to the reconfiguration of religious experience and the imagination and fashioning of Muslim identity through processes of digital mediation (Stephan-Emmrich 2018a). As we sat hunched over the digital *ḥajj* photos, I could not help but connect the women's emotional narrations of their Mecca pilgrimage with the glittering cases on their latest smartphones. This digital mediation of religious experience provided a multi-sensory resonance space for the women's dreams, desires, and sensibilities related to urban Muslim middle-class lifestyles lived, consumed, and presented in Mehrigul's new living environment and which she, with and through her new friends, sensed, adopted, and shaped. Against the subtle hum of the dishwasher in the kitchen and the new *kurpacha* embroidered with golden

thread, a pleasant afternoon atmosphere spread out; an aesthetic arrangement in Mehrigul's comfortable new apartment, in which the aspiring Islamic life projects of the women present became a meaningful and unifying experience of neighborly conviviality, in which the women allowed me to participate. At least for this one moment captured here.

The cosmopolitan moments of sharing past religious experiences on the one hand, and the homemaking work of the Tajiks in their new neighborhood on the other are characterized by processes of demarcation. Migrant women's invocation of religious discourses on social exclusion thus reveals the ambivalence, fragility, and contingency of migrant sociabilities and shared (life-) worlds against the background of anchoring migrant residential desires in an urban environment characterized by diversity, difference, and a strong fluctuation in the composition of urban neighborhoods. How did Tajik women cope with ongoing diversity and difference in their neighborhoods? When, why, and how were boundaries of communality, belonging and difference imagined, created, and articulated in the course of neighborly cohabitation, and on the basis of which shared moralities and aesthetics? Answers to these questions are provided by changing the analytical focus from processes of home*making* to those of *un*making home.

"All These *Kofir* Here, It's so Scary!"

As both a situated practice and a relational experience, home is, like belonging, both 'lived' and 'imagined' and therefore continually reprocessed and constituted (Taylor 2013; Brah 1996). Thus, the associated three practices of placemaking, i. e., *mapping*, *building* and *inhabiting,* highlight that home*making* is a creative and productive process of cognitive, physical and performative engagement with the materiality of the lived world (Baxter and Brickell 2014, 134), through which Tajik migrants attempt to achieve well-being, belonging, and self-realization. Conceiving of home with Tim Ingold (2013) as a process of making, makes home synonymous with growth, or becoming – never fixed or complete, but always in the making. Accordingly, time and temporality provide fruitful analytical lenses to understand the volatile character of Tajik migrants' aspirational Islamic life projects in the Arab Emirates. Pointing to the transient character of housing as a translocative practice, biographies of home prove to be stories of both home*making* and its *un*making (Baxter and Brickel 2014, 140). While both processes can take place sequentially and simultaneously, home *un*making refers to "the precarious process by which material and/or imaginary components of home are unintentionally or deliberately, temporarily or permanently, divested, damaged, or even destroyed" (Baxter and Brickell 2014, 134). This may lead to divergences from idealized ver-

sions of home as it causes the experience of loss of place or diminishes the affective attachment to a place (Baxter and Brickell 2014, 135, 140). While Tajik migrant narratives construct the emirate of Sharjah as a hopeful place for the realization of the good Muslim life, the 'liquid state of living' in the city (Baumann 2003), and particularly the immediate co-presence of 'strangers' produces a wide range of fears, as well as experiences of contingency and unpredictability (Bauman 2003, 16). As a consequence, the sense of feeling at home in the city can occur as a highly ambivalent matter, with states including both well-being and anxiety, fear, friction, or alienation, as well as relocation *and* dislocation at the same time (Mattes et al. 2019, 312; Habeck and Schröder 2016, 14–16).

When I met Mehrigul and her family, the imaginary of Sharjah as an ideal place for a proper Muslim family life had been challenged by the influx of non-Muslim residents into the formerly relatively homogenous Muslim housing blocks; a consequence of the tense real estate market and a rise in rents already underway in Dubai, when Saidullah brought his family to live with him in the Arab Emirates. The presence of non-Muslims in Sharjah's Muslim-majority housing blocks triggered Mehrigul's fear of moral threat, a perceived loss of intimacy and integrity, just as it fueled feelings of unsafety, which had striking effects on both Mehrigul's urban mobility and her children's upbringing. The new non-Muslim neighbors were perceived as intruders into what was claimed by the women to be a self-contained Muslim-only urban place, whose spatial intimacy allowed for an extension of the family home and thus gave women a sense of security, home, and belonging.

The day after the women's gathering Zamira brought her daughter Guli into Mehrigul's care. After she left for a doctor's appointment, Mehrigul sent the girl and her youngest son Sami to play in the hallway. While we chopped the vegetables for dinner and engaged in a conversation, loud noises from the hallway sounded into the kitchen. When the doorbell rang, Mehrigul went to open it and was almost run over by several rushing children. Zamira's daughter had stripped off her *hijab* and long underpants under the dress and now looked just like the Indian girl chasing her from the hallway into the living room. Horrified by the incident, Mehrigul screamed at the Indian girl to leave the apartment immediately, grabed Guli by the arm and scolded her angrily: "How do you look, naked legs, naked head. Shame on you! You're a Muslim, not a Hindu. Didn't your mother tell you not to play with that girl?" When Guli started to cry, Mehrigul continued in a milder tone: "Cover yourself and go play with Sami, but inside! Tamom!" Back in the kitchen, still agitated, she explained to me: "These neighbors are new here. They are Hindus, they are not pure (*nopok*). I don't want to have them here in my place. They're not Muslims. And that girl is not well-mannered." Later, when Zamira came to pick up her daughter and learned about the incident, she explained to me with as much agitation as her friend: "My husband selected this place because it used to be a

Muslim place. We moved here because we wanted to live among our kind, Muslims only. Just as we did when we studied in Yemen. Our apartment block is closely related to the mosque, as you know. That's why most residents here are Muslims. Afghans, Tajiks, Arabs. Women here can move freely, even without our husbands or a *mahram.* After shopping, I loved to sit in the small public park with our kids. We chatted, relaxed, and sometimes had a small picnic with friends. It was wonderful, because we were only Muslim women during the daytime. It was a safe place (*joyi bekhaf*). At home in Tajikistan, I never met with other women outside home. So, I loved to be there. But now, Indians, Asians live here. Even Russians, imagine!" Mehrigul drew in the air sharply and called out, horrified: "And all of them are *kofir* (unbelievers). That is so scary!" And Zamira continued: "Now the park is full of them. We cannot go there anymore. This place changed a lot!"

As this ethnographic vignette illustrates, coping with the transient character of the new home abroad was, similarly to sharing *ḥajj* stories, closely intertwined with crafting pious Muslim selves in close relation to the women's dwelling in neighborhood spaces in the Arab Emirates. In this context, the Islamic doctrine of *takfīr* (Arabic) that legitimizes the accusation of unbelief (apostasy, Arabic *ridda*) and regulates the social exclusion of non-Muslims (*kofir*), became an important resource the women could draw on in their religious placemaking. Put differently: Emotion work were coupled with affective labor and turned out to be a meaning-making process, in which ambivalent experiences of dwelling in the new place were imbued with religious meaning. This happened when the women affectively performed normative Islamic scripts that, working as a crucial authoritative body of reference provided historically generated sensational forms through which the women's negative spatial experiences turned religiously meaningful. As Mehrigul and Zamira's evaluation of the incident with the Hindu girl reveals, *takfīr* was invoked as a specific rhetoric language in relation to the dynamic and changing conditions of living together in Sharjah's newly built neighborhoods. While the emergence of non-Muslim families in the close neighborhood posed a direct threat to the realization of Islamic life projects in Muslim-only places, Mehrigul and Zamira gained spatial agency by invoking a religiously based rhetoric of boundary-drawing. Even more, their experience of 'loss of place' and their desire for secure community became timeless and universal and thus was authorized as an authentic religious feeling. A form of religious placemaking, such authoritative framings helped Tajik women in Sharjah to manage difference, diversity, and belonging in the city by claiming a position of moral superiority that simultaneously marked social distinction. The question thus is, belonging to whom and to what, and secondly, moral superiority over whom and social demarcation from whom?

The merging of the mobility and material turn in religious studies prompts us to focus on how religion as a migrant practice of translocation works through par-

ticular aesthetic formations, through which pious Muslims craft mobile-cum-religious subjectivities by tuning their senses and invoking emotions through rhetoric language and sensational forms (Meyer 2010, 754, 756–757). Following the incident with the Hindu girl, the cultivation of emotions such as fear of sharing the neighborhood with non-believers (*kofir*) was integral to Tajik migrant women's fashioning of reformist-Muslim pious selves that featured senses of communality and belonging through boundary-making and social exclusion. Obviously, and in line with recent anthropological studies, social integration into transregional religious reform movements provided a powerful aesthetic framework for Mehrigul to manage her own emotions. Proposing an emotion management perspective, Arlie Russell Hochschild situates emotion work at the theoretical juncture of consciousness of feelings, feeling rules and social roles (or structures) (Hochschild 1979, 560). In studies on Islamic reformism in migration, the concept of emotional work encompasses how emotions are experienced, articulated, managed and thus made meaningful in order to maintain or build relationships as well as to cultivate feelings and their expression that are appropriate to certain situations in the context of shifting political, cultural and spatial formations during migration (Ahmad 2012a; Inge 2016; Jouili 2009).

When Tajik women engaged in *takfīr*, their expression of their fear of urban diversity formed part of a piety-in-the-making that needed the creation of a non-Muslim Other to become physically 'tangible', and thus real and authentic. Built around narratives of bodily discomfort, moral risk, and purity (*pokī*), Mehrigul and Zamira engaged in discourses and practices of religious awareness and the authenticity of religious experience. Statements such as "All these *kofir* around us, that's so scary!" were in line with how migrant women reacted to my presence as a non-Muslim scholar in their midst. When Mehrigul introduced me as a German scholar interested in Islam but not a Muslim, her female acquaintances reacted to the last statement in an apparent performative rehearsal, holding their hands protectively in front of their mouth in shock and saying: "A *kofir*, God forbid!" or "How unfortunate!"

