

Understanding Space, Politics and History in the Making of Dubai, a Global City

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other University.

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8th Day of October 2014, Johannesburg

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Abstract

This dissertation is a rewriting of Dubai's urbanity as global history. Drawing on documentary and ethnographic evidence, it revisits both popular and academic notions of the global city in Dubai as a novel entity, highlighting the ways in which such notions remain tethered to analyses of the city's superlative urban forms and iconic architecture in the 21st century. While unpacking the politics of capital and dynasty in denying Dubai a history prior to globalization as well as silencing the city's other pasts and histories of global connections, I present a city that is a material embodiment of social, cultural, spatial and political processes. Tied to pre-existing structures and rather long periods of economic, social and political change within the canvas of global history, I argue that these are processes that constitute the subject of history and therefore ought to be studied as such. My study of Dubai documents these processes as connections and entanglements between particular spaces and times, illustrating how such connections and entanglements facilitated, staged and legitimized by the city, have essentially been global in their effects and have had consequences not just for Dubai but for other spaces as well. In doing so, I offer a picture of the global city in Dubai as social reality rendered through processes and practices addressed from below rather than as a standalone political, cultural and financial symbol of 21st century capital.

My narrative of Dubai takes recourse to an Indian Ocean history of trade, migration and capital flows as key forces shaping processes of urbanization in the city-state for close to two centuries. It further explores the ways in which the Indian Ocean as a distinctive social, political, financial and most importantly, monetary geography interlocked with a post-war international system of nation-states and their monetary geographies to create particular trajectories and social constituencies of capital and commodity flows defining Dubai. It is these trajectories and social constituencies of capital, commodity and monetary exchange, mapped by and at the helm of which are

Indian migrants, traders and entrepreneurs who have traversed it in imperial and post-imperial times, that have fed into Dubai's diverse pathways of globalization in the 21st century.

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Chapter One

Geographies of Commerce: Globalizing Dubai in History

Dubai, in the early years of 21st century, began to feature on an almost daily basis in the popular travel, destination and lifestyle columns of many international dailies. Drawing the reader's attention in *The New York Times*, for instance, are tips on how to spend a rewarding 36 hour break in Dubai, which for the writer is a city that has it all, or if it doesn't, is building it, or "if it's not building it, it's dredging up an island to put it on."¹ A British expatriate who had lived in the city for some time and writes a travel column in *The Telegraph*, offers a list of attractions in this "playground of the Middle East," ranging from jet and sand to snow skiing on the one hand to golf, safari, fine dining and shopping on the other.² The euphoria and aura around Dubai as the global urban future however, was short-lived. With the financial meltdown of 2008 bringing the city's many extravagant projects to a grinding halt, negative criticism of the city's pace, style and promise of growth began to outweigh all its hype in what have been referred to as acts of "Dubai bashing" by bloggers in the city.³ Prognoses of the city as a "giant gamble," a "bellwether of the global credit crunch," "the foreclosure of a dream,"⁴ and with a future which "looks like nothing so much as a nightmare of the past,"⁵ all seemed to make sense in the climate of acute

1 Danielle Pergament, "36 Hours in Dubai," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2008, <http://travel.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/travel/06hours.html?ref=36hours>. (accessed May 10, 2010).

2 Tiffany Hancock, "Dubai: What to See and Do," *The Telegraph*, February 7, 2004, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/middleeast/dubai/729620/Dubai-what-to-see-and-do.html> (accessed May 10, 2010). Also see Andrew Flintoff, "Andrew Flintoff's Dubai," <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/celebritytravel/7221016/Andrew-Flintoffs-Dubai.html> (June 2, 2010).

3 Govind Dhar, comment on "Diaspora Diaries: Dubai," *Mumbai Boss*, comment posted on February 16, 2010, <http://mumbaiboss.com/2010/02/16/sand-spit-and-ink> (accessed August 12, 2010) and Grace, comment on "Dubai Bashing: a New Sport," Sandier Pastures, comment posted on April 18, 2009, <http://sandierpastures.com/personal/personal-thoughts/dubai-bashing-a-new-sport.html> (accessed August 25, 2010).

4 Christopher Davidson, "Dubai: Foreclosure of a Dream," *Middle East Report* 251 (Summer 2009): 9-13.

5 Mike Davis, "Fear and Money in Dubai," *New Left Review* 41 (September-October 2006): 68.

economic recession in the emirate. An article in *The Independent* offers us the perfect snapshot of Dubai as having been nothing but a betrayal of its urban promises,

Short of oil, Dubai attempted to create an artificial economy from reclaimed land and borrowed capital; but it was unnatural both economically and in an environmental sense. Grand as Palm Island and those imperious tower blocks appear, they are badly damaged collateral, a financial mirage. As our banks are discovering, Dubai is simply sub-prime in the desert.⁶

Not only is Dubai seen by some as a failed model in economic development, it also remains an anomaly in the popular and scholarly imagination, by and large, given its rather truncated course of urbanization and short-circuited approach to capitalist modernity. Dubai has been variously described as “a wild ride,”⁷ a legend, and as having “fast forwarded from the 18th to the 21st century in a single generation.”⁸ It has become after Los Angeles in the 20th century, the one city inspiring ruthlessly critical epistemologies and dystopic visions of the urban, the social and the economic as its hallmark. Interestingly, all that Dubai is accused of now, was once pertinent to Los Angeles—real estate capitalism, low property taxes, speculation, non-unionized migrant labour, ecological deterioration, oil bonanza, obsession with architecture and the culture of myth making around the city through the media, being the most striking commonalities.⁹ Criticism of Dubai, however, does not stop with these. It is not a city that spells counterfeit urbanity like Los Angeles. It carries, on the other hand, as manifest in the writings of Mike Davis, not just the charge of an aberration of the normative urban, but an aberration of the very aberration itself. Dubai is doubly fake, a city twice removed from the real and therefore worthy of pointed censure:

[T]he coastal desert has become a huge circuit board upon which the elite of transnational engineering firms and retail developers are invited to plug in high-tech clusters,

6 Sean O'Grady, “Is Dubai the New Lehman’s?,” *The Independent*, November 26, 2009, <http://independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/sean-ogrady-is-dubai-the-new-lehmans-1828328.html> (accessed January 12, 2011).

7 Jim Krane, foreword to *Dubai: The Story of the World's Fastest City* (New York: Atlantic Books, 2010), viii.

8 Johann Hari, “The Dark Side of Dubai,” *The Independent*, April 7, 2009, <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/johan-hari/the-dark-side-of-dubai-1664368.html> (accessed January 5, 2011).

9 Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Vintage, 1990).

entertainment zones, artificial islands, glass-domed 'snow mountains,' Truman Show suburbs, cities within cities—whatever is big enough to be seen from space and bursting with architectural steroids. The result is not a hybrid but an eerie chimera: a promiscuous coupling of all the cyclopean fantasies of Barnum, Eiffel, Disney, Spielberg, Jon Jerde, Steve Wynn and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. Although compared variously to Las Vegas, Manhattan, Orlando, Monaco and Singapore, the sheikhdom is more like their collective summation and mythologization: a hallucinatory pastiche of the big, the bad and the ugly.¹⁰

The trajectory to such a fantasy of city could only be traced to a political anomaly, the *Maktoum* monarchy and its strategic cover up, even willful tolerance of many of the dark and fearful secrets underlying Dubai. Political commentaries and financial analyses, although sparing the Sheikh himself in their fierce criticism of the legion of Dubai's evil pursuits of wealth, made no efforts to conceal the city as situated at the centre of a global network of money laundering, terrorism, prostitution and drug trafficking.¹¹ A set of discourses around fear, drawing on Dubai's connections with the Al Qaeda and culminating in the Dubai Ports World incident of 2006 (in which the US government's decision to hand over the management of six ports in the country to Dubai Ports World had to be revoked), suddenly came to align itself with the discourses of the city as a debacle in urbanity.¹² In what Benjamin Smith calls a “racist geographic sleight of hand,” Dubai had gone overnight “from the darling of the world business elite to a pariah in Middle America.”¹³

For all the fantasies, perceptions, fears and suspicions rallied by politicians and media wizards in the 'West,' Dubai exists, even thrives, and remains far from what apocalyptic visions of the city envisaged it would be. It continues to inspire other cities and spaces in the developing world as a model of economic growth, particularly in the property and real estate sectors. As I write this dissertation, Emaar, Al Ghurair and Al Futtaim some of the biggest parastatal property developers and real estate conglomerates are importing Dubai's city centers, business parks and integrated urban communities and recreating them in aspiring cities in the Middle

10 Davis, “Fear and Money,” 49.

11 John Sfakianakis, “Gray Money, Corruption and the Post-September 11 Middle East,” *Middle East Report* 222 (Spring 2002): 32-39.

