Chapter 4
Beyond Work: Making Dubai a Muslim Place

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

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

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

Mosques and Endowments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When I confronted Abubakr with this statement, he responded:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Manja: Why do Tajiks do that?

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

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

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

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

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

Adopting Arabic Names

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lunchtime Talks

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

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

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

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

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

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

Afghan Restaurants

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We Only Eat Halal!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pleasures and Piety in a Tempting Paradise

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From Embodied Placemaking to Alternative Belonging

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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