Aesthetics and politics are mutually implicated and co-constitutive in the construction of 'communities of sense' through which political orders emerge and social boundaries are drawn (Rancière 2009). Migrant women's sociabilities enabled Mehrigul, Zamira, and their guests to share sensational forms through which feelings, ethical norms, and values could occur, expressed, and cultivated through collective repetitive action (Meyer 2010, 750). These sensational forms, because they are persuasive, morally bound the women to each other as well as to the place where they met, as these forms were authorized by normative Islamic discourses such as those related to *takfīr.* The women had mostly already internalized these discourses during their Islamic studies in Egypt, Yemen, or Saudi Arabia, and

were able to apply them properly in multiple contexts to locate themselves as reform-minded Muslims in dynamic and diverse urban neighborhood settings.

Like any form of belonging, Muslimness is not a constant or essential sense but the effect of performance, and as such permanently produced and reproduced (Bell 1999, 3). In reference to Judith Butler's concept of performativity, Bell rightly notes that the articulation of senses of religious and other forms of belonging, for example through the cultivated articulation of fear, is relational to the places and communities within which individuals find themselves and articulate, sense, and negotiate belonging (Bell 1999, 3). A signifier for a particular religious distinction, sensibilities reflect patterns for social or moral membership to a religious community or what Beth Hinderliter et al. (2009) term 'communities of sense', to depict the nexus between aesthetics and politics. In line with this, Sharjah's neighborhood sociabilities effected specific Muslim sensibilities that mattered because they situated Tajik migrants' aspirational Islamic life projects in transregional fields of cultural identity politics; the latter were not only post-nationally oriented, but also spatialized class-belonging in a cosmopolitan urban context. Together with the cultivation of fear, the women's elusive desire for homogeneity and sameness found resonance in two forms of dreamwork: desiring Muslim-only neighborhoods to become real through enclosed communities, and pursuing a Muslim home elsewhere, mobilizing for further migration.

Let us go back to the mosque near Mehrigul's apartment block and think of it as an infrastructure of the Muslim sociabilities described above. Referring to Di Nunzio's double view of the "political reading of infrastructures" (Di Nunzio 2018, 1), Sharjah's neighborhood mosques are both the consequence of state policies and an integral part of migrant life-worlds that inform experiences and alternative understandings of belonging to the city. When Tajik women dreamt of their neighborhood in Sharjah as an enclosed community, they crafted alternative urban worlds that went beyond the real existing city. Even more, through the work of imagination and longing, Mehrigul and her friend engaged in forms of migrant belonging despite the excluding mechanism of the Arab Emirate's citizenship regime (Vora and Koch 2015). "May God remove all of these *kofir* from here!" This exclamation shows how Mehrigul and Zamira built their moral geography of the city on social exclusion as both a lived past experience and a hopeful practice in the present. As Kathiravelu (2016) writes about Dubai as a divided city, gated communities enact exclusions that are tangibly and physically felt, and that make starkly obvious the differentiated publics that share the city. Even more, gated communities do not merely reflect existing exclusions but create new ones in terms of symbolic economies of mobility, access, and prestige. Following that reading, Mehrigul and Zamira's dreamwork may prompt us to read their spatial preferences as a form of cultivating class sensibilities the women shared with other women in the neighbor-

hood, whose husbands were businessmen (*biznesmen*) rather than migrants (*migranty*), like those of Mehrigul and Zamira. Accordingly, when Mehrigul and her friends engaged in practices of religious Othering, they expressed their desire for a socio-economic distinction in relation to other migrants in the emirates.

Always relational, locative practices such as housing also have to be understood against the background of spatial experiences in the past. In her work on the development and marketing of Islamic gated communities in Basaksehir, Istanbul, Ayşe Çavdar (2016, 518) argues that many of the inhabitants in these religion-and-wealth-based urban communities have experienced social exclusion due to their religiosity what eventually triggered movement to these new urban settlements. In response to the newly arrived Russian neighbors, Mehrigul and Zamira invoked the rhetoric of *takfīr* to keep their distance, at least symbolically; a desire they shared with other Tajiks who wish to overcome their negative experiences with racist discrimination in Russia by migrating to Dubai. Ramziya expressed this wish when we bumped into a Russian family in the lobby of her apartment block who, like us, were waiting for the elevator. After Ramziya had given the Russian family priority to board and we were waiting for another elevator to come, she explained to me: "I don't want to share space with them, ever! We came here to have some peace and quiet from them. But they are everywhere, even here. One cannot escape the Russians. Not even when doing business. We are firmly bound to each other".

While this example refers to the interrelation of *takfīr* and *hijra*, the longing for spatial segregation from both Russians and non-Muslim Asian migrants is more indicative of the women's desire for socio-economic and cultural distinction. Even more, the example points to the intermingling of migrant discourses on fear, purity (*pokī*), and loss of place with class belonging. By labeling new residents as *kofir*, Mehrigul, Zamira, and Ramziya articulated an understanding of 'their' neighborhood as an exclusive Muslim place. This form of religious placemaking resonates with the work identities as Muslim businesspeople, not as migrants, that the women's husbands constructed in order to differentiate themselves from other Asian migrants working in the low-wage sector in Dubai, and who are accordingly located at the bottom of Dubai's migrant labor hierarchy as Tajik migrants. Rejecting the category of 'migrant' (Russian *migrant*) for themselves too, Tajik women were also able to claim belonging to a place branded, sensed and inhabited as urban middle-class. Arguably, Tajik women's engagement in housing practices and the related neighborhood sociabilities reveal the analytical and empirical limits of the category of 'migrant' or 'migrant women'. Such a categorization narrows down the complexity, diversity, and multiplicity of life-worlds, lifestyles, mobilities, and belonging that Tajik women and men engaged in while

working and living in the Gulf or commuting between their new and their original home (Osella 2010, 1).

At the same time, Tajik women's religious practices of social exclusion direct the analytical gaze towards the limits of migrant cosmopolitan sociabilities. Mehrigul, Zamira, and their friends embraced the political branding of Dubai and the wider Arab Emirates as a global cosmopolitan place as they created and sensed cosmopolitan moments of openness when engaging in shared Muslim sensibilities. With these Muslim sensibilities, the women were able to transcend ethnic and national identifications and fed their aspiration for pious self-perfection, social mobility, and modern urban life according to middle-class standards. At the same time, the lived reality of this branded urban cosmopolitanism obviously promoted a greater fear of the migrant Other and fueled the women's longing for sameness rather than embracing diversity and difference.

It is this simultaneity of openness and boundary maintenance in the process of precarious migrant homemaking, that caused Glick Schiller, Darieva, and Gruner-Domic (2011) to suggest 'rooted cosmopolitanism' as a dialectical concept that takes up the contradictoriness and ambivalence of migrant and diasporic everyday life. Instead of naturalizing cosmopolitanism as a fixed socio-political or spatial condition, or as a human competency and orientation closely related to mobility, the conceptual note of rooted cosmopolitanism draws attention to the moments of cosmopolitan sociability in migrants' everyday life that derive from situated and creative everyday migrant practices. Thus, the concept helps to scrutinize normative representations of mobility as always going hand in hand with openness to urban diversity and social change (Buitelaar, Stephan-Emmrich, and Thimm 2021, 7).

In a more nuanced reading, Muslim mobility can facilitate transformation and change and simultaneously foster migrant longing for continuation despite aspiring to social mobility. The reproduction of village lifestyles in the process of becoming an urbanite is a fitting example. To prevent encounters with the newly arrived non-Muslims, Mehrigul engaged in a wide range of spatial strategies. She avoided leaving her apartment as much as she could. Out buying groceries with her husband, she preferred to stay in the car. She rescheduled visits to the nearby park with her children after dark. Full-face veiling, which she had practiced since her student days in Yemen, once again took on a protective meaning, as it helped her to make herself invisible, providing comfort in a no longer intimate neighborly space. As a daughter of a *makhsum* family brought up in strict spatial segregation at her village home, Mehrigul could effortlessly draw on spatial strategies of avoidance internalized during her childhood:

> As my parents were well-respected religious people, everyone came to us. I only rarely left home. Even so, I had no desire to go outside. My classmates even brought my homework

> from school ahead of time. I had my first contact with foreigners (*khorijiyon*) in Yemen, when I followed my husband to study there. However, they were no strangers (*begonaho*), as they were Muslims like myself, Tajiks, other Central Asians, and Arabs.

In Sharjah, the seclusion she was familiar with from home made it easy for Mehrigul to ultimately separate herself from the urban places that she had initially appropriated as an intimate neighborhood space.

Arguably, it is not mobility per se that produces cosmopolitan sociabilities. Nor is mobility per se cosmopolitan. As a relational practice, mobility brings the relationship between spatial movement and places of migrant dwelling into analytical focus and prompts us to consider rooted cosmopolitanism in terms of both space and temporality. In line with that, rooted cosmopolitanism can be situated in translocative migrant practices rather than depicting an individual capacity or competence to cope with diversity and difference that migrant subjects would possess per se. When Mehrigul and the other migrant women engaged in and co-shaped cosmopolitan sociabilities, they built on a social competency to step beyond their own networks and the related cultural or ethnic rootedness and coziness to associate with other migrant women openly to create "a shared sense of common sensibilities that do not override but coexist with ongoing diversity in perspective and practice," (Glick-Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011, 401). Thus, it was the spatial management of urban diversity and difference that set the socio-political conditions under which Tajik migrant women in Sharjah navigated rootedness and openness, and under which cosmopolitan sociabilities as a form of living together could flourish or were restricted (Freitag 2014). As the newly built neighborhoods in Sharjah have no history of living together, there is no script for learning how to become an urbanite that Mehrigul and the other migrant women could have referred to. In addition to that, while the invocation of *takfīr* rhetoric illustrates that migrant sociabilities were enacted within religious communalities that enabled Tajiks to experience cosmopolitan moments of shared Muslim sensibilities through a spatial demarcation that worked discursively and thus rather symbolically, these affective formations at the same time produced practices of difference that created constraints and limitations on migrant openness for cultural diversity and difference (Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011, 404, 412). As there were neither physical boundaries nor a political or social institution that regulated the composition of urban populations and protected the intimacy of lived neighborhood spaces against intruders, i. e., non-Muslims, as that was the case in Middle Eastern cities during the era of Ottoman empire (Freitag 2014, 378, 381–383), Sharjah's neighborhoods did not guarantee Tajik migrant women permanent moral safety and well-being. Under the condition of rather unregulated neighborly cohabitation and a volatile 'true' Muslimness of the place they dwelled in, Tajik women

reproduced familiar lifestyles of spatial segregation to manage urban diversity and difference.