12 Paul Krugman, “Osama, Saddam and the Ports,” *The New York Times*, February 24, 2006, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B07E3DF1F3EF937A15751C0A9609C8B63> (accessed January 31, 2014). Also see Frank J. Gaffney, Jr. “Peril in Port,” *New York Sun*, February 15, 2006, <http://www.nysun.com/opinion/peril-in-port/27663/> (accessed January 31, 2014).

13 Benjamin Smith, “The Great Ports Panic of 2006,” *Middle East Report* 248 (Fall 2008): 40-44.

East, North Africa and South Asia.¹⁴ The pace at which Dubai has diversified into new economic ventures and projects including the world's largest airport¹⁵ and gold refinery as well as a bullion bank¹⁶ puts the crisis story behind a new phase of history in the city. When I went to do my fieldwork in November 2011, I found Dubai much the same as I had in 2005, visiting my parents who had lived there for close to thirty years and who were leaving it forever to settle in India. Migrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka as well as Iran, parts of Central Asia and the Persian Gulf continued to throng to the city in search of better prospects, whether as blue or white collar workers, labourers, entrepreneurs or established business people. Dubai was far from an urban fantasy in the desert or the site of a potential ghost town, but a city like it has always been, grounded in and negotiating its own specific processes and practices of urbanization. The airport, duty free shops, streets, shopping malls, offices and other public spaces were crowded as they always were, in my memories of the city as a child, an adolescent and later as a young adult. The newly opened Dubai Metro had no dearth of commuters, the Gold Souk, buyers; offices, staff; restaurants, customers; and construction sites, laborers. If anything, the monumental office buildings and apartments on Dubai's Sheikh Zayed Road evacuated by westerners during the crisis, were according to cab drivers, cafeteria boys, real estate agents and financial brokers, finding new occupants from among the richer Indians and other South Asians. Dubai, indeed was becoming more 'stable,' 'secure' and 'sober,' in the views of many of these men I was in conversation with while in the city in 2011 and 2012. It was a city that worked, a city that could maneuver global flows of commodities, people, capital, discourses, images and cultures in its own

14 For a list of real estate and urban community projects in Dubai, the Emirates and overseas, go to the websites of the Al Futtaim group <http://www.afrealestate.com/content/residential.aspx>, the Emaar group <http://www.emaar.com/en/index.aspx>, and the Al Ghurair group http://www.alghurair.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=35&Itemid=213.

15 "Dubai's appetite for construction continues with multi-billion dollar boost to build world's largest airport," CNN Travel, September 10, 2014 <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/09/travel/dubai-al-maktoum-airport-expansion/> (accessed September 15, 2014).

16 Andrew Torchia, "Gold industry shifts east as Dubai plans huge refinery, spot contract," *Reuters* May 5, 2014 <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/05/05/emirates-dubai-gold-idINKBN0DL0LJ20140505> (accessed September 15, 2014) and Simon Bowers, "Billion dollar gold market in Dubai where not all was as it seemed," *The Guardian*, February 25, 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/feb/25/billion-dollar-gold-market-dubai-kaloti> (accessed September 9, 2014).

terms and to its advantage as well as to that of other spaces bound intimately and tangentially to it. My enquiry on Dubai was precisely along these lines, in other words, it was to see how the city worked in and through its global connections in history as well as in the present.



Figure 1.1: The United Arab Emirates (Courtesy: Google Maps)

Dubai is the second largest of the seven emirates that collectively constitute the federation of the United Arab Emirates or the UAE, otherwise referred to as the Emirates. The United Arab Emirates was formed with Abu Dhabi as its capital in December 1971 when the British withdrew from the Persian Gulf after more than a century of treaty relationships with its different principalities.¹⁷ It is a member of the Gulf Co-operation Council or the GCC which is a political and economic alliance of six oil producing states in the Persian Gulf.¹⁸ Each of the individual emirates of the

¹⁷ For details see James Onley, "Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820-1971," *Journal of Social Affairs* 22, no.87 (2005): 29-43.

¹⁸ The other members are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain.

federation is headed by a sheikh or a ruler, owing to which their principalities also take the name 'sheikhdoms.' Ruled by the sheikhly family of the Maktoums for close to two centuries now, Dubai is also the seat of the Vice-President and Prime Minister of the Emirates. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum who holds both these titles like his brother and father did, is the current ruler and the political architect of the city-state that Dubai is associated with in the popular imagination today.

In this dissertation, I propose a Dubai beyond popular fantasies and fears and continuing to mark its presence as a place and a city in its own right. My narrative of Dubai is grounded in an Indian Ocean history of trade, migration and capital flows and the development of a global economy spanning a century and a half. In the study, the Indian Ocean is redeemed as an alternate frame within which the connected histories of Dubai, India and other regions in Central and Southeast Asia as well as Eastern Europe in their imperial, post-imperial and global contexts make sense. This frame, therefore, is spatial, historical and political as well as generative of newer epistemic and methodological possibilities. “Geographies of commerce” is the key conceptual category I propose to study some of the ways, practices and processes in which the Indian Ocean continues to define Dubai's urbanization. It is through the idea of “geographies of commerce” that I recover concepts, discourses and narratives that produce, define and are produced in the everyday lives of communities implicated in the course of these histories. As a step in this direction, this dissertation aims to recoup this world of mobilities, transactions and exchanges of an economic, social, cultural and political nature. In the process I hope to restore to Dubai its urban history and present as against a present that looks only towards an imagined global future.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the contexts of globalization and urbanization within which literature on Dubai began to surface and the attitudes to the city's history espoused in them. While pointing to the inadequacies of their project of the global city in Dubai, which I illustrate is at odds with its history of global relations of trade, migration and capital, the chapter foregrounds the city as a concept in the writing of Dubai's history. The section on Indian Ocean Dubai both

presents the contemporary tradition of research on the the city in this direction as well as adds to it as an evolving complex of conjoining and contesting structures and practices of monetary transactions. The penultimate section discusses the key conceptual foundation for the thesis, namely "geographies of commerce", while the concluding section sets out the methods and sources as well as a brief outline of chapters.

Global Dubai, an Urban Network, an Image or a City in the Desert?

Much of the scholarship like popular journalism, literature and film on Dubai emerged in the early years of the millennium and forms part of the larger academic discourse on cities in the epoch of globalization. Cities have constituted the most perceptible material forms and vibrant experiences of the social, political and spatial relations of global capital. It is not surprising therefore that theories of the latter have, in turn, shaped the way we both conceptually understand the city and perceive and engage with actual cities in the world. The city has fascinated urban theorists, sociologists, historians, political economists and anthropologists for well over a century now, and they have contributed to our knowledge of individual cities as sites of manufacturing, political and social movements, art, aesthetics, culture, film and music as well as crime, conflict and riots. With globalization taking over as the larger frame however, two significant aspects defining cities have taken precedence over other social, political and cultural constellations within cities—these include urban networks and iconic urban forms.

Cities figure no longer as bounded territory, but as extensive networks hinged on particular regimes of flows, including those of commodities, labour, capital, images and signs in particular directions.¹⁹ Entrenched within a system and operating as nodes linked through virtual channels of communication, advanced technologies of transfer and logistics, the actual geographical referents of cities have become marginal to our interests as scholars and critics, much in contrast to earlier

¹⁹ For details on this argument see Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2002); Saskia Sassen, introduction to *Global Networks: Linked Cities*, ed. Saskia Sassen (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1-36.

approaches to the city as bounded space.²⁰ Alongside this is perhaps a more dominant feature of current thinking on the city in terms of its existence as images, icons and discourses of actual spatial forms and urban morphologies and the engineered experiences offered by these. Thus, the city in the 21st century imagination is both part of a networked system on the one hand and an image, a discourse and an urban language on the other. These dual aspects of the city are not segregated elements, rather, they complement, even intersect, each other, to transform an existing or a newly evolving urban space into the global city that it strives to become.

