Chapter 3
Furs and Piety in the 'Evil Paradise'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Da'wa Spaces

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Money, Morality, Masculinity: Forming *Kamak* Subjects

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

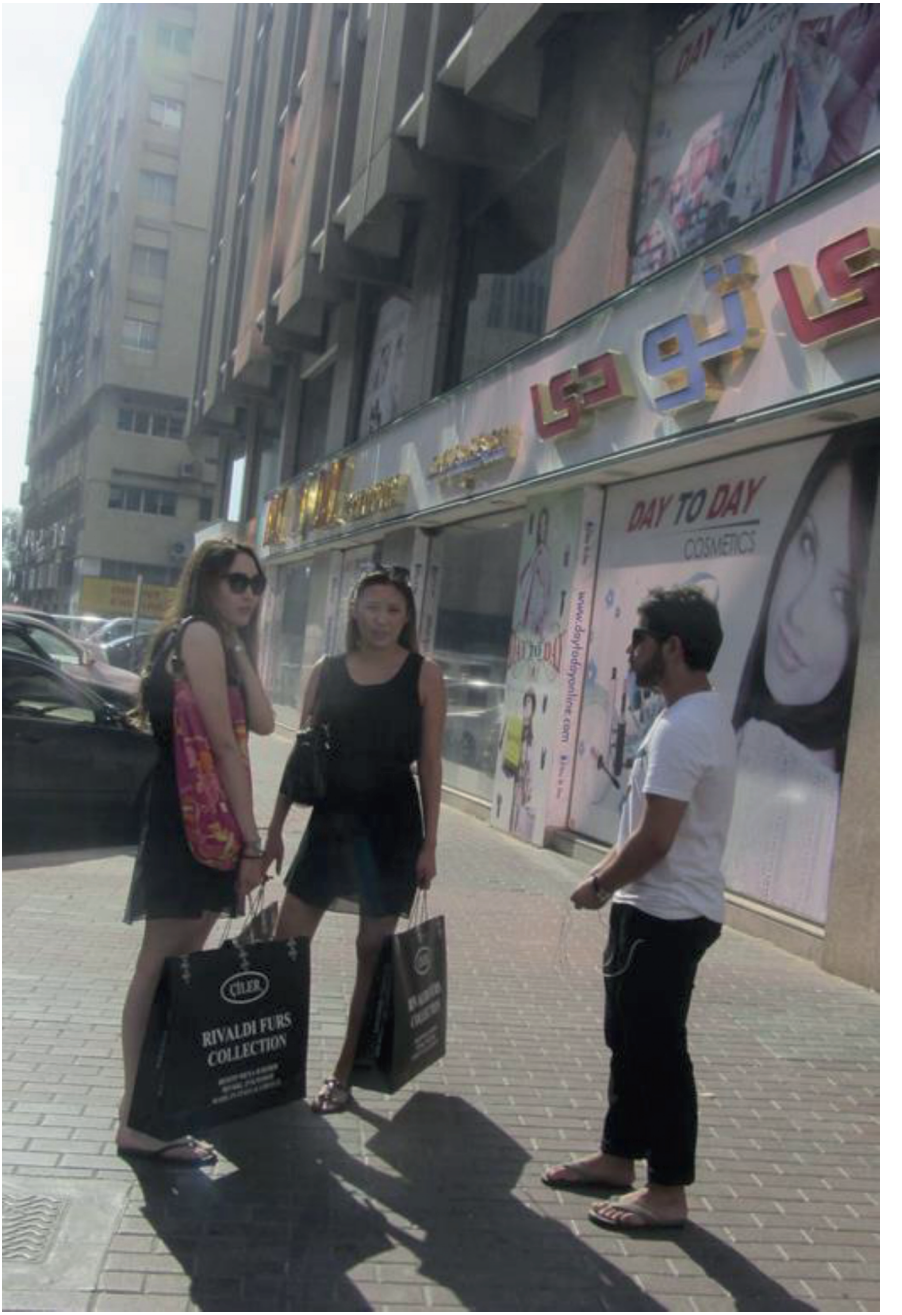

Fig. 5: A Tajik *kamak* invites potential customers to visit the fur store he works for. Photo: Manja Stephan, 2013.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Proper Work' – A Contested Concept

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

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

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

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

Manja: Why not?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Puli Baraka: Economic Theologies and Uneven Prosperity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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