While their engagement in cosmopolitan sociabilities helped Tajik women to locate themselves flexibly and multiply in shifting urban places, the transient Muslim identity of Sharjah's neighborhood spaces at the same time fed Tajiks' longing for other places elsewhere that were imagined as 'more Muslim' than Sharjah. Mehrigul combined her enthusiasm for Mecca and Medina, which she experienced as true Muslim-only places during her *ḥajj* pilgrimage, with her efforts to look for business contacts for her husband during the joint women's meetings, hoping to enable the family to migrate on to Saudi Arabia. *Hijra* obviously worked as a consequence of *takfīr*, even if only in imaginary form. Thus, Tajik migrants' dreaming of Muslim destinations elsewhere satisfied an elusive Muslim homing desire that situated Dubai as only one geographical stop in the migrants' itinerary in much larger moral geographies of Muslim mobility and belonging. This also goes for Ramziya. For her, Sharjah was merely a stopover on the way to Saudi Arabia, her real place of longing as the house of God (*khonai khudo*), and the only place where Islam could be found in its purest form (*islomi toza*).

Ways of Knowing 'from Inside'

In his book *Making* (2013), Ingold advocates an approach to anthropology as a way of making. Starting with the observation that making creates knowledge, for Ingold, anthropology's main purpose is to open up a space for "a critical inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life" (Ingold 2013, 4). Accordingly, the only way of knowing things is "to grow into them, and let them grow in you, so that they become a part of who you are" (Ingold 2013, 1). While Ingold unfolds his philosophical thoughts in tracing how practitioners and active materials 'correspond' with one another in the generation of forms, I wonder if, and how, the correspondence between anthropology as a way of creating knowledge through making and personal growth mattered in my situated spatial analysis of Islamic reform abroad. To be more concretely, how did participant observation as the heart of anthropological methodology helped me to shift gaze from how my research partners not only perceived but also how they experienced the worlds they dwelled in and moved through in the course of their mobile lives?

As emphasized at the beginning of this book, I do not want to suggest that all migration from Tajikistan to Dubai was driven by religious sentiments, just as Muslim travel has always been a complex social process merging spiritual concerns with economic, social and other motives (Buitelaar, Stephan-Emmrich and Thimm 2021, 3; Reetz 2009; Eickelman and Piscatori 1990). Developing a Muslim

mobility gaze, the book's major aim is rather to identify and describe moments in which religion, here in multiple forms of Muslim piety and belonging, mattered in the mobile lives of Tajik men and women at the cutting edge of post-socialism and global capitalism. Thus, the chapters so far have put focus on both the possibilities and constraints that Islamic reform projects pursued abroad produced, and on the capacities of mobile Tajik Muslims to engage, link, as well as make sense of knowledge, work and piety abroad in multiple ruptured, nonlinear, often unexpected and creative ways. Ultimately, the mobility and religion gaze this book employs cannot work without locating my fieldwork and the related processes of knowledge production within the geographies of Muslim piety and belonging mapped in this book. Thus, emphasis is on a critical reflection on how I as the researcher was involved with personal and professional positions into the complex processes of relational placemaking this book has addressed so far.

A contested project, the anthropology of Islam has meanwhile shifted its gaze from Islam as abstract form and normative reference to Muslim piety as a lived practice, embedded in and shaped by the context of ordinary and often contradictory concerns of daily life (Beekers and Kloos 2017a; Marsden and Retsikas 2013a; Schielke 2009; Simon 2009; Bowen 1993). Emphasizing contextualization and the interrelatedness of piety with other possible and applicable frames of reference, i. e., 'grand schemes', a growing body of fine-tuned ethnographies has helped to 'de-exceptionalize' the study of Islam (Coleman 2013), and to turn away from the anthropology of Islam to an existential anthropology that build on ethnographies of human life "in which nothing ever quite works the way one hoped it would" (Schielke 2015a, 25). That is exactly why I felt discomfort in the field about the precisely opposite attempts of my conversation partners to 'exceptionalize' Islam as an elusive ideal, a model for purity and perfection they positioned outside the imperfection of their daily lives and thus made Islam an antidote to the real; and even more, a signifier for their piety while labeling themselves 'Islamic'. How to grasp their desire for Islam as an object, and, reflecting on the complex field relations, what was the ethnographer's impact on these articulations?

Modernity has accelerated the process of dis-embedding religion from the rest of life. Thus, religion has shifted into an object of choice, a core resource, tool and primary signifier for identity politics. In the multiple projects of colonial and postcolonial modernization in the Muslim world, Islam has been utilized to form the good and modern citizen (Hefner 2008; Starrett 1998, among others). A step back in history, early modern reform movement such as Central Asian Jadids put effort into objectifying Islam by reconfiguring a complex Muslim tradition of learning that was based on a specific art of internalization and the embodiment of quite different forms of knowledge (*ʿilm*) into a rationally accessible subject of knowledge to be learnt from printed school text books and educational pamphlets (Khal-

id 1994, 193). Later, Islam as a subject became secularized and domesticated as integral body of national culture and tradition under Soviet rule. Scholars of the anthropology of Islam in Central Asia have rightly alerted that if we use Islam as a category of analysis or object of research, we automatically look through the gaze of state politics that gained the dominant authority in defining 'Islam' in the region to domesticate Muslim belief and practice according to the state's nationalistic agenda (Rasanayagam 2014; Marsden and Retsikas 2013a, 22–23). As a result, Islam in Central Asian Studies has merely been addressed through a religion and politics gaze (Thibault 2013).

Discourses on modernity and secularism are as tacit and globally pervasive as the affective politics of Islamophobia and the globally circulating War on Terror rhetoric accordingly influenced my ethnographic encounters in each field site. Talking about, and fashioning Islam as a moral authority located in a realm beyond question and debate, above all outside the domain of the political, was always framed by my interlocutors through the increasing politicization of Islam in many parts of the world, not only at home in Tajikistan. However, while my research partners were very concerned to locate 'their' Islam outside politics, the ethics of leaving that centered around their Dubai migration were indeed articulations of a political position, or at least a response to the related experiences. Thus, the researcher's 'Western' identity fueled their anxiety about my power to write 'wrong things' (*jizhoye nodurust*) and portray them as the political agents they constantly tried to avoid being, but which they inevitably are, as the moral geographies described in this book reveal. The 'authoritative third' which Crapanzano (2012) identifies in each intersubjective process of fieldwork, was significantly discursively framed by a growing influence of ISIS among Muslims in Central Asia and its brutal media presence during my research in Dubai. Coupled with the strict surveilling regime in Tajikistan that pushed many former students of Islam to leave home, writing this situated spatial analysis of Islamic reform was always accompanied by ethical concerns, above all aiming to protect my interlocutors while tracing their spatial biographies.

At the same time, statements such as "We are Islamic women!"[77] or "But you wanted to see an Islamic woman!"[78] expressed when wives of Dubai businessmen presented their Dubai style Islamic fashion before me, proved *their* power to redefine Islam in reference to globally circulating discourses around Islam and modernity that framed Muslim piety, no longer just through national politics, but instead through sharing global Muslim middle class sensibilities. Obviously, the

77 In Tajik *Mo zanhoi islomī hastem!*

78 In Tajik *Shumo zani islomī-ro didanī khosted-ku!*

dynamic blending of global capitalism and consumerism has induced other processes of objectification outside the realm of post-Soviet state politics. Furthermore, the newly emerging assemblage of piety and neoliberal capitalism has transformed Islam into an external "object of debate, reflection, and consumption (Tobin 2016; Atia 2012; Frisk 2009; Deeb 2006, among others).

So, the multiple registers on which Tajik Muslims have drawn when exceptionalizing Islam in their narratives reveal how religious and moral values were evoked and diffused in relation to different social, political and other contexts of their mobile everyday lives involving places outside their home in Tajikistan, such as Dubai, Moscow, Cairo and other geographical locations. In that sense, the stories assembled in this book, and the circumstances under which they were produced, are windows into how mobile Tajiks saw, defined, interpreted, debated and made sense of the world through engaging multiple Muslim sentiments to make sense of their migratory experiences. However, I hope it became clear throughout the chapters of this book, that I do not want to portray religion as just a cognitive discourse about the world and its contemporary precarious conditions, or a verbally articulated belief. Religion, and more concretely Islamic reform, is a simultaneously lived, embodied, and highly aesthetic reality, covering practices and processes of material mediation that shaped the way my research partners felt, perceived, acted, and related themselves as Muslims to the worlds they dwelled in and crossed through over their mobile life trajectories.

Eventually, the material dimension inherent to Tajik Muslims' relational placemaking in Dubai and beyond lead me to reflect on how I have personally been immersed in the processes of aesthetic formation as they are unfolded in this chapter. In their article on phenomenology as epistemology, Knibbe and Versteeg (2008, 48) ask critically, how an anthropology of religion could look "if we were unable to take seriously the experience of a religious reality, central to the people we study." Taking Islamic reform as such a lived reality, a lifeworld, I understand participant observation as constitutive to my way of doing fieldwork in the Arab Emirates and in Tajikistan, not simply a method of data gathering. Instead, participant observation provided me a way of "knowing *from inside*" (Ingold 2013, 5) that, building on the idea of "experiencing observation" (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008, 52), helped me to avoid taking theoretical concepts like 'Islamic reform' or 'Muslim piety' as foundational for Tajik migrants' reality as lived, i. e., a very reductionist way of grasping religious experience. Instead of privileging scientific over other kinds of knowledge, I approach these concepts as only "abstractions of this reality" (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008, 50). Going beyond this level of abstraction, recent material approaches in the study of religion guided me to understand the role of emotions in anthropological fieldwork as a crucial way of knowing. Reflecting on several "key emotional episodes" (Berger 2009) during my research helped me to

understand how Islamic reform has grounded social hegemony among Tajik Muslims in Dubai. Put differently: There were moments during my fieldwork where I sensed a kind of shared understanding of how it might have felt for Mehrigul, her friends, and other Tajiks I met in Dubai to pursue a reform-oriented life abroad.