Urban networks consist of cities “that can be evaluated across multiple scales for both their relational characteristics and their positional implications.”²¹ Saskia Sassen's argument that the territorial dispersal of contemporary economic activity and the subsequent centralization of control and management of such activity in particular sites have given rise to a new global order, is crucial to understanding the hierarchical organization of these urban networks.²² In other words, what we find within the networked urban system are cities situated vertically at different geographical scales ranging from the local and the national to the regional and the global.²³ To qualify for global city status, cities had to have certain features. They had to be the command and control centres of banking, finance and management as well as offer specialized services, say for instance, stock exchange, corporate law, accounting etc., and serve as transnational marketplaces for global economic operations. They had to be sites where the headquarters of multinational corporations, international financial institutions and their support services were concentrated. Investing in the urban form and morphology of their territory and the symbolic aspects of their history and culture, engineered to suit the interests of capital were all part of the strategy towards becoming a global city.

20 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, vol.1, 2nd ed. (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2011); *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring and the Urban-Regional Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

21 Bruce Stanley, “Middle East City Networks and the 'New Urbanism,’” *Cities* 22, no.3 (2005): 190.

22 Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

23 John Friedmann, *The Prospect of Cities* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2002).

The early series of writing on Dubai soon after the turn of the millennium and emerging from the fields of architecture and urban planning was obsessed with claiming for Dubai the global city status it supposedly deserved. A work representative of the genre is Yasser Elsheshtawy's edited volume, *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World* (2004).²⁴ Setting themselves the critical task of rethinking Arab/Islamic cities in the Middle East as contemporary urban spaces, the contributors evaluate the specific ways in which these responded to political, economic and cultural trends identified as the signature aspects of globalization. The editor's case study at the end of the volume, elaborating on the spatial characteristics of Dubai, including its premium infrastructure (worthy of catering to the standards of transnational corporations) and the state's investment in the production of symbols exclusive of the city, hoist Dubai as an exemplar of a global city in the Middle East. Although Elsheshtawy laments that spatial expansion towards "New Dubai" may jeopardize the urban fate of its "traditional city," the essay concludes on an optimistic note affirming that Dubai could serve as a model for "more traditional cities" in the Middle East looking to recreate themselves through the popular gaze of 21st century capitalism. The argument of the volume with its disciplinary location in architecture, and its cultural and political location in the Arab/Islamic Middle East, rests on the theoretical notion that space works both as the cause and effect of capitalism in a post-industrial global economy. To this spatial logic of capitalism not even the supposedly exceptional Middle East, and less so Dubai, were exceptions. Elsheshtawy in vouching for Dubai, a city in the Middle East, as entrenched essentially within the structural framework of western capitalism strikes at the very orientalist notions of the Middle-eastern city as existing at odds with the latter.

Attempts to understand the ways in which Dubai projected itself as a global city also focused on its ability to tap into the vocabularies of "symbolic power"²⁵ or what Michele Acuto defines as the "technique of 'worldmaking' that confers influence by

²⁴ Yasser Elsheshtawy, *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World* (London: Routledge, 2004).

²⁵ For a discussion of symbolic power, refer Pierre Bordieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7, no.1 (1989): 14-25.

mediating people's understanding of the world.”²⁶ In other words, Dubai was portrayed as a city that could represent itself in terms of the already existing semantic codes of contemporary cities and even so, alter modes, categories and structures of perceiving, classifying and conceptualizing them. He identifies architecture and architectural icons, skyscrapers, ultra-modern airports and international trade centres among others as the principal sites that display and negotiate the degree of symbolic power accruing to urban Dubai today. Scholars looking at urban development in the city through its "spectacular projects" and an "artificial and themed urbanity," say for instance, resort hotels, shopping malls, theme parks, island empires and landfills of waterfronts on its coastline, point to Dubai's symbolic capital as having graduated to an "economy of fascination.”²⁷ Dubai thus joins the rank of cities like Las Vegas and Orlando in contemporary times and is symptomatic of a development “increasingly reducing everyday 'reality' and replacing it with a 'culture of simulation.’”²⁸ It is this urban capacity to alter everyday experiences through programmed spatial and emotional interventions and render them, as Anthony Giddens observes, more realistic than their unaltered forms, that in many ways exemplifies it as a global city.²⁹

Investment in symbolic power, however, in the case of Dubai does not limit itself to spatial and architectural expressions or the commercialization of emotion and experience. The emirate's stakes in and exploitation of the dominant discourses, descriptions and categories informing popular perceptions of its urbanity are some of the other significant pathways to symbolic capital that critics have addressed in some detail. A particularly valuable concept in this regard has been Benjamin Smith's "market orientalism.”³⁰ Smith argues that Orientalism and the market are not in the

26 Michele Acuto, "High-rise Dubai Urban Entrepreneurialism and the Technology of Symbolic Power," *Cities* 27, no.4 (2010): 272-284.

27 Heiko Schmid, "Economy of Fascination: Dubai and Las Vegas as Themed Urban Landscapes," *Erdkunde* 60, no.4 (2006): 346-361.

28 Schmid, "Economy of Fascination," 347. For a discussion of simulation, its conceptual meanings, its origins in art and its aestheticization of banal realities and everyday lives, see Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (Semiotext [e], Inc., 1983), https://archive.org/stream/Simulations1983/Baudrillard_Simulations#page/n0/mode/2up.

29 Anthony Giddens. *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford University Press, 1991).

30 For details see, Benjamin Smith, "Dubai, Landscape and the Production of Attractive Markets"

case of Dubai mutually exclusive categories as current epistemologies of the city would have us believe. Orientalism, a circuit of textual and discursive practices validating the imaginative geography of the Middle East as the other of the modern, progressive and civilized West, sets Dubai back in time and confines it to the domain of culture, essentially Islamic and Arab.³¹ The discourse of the market on the contrary, situates it within the realm of capital and modernity, equating it in principle, with urban spaces and cities in the west. The intersection of these discursive fields points to the utility of the concept in the analyses of commercial rivalries between the West and its other as well as the complex and often contradictory political articulations of these rivalries. Smith discusses market orientalism in relation to the question of doing transnational business within the Middle East highlighting how notions of religious and cultural orthodoxy are raked up to prevent firms and corporations from migrating into the Middle East. However, Dubai in its global urban ambitions, he argues, uses the very same discourse that alienates other cities and spaces in the Middle East to mark its exceptionality within it and draw in investors, tourists and shoppers who come to the city to experience such exceptionality. At the heart of the project of market orientalism in the otherwise "desert emirate," observes Smith, is landscape.³² Landscape in Dubai, like elsewhere, is an optical illusion of reality, even history that the state and the elite have created. This illusion we buy into, oblivious of the social relations that it both contests and abstracts history from.

The mythical use of landscape in Dubai clearly manifest in the city drawing on its oriental desert past to trumpet its novelty, exoticism and the superlative scale of its successes considered impossible to achieve elsewhere, and in terms intelligible to a global audience, has formed the theme of many significant works. An interesting cultural metaphor used to describe this particular discursive strategy of competitive urban marketing premised on the image of the desert in Dubai and its transformation into a world class city is "Scheherazading," or in literal terms, storytelling.³³

(PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2008), 70-78.

31 Edward. W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Toronto: Vinatge, 1979).

32 For the discussion on landscape and its conceptual underpinnings, see Smith, *Dubai*, 37-65.

33 Alamira Reem Bani Hashim, Clara Irazabal and Greta Byrum, "The Scheherazade Syndrome,"

Storytelling in and about Dubai seems to have an element of orientalist magic to it and has created a cult of urban fantasy around the city. More significantly, its magical transformation, articulated as a monumental leap from a small, sleepy fishing village in the 19th century to the futuristic urban space of the 21st century in a preposterous Arab/Muslim Middle East, began to be an oft-quoted trope of Dubai's history. The narrative genre of the city's urban history rendered much like a tale from *The Arabian Nights* and premised on landscape, architecture and the built environment as sites of history writing had become quite popular by the latter years of the previous decade.³⁴ While not structurally different to the existing tradition of scholarship referred to earlier, this genre of writing personalizes history in Dubai within the infrastructural modernity and urban morphology argument and condenses it to the laissez faire economic policies of the ruling *Maktoums*.³⁵ Largely episodic and anecdotal, this criticism of Dubai does not exceed popular comments on the excessively ambitious and unrealistic projects of Sheikh Mohammed, the illegal and morally corrupt foundations of terrorism, criminal networks, money laundering and prostitution and the human costs and effects of the Dubai model of development.³⁶ The tone of these works attempting to give the new global city candidate a past and a history may vary from scathing criticism as in Syed Ali's "gilded cage" of a city to apologetic undercurrents in Davidson's vulnerability paradigm.³⁷ Nonetheless, that these authors could not evoke a picture of Dubai other than as a paradoxical, plastic and a hyper-iconic urban entity³⁸ only betrays their inability to override the given categories of discourse delineating the city and the problematic frame of space at the core of their analysis.

