Chapter 5
Housing, Home, and the Good Muslim Life

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

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

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

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

Women's Worlds

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Places More Muslim Than Dubai: Sharjah

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mosques and Mooring

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

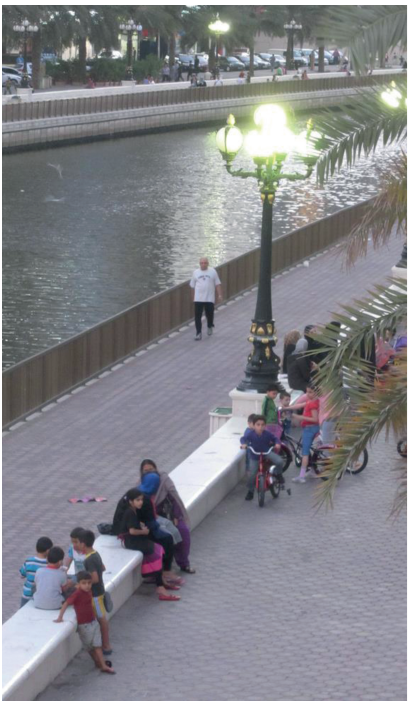

Fig. 11 und 12: Evening scenes on al-Majaz waterfront in Sharjah. Photo: Manja Stephan, 2014.

The Aesthetics and Ethics of Neighborhood Sociabilities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How Female Is Tajik Dubai Business?

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

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

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

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

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

Affective Binding Through *Ḥajj* Stories

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ways of Knowing 'from Inside'

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

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

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

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

Modernity has accelerated the process of dis-embedding religion from the rest of life. Thus, religion has shifted into an object of choice, a core resource, tool and primary signifier for identity politics. In the multiple projects of colonial and postcolonial modernization in the Muslim world, Islam has been utilized to form the good and modern citizen (Hefner 2008; Starrett 1998, among others). A step back in history, early modern reform movement such as Central Asian Jadids put effort into objectifying Islam by reconfiguring a complex Muslim tradition of learning that was based on a specific art of internalization and the embodiment of quite different forms of knowledge (*'ilm*) into a rationally accessible subject of knowledge to be learnt from printed school text books and educational pamphlets (Khal-

id 1994, 193). Later, Islam as a subject became secularized and domesticated as integral body of national culture and tradition under Soviet rule. Scholars of the anthropology of Islam in Central Asia have rightly alerted that if we use Islam as a category of analysis or object of research, we automatically look through the gaze of state politics that gained the dominant authority in defining 'Islam' in the region to domesticate Muslim belief and practice according to the state's nationalistic agenda (Rasanayagam 2014; Marsden and Retsikas 2013a, 22–23). As a result, Islam in Central Asian Studies has merely been addressed through a religion and politics gaze (Thibault 2013).

Discourses on modernity and secularism are as tacit and globally pervasive as the affective politics of Islamophobia and the globally circulating War on Terror rhetoric accordingly influenced my ethnographic encounters in each field site. Talking about, and fashioning Islam as a moral authority located in a realm beyond question and debate, above all outside the domain of the political, was always framed by my interlocutors through the increasing politicization of Islam in many parts of the world, not only at home in Tajikistan. However, while my research partners were very concerned to locate 'their' Islam outside politics, the ethics of leaving that centered around their Dubai migration were indeed articulations of a political position, or at least a response to the related experiences. Thus, the researcher's 'Western' identity fueled their anxiety about my power to write 'wrong things' (*jizhoye nodurust*) and portray them as the political agents they constantly tried to avoid being, but which they inevitably are, as the moral geographies described in this book reveal. The 'authoritative third' which Crapanzano (2012) identifies in each intersubjective process of fieldwork, was significantly discursively framed by a growing influence of ISIS among Muslims in Central Asia and its brutal media presence during my research in Dubai. Coupled with the strict surveilling regime in Tajikistan that pushed many former students of Islam to leave home, writing this situated spatial analysis of Islamic reform was always accompanied by ethical concerns, above all aiming to protect my interlocutors while tracing their spatial biographies.