Our research partners plot us in their narratives. While their plotting has implications for the data we collect, the categories ethnographers are cast into are themselves "wonderful ethnographic opportunities" (Bielo 2013, 6) to engage an anthropology of religion not *about* but *from* (Meyer 2020) as well as *with* pious Tajik Muslims in Dubai. During my fieldwork, I found myself understood in religious positions very familiar to my research partners such as 'the traveling knowledge seeker' (*musofir*), the 'professor' or 'the educated' (*khondagī*), or 'the unbeliever' (*kofir*). These categories allowed both sides to engage in a form of partnership that produced a sense of familiarity, but not belonging, and different degrees of proximity, distance, and difference that were, however, always negotiated with a line between my white, European, Christian and their own reform-minded Muslim identity (Blanes 2006, 227). My presence in the lifeworlds of the women in Sharjah created friendly relationships. However, moments of intimate closeness and confidential conversations about problems in marriage and family alternated with blatant demarcations between them and me as a non-Muslim; an emotional dilemma that Mehrigul formulated as follows: "Manja, you have become like a sister to me and I suffer all the more because you are not Muslim like we are. We could be much closer. I feel responsible for you and am very worried about your life in the hereafter (*okhirat*)."

Traversing inside–outside boundaries created emotional upheavals for both me and my research partners and challenged the very idea of 'participating' and experiencing it. Eventually, it was the anthropologist's 'apprenticeship' in a new lifeworld that made it possible for me to look "for meaning as something that appears to our senses [...] [by learning] to become an insider" (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008, 52). Doing research on piety and belonging in Salafi Islam-inspired, missionary communities, the preexisting category for the ethnographer was that of a potential convert (Crane 2013, 11). Accordingly, missionary attempts became a main form of social interaction, which I initially misunderstood simply for proselytizing clichés and experienced as a 'disruption' of my working flow, but also as an act of humiliation that reflected plays of power in the field situation (Crapanzano 2012, 553). But testing requires comment, a way my interlocutors learned about me and negotiated with my status as a traveling scholar studying Islam without being a Muslim myself. How to treat the unbeliever as a close friend? How much can she know? Can she grasp at all what we tell her, as a non-Muslim? These were major concerns for Karim, Mehrigul, and the other pious Tajik Muslims I met during my

fieldwork. Reflecting their ambivalent plotting of the researcher, I began to understand that both the harsh labeling of the ethnographer as a *kofir* and the idea behind my research partners' missionary attempts drew on both the theological and ethical core of their Islamic reform projects, emphasizing moral self-perfection and spiritual success in moments of inconsistency and ambiguity. Instead of 'flirting with conversation' as a field strategy (Crane 2013), I eventually decided to reverse their own argumentation. Using the inherent logic of their Islamic reform projects, I marked my own distinctive position as a 'religious beginner trying hard to learn.' When I asked Mehrigul to teach me Arabic like the daughters of her neighbors and we sat bent over the textbook, I felt both Mehrigul's deep joy and the release of an inner tension that I sensed whenever she took me to her friends. Being able to tell the other women that I was approaching Islam like the women themselves, namely first learning Arabic to study the books so as to 'really understand Islam in its depth' (*islom-ro bo jukurī fahmidan*), offered all those present the opportunity to cope with the pressure to convert the German researcher as a close friend (of their friend). Moreover, my role as a learner relieved the women in their emotional efforts of dealing with me as a 'non-believer' by being demonstratively shocked as described above. Accordingly, the interaction with me relaxed and they took me to the mosque for Friday prayers. Due to my role as 'apprentice', I also started to work with my research partners' missionary stories to understand the existential dimension of their pious endeavors. Moreover, immersing myself into their 'communities of discourse' (Conermann and Smolarz 2015, 9) through a shared, culturally intimate, and aesthetic language eventually created a common ground of understanding and respect (Blanes 2006, 229), and even allowed me and my research partners to joke about my status as *kofir*. During a shopping tour in the nearby mall, Ramziya lent me her money card when the vending machine of an Islamic bank refused to accept my bank card several times in a row, and I remarked with a twinkle in my eye: "Oh, apparently the bank doesn't accept the bank card of an infidel".

Conclusion
On Temporality, Flexibility, Positionality, and Connectivity

Investigating how Dubai migration entangled with individual and aspirational projects of Islamic reform and shaped mobile Muslim subjectivities, this book ultimately dealt with the much broader question of how Tajik Muslims positioned themselves in the world by perfecting their piety and performing multiple belonging in processes of Muslim migration and relational placemaking. Based on the spatial biographies of pious and Islamic educated Tajiks like Karim, Fazliddin, Saidullah and Mehrigul, this book explored the meaningful role Dubai migration, with its accompanying possibilities and constraints, played in the pursuit of a good Muslim life by Tajiks almost fifteen years after the end of the Soviet Union. Having traced Tajiks' multiple translocations within and across Dubai's entangled business worlds, this book has considered migration as an existential experience and as a form of relatedness to the world. Accordingly, it has explored what it has meant to live a mobile life as reform-minded pious Muslims in a time marked by rapid political and economic transition and experiences of precariousness, dislocation, and estrangement. The book has sought to understand how Tajik Muslims' Islamic life projects have intertwined with the unpredictability of their mobile life trajectories and the volatility of the future they imagined and tried to realize, at home and abroad.

After my meeting with Karim, I expanded my fieldwork to Dubai to look more deeply into the moral geographies of Dubai migration. By then, the Dubai boom had already peaked. As chapter two and three have shown, Tajiks well established in Dubai's fur trade were struggling with the increasing influx of unskilled compatriots and other Central Asian migrants arriving from Russia. Often poorly trained and lacking key business skills and work ethics, these rural youngsters jeopardized both the trustworthiness and exclusivity of the Tajik fur business. Dubai's last debt crisis and the related decline in property prices in 2009; increased deportations of undocumented migrant workers, especially from Central Asia and the Caucasus; the economic recession in Russia between 2008–2009 and the ensuing significant decline of Russian tourists in the Arab Emirates; together, these economic developments overshadowed the alluring image of Dubai as an economic paradise. Many of the Tajiks I met in Dubai were therefore thinking about alternative destinations for work. Apart from the volatility of an economic sector heavily dependent on global capitalist market dynamics; it was also the obvious socioeconomic precarity Tajiks faced in Dubai that revealed the elusiveness (or fakeness) of circulating mi-

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grant stories about Dubai as an ideal Muslim place for spiritual and material progress. These narratives obscured everyday manifestations of social difference, polarization, and a racialized structural inequality dominant in Dubai's multiple business worlds in the early 2010s (Elsheshtawy 2010; Mahdavi 2011). This book identified the striking gap between hopeful spatial imagination and expectation regarding the good elsewhere and migrants' everyday experiences of being 'there', and investigated how Tajik Muslims navigated their pious endeavors through business worlds that promised much but delivered highly contingent, unpredictable, and transient results. The multiple translocations addressed in this book can be read as both embedded in and responding to these transient Muslim worlds: Resulting from unevenness and contingency, they served to cushion these experiences, even as they sometimes also reinforced them. Dubai's volatile business worlds created the context for processes of mobile Muslim subject formation. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that the Islamic reform projects of pious Tajiks proved to be just as contingent, volatile, and uneven as the multiple business worlds of Dubai themselves.

In a final reflection on religion as a practice of translocation in migratory contexts determined by volatility, unevenness, and contingency, I will now attempt to synthesize four interrelated aspects that proved relevant in methodological and epistemological terms for the spatial analysis of Islamic reform among mobile Tajik Muslims: i. e., temporality, flexibility, positionality, and connectivity.

On Temporality: Spatial Moments

Throughout the chapters of this book, this translocal ethnography has highlighted the spatial over the temporal dimension of Islamic reform. Coming back to a statement in the introduction, with reference to Julia Verne I argued that the spatial biographies assembled in this book do the work of both spatially *and* temporally fixing forms of transregional connectivity and connectedness, which tend to be dynamic, unstable, changeable and therefore slip from the analytical gaze (Verne 2019, 85). I have further argued that spatial biographies provide 'thick moments' that shed light on the very specific space-time contexts in which Muslim mobilities, and the related movements and placemaking practices, took place and were imbued with meaning through connectivity and connectedness, shaping mobile Muslim subjectivities. Finally, with its bio-centric approach, the book follows up on an argument made in an earlier publication about time as being an integral part of translocality as a lived reality. According to Stephan-Emmrich and Schröder (2018b, 43), memories, dreams, and illusions, like the virtual sharing of spectacular *ḥajj* stories or chains of Islamic knowledge transmission (Arabic *isnād*), fixate tem-

poral translocalities. Transtemporalities emerge from "movements that cross and connect times on different, yet 'jumping scales'" (Stephan-Emmrich and Schröder 2018b, 43), as they are shaped by "both sequences of experience in time, as well as from techniques that bring multiple moments together in consciousness" (Light 2018, 18). Focusing on moments that are spatially and temporally 'thick' and bring to light existing connectivities and their historical dimension with the senses of connectedness they generate, I argue, provides a fresh stimulus to rethink the meaning of 'thick description' in translocal ethnographies like the one presented in this book.