Architectural Theory Review 15, no.2 (2010): 210-231.

34 The most well known of works in this genre are by Christopher Davidson, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success* (London: Hurst, 2008), Jim Krane, *Dubai: The Story of the World's Fastest City* (New York: Atlantic, 2009) and *City of Gold: Dubai and the Dream of Capitalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), Syed Ali, *Dubai: The Gilded Cage* (London: Yale University Press, 2010) and Pranay Gupte, *Dubai: The Making of a Megapolis* (New Delhi: Viking, 2011).

35 The earlier tradition too offers the contemporary city in Dubai an (infra)structural continuity in the past, but the monarchic politics of the Maktoums in all of these infrastructural projects is taken for granted rather than explicitly stated.

36 Ali, *Dubai*, 16-19.

37 Davidson, *Dubai*, 6-7.

38 Ali, *Dubai*, 38.

Ahmed Kanna in *Dubai: The City as Corporation* (2011) which is one of the most significant scholarly contributions on the city to date, addresses the politics of a historiography conjectured on space and the kind of urbanization to which it remains tied.³⁹ Drawing on the writings of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey and others, he foregrounds the political dimensions of space in Dubai and situates it at the centre of what he calls the "family-state" of the *Maktoums* and their project of appropriation of its urban history. The consciousness that urban space must form the site of inscription of state power and that urbanization through the symbolic rendition and use of space must remain the exclusive prerogative of the state, he reminds us, has been the dominant ideology of the *Maktoums* since the 1950s. The project of the state revolved around the symbolic, spatial and political management of social and cultural difference in Dubai and the hierarchization of cultures, classes and ethnicities in terms of their utility to the spatial base of its power. It was the spatial thinking of the *Maktoums* that created distinct regimes of citizenship and patterns of urban inclusion in the emirate, run and managed as a city-corporation. In other words, the ethnic and neoliberal categories of the citizen as well as the consumer clientele, all made sense in a context where the state could, given the lack of political resistance, transform architectural space into social space in almost absolute terms. The politics of the *Maktoums* also involved what Kanna calls the "spatialization of Dubai as a blank slate,"⁴⁰ or the capacity to restore its sovereign territory as what Harvey calls "absolute space."⁴¹ For the regime to work on space and the concept of space so as to amend these to suit its ideology, it (space) had to be rendered empty, abstract, devoid of history and erased of the signs of political struggle. It was only on de-historicized and de-politicized space that the regime could build the world's tallest tower, only seven star hotel, biggest malls and the most exquisite private beaches, and also exude a sense of greater political and territorial security for particular classes of the elite, including wealthy foreigners and tourists. The idea of Dubai as having been built from the desert and therefore from nothingness makes

39 Ahmed Kanna, *Dubai: The City as Corporation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

40 Kanna, *Dubai*, 209-217.

41 David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006), 121-122.

better sense when looked at from this perspective. The desert in this perspectival scheme is only a geographical signifier for a conceptual signified, the absence of history. To put it differently, the void that the desert stands for is a metaphor for the historical vacuum inscribed on Dubai by the ruling regime.

Scholars have traced the pathways to Dubai's global urbanity—the diverse spatial, symbolic and political aspects which have been set out in the preceding pages—to the economic policies of the state, its property regime and its absolute control over urban planning. That the three work in concert with each other as part of the framework of an urban development hinged on the spatial logic of capitalism is something we begin to see with Michael Pacione's profile of Dubai. He writes of the city as “a hybrid model between state control and economic liberalism in which urban development is determined largely by the planning vision of the ruling family within an environment of market capitalism that seeks to attract foreign investment and reduce restrictions to free enterprise.”⁴² Waleed Hazbun adds to this strand of thinking on the city's development with his account of the state's practices of land allocation and rights distribution, as well as his critical gestures towards the partnership between state and private capital engendered by these. He observes that Dubai's current land regime goes back to the 1960s when there were very few clusters of settlements in town.⁴³ While some of the long inhabited settlements were spared, the remaining territory in the desert and along the coast of the emirate was taken over by the Maktoums, giving them 'total territorial control' and the privilege to transform such territory into enclaves of tourism, leisure and entertainment with little resistance from the citizenry. The ruler was entitled to “sell the land, lease it, put it to special uses over a set period, or allocate it to the municipality for public utilities.”⁴⁴ However, what was interesting about the regime was that although property rights over land were transferred to private individuals and commercial establishments, the latter could only claim ownership of capital and profits, with no “prerogative over the

42 Michael Pacione, “City Profile: Dubai,” Pacione, Michael. “City Profile: Dubai.” *Cities* 22. no. 3 (2005): 257; and Jeffrey Sampler and Saeb Eigner, ed. *Sand to Silicon: Achieving Rapid Growth, Lessons from Dubai*, ed. (London: Profile Books, 2003), 16-17.

43 Waleed Hazbun, *Beaches, Ruins, Resorts: The Politics of Tourism in the Arab World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 217.

44 Pacione, “City profile,” 260.

disposition of territory" which essentially remained the state's.⁴⁵

Is there a Past to Dubai's Global Capital?

The urban history of towns and cities is more than a history of concrete objects. It is constantly transformed into an entire system of signification. The image of the city extends beyond the city itself to its articulation, in precise and distinctive ways, to the abstract concept of the state, government, society and economic activities.

K.N.Chaudhuri⁴⁶

What interestingly is lacking in the vast majority of scholarly writing on Dubai is a sustained engagement with questions of economy or capital, as it were, and the practices that have constituted its urbanity. This might seem like a contradiction of sorts given the ample attention paid to its 21st century leisure, shopping and tourism economies in contemporary literature and the financial conduits marking them.⁴⁷ For all the speculations on its contemporary economy, touted as “a pioneering model for post-oil development,”⁴⁸ Dubai's pre-globalization economy has evoked very little academic interest; if anything, it has been quickly glossed over as based on oil, smuggling etc.⁴⁹ This negligence, I argue, has to do primarily with imagining Dubai as territorially entrenched within the multiple geographical scales of an oil-rich Middle East; the Arabian Peninsula, its topography corresponding to the political geography of the Gulf Co-operation Council or the GCC; and finally the oil federation of the United Arab Emirates.⁵⁰ The Middle East remains a geographical construct that does not have a past beyond the early 20th century when it was used to designate an arena of strategic operations in west Asia.⁵¹ As a popular usage, a cultural construct and “a geographical label with a tendency to slide about the map, whether following socio-cultural groupings, political boundaries or simple

45 Hazbun, *Beaches, Ruins, Resorts*, 217.

46 K.N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe: Economy and Civilization of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 338.

47 Davidson, *Dubai*, 121-135.

48 Davidson, *Dubai*, 1.

49 Yasser Elsheshtawy, “The Great Divide: Struggling and Emerging Cities in the Arab World,” in *The Evolving Arab City: Tradition, Modernity and Urban Development* ed. Yasser Elsheshtawy (London: Routledge, 2008), 2.

50 The federation of the UAE is financed by the oil revenues accruing to Abu Dhabi.

51 Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 64-65.

prejudice,” the Middle East has been all about framing a people, a culture and a history as texts, objects and commodities.⁵² These texts, objects and commodities have no existence outside of our intervention as subjects that read, gaze and consume them.⁵³ Placing oil as central to both the economy and the state in Dubai is only an extended reading in textual fashion, literally and metaphorically, of what happens elsewhere in the Middle East, including Abu Dhabi, and hardly takes into account any empirical reality as it defines Dubai.