At the same time, statements such as "We are Islamic women!"[77] or "But you wanted to see an Islamic woman!"[78] expressed when wives of Dubai businessmen presented their Dubai style Islamic fashion before me, proved *their* power to redefine Islam in reference to globally circulating discourses around Islam and modernity that framed Muslim piety, no longer just through national politics, but instead through sharing global Muslim middle class sensibilities. Obviously, the

77 In Tajik *Mo zanhoi islomī hastem!*

78 In Tajik *Shumo zani islomī-ro didanī khosted-ku!*

dynamic blending of global capitalism and consumerism has induced other processes of objectification outside the realm of post-Soviet state politics. Furthermore, the newly emerging assemblage of piety and neoliberal capitalism has transformed Islam into an external "object of debate, reflection, and consumption (Tobin 2016; Atia 2012; Frisk 2009; Deeb 2006, among others).

So, the multiple registers on which Tajik Muslims have drawn when exceptionalizing Islam in their narratives reveal how religious and moral values were evoked and diffused in relation to different social, political and other contexts of their mobile everyday lives involving places outside their home in Tajikistan, such as Dubai, Moscow, Cairo and other geographical locations. In that sense, the stories assembled in this book, and the circumstances under which they were produced, are windows into how mobile Tajiks saw, defined, interpreted, debated and made sense of the world through engaging multiple Muslim sentiments to make sense of their migratory experiences. However, I hope it became clear throughout the chapters of this book, that I do not want to portray religion as just a cognitive discourse about the world and its contemporary precarious conditions, or a verbally articulated belief. Religion, and more concretely Islamic reform, is a simultaneously lived, embodied, and highly aesthetic reality, covering practices and processes of material mediation that shaped the way my research partners felt, perceived, acted, and related themselves as Muslims to the worlds they dwelled in and crossed through over their mobile life trajectories.

Eventually, the material dimension inherent to Tajik Muslims' relational placemaking in Dubai and beyond lead me to reflect on how I have personally been immersed in the processes of aesthetic formation as they are unfolded in this chapter. In their article on phenomenology as epistemology, Knibbe and Versteeg (2008, 48) ask critically, how an anthropology of religion could look "if we were unable to take seriously the experience of a religious reality, central to the people we study." Taking Islamic reform as such a lived reality, a lifeworld, I understand participant observation as constitutive to my way of doing fieldwork in the Arab Emirates and in Tajikistan, not simply a method of data gathering. Instead, participant observation provided me a way of "knowing *from inside*" (Ingold 2013, 5) that, building on the idea of "experiencing observation" (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008, 52), helped me to avoid taking theoretical concepts like 'Islamic reform' or 'Muslim piety' as foundational for Tajik migrants' reality as lived, i. e., a very reductionist way of grasping religious experience. Instead of privileging scientific over other kinds of knowledge, I approach these concepts as only "abstractions of this reality" (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008, 50). Going beyond this level of abstraction, recent material approaches in the study of religion guided me to understand the role of emotions in anthropological fieldwork as a crucial way of knowing. Reflecting on several "key emotional episodes" (Berger 2009) during my research helped me to

understand how Islamic reform has grounded social hegemony among Tajik Muslims in Dubai. Put differently: There were moments during my fieldwork where I sensed a kind of shared understanding of how it might have felt for Mehrigul, her friends, and other Tajiks I met in Dubai to pursue a reform-oriented life abroad.