An attempt to determine 'context' in Tajik's mobility practices and their mobile lifeworlds, the spatial biographies unfolded here have highlighted, not only how religious subject formation was linked to relational placemaking in larger geographies of Muslim mobility, but also how spatial biographies draw attention to those moments in fieldwork, making the connectivity between subject, place, and mobility apparent and the senses of connectedness tangible. Moments that were fleeting, yet thick, i. e., 'spatial moments', as van Schendel (2015) calls them, approach histories of placemaking by exploring how people turn a location into a place through social action and relation (including religious practice), and by drawing attention to the spatiality of social relations (and religious practices) (van Schendel 2015, 98, 100). In addition, the bio-centric[79] approach in this book's spatial analysis has connected mobile actors (pious Tajik Muslims) with historical dynamics (the religious economy of Dubai business) on multiple scales, while tracing how these historical dynamics shaped life trajectories and were inscribed into bodies through experience and memory, all in relation to the places Tajik migrants dwelled in and crossed through.

But the benefits of drawing attention to spatial moments go much further. Providing a fruitful epistemological anchor, moments connect anthropology and new area studies in critical attempts by the two disciplines to decenter knowledge orders that build on methodological nationalism and favor static, essentialist, Eurocentric, and Orientalist approaches in studies, not only on Islam in Central Asia, but also on Islam and Muslims in general. A focus on moments that highlight the

79 With 'bio-centric', I emphasize the book's approach that takes processes of subject formation through spatial processes of dwelling and crossing through multiple Muslim worlds as the point of departure. Inspired by, but different from Vincent Houben's pledge for a 'pericentric perspective' that, "staring from a particular place and proceeds to look laterally in all directions across scales" focuses on historical actors as relevant brokers between multiple historical trajectories on multiple scales (Houben 2021, 13), the spatial biographies collected in this book fix, at least temporarily, how transient space-time configurations like Dubai business created the context for mobile Muslim subject formation.

transformative (transductive) character of connectivity and connectedness as proposed in this work, I argue, prompts us to gaze beyond the existence and persistence of networks (as economic, social, or cultural infrastructures) across space, place, and time, and to explore how networks, and the connectivity they effect, shape subjects and make places and movements meaningful by binding its members effectively to discursive and aesthetic formations that transcend the power of the nation state as an imagined community, as revealed in chapter three and five. The moments captured in the presented spatial biographies have served to contextualize Tajik migrants' Muslim sentiments, sensibilities, and existential questions, not only in space, but also in time.

A focus on moments helped me to situate everyday religious practices and experiences in migratory contexts at "the confluence" of multiple "transregional processes [...] that cross-cut and knit together" hitherto separated regional entities (Ahmad 2017, 31), like Central Asia, Russia, the Gulf, and the wider Middle East. Moments thus allowed me to fix spatially and temporally what seemed unfixable, volatile, and transient. My focus on moments also allowed me to situate my fieldwork in the dynamic geographies of Muslim mobility and connectivity I investigated in a "punctuated form" (Ahmad 2017, 32). Thus, migrant stories proved to be a good place to start. An emerging concept in anthropological research about morality and ethical self-formation, and beyond, narratives are seen as a fundamental way in which people give meaning to experience, produce identity, and realize the good (MacIntyre 1981; Ricoeur 1992; Zigon 2012). As shown in chapter one, in Tajikistan, narratives about Muslim travel and the related mobile experiences co-produce spatial imaginaries about the moral and the good elsewhere, which have become a driving force in the institutionalization of a Muslim ethics of leaving for the Middle East. At the same time, the book has carved out that migrant stories are an empowering cultural resource that mobilize people to engage in pious self-fashioning and moral improvement through migration.

Beginning this book with Karim's story, I could also have started with another case study and a different perspective on Dubai migration, but eventually decided to highlight the processual character of this translocal ethnography. Not only was Karim the first student returnee from al-Azhar university who agreed to meet and tell me his life story, he also paved the way for the transformation of my research into a multi-sited ethnography by advising me to go to Dubai to meet more people like him. Karim's story itself resulted from a specific moment of ethnographic encounter, which was curious in many ways and made me reflect on the pathways I was able to take through a transregional research field as shaped by "the art of making an unsought finding" (Rivoal and Salazar 2013, 178; McAdams 2011). Serendipity characterized key moments of my ethnographic fieldwork that often centered around the stories I was listening to and that helped me to understand that

mobile Tajiks' Islamic life projects were just as volatile and elusive as Dubai's fur business itself. In that sense, serendipity also let me experience the agency of the research field in terms of what we can know at all (Tilche and Simpson 2017).

But the curious circumstances in which I met Karim also helped me to understand how place mattered in the geographies of Muslim piety and belonging mapped here. By place, I meant more than the physical settings where I learned about Karim's and other mobile Tajiks' life stories. The spatial analysis developed in this book approaches place above all as a site that, with all its interlacing material and immaterial properties and power relations, had a great impact on how stories were told and made sense of as an intersubjective ethical endeavor of those involved (Zigon 2012; Crapanzano 2012).

Eventually, considering my translocal ethnography 'punctuated' by moments enabled me to understand transformation to be decentered and fluid rather than linear, accounting "for the reconfiguration of what are always a dynamic and shifting constellation of factors" (Ahmad 2017, 32). Ahmad's considerations clearly resonate with an understanding of the transformative nature of connectivity as transduction (Adey 2017), as discussed in the introduction to this book. In that sense, moments provided an approach that, again referring to Attiya Ahmad, helped me to highlight human agency and creativity as moments that illustrate that experiences, situations and encounters are not only structured by discursive traditions, disciplinary practices and political-economic relationships. These moments in ethnographic fieldwork also represent examples of "newly discovered possibilities that have only just been glimpsed or barely grasped" (Ahmad 2017, 33). Paying attention to both possibility and contingency proved to be a helpful epistemological anchor that enabled me to make processes of connectivity visible and experiences of connectedness graspable, to "account for the novel forms of subjectivity and belonging that are being configured by transnational processes today" and "that might otherwise elude, or be elided by, our scholarship" (Ahmad 2017, 33).

On Flexibility

Moments that permit the reader or listener to pay attention to both possibility and contingency evoke the discussion in chapters two and five on precarity as the constant condition experienced by my mobile research partners as they engaged in processes of relational placemaking and the associated spatial practices of dwelling and crossing in Dubai's business worlds. Precarity, taken as a human experience, arises from volatility and transience as well as from heightened uncertainty of working conditions. As Richard Sennett has argued in his now classical work on the effects of flexible capitalism in the USA, driven by the corporate maxims of ar-

bitrariness and speed, people are expected to be able to constantly adapt to new circumstances and working conditions. In due course, flexibility has become a necessary skill in the capitalist economy, together with a tolerance for fragmentation. This was associated by Sennett with the evaporation of community and dissolution of long-term relationships like the family (Sennett 1998, 20, 22, 24). Sennett's analysis is strong in illustrating how short-term, fragmented, and flexible capitalist working conditions result in the corrosion of character through emotional inner-life drift inscribed into individual work histories, (post-) migrant family biographies, and people's sense of being in the world. By contrast, Aihwa Ong's transnational ethnography of globalization in the Asia-Pacific region reverses that gaze to carve out the cultural logics that shape uneven global capitalist development and illustrate that global capitalist conditions can tighten social bonds through spatially expanding families and communities in the context of migration (see also Saxer 2023). Illuminating the complex relationship between state, society, and capital, Ong introduced 'flexible citizenship' as a concept to tackle a new "logic of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically" to changing economic, social and political situations (Ong 1999, 6). This response, however, is not an individual one, but part of a family strategy. Thinking flexibility (and adding multiplicity) as a product and condition of global capitalism with both Sennett and Ong helps to understand the engagement of Tajiks in multiple forms of belonging and to reconfigure Muslim mobilities from Central Asia in the wider context of uneven participation in processes of economic and religious globalization that transcend the realm of Dubai business life. Tajiks thus were able to mitigate against economic and political uncertainty. But flexibility simultaneously allowed them to pursue less tangible life goals related to the enhancement of pious lifestyles, religious identities, personal growth, or moral and material well-being, including both individual and family, or community interests (Studemeyer 2015; Lin 2012). But mobility as flexibility was not without unforeseeable consequences. What role did religion play here?

The Islamic reform projects Tajiks engaged with in the context of their Dubai migration has illuminated how culture (here: religion) can give meaning to (here: economic) action, and in the wider sense existential concerns. But the trajectories of the pious endeavors of mobile Tajiks also reflected how the 'cultural logic' behind the transregionalization of religion, family, and Muslim travel were reworked about the intertwining of capitalism and state power (Ong 1999, 240, 243). I argue that we need to see Tajiks' Dubai migration as embedded in larger spatial strategies of flexible belonging, which include citizenship as both a legal category and an ideal (Studemeyer 2015, 567). Russian citizenship, for example, could, and still can, be acquired by Tajiks through marriage. Emirati citizenship, by contrast, remains an unfulfilled wish due to the country's exclusive citizenship regime. That

is compensated, as Tajiks' engagement in religiously-driven relational placemaking has shown, by other forms of belonging such as adopting Arab names and clothing styles, or cultivating work ethics based on a purist version of Islam. However, Tajiks' flexible handling of notions of Muslimness, Arabness, or Persianness also reflects the post-national sentiments promoted by global Islam (and the idea of a global *ummah*), which force us to understand citizenship (as a form of belonging) in a global and globalizing world in more flexible ways.

Eventually, the translocations and related forms of multiple positioning, by which Tajiks engaged and pervaded various regimes of regulating both movement and dwelling, produced a more complex view of religious and moral subject making (Ong 1999, 243). This book challenges essentializing narratives of difference rooting in methodological nationalism produced and reproduced in circulating political discourses of fear and disorder that fuel Islamophobia in the home country and beyond and that dismantle Tajik Muslim travelers returning from their Islamic studies in the Middle East as deviant adherents of a 'foreign' and dangerous Arab Salafi Islam.