Viewed from the geographical frame of reference in question, the city, quite problematically, is only the material form of the abstract entities of state and economy and not a socio-spatial form in its own right. This was partly since modern urbanization in the larger part of the Gulf coincided with the establishment of independent nation states whose “capital cities became increasingly identified with the modern state as they began to extend over large parts of their national territory.”⁵⁴ Dubai, the city thus became eponymous with Dubai, the emirate, the latter created as a constituency of the modern oil federation of the United Arab Emirates and ruled by the sheikh or the emir as it were. Migration from parts of the Indian subcontinent as well as Iran was a dominant feature of this phase of urbanization in the Persian Gulf. Migrants were required to build, maintain and renovate infrastructure as well as provide services to a native population that had to be modernized as subjects of welfare regimes in these states. The increasing demand for labour and services including transportation, communication, technology, education and health reflected in migrant numbers swelling to alarming proportions with Indians alone estimated to have constituted about 24.5 percent of UAE's migrant workforce in 1982.⁵⁵ By 2013, the number of Indian migrants was estimated at 2.2 million in the UAE which had a migrant stock of 7.8 million foreign workers out of a total population of 9.2 million.⁵⁶ Of the 2.2 million, 40 percent are from Kerala in South India which also

⁵² Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, 64-65.

⁵³ For the discussion on imaginative geographies as texts, see Derek Gregory, “Power, Knowledge and Geography: The Hettner Lecture in Human Geography,” *Geographische Zeitschrift* 86, no.2 (1998): 70-93.

⁵⁴ Nelida Fuccaro, “Visions of the City: Urban Studies on the Gulf,” *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 35, no.2 (2001): 176.

⁵⁵ See “Migrant Workers in the Arab Middle East,” *Third World Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (1982): 530.

⁵⁶ “UAE has 2.2 m Indians: 40% from Kerala,” *Emirates* 24/7, May 13, 2013,

has the greatest advantage from remittances of Indians working overseas. Pakistanis come a close second to Indians at 1.2 million, Bangladeshis at 700,000, Filipinos at 680,000 and Iranians at 400,000.⁵⁷ That state, economy and culture were deliberately constituted as mutually exclusive categories in Gulf societies where migrant populations far exceed the demographic category of citizens is an observation Neha Vohra makes in her recently published monograph on Dubai's Indian diaspora.⁵⁸ The politics implicit in such a strategy, she elaborates, was to relegate the 'foreigner,' or the migrant as it were, to the realm exclusively of the economy⁵⁹ and define his/her existence as subservient to the interests of the citizenry and the logic of a state at the helm of the two in Dubai.

Dubai as an emirate, or the seat of the ruling *Maktoums*, does share certain structural and functional features with other oil cities in the Arabian Gulf. Oil revenues construed as primary drivers of urban development in Gulf monarchies, may have in more ways than one, consolidated the power of the *Maktoums* and defended the legitimacy of their right to reign over Dubai. They may also have contributed quite significantly to the "ruling bargain" as the key characteristic of economic and political subject-hood in the emirate,⁶⁰ shaped state-society relations and institutionalized its bureaucracy and rentier systems of governance.⁶¹ However, to say that oil created a city and forged an economy on its own terms is to practically deny the existence of both prior to oil in the emirate, even erase their imperial and post-imperial foundations in trade, mobility and financial exchange. It is also in

<http://www.emirates247.com/news/emirates/uae-has-2-2m-indians-40-from-kerala-2013-05-13-1.506273> (accessed October 10, 2013).

57 For details see Froilan T. Malit Jr., and Ali Al Youha, "Labour Migration in the United Arab Emirates: Challenges and Responses," <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/labor-migration-united-arab-emirates-challenges-and-responses> (accessed March 21, 2014).

58 Neha Vohra, *Impossible Citizens: Dubai's Indian Diaspora* (London: Duke University Press, 2013).

59 Neha Vohra, "Participatory Exclusion: The Emirati State, Forms of Belonging and Dubai's Indian Middle Class," (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2008), 12.

60 The ruling bargain is a term coined by Christopher Davidson to explain the project of pursuing economic reform without meaningful political reform, not just in Dubai but in the federation as a whole. The components of the ruling bargain, he identifies as "the development of a patrimonial and technocratic network, the provision of a veneer of modern, "neo-patrimonial" government institutions, and the careful exploitation of a range of ideological, religious, and cultural resources." For details see, Davidson, *Dubai*, 137-138.

61 Steffen Hertog, "The Sociology of the Gulf Rentier Systems: Societies of Intermediaries," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, no.2 (2010): 282-318.

many ways, a statement that trivializes the impact of the city's multiple economies on its state, society and politics in both oil and post oil times.

Oil was a relatively late entrant in the emirate's urban, political and economic existence. Although concessions were signed as early as 1939,⁶² hardly any oil was discovered in the emirate until 1966 or exported until 1969. Abu Dhabi by this time had been exporting about 2.5 million tonnes of crude a year for close to six years.⁶³ At least four offshore oil wells were discovered in the early years of the 1970s, but despite their production put together Dubai could not claim more than 4 percent of all the oil found in the Emirates, a figure not exceeding 4 billion barrels of proven reserves. By 1975, oil revenues accounted for two-thirds of Dubai's GDP following which it was on a downward swing to 50 percent in 1985 and just about 18 in 1995.⁶⁴ Interestingly, it was in the early 1970s, as reported by the British press, that Dubai's trade in gold, more of which we will see in chapters 3 and 4 of the dissertation, was running at almost £120 million annually.⁶⁵ It was also the phase in its economic history when the annual import of wrist watches alone was estimated at "40 or 50 per head of its population," with these making their way, not unlike gold, as "smuggled goods" into India.⁶⁶ With a creek filled with dhows⁶⁷ and a modern port where container ships loaded with goods imported from as many as seventy countries called, Dubai was a vibrant relay market in an entire spectrum of commodities from at least the late fifties when oil was still missing from the picture and the Emirates as a federation had not yet materialized.⁶⁸ These figures of the city's trade at a cursory glance must explain why I move away from the grand narrative of oil, while focusing

62 The reference is to the agreement between the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and Sheikh Said of Dubai in 1939 by which the latter was to receive ground rents to the order of 200 rupees per month for a plot of land leased out to the company in *Hamriya* bordering the creek. For details see "Agreement between Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and Shaikh Said Bin Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai to lease a plot of land," File No: 1939 R/15/4/3, 7-8. National Centre for Documentation and Research, Abu Dhabi.

63 "Economist Intelligence Unit, January 2009 UAE Country Report" is quoted by Jim Krane, *Dubai*, 50.

64 Jim Krane, *Dubai*, 50-52.

65 Anthony Pearson, "Dhows now turn to trade," *The Guardian*, April 24, 1975, 19.

66 Pearson, "Dhows now turn to trade," 19.

67 Dhows are the traditional sailing craft found off the coasts of India, the Persian Gulf and East Africa. They have been plying the waters of the Indian Ocean for centuries.

68 Anjali Chanda, "India—Paradise for Smugglers," *The Times of India*, May 23, 1971, 5. For the discussion of Dubai's entrepôt trade and the commodities traded from the fifties up until the eighties, see chapter 3 of the dissertation.

on its economy of trade, re-export and 'smuggling' as significant aspects of its urbanity.

As a first step towards studying the history of capital in Dubai as well as the multiple dimensions of its economy of trade, I extricate the city from the oil geographies of the Middle East as its frame of reference and restore it as a conceptual and geopolitical entity in its own right. I then combine the categories of state, economy and culture segregated in the official discourse of the corporate city-state to propose a historical reading of the city as a place as well as a site of mobility, exchange and transactional flows. Culture, as it is written back into Dubai in the dissertation, is not the reified culture of an imagined Arab past, tribal, homogenous and ethnically pure, but a culture of cosmopolitanism entrenched within the particular histories and practices of earlier and existing regimes of commerce in the Indian Ocean. A shift in spatial perspective from the Middle East to the Indian Ocean entails more than expanding Dubai's economy in space, scale and time or addressing the geographies, politics and cultures of global capital that define it. It is also an attempt to write the emirate's urban history from the point of view of a different set of actors, constituted in the political discourse of the *Emirati* state as migrants and foreigners and whose distinctive claims to a legitimate presence in Dubai derive from the commercial traditions and shared cultures of the Indian Ocean world. The significance of retrieving shared economic, political and spatial structures as well as cultures and categories of meaning lies in their potential to explain life in Dubai as it is lived and experienced by these different communities of actors in relation to each other and the urban society at large. Lest we are mistaken, it is not just migrant communities of traders and immigrants whose perceptions and everyday lives are shaped by these but the state itself with its inherited concepts and vocabularies of economic development, political governance and bureaucratic administration. A due analysis of these concepts and vocabularies also sheds light on the structural continuities between earlier regimes of commerce in the Indian Ocean and its contemporary practices ranging from 'smuggling,' to re-exports and the trade in counterfeit, all of which as the dissertation shows, are paramount to the transnational urban economy and its

social relations in Dubai. It also reveals the ontological configuration of the state in Dubai as concurrently an Indian Ocean city-state, an emirate and the corporation or *Maktoum Inc.*, to say the least.

