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-

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 *ʿulamāʾ*) adhering to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence (Arabic *taqlīd*). While worshipping and visiting the tombs of saints (*avliyo,* Arabic *ʾawliyāʾ*) 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 *da'wa* 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 re-craft 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 'home-grown' (*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

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10 Yusuf al-Qaradawi was an Islamic legal scholar and influential member of the Muslim Brotherhood (Arabic *al-iḥwān 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-šarī'a 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 *'ilm* (see Euben 2008, 35). Accordingly, *'ilm* 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 *'ilm* 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

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[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*, *qirāʾāt* 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-

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[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

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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-

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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-

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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

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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 danger-ous 'abroad', i.e., the Middle East, builds on the correlation between the two con-cepts 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 con-struction 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 authoritar-ian 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 under-pins 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 eco-nomic 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 civi-lization and heritage. For example, with financial support from Qatar, the govern-ment launched the construction of the biggest mosque in Central Asia and recon-structed 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 or-ganizations, and educational activism in 1990s combining development projects with missionary activities (Wilkowsky 2009; Balci 2007).

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17 This is an allusion to the historical conflict between the British and Russian empire for suprem-acy 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-

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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-

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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).

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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 *'umrah*) 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 dini*), 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

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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-taji kistan-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 reso-nates 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 every-where" 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 imme-diate homeland. What is more, these encounters also bring together historical and contemporary forms of Muslim travel, above all *riḥla, hijra*, and *ḥajj* and the asso-ciated 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 Mus-lim encounter share their functionality and social meaning with the historical genre of written *ḥajj* memoirs or travelogues, as they produce powerful imagina-ries 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 home-making 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.