Following Ong's cultural logic of flexible citizenship, religion (religious knowledge, piety, and belonging) as a translocative practice proved to be a resource for successful economic action and for progress. But such an interpretation would obscure what Thomas Tweed has described with his spatial metaphor of 'crossing' as the ambivalent ability of religion to fix a horizon for mobility. Religion both prescribes and proscribes movements across boundaries while simultaneously employing tropes, codes, institutions, and norms to set and mark boundaries (Tweed 2006, 123). Following Tweed further, religion shares with economy, society, and politics that they are "transfluvial currents, transverse flows that cross and thereby impel new cultural streams". In other words, political and economic causes can trigger migration, but migrants imagine their crossings and dwellings by using religious tropes (Tweed 2006, 131).

The concept of 'mobilizing religion' introduced by Conermann and Smolarz (2015) is similarly fruitful as a conceptual lens on the entangled relationship between mobility and religion. This relationship becomes traceable in relation to precarity as a major condition and experience shaping the everyday life of Tajiks, not only in post-civil war Tajikistan, but also in other migrant destinations. As the spatial biographies in this book have revealed, Tajiks' striving for pious self-making and belonging abroad was embedded in mobility projects that were themselves highly precarious. As an exit option, religiously motivated migration emerged from a precarious moral or emotional condition, even as it was followed by unexpected consequences that created new forms of precarity (economic uncertainty, political surveillance, and social marginalization). These reflections underline once again the aim of this book not to celebrate Gulf migration as simply a success

story, unlike what the many migrant accounts I collected during my fieldwork suggested. While engaging in alternative futures abroad, Tajiks could become very successful economic, spiritual, and moral actors. But given a piety that does not conform with Tajikistani state-promoted national Islam and differentiates pious Muslims from the religious orientation of the majority of Muslims in the country, they always run the risk of political discrimination, social marginality, and therefore economic uncertainty at home. At the same time, and turning to everyday migrant life in Dubai itself, Tajik's business activities were framed by a restrictive labor and residence law regime, which added volatility and elusiveness to the economic and social progress they aspired to and achieved.

Finally, the contingency of Islamic reform projects abroad was also fed by family and emotional crises, which often resulted in an unplanned return home. One of the main reasons for this was childlessness. Nura, a friend of Fatima's whom we met with her husband Ahmad in the introduction to this book, was not able to become pregnant abroad. She therefore returned home with her husband, who had successfully established himself as a middleman in Dubai's fur business. Although Nura became pregnant shortly after the couple's return home and gave birth to a son, she began to suffer from depression. She explained to me that it was caused by the lack of opportunities at home to continue her religious studies and pass on her knowledge by teaching young girls and neighboring women in Quran recitation (*tajwīd*) while in Sharjah, just as she had practiced Quranic teaching in Yemen, where she had studied Islamic subjects with her husband and with Fatima and Ahmad. But Nura also suffered from the rejection she experienced from her neighbors due to her reformist piety, which she expressed through an Arab-oriented style of Islamic dressing. When I once met her in Fatima's house, she was initially wearing a fashionable black female dress (Arabic *ʿabāya*), a shiny dark blue *hijab* with a face veil (Arabic *niqāb*), and gloves with glittering stones, just like the Tajik women I met in Sharjah did. But later, she took off her stylish Arab dress when other women from the neighborhood joined us for tea. With the colorful flowered wide national dress, she wore under her Arabic dress, Nura differed only slightly from the other women present. When I later asked her about her change of dress, she replied, at first surprised, "I thought you wanted to see an Islamic woman!" but then explained how difficult it was for her to maintain her Islamic lifestyle, cultivated in Yemen and then in Sharjah, in the hostile environment of her neighborhood on the outskirts of Dushanbe. Partly because of this weakness (*zaify*), Nura reflected, she became depressed and longed nostalgically for the good Muslim life in Sharjah the couple had given up because of her desire to have children. This episode is telling in many respects. It points to the diverse expectations to which reform-oriented Muslims expose themselves: their own, those of like-minded Muslims, and those anticipated in a researcher from Germany interested

in Muslim piety and Dubai migration. The episode also shows the multiplicity of religious experiences in the context of translocal Islamic lifestyles, illustrating how Muslim piety and belonging have been shaped by the experienced limitations of flexible action and the resulting emotional crisis in mobile life contexts. Both volatility and elusiveness have shaped the flexible engagement of pious Tajik Muslims in multiple belongings. This invites reflection on their positionality within the geographies of Muslim piety and belonging as investigated in this book.

On Positionality: A Peripheral Cosmopolitanism

Globalization is inescapable and pervasive. Along with the overwhelmingly precarious involvement of Tajikistan's youth in the global economy through labor migration and international study trips, this book has illustrated how post-cold war globalization has intensified an ongoing and striking religious renewal in Tajikistan and wider Central Asia described as a re-configuration, re-evaluation and re-positioning of Tajiks' Muslim identity and belonging in the dynamic, entangled worlds of the global *ummah.* Such an understanding of Islamic renewal resonates with what Beck has termed as "cosmopolitanization," a dynamic that derives from the interplay of global risks, migration, cultural consumption and media impacts, and that has led to a "growing awareness of relativity of one's own position and culture in a global arena" (Beck 2016, 27).[80] Following this argument, I tackled 'Muslim', 'Salafi', or 'reform', not as fixed categories of identity and belonging, but as related socio-spatial locations and positionings or translocations (Anthias 2006). In this quality, 'Muslim', 'Salafi', and the other categories used in the book situated Tajik Muslims in larger, flexible, and multiple contexts of discursive and aesthetic formations, thus drawing attention to the material dimension of how Tajik Muslims were bound to imagined communities beyond the nation-state (Meyer 2009, 6). Likewise, 'Tajik' proved to be, not simply a territory-fix category for 'the local', but a relational position shaped by what I have described in chapter two as 'peripheral cosmopolitanism', through which Tajiks positioned themselves within Dubai's multiple business worlds, while simultaneously connecting them.

As argued in an earlier article (Stephan-Emmrich 2021, 71), globalization has revitalized the idea of the community of Muslim believers (Arabic *ummah*) as a postcolonial form of Muslim imagination, not only, but particularly in migrant

80 Although this book put focus on Tajik Muslims' engagement in post-national sensibilities abroad, a cosmopolitanization and globalization of citizenship occurred also as part of the state-promoted projects of post-Western modernity (Heathershaw 2011; Adams 2010).

and diasporic contexts. Through narratives of the *ummah* as Dubai business community, Tajik migrants created moments of cultural and religious nestedness, solidarity, and affirmation and sensed a belonging to something larger that transcended established notions of 'Tajikness' and 'Muslimness' and fueled postnational sensibilities and cosmopolitan positions. I see here a clear confirmation of Appadurai's observation that "imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only [for] escape" (Appadurai 1996, 7). The book has also shown that different conceptions of the *ummah* were developed when Tajiks formed and engaged in various Muslim sociabilities at their workplaces and in their migrant accommodations in Dubai, or in their new homes in Sharjah. Engaging in a wide range of discursive and aesthetic formations, Tajiks experienced diversity while also coping with difference and fragmentation and negotiating prevailing notions of 'center' and 'periphery'.

When positioning themselves economically, socially, culturally, and morally within the community of Muslim believers (Arabic *ummah*), Tajiks sensed their 'peripheral' status. Produced at the meeting point of multiple intersectional positions, this sense of peripherality has shaped Tajiks' multiple translocations in their spatial biographies: as labor migrants in Russia facing structural racial discrimination, as Muslims from former Soviet Central Asia isolated from Islamic knowledge circuits, as deviant pious Muslims under state surveillance at home, or as people from the dissident Gharm region in Tajikistan. Fashioning an exclusive migrant identity as Muslim businesspeople cushioned my research partners' peripheral status as Tajiks and enabled them to articulate belonging outside ethnic, regional, and national concepts of being Tajik.

Their peripheral status did not constitute a passive mode of being; instead, it designated their cultural and political situatedness. In his ethnography on coastal Muslims in Kenia and their double peripheral position in the Muslim world, Kai Kresse (2013, 80–82) illustrates how peripherality favors Muslim cosmopolitanism grounded in flexibility, openness, adaptability, and creativity to engage in multiple discourses, debates, and cultures on different scales. In other words, people act in concrete personal contexts of everyday life shaped by postcolonial nation-states, while "having the wider [Muslim] world in mind" (Kresse 2013, 80). My argument here is similar. The peripheral cosmopolitanism Tajik Muslims became involved in during their Dubai migration is not only an effect of intensified globalization. My research partners' capacity, competence, and skill to draw flexibly from diverse registers of knowledge, language, education, cultural openness, and historical experience to navigate the world (Kresse 2013, 82, 95–96) is grounded in a sense of Muslim connectedness associated with a kind of historical knowledge based on travel, shared intellectual currents, and an ambivalent border position "simultaneously inside and outside the Muslim world". This mode of being in the world

has shaped Muslim identity and subjectivity in the region in complex processes of historical entanglement and intense transculturation (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012, 88). And as depicted in chapter one, instead of cementing belonging to a particular national culture, a certain "mediating function between different worlds" (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012, 89) has mobilized Tajiks to turn to destinations abroad, "as long as there is a Muslim there". This mediating role has privileged Tajik migrants to become middlemen in Dubai's mutiple business worlds, as shown in chapter two.

Both "As long as there is a Muslim there" and "We Tajiks are everywhere" were frequent responses given by my research partners when asked what had motivated them to migrate. What struck me most was that these statements seemed to posit such spaces as morally safe, familiar Muslim spaces in terms of both ethnic and religious networks, as little more than a geographical extension of home (Stephan 2013; Saxer 2023). However, the stories assembled in this book speak a very different language, revealing that foreign lands and certain far-off places were assessed as safer, more familiar, and more promising than the Tajikistani homeland. This was related to a territorial shift or translocation of home and community to places elsewhere. In his work on waiting and hope in Iran, Sharom Khosravi (2017, 5) connects social precarity, which he understands as de-securitization of one's life conditions, with a growing sense of disconnectedness to and exile from home (or the homeland) while at home (see also Ahmed 1999). In this sense, for many Tajiks migration has become linked with a 'homing desire', a longing to find a home elsewhere (Brah 1996). Peripheral and simultaneously cosmopolitan, this longing describes a sensibility that marks a certain positionality and way of relating to the wider world that also grounds in the collective memories of Tajik families involved in various kinds of mobility throughout history, covering diplomatic journeys, work migration to Russia, civil war displacement to Afghanistan, cross-border trade, pilgrimage, and diaspora belonging.