An almost uncritical view of oil as central to the political project in Dubai perhaps nowhere more exemplified than in its ruling bargain, deflects attention from other more significant practices and constituencies defining the politics of the Maktoums. In fact, to construe the ruling bargain as symptomatic only of state-citizen relations is to write off non-citizens as insignificant to the constitution and legitimacy of the state, a notion this work challenges through historical and ethnographic analyses of trade in the city. Alongside the ruling bargain, as the dissertation illustrates, exists a tacit commercial consensus with a much deeper history and a more nuanced texture to it. The trajectory of this consensus goes back to the 19th century and was at the core of the state-merchant relations through the times of the burgeoning trade in the Persian Gulf. As a dynamic political strategy replete with its own set of conflicts and conjectures, the dissertation continues to mark the social, ethnic and cultural hierarchies prevailing in Dubai's urban economy even today, besides explaining the configuration of its smuggling and other illegal trades. The commercial consensus drawing its substance from the cultural and commercial milieu of the Indian Ocean world has personal, structural and often (il)legal dimensions to it. Its intensity and indelible presence can be gauged only against the scale and form of the many 'illegal' trades in question and the degree of state participation in the production and perpetuation of such illegalities.

I illustrate the multiple forms, regimes and practices constitutive of the commercial consensus, including that of banking, labour migration and law in chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the dissertation. I also signpost the ways in which these regimes, forms and practices obfuscate the legal, the formal and the licit; insofar as economic and commercial practices in Dubai are concerned. At this juncture in the discussion, I only draw attention to the ways in which the elements of the commercial consensus were co-opted by the oil state privileging certain ethnicities of merchants as

"gatekeepers around senior regime figures"⁶⁹ while rendering certain others invisible in the domain of political and economic authority. An interview with a certain Muhammad Mahdi Al Tajir, the ambassador of the UAE to the UK and the trusted personal adviser of Sheikh Rashid of Dubai that appeared in *The Observer* lays out in clear terms the intricacies and shifts in the commercial consensus during the oil years.⁷⁰ Al Tajir, born in Bahrain but exiled as a young man, at the time of the publication of the interview in April 1975, had a personal fortune of £ 2,000 million and was supposedly "the richest man in the world." Although he was born into the largest family of merchants in Bahrain, he was believed to have made his initial capital through the "cut on the gold trade" in Dubai where he had at the behest of Sheikh Rashid, taken charge of the Customs, Lands Department and the Ruler's Office.

Identifying a whole range of possibilities in the gold trade, apparently destined for smuggling into India, he advised the ruler to build adequate port infrastructure while the 'business community' asked for a hike in port duties to raise capital required for the establishment of public institutions such as a municipality, a school, hospital etc. With the discovery of oil, Al Tajir began to negotiate oil leases for many other rulers, besides Sheikh Rashid, eventually becoming an international investor with inter-continental interests in real estate, mining, diamonds and precious stones. There were others like Al Tajir with a similar Arab-Persian ethnicity⁷¹ and a trajectory of commercial and political success in Dubai and who rose to the ranks of brokers with the *Maktoums* and other sheikh families during the era of oil. They were from among the *Al Ghurairs*, the *Al Tayers* and the *Gargashes*, to name a few merchant families in the Emirates.⁷² However, the 'business community' in Dubai was not all of Persian and Arab merchants, nor was the commercial consensus restricted to these ethnicities who naturalized as *Emirati* citizens following the consolidation of the

69 Hertog, "The Sociology of Gulf Rentier Systems," 290-291.

70 Colin Chapman, "The Richest Man in the World," *The Observer*, April 16, 1975, 15.

71 This Arab-Persian ethnicity was characteristic of the Indian Ocean in pre-oil times. See James Onley, "Transnational Merchants in the Nineteenth Century Gulf: The Case of the Safar Family," in *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*, ed. Madawi Al Rasheed (New York: Routledge, 2005), 59-89.

72 Hertog, "The Sociology of Gulf Rentier Systems," 291.

federation. Indian merchants who had historical connections with Dubai from at least the mid 19th century and had settled in as diasporic communities were also factored in as key constituencies of the consensus, although with much less visibility than their Arab and Persian counterparts. The transition that the latter made as gatekeepers, brokers and intermediaries between the regime and its citizens in times of oil was certainly not an option available to them. This however is not to say that they did not have privileges or sovereignties tied to their financial position and commercial standing within Dubai or that they did not participate in its urban development.

Neha Vohra has studied the "unofficial citizenship" and "expatriate client" identities of particular categories of Indian merchants in Dubai as effects of what she calls "multiple logics of governance."⁷³ These effects, she argues, are most visible in the realm of the economy which as neoliberal and open as it claims to be, prohibits the entry of other ethnicities into commodity sectors like gold, textiles and electronics, over which Indian mercantile communities were granted and have held commercial monopolies for the longer part of Dubai's history. Complicit with the state's project of producing social and economic hierarchies beneficial to citizens and to these clients, the latter have written themselves out of the political domain and chosen much to the state's pleasure, to exert rights and extend the state's practices of governance over lower class migrants among Indians. While these aspects of the pact between the state and the Indian elite are significant to thinking politics in Dubai, it is the routes that these mercantile communities have taken to reinforcing their client positions within the city-state's power grid that help navigate and chart the course of the argument in this work. Vohra's emphasis on the merchants' use of the informal economy practices for the accumulation of wealth and the creation of transnational ethnic strongholds are what offer it entry points into the discussion on the commercial consensus.

The informal economy in Dubai revolving around the import and illicit transfer of gold, textiles and electronics to India where private trade was heavily regulated well

⁷³ Vohra, *Impossible Citizens*, 11-14.

into the 1990s relied on, I argue, a completely different order of urbanity and politics to that engendered by oil in other Gulf states. Yet in Dubai, as the dissertation shows, politics and urbanity existed at the interface of the two colluding with each other in several ways and at the level both of the emirate and the federation so much so that the one cannot be made sense of without the other. If the formal and the informal intersected rather than co-existed with each other, it cannot be the case that the state was not implicated in this nexus. In other words, the state in Dubai was in its official capacity, the guardian and distributor of oil wealth while remaining in its private domain a set of players comprising the *Maktoums* and their allied families. While there is no conclusive evidence to pinpoint the involvement of the *Maktoums* in the informal economy that the Indian state referred to as smuggling, that they could not have been unlike the other merchant communities themselves is a closely guarded secret within diplomatic circles in India and the Indian population in the larger Gulf. Not uncommon in Indian Ocean societies before and during imperialism, the role of the state as a conglomerate of private players was anything but legitimate in the post-imperial system of nation-states. The commercial history of Dubai as part of the Indian Ocean world had to be erased following the advent of oil not merely because the continuing presence and legacy of this past in the public memory would have been fatal to the political legitimacy of the *Maktoums* and their relations with the rest of their oil rich neighbour states. It was also since Dubai's commercial history was one of transnational trade, often illicit than not, and one in which not just Indian merchants and others, but Arab traders, citizens and even the sheikhs themselves had a dominant role to play.

In order to map Dubai in its present urban contours, it is imperative that we leave behind our moral prejudices and return to this commercial past, nuance current thinking on migration and trade as merely international border crossing phenomena, and revisit the economic, social, historical and political aspects of mobilities, flows and structures constitutive of the city. The key to such an exercise as it is undertaken here is the commercial consensus. At the heart of Dubai's mobilities, structures and flows, the commercial consensus is not, I argue, confined to the high profile

relations, informal and otherwise of the *Maktoum* state with Vohra's Indian elite. On the contrary, it is with its multiple social and political gradients, a logic that permeates the urban social and cultural fabric in Dubai to its grassroots level and expedites particular kinds of urban possibilities in the process. It has shaped the social relations and intertwined the lives of migrants, citizens, tourists and consumers within the structures of the ruling bargain and the sponsorship system. With its powerful but nearly invisible presence, the commercial consensus looms over if not supersedes the state's spatial logic of segregation and containment of migrant populations, particularly of non-elite Indians, as I illustrate in the dissertation. It is important to factor in the commercial consensus if we are to explain why so many of these non-elite migrants have been afforded particular forms of social mobilities by the city. The trajectory of their mobility, engaged with here as the switch from labour to entrepreneurship and mercantilism, is in many ways, I illustrate, representative of the trajectory and nature of Dubai's urbanization and deserves to be addressed at some length. While I address the recent past and the present contingencies of Dubai's commercial consensus through an ethnographic study of Indian migrants—specific categories of these with differential histories of migration and distinct social and cultural relations to the city—I locate its origins and its structural continuities in the historical and mercantile past of the Indian Ocean world.