Our research partners plot us in their narratives. While their plotting has implications for the data we collect, the categories ethnographers are cast into are themselves "wonderful ethnographic opportunities" (Bielo 2013, 6) to engage an anthropology of religion not *about* but *from* (Meyer 2020) as well as *with* pious Tajik Muslims in Dubai. During my fieldwork, I found myself understood in religious positions very familiar to my research partners such as 'the traveling knowledge seeker' (*musofir*), the 'professor' or 'the educated' (*khondagī*), or 'the unbeliever' (*kofir*). These categories allowed both sides to engage in a form of partnership that produced a sense of familiarity, but not belonging, and different degrees of proximity, distance, and difference that were, however, always negotiated with a line between my white, European, Christian and their own reform-minded Muslim identity (Blanes 2006, 227). My presence in the lifeworlds of the women in Sharjah created friendly relationships. However, moments of intimate closeness and confidential conversations about problems in marriage and family alternated with blatant demarcations between them and me as a non-Muslim; an emotional dilemma that Mehrigul formulated as follows: "Manja, you have become like a sister to me and I suffer all the more because you are not Muslim like we are. We could be much closer. I feel responsible for you and am very worried about your life in the hereafter (*okhirat*)."

Traversing inside–outside boundaries created emotional upheavals for both me and my research partners and challenged the very idea of 'participating' and experiencing it. Eventually, it was the anthropologist's 'apprenticeship' in a new lifeworld that made it possible for me to look "for meaning as something that appears to our senses [...] [by learning] to become an insider" (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008, 52). Doing research on piety and belonging in Salafi Islam-inspired, missionary communities, the preexisting category for the ethnographer was that of a potential convert (Crane 2013, 11). Accordingly, missionary attempts became a main form of social interaction, which I initially misunderstood simply for proselytizing clichés and experienced as a 'disruption' of my working flow, but also as an act of humiliation that reflected plays of power in the field situation (Crapanzano 2012, 553). But testing requires comment, a way my interlocutors learned about me and negotiated with my status as a traveling scholar studying Islam without being a Muslim myself. How to treat the unbeliever as a close friend? How much can she know? Can she grasp at all what we tell her, as a non-Muslim? These were major concerns for Karim, Mehrigul, and the other pious Tajik Muslims I met during my

fieldwork. Reflecting their ambivalent plotting of the researcher, I began to understand that both the harsh labeling of the ethnographer as a *kofir* and the idea behind my research partners' missionary attempts drew on both the theological and ethical core of their Islamic reform projects, emphasizing moral self-perfection and spiritual success in moments of inconsistency and ambiguity. Instead of 'flirting with conversation' as a field strategy (Crane 2013), I eventually decided to reverse their own argumentation. Using the inherent logic of their Islamic reform projects, I marked my own distinctive position as a 'religious beginner trying hard to learn.' When I asked Mehrigul to teach me Arabic like the daughters of her neighbors and we sat bent over the textbook, I felt both Mehrigul's deep joy and the release of an inner tension that I sensed whenever she took me to her friends. Being able to tell the other women that I was approaching Islam like the women themselves, namely first learning Arabic to study the books so as to 'really understand Islam in its depth' (*islom-ro bo jukurī fahmidan*), offered all those present the opportunity to cope with the pressure to convert the German researcher as a close friend (of their friend). Moreover, my role as a learner relieved the women in their emotional efforts of dealing with me as a 'non-believer' by being demonstratively shocked as described above. Accordingly, the interaction with me relaxed and they took me to the mosque for Friday prayers. Due to my role as 'apprentice', I also started to work with my research partners' missionary stories to understand the existential dimension of their pious endeavors. Moreover, immersing myself into their 'communities of discourse' (Conermann and Smolarz 2015, 9) through a shared, culturally intimate, and aesthetic language eventually created a common ground of understanding and respect (Blanes 2006, 229), and even allowed me and my research partners to joke about my status as *kofir*. During a shopping tour in the nearby mall, Ramziya lent me her money card when the vending machine of an Islamic bank refused to accept my bank card several times in a row, and I remarked with a twinkle in my eye: "Oh, apparently the bank doesn't accept the bank card of an infidel".