Such a Muslim cosmopolitan sensibility or globality (Crews 2015), as elaborated here, is nested primarily in the Persian-Islamicate world. Organized around linguistic, ethnic, and religious communities, in the past this Muslim cosmopolitanism has traversed and connected the territories of the Ottoman, Russian, Moghul, and British Empires (Green 2019; Marsden 2016b; Kane 2015; Burton 1997) and today links Tajikistan's Muslims via Dubai's business worlds with Afghan and Iranian trading networks spanning the Indian Ocean, Eurasia, and the Middle East. During the Soviet period, the cosmopolitanism of Central Asian Muslims coalesced with a new semantic framework when socialist internationalism (Russian *internatsionalizm*) as both ideology and practice became an important aspect of urbanism and progress, including different forms of travel within and across the borders of the Soviet Union (Grant 2010, 127–133; Humphrey 2004). As discussed with refer-

ence to leisure activities, urban mobilities, and Muslim neighborhood sociabilities, when Tajiks cultivate cosmopolitan sensibilities in Dubai as both an economic strategy and a form of religious placemaking, they draw on cultural capital that, combining education and multilingualism with urban competences and intellectual currents, has also privileged and signified Soviet urban middle classes (Humphrey 2004). But Soviet ideology also has clear restrictive effects on contemporary migration to the Middle East. Consider the stigmatization of Muslims who, like Karim, engaged in unregistered forms of Muslim travel to the Middle East. The negative image inherent in the concept of cosmopolitanism (Russian *kosmopolitizm*) during the Soviet period (Grant 2010; Humphrey 2004) still resonates in the state's attempt to securitize its citizens' Muslim mobility through a regime of normativity that frames the transgression of national borders as an act of deviant citizenship. As further elaborated in chapter three, the Islamic reform projects Karim and his compatriots engaged in while in Dubai were flexible in nature, combining ethical positions drawing on purist Salafism, Sufi ethics, and the Persianate Islamic tradition prevailing at home in Tajikistan. However, following Beck's (2016, 27) notion of cosmopolitanization as an unintended, forced process, cosmopolitan religious practice involves individuals with limited choices, and the production of new socio-religious arrangements in these cosmopolitan settings does not occur in an "unbridled horizon of cultural appropriation and enactment" (Vertovec 2010, 66).

Academic work and media coverage have reproduced orientalist images of Tajikistan and Central Asia in general as 'in-between' or 'transit space', as the 'peripheral Other', contributing to a 'discursive marginalization', not only of Tajikistan, but of wider Central Asia (Kirmse 2020, 21–23, 26). Phrases such as 'with its southernmost position in Central Asia' surely refer to a geographical or geopolitical position, but they also evoke images of Tajikistan as remote, mountainous, and poorly urbanized – a marginalized place that only peripherally participated in the Soviet modernization project, and later in globalization (Kirmse 2020; Mostowlansky 2017). At the same time, Tajikistan is almost instantly associated with its civil war (1992–1997) and its lasting socioeconomic and political aftereffects, reducing its perception to that of a place where poverty and political fragility meet religious radicalization. The ascription of peripherality to Tajikistan and its people and their subjectivities produces a powerful political and cultural discourse that frames how Tajiks feel about and describe themselves in relation to the wider world. Whether as the only Persian-speaking nation in Central Asia, as discriminated-against labor migrants in Russia, as members of a young generation prevented from political and social participation, or as Tajik citizens without access to lucrative jobs in the public sector or on the market due to their 'wrong' regional background, the stories assembled in this book have much to tell about the multiple settings and situations in which Tajiks have related themselves to their envi-

ronment as 'second-class citizens' or 'second-class migrants'. Such self-attribution also includes their position as Muslims on multiple scales: as ignorant former Soviet Muslims cut off from Islamic knowledge and discourses, as Persian-speaking Muslims cut off from their intellectual and cultural home in Bukhara and Samarkand (the two historical cultural and religious centers of Persianate Central Asia that today belong to the territory of Uzbekistan), and as deviant Muslim migrants in the Middle East, prone to becoming radicalized abroad. While in Dubai, Tajiks tried to divest themselves of their multiple peripheral positions by refashioning themselves as cosmopolitan Muslim businesspeople. Acknowledging the dynamic relation between cosmopolitan and peripheral sensibilities, I argue, is an important precondition to understanding the geographies of Muslim piety and belonging mapped out in this book. The spatial biographies collected here have illustrated the ambivalent relationship to Russia characterized by economic symbiosis and an interplay of desired distance and sought-after closeness which has bound Tajiks to Russia even in Dubai and continues to bind them to this day. With Dubai as a new migration destination, there was an obvious opportunity to overcome old Soviet dependencies on Russia. But having arrived there, Tajiks realized that the existing uneven power relations had merely undergone a spatial shift and thus an expansion into Dubai's fur business, confirming the peripheral status felt by Tajiks, but in a different spatial context. Symptomatic of this déjà vu is the rather elusive longing of Tajik Muslims to be part of the Arab Muslim world in Dubai business life.

On Connectivity: 'Dubai Islam'

What a transregional perspective allows us to see that we would otherwise have missed can be answered with reference to the three conceptual lenses deployed in this book. Transversal and multi-perspectival, the book has used 'Muslim mobility', 'Dubai business', and 'translocation' to transcend taken-for-granted spatial orders and conventional unitary area frames such as 'Central Asia', 'the Middle East', or 'the Gulf'. It has connected previously compartmentalized fields of research, such as Central Asian and Gulf Studies, Religious Studies and Economics, and the anthropology of Islam and Muslims, with studies on mobility and migration and Area Studies. These conceptual lenses help turn the analytical gaze to dynamic processes related to *connectivity* (and senses of *connectedness*) to emphasize transgression and transition over stasis and fixity, and to overcome essentializing container cultures in studies of Muslims, Islam, and migration, as they are enforced by methodological nationalism or regionalism.

The dynamic and multi-layered interconnectedness of Muslim travel, work migration, trading, tourism, and reform-minded Islamic life projects has prompted me to approach 'Dubai business' as a dynamic transregional platform of material and immaterial exchange and circulation that connects, creates, and forms multiple entangled Muslim worlds. As shown, these worlds were appropriated, inhabited, shaped, and experienced by Tajik Muslims in multiple ways. The intertwinings of economic, social, and religious life and the fusion of Persophone, Arabophone, and Russophone Muslim worlds in Dubai's multiple business fields through Tajik migrants engaging in the processes of dwelling, crossing, and relational placemaking, mark fascinating moments of interconnectivity in the translocal ethnography presented in this book.

With *connectivity*, Brosius and Pfaff-Czarnecka (2019, 5) suggest a convincing dynamic concept to denote a focus on "transgressive formations and their interrelations," as well as to challenge prevailing globalization studies perspectives by highlighting "vernacular qualities of connection-making or breaking". Much more than connection, which designates a result of dynamic processes, connectivity directs our gaze to the dynamic relations and processes that connect people, geographical sites, social realms, or cultural repertoires with each other. Having traced multiple processes of connectivity between Islamic knowledge, work, piety, and belonging; between Islamic reform and global economy, between different cosmopolitan traditions; between different forms of Muslim travel; and between different national and transnational politics concerning nationalism, labor migration regimes, and the securitization of Islam, this book has also explored how processes of connectivity and and senses of connectedness transformed what was being connected (Brosius and Pfaff-Czarnecka 2019, 5). As a result, the book has brought those actors into view that have dwelled in and crossed through these spaces of connectivity and connectedness, exploring how these actors (reform-minded Tajik Muslims) as Islamic knowledge seekers, migrants, economic middlemen, cultural brokers or social intermediaries, shaped and were shaped (their Muslim subjectivities) by these connectivities (Brosius and Pfaff-Czarnecka 2019, 5).

As a major finding of this book, it was through multiple translocations within and across Dubai's business worlds (e. g., in working, engaging in leisure practices like eating out or visiting spectacular mosques, adopting Arab names, or in their housing practices) that Tajik Muslims as pious-cum-economic agents contributed to both the formation and circulation of a Dubai Islam. Cosmopolitan, post-national, and bourgeois in nature, this Dubai Islam can be best characterized as an Islam shaped by middlemen. Emerging in Tajik Muslims' flexible social, economic, and cultural positionings and by a cultural brokerage situated in a peripheral and rooted cosmopolitanism and its associated processes of relational placemaking, Dubai

Islam emerged as dynamic and transgressive formation from multiple cultural translations. Accordingly, Dubai Islam is not simply a ready-made product to be labeled as 'Arab', or 'Middle Eastern' and imported to Tajikistan and thus alien to the local Islam tradition. It is a process and product of connectivity and connectedness. As such, Dubai Islam integrates multiple traditions of Islam and notions of Muslimness. In addition to that, Dubai Islam produces rather flexible positionings and situated forms of belonging. Accordingly, 'Persian', 'Arab', 'Sufi', and 'Salafi' were shaped as cultural repertories of multiple belonging rather than as fixed identities or affiliations.

As a second finding, Dubai Islam formed both a moral resource and a social register that allowed Tajiks to position themselves in Dubai's uneven, precarious, and volatile business worlds, and to make sense of their contingent life trajectories. As the chapters in this book have illustrated, Gulf urbanism and the related political narratives had left a deep footprint in the transregional business worlds in which Tajiks moved. Thus, Dubai migration played a crucial role in fashioning an exclusive 'bourgeois Islam'. An aspirational migrant project oriented towards moral self-development, material well-being, social mobility, and middle-class lifestyles, the notion of 'bourgeois Islam' turned out as inseparable from Dubai as a brand that epitomizes progress and success in the context of both a highly exclusive hypermodernity and a vibrant Islamic economy. Through immersion into Dubai's uneven business worlds, Dubai Islam itself turned into a form of socioeconomic location, becoming a signifier for an exclusive piety associated with new global middle-class lifestyles and aspirations.