Indian Ocean Dubai

Trade in the Indian Ocean, even before the rise of Islam in the 7th century AD, was a key factor building, perpetuating and institutionalizing social relations between people of different ethnicities, languages, religions and classes along its shores. Historians like K.N. Chaudhuri and others have brought to bear on our imagination of history webs of geographies knit through long distance maritime trade during the pre-modern and early modern periods in the Indian Ocean.⁷⁴ These were geographies that shaped and defined the economic, social, cultural and political lives of different civilizations, drawn directly or otherwise into these webs of trade for centuries

⁷⁴ K.N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe*; Ashin Das Gupta and Michael Pearson, *India and the Indian Ocean World, 1500-1800* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1987).

together. The entry of Europeans into the picture shattered the sense and purported imagination of its spatial unity and the fluidity of its boundaries, transforming the



Figure 1.2: The Indian Ocean World of Dubai (Courtesy: Google Maps)

Indian Ocean world into an imperial system of commerce. Its spatial, cultural and political contours changed still further in post-imperial times with the hegemonic structures and policies of postcolonial nation-states beginning to define and delimit territorial boundaries and social identities in absolute, even monolithic terms. This however, is not to say that the Indian Ocean and its contexts of social, political and cultural meanings as well as the logic of its distinctive commercial practices are now extinct. The argument put forth here, on the contrary is that Indian Ocean histories of trade, mobility and exchange continue to both define and contest other structures, contexts and practices, including those of nations-states and modern polities and societies in the region. These correlations and contestations visible in multiple

realms ranging from the cultural to the political and the economic constitute a major theme of the dissertation, contributing to its interpretation of such phenomena as migration, smuggling, consumption and social mobility as significant markers of Dubai's contemporary urbanity.

The relevance of the Indian Ocean in thinking Dubai and other Gulf states as transnational spaces, rather than as bounded oil cities, has been duly acknowledged in much recent writing, ethnographic and historical, by Karen Leonard, Sugata Bose, James Onley, Nelida Fuccaro and Neha Vohra. Karen Leonard, in her comparative study of Kuwait and Dubai, asserts that transnationalism inspired by the history and structural continuity of Indian Ocean connections have resulted in diametrically opposed strategies of economic and political governance in the two states.⁷⁵ Dubai with its multiple ethnic groups and socio-economic classes of South Asians which not only looks to South Asia for its popular cultural practices, but also modifies its language, gender and policing practices in tune with such practices is spatially and politically oriented towards South Asia. In sharp contrast, Kuwait with a narrow range of expatriate bachelors from among South Asians belonging to either a small elite professional class or the broader working class, is positioned as part of the Middle East.⁷⁶

The historical connections between the Persian Gulf and the British Raj in India have also been clearly mapped both at a structural level and in terms of actual practices of trade and politics. Sugata Bose, elaborating on the changing imperial political milieu of the 19th century in the Indian Ocean World, outlines the events that culminated in the incorporation of the Persian Gulf, called the "the pirate coast," by administrators in British India, as part of the empire.⁷⁷ James Onley, who refers to the Persian Gulf as the "Arabian Frontier of the British Raj," examines its political system as a synthesis of Britain's residency system and indigenous tribal chieftaincies

75 Karen Leonard, "South Asians in the Indian Ocean World: Language, Policing and Gender Practices in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no.3 (2005): 677-686.

76 Leonard, "South Asians," 682.

77 Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of the Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 43-48.

underwritten by particular codes of power sharing between the political resident, native agent and the ruler or chief.⁷⁸ An observation Onley makes and that helps mark the significance of Indian merchants within the configuration of the current political system in Dubai is the role of the political or native agent within the residency system in the Gulf. Mostly Indian, Arab or Persian, these agents were recruited by the Resident from among powerful merchants trading in the Indian Ocean to act as local mediators between the Arab Chiefs and the British Resident and help sustain Britain's informal empire in the Gulf.⁷⁹ The indispensability of these agents being drawn into empire on account of their substantial knowledge of local cultures, languages and indigenous politics, and extensive social, familial and commercial networks, brought them wealth, prestige and political influence as individuals and situated them in many ways as insiders to societies in the Gulf. Officially, the residency system has graduated into consular structures in contemporary times. Nevertheless, what remains significant from the perspective of the work is its legacy, manifested in an informal sense, of the convergence of political leverage and private enterprise in legitimizing the position of Indian merchants in Dubai even today.

Neha Vohra who has studied forms of urban citizenship among middle-class Indians in Dubai offers us a more textured account of the present day contours of an Indian Ocean society in the city. She highlights the "overwhelming Indianness of Dubai" in the clustering of *Emirati* life with Indian popular culture, in the nostalgic sense prevalent among the Indian elite of a fast receding Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism, in the histories of power, migration and cultural exchange across the Indian Ocean and the sheer number of migrants from the subcontinent in the city. At the level of business practices, she points to the transplantation and reproduction in Dubai of patriarchal informal economic forms commonly found in India, particularly through the social organization of Indian migrant labour. By foregrounding the significance of transnational diasporic networks of Indians to the cultural and political

⁷⁸ James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers and the British in the Nineteenth Century Gulf* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷⁹ Onley, *Arabian Frontier*, 2-5.

constitution of the urban in Dubai, Vohra has shifted the terms of its global city discourse away from transnational corporations and rendered new possibilities for research on the city.⁸⁰ Ahmed Kanna, meanwhile, warrants the resilience of Dubai's Indian Ocean attributes despite the state's spatial projects to contain and erase them by citing instances in which such attributes emerge through the cracks and fault lines of a neoliberal regime of urban citizenship.⁸¹

Having justified the intent to take recourse to the distinctive spatial frame of the Indian Ocean towards a study of Dubai's urbanity and its trajectory of capital, what must follow, logically speaking, is a discussion of the manner in which it is specifically used in the work, or to put it differently, the method it yields for the study. The question I am asking is not how much of an Indian Ocean city Dubai really is but how and why it continues to be so and how its being so enables the city to engage with the economic, social, spatial and cultural processes of a much later globalization. My narrative of contemporary Dubai, no doubt, extends the cultural aspects of the Indian Ocean into the realm of everyday acts of commercial exchange as well as the processes and transactions defining mercantile and financial activity both within and across its borders. These processes and transactions must not, however, be construed as random practices rooted entirely in earlier traditions of commerce and its concomitant social institutions and networks in the Indian Ocean world. On the contrary, I argue that they make greater sense if looked at as responses to the changing contours of capital within the international order of monetary regulations and restrictions⁸² and its (capital's) latent contradictions of geography, history and politics over the course of the 20th century. Capital is understood here as a system riddled with its own set of contradictions in terms of space, politics and history. Its logic of accumulation and its tendency to exceed the limits of its own geographies—prescribed by political, social or cultural factors—in its quest for profits contains within it the seeds of its own crisis. It was to check the excesses of

80 Vohra, *Impossible Citizens*, 107.

81 Kanna, *Dubai*, 204.

82 For a history of the changing contexts, policies and structural frameworks of regulation, see Andrew Leyshon and Nigel Thrift, *Money/Space: Geographies of Monetary Transformation* (London: Routledge, 1997), 59-81.

capital and to maintain systemic equilibrium that regulations were established. I am here referring to the imperial and post-imperial policies of international regulation formulated in the inter-war and post war years of the 20th century. While in the 19th century, regulation revolved around the disciplinary mechanisms of money in its abstract form, that is to say, the linking of currency to the gold standard and ensuring its convertibility into the metal, the post war forms of regulation were primarily fixed exchange rates and predictable currency markets facilitating international trade.

The international regulatory order defined by the Bretton Woods system⁸³ was oriented towards creating a system of nation states that were economic entities in their own right and linked to each other through reciprocal flows of money, goods and services. A "nationally regulated capitalism" which had to balance domestic accumulation strategies with a competitive international economy, it leaned heavily on industrial capital as the engine of the state's economic development and political sovereignty. This shift in the perception of the system of capital as the global sum of its national parts was much to the disadvantage of merchant and financial capital which had to be contained and regulated within the territorial borders of the nation-state now synonymous with the boundaries of the national economy. The pathways, geographies and activities of financial capital in the midst of these restrictions have formed the stuff of much academic discourse particularly with reference to the question of the global city and the part played by financial capital in the creation of such cities as New York, London and Tokyo.⁸⁴ Merchant capital, on the contrary, still remains understudied in its contemporary articulations and is often imagined as Marx did, as symptomatic of pre-modern economies, pre-capitalist societies and their corresponding urban formations.⁸⁵ My interest in the Indian Ocean owes much to the predominance of and the ways in which merchant capital, its conceptions of space, its historical and current geographies and the political management of its urban economy and society shapes contemporary Dubai and its imaginaries as a

83 For a detailed discussion of the Bretton Woods system see, Barry Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital: A History of the International Monetary System* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 92-95.

84 For details see Saskia Sassen, *The Global City*, 110-113.

85 See section on "Historical Facts about Merchant's Capital", Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* Vol III, Part IV (New York: International Publishers, 1894), 651-680.

place. To put it briefly, the Indian Ocean in Dubai, as it is engaged with in the dissertation, is among other things, the structural continuity of mercantile capital in an age when industrial capital held sway over all other forms of capital.

Gold, Silver and the Politics of Monetary Value in the Indian Ocean

Merchant capital which according to Marx is “historically the oldest free state of existence of capital,”⁸⁶ has its origins in and is conditioned by the circulation of commodities and money. Money is the form of capital that makes and breaks the circuit of exchange or circulation of commodities. Likewise, it is in the process of circulation that money is transformed into capital and products into commodities and ultimately, money itself. The circulation of commodities insofar as these are values in themselves and therefore money, is what adds value to merchant capital. Money in its commodity form, say gold or silver, also circulates, acquiring and transferring values in the very process of circulation. This might seem like a contradiction in contemporary times given that we understand money in its universal functions as a standard measure, an abstract value and a means of exchange, rather than as a commodity in itself. Money for all practical purposes, no longer circulates in the form of gold coins unlike in earlier centuries. Where it circulates in the form of silver, it is only as token coin, an abstract representation of monetary value and not as material or commodity value accruing to its silver content that it is significant. It is certainly true that following Marx, we relate to money as the absolute form of commodity and hence of wealth or hoard, so that its conservation and accumulation as money becomes an end in itself. Nonetheless, money as something easily replaced with gold or silver owing to its character as Georg Simmel refers to it, “an intermediary,” in the series of relative values and a “means to store and transport values,” both of which it shared with these metals is still not justifiable except as a feature characteristic of pre-modern societies.

The material value of money as a functional value of its gold or silver content,⁸⁷ I

⁸⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* Vol III, 654.

⁸⁷ This idea has been taken from Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* ed. David Frisby. Trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 2004), 152-169.

argue, is perhaps nowhere more empirically true than in the modern spaces constitutive of Dubai's trading networks. The social, cultural and political conditions that defended and conserved the material value of money in the context of actual transactions in the Indian Ocean even as elsewhere money was rapidly renouncing such value for its universal functional value, form key aspects of discussion in the dissertation. While I do not refute its having been in some sense a carryover from historical times, I equally recognize the need to contextualize it within the changing monetary regimes of the 19th and 20th centuries in the Indian Ocean as well as the international economy. The politics of value within these monetary regimes meant that money was slotted as one commodity among other commodities like gold and silver in the same series of values and more significantly for our purposes, the same circuit of flows informing trade, mobility and commerce in the post-imperial world of the Indian Ocean.

A cursory glance at the evolution of the emerging monetary framework in the Indian Ocean is in order here, while, its recent contingencies will be discussed in relation to the actual processes of trade and mobility and the politics of an inter-state system in the Indian Ocean in later chapters. Precious metals, particularly silver, functioned both as currency in the settlement of trade balances as well as a commodity from early on in Indian history. Key determinants of its textile trade with West Asia in pre-modern times and Europe in modern times, gold and silver were not only used in ornamentation but hoarded as liquid assets by households and merchants. The often blurred boundary between silver as commodity and silver as currency gave the concept of money in India, and to some extent the larger Indian Ocean, a certain flexibility and was to become in later times, a significant aspect of their monetary geographies. Mughal India had an exchange economy defined by open coinage, a practice which enabled the suppliers of gold, silver and copper—mostly *sarrafs* who were money changers and buyers for the mint and big merchants—to procure freshly minted coins for the market on payment of mint charges. The sources of supply of monetary metals for the mint were internal stocks of demonetized coins and hoards as well as foreign trade⁸⁸ in which European companies converted the silver coins

⁸⁸ Due to a favorable balance of trade, India required a reasonably adequate supply of money and so

they brought in from the Americas to Mughal Indian rupees.

The flexibility that accrued to the rupee was also manifest in the practice of copying it in weight and the fineness of its silver content in other places in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, this continuing well into the early half of the 20th century.⁸⁹

However, with the British gaining political hegemony in mid-19th century in India, the terms of this monetary framework began to shift towards a more monolithic system underpinned by the rupee as standard currency and principal medium of exchange within the colonial geography of the Indian Ocean. The consequences of this included among other things, India's mints having to issue rupees to facilitate colonial projects and commercial transactions within a domain stretching all the way from Turkish Arabia to the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, besides meeting the financial commitments within the mainland.⁹⁰ The rupee, which was a coin 180 gm of silver 11/12 fine began to go through phases of destabilization with the plummeting prices of silver brought about by the demonetization of the metal in rapidly industrializing economies like Germany and the US towards the closing years of the 19th century and the subsequent flow of their stocks of currency into India.⁹¹ Precious metals were even otherwise the preferred store of value in Indian society; the falling exchange rates of the rupee only intensified the situation, much to the apprehensions of the Bank of England and the imperial government in London. With India's history of liquidating its trade surpluses, nearly a third of them, on the imports of silver and gold,⁹² in the pre-First World War years and the declining supplies of

had to import foreign currencies, bullion and raw copper to augment its internal stock. Towards the closing decades of the 16th century, India had become the greatest importer of bullion outside Europe. For details see, Najaf Haider, "Precious Metal Flows and Currency Circulation in the Mughal Empire," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 39 (1996): 326-342 and Shireen Moosvi, "The Silver Influx, Money Supply, Prices and Revenue Extraction in Mughal India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 30, no. 1 (1987): 47-94.

89 Om Prakash, "Foreign Merchants and Indian Mints in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century," in *The Imperial Monetary System of Mughal India*, ed. John F. Richards (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987) and *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India* Vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1998): 315- 336.

90 Michael E. Edo, "Currency Arrangements and Banking Legislation in the Arabian Peninsula," *Staff Papers—International Monetary Fund* 22, no. 2 (1975): 511.

91 J. Laurence Laughlin, "Gold and Prices Since 1873," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 1, no.3 (April 1887): 319-355.

92 For details see, G. Balachandran, "Towards a 'Hindoo Marriage': Anglo-Indian Monetary Relations in Interwar India, 1917-35," *Modern Asian Studies* 28, no. 3 (July 1994): 615-647 and "Britain's Liquidity Crisis and India, 1919-1920," *The Economic History Review*, New Series 46, no. 3 (Aug

these metals during the war years, controls on the inflow of precious metals through colonial policy interventions became inevitable.

Despite rising silver prices and the stagnating production of the metal in inter-war times, the rupee in the form of silver coins found its way into private hoards or accumulated currency reserves and securities such as British Treasury Bills.⁹³ These had serious implications for the convertibility of the rupee at home and the domestic currency system as it were. The threat that it posed to the imperial government in London in the form of potential loss of its gold reserves through India's liquidation of its securities was even greater. It was important to stem the flow of gold into India and check the spiraling expansion of the rupee if crises along these lines were to be averted. Limited capital flows alongside exchange rate intervention were put forth as policies directed towards these ends. In the global political and economic climate of the post-war world marked by stable exchange rates, reduced capital mobility and the rise of the dollar as the sole currency to which gold was linked,⁹⁴ the urge to save and hoard in gold and dollars rather than the rupee was even more compelling.

The point I wish to make here is