In these qualities, Dubai Islam poses a challenge to the applicability of prevailing political narratives diagnosing an Arabization of Islam in Tajikistan that accompanies the alienation of Muslims from a so-called 'homegrown' Islamic tradition and their transformation into radicalized subjects.

Returning to the question of the knowledge gained from the transregionality approach used in this book, considering Dubai Islam as a material effect of transregional interconnectivity based on Muslim mobility that links continental Eurasia with maritime Indian Ocean prompts a critical examination of the prevailing political narrative of an ongoing Arabization of Islam in Tajikistan: does it apply here at all? The narrative resonates with an understanding of religious transregionalization processes based on clearly defined and recognizable ready-made religious imports, here from the so-called 'Arab world', into the territory of Tajikistan and wider Central Asia. Such space-fixing and boxing-paradigm-based explanations become complicated if we look at the large proportion of the non-Emirati

population in Dubai[81], at the striking superdiversity that forms the social landscape of the emirate in terms of ethnicity, culture, and religion, and, finally, at the transregional cosmopolitan past of Dubai. Accordingly, how 'Arabic' is Dubai anyway?

The discussion gets another twist if we reverse the gaze and ask how much of 'Tajik' or Central Asia is in transregional Islam in Dubai? This question shifts the emphasis to the multi-directional processes of flow and impact that shaped Dubai Islam. Accordingly, connectivity as a dynamic concept challenges the prevailing assumption of cultural and religious globalization as a unidirectional, hierarchical process from center towards periphery and points to the agency of *all* people involved to shape these processes on the ground. Besides, connectivity prompts scrutiny of essentializing readings within a rather monolithic and fixed container of 'the Arabic' that level out existing diversity and difference in Dubai and the wider Gulf.

Doing justice to the book's spatial-analytical approach, by means of which an attempt was made to de-center knowledge production about Islam, Muslim piety, and belonging in Central Asia by decoupling processes of Islamic reform from methodological nationalism, it seems more appropriate to frame the processes of transregionalization discussed here as the 'Dubaization of Islam' rather than as Arabization. I am not referring here exclusively to the phenomenon of spectacular development through megaprojects reconfiguring cities in the Middle East and Asia to cater for global capital and investment interests, as the growing corpus of Gulf Studies suggests (Bromber et al. 2014, 10; Elsheshtawy 2010, 256). My understanding of 'Dubaization' is much broader. Referring back to the co-constitutive relationship between movement, place, and subject explored in this book, 'Dubaization of Islam' highlights the entangled dynamics of how Dubai as a Muslim place, with all its material properties, contested narratives of the city's past, its spectacular representations and migrant sociabilities has inscribed itself into Tajik migrant bodies and formed Muslim subjectivities, and further, how the everyday practices of Tajik migrants in dwelling and crossing (embodiments) have made Dubai a Muslim place.

A traversal lens itself, Dubai Islam puts the focus on the discursive and aesthetic formations that emerged from multiple forms of transductive connectivity between places, people, practices, things, and ideas. Those binding styles have worked in multiple ways: i. e., integrative, transgressive, and transformative. Thus, the book has

81 In 2023, the number of Emirati citizens was only 11.9 % compared to 88.1 % of people with temporary residences (non-Emirati people including immigrants, migrant workers, expatriates an others), see https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/united-arab-emirates/, page last updated January 02, 2024.

shown that Dubai migration did not produce Arabized Muslim subjects prone to radicalization; rather migration has contributed to the Dubaization of Islam largely driven by processes of cultural translation. Tajiks' multiple translocations within geographies of Muslim mobility and connectivity have shown their ability to engage in migrant brokerage and middleman-ness in multiple, flexible, yet uneven ways. Following the spatial biographies assembled in this book, cultural translation based on multilingualism, urban skills, and a specific mobility knowledge thus proved to be a prerequisite for successful translocal livelihoods, not only in economic but also in social, religious, and moral terms. Following an anthropological reading of translation in line with Stanley Tambiah (1985), translation can be described as a "process of transporting specific understandings of reality across boundaries of time, place, and culture" (Stephan-Emmrich and Schröder 2018b, 47). This process involves practices of "shifting into a different system of meaning" (Houben 2017, 206). Mobile Tajik Muslims shaped Dubai Islam above all through translations accompanied by spatial practices of crossing. These crossings, as we have seen, were not unlimited, occurring against a "bounded horizon of possible choice" (Conway 2012, 21) and embedded in a cosmopolitanism that was both peripheral and rooted and built on the individual's capacity, and their limitations, to be open for cultural and religious diversity and to cope with difference and hierarchical relations. The spatial identity of Dubai as 'Arabic', 'Persian', or 'Muslim' can therefore discussed here only in relation to Tajik migrants' experiences of dwelling and crossing through Dubai's multiple business worlds. In this book, the relationship between spatial imagination and lived reality has been discussed in two ways: as shaped by a fault line and by multiplicity.

While Persian as the spoken language served as a crucial resource to gain entry into Dubai business, it was not only a transregional contact language (Fragner 1999), or *lingua franca*, among multilingual Asian people, that served as medium of information, knowledge exchange, and understanding to enable doing business successfully. Socio-linguistic commons through spoken Persian, as I argue, promoted a cultural nestedness and stimulated a sense of 'Persianness' that was shared across ethnic and national divides (Tajik, Afghan, Iranian, Baluch identity), and across different regional belongings (Tajiks from Gharm, Dushanbe, Kulob). This Persianness was inclusive, affirmative, and affective. The often-heard statement, 'we go everywhere [to do business], as long as there is a Tajik, or a Muslim', together with migrants' references to belonging to the group of Persian-speakers (*farsigūyon*), marked a sense of dwelling in a larger 'home-space', i. e., a sense of globality inherent to Muslim subjectivity and belonging to the world which predates the emergence of the Tajik nation-state and places Tajik Muslims historically within the Persianate world (Green 2019). This rather 'natural' belonging to Dubai as part of the Persianate world resonated the way Tajiks who stayed behind rather

than migrating articulated their belonging in the world. When Fazliddin's father told me the history of his family, which belongs to the Sufi brotherhood of Qādirīya, he pointed out: "We are Farsi-speaking people (*mardumi farsigūyoni mo*), we lived all over the world long before the Soviets came and divided us. We were one big and widely dispersed family." Family stories like that form the foundation on which his son Fazliddin and his *kamak* friends were able to connect easily with Dubai's transregional cosmopolitan past – especially, as the latter was also shaped by the long history of Persian-speaking population in Dubai, the result of its trading and social connections across the strait of Hormuz (Glioti 2018; Ahmad 2012b, 30–32), as well as by a strong presence of Persian-speaking people in the Dubai economy since the oil boom (Kanna 2011, 58–59; Thomas 2006). Making the cosmopolitan history of Dubai their own through a shared Persianness, Tajiks' rejection of identifying as migrants in Dubai, emphasizing instead that they were Muslim businesspeople, underlined an exclusive and superior position they assigned to themselves within the strongly hierarchical Dubai migrant working world.

At the same time, the stories in this book have clearly carved out the 'social frontiers' and 'fault lines' (Green 2019, 1, 2) of this Persianate space in the business worlds of Dubai and highlighted their ambivalent character. Dwelling in the Persianate space, a decidedly Muslim world, was not without limitations. Power relations shaped by cultural hegemony and social limits, linguistic frontiers and religious fault lines were at work when Tajiks avoided doing business with Turkish-speaking neighbors from Central Asia or Shia Muslims, or when they exposed themselves to the cultural and religious superiority of their Iranian business partners. The strict creed of 'no business with non-Muslims', however, did not work where Russian customers in the fur business were concerned. There, strikingly, the Soviet legacy has also shaped economic dependencies in Dubai business life. The role of hegemony, hierarchy, and competition clearly shows that there is no reason to celebrate a 'Persian cosmopolitanism' (Green 2019, 2). On the contrary, Tajiks sensed their role in Dubai to be peripheral despite their exclusive position as street brokers and middlemen, which reflected their generally perceived peripheral position in the world as Muslims from Tajikistan. The limits of the Persianate space also became apparent when Tajiks tried to gain access to Arab business worlds. With their display of 'Arabness', e. g., through Arabic dress codes or adopting Arab names while in Dubai, they articulated a strong longing for attachment to the more prestigious, but exclusive, Arab world of business, commerce, and religious hegemony.

The Muslim worlds that Tajik migrants inhabited in Dubai were simultaneously real, experienced, and sensed, and thus materially existing *and* imagined. These worlds were simultaneously intertwined and clearly separated from each other and yet became contested through polarising nationalist narratives that defined Dubai's transregional history as either 'Persian', or 'Iranian', or 'Arabic'. Tajiks sit-

uated themselves flexibly inside the current political and cultural discourses on regional supremacy: in the Persian Gulf, with its historically grown cosmopolitan trading culture, and simultaneously in the Arabian Gulf, as a political project promoting Arab nationalism and overwriting the cosmopolitan and transcultural heritage of long-established economic and cultural interconnectivity across the Indian Ocean. Thus, belonging to the Arab world occurred as a highly elusive and temporally limited endeavor and nurtured a notion of elitism shaped by religious hegemony, exclusive citizenship, the strategic communication of Dubai's place branding, and the hierarchical conditions of the *kafāla* system that created new economic dependencies. It is precisely along this fault line where we can pinpoint attempts to 'Arabicize' both Islam and Dubai's religious economy, not only by the emirate's political elite, but also by Dubai migrants. Privileging Emirati (Arabic *khalyji*) identity and the homogenous Emirate cultural heritage in Dubai within the politically forced formation of the Arab Gulf is only one development within the Dubaization of Islam described here. This development conflates with other dynamics into wider processes of entangled religious and economic globalization, which, as has been shown, were also shaped by mobile, pious, socially aspiring and well-educated Tajik Muslims in their search to find their place in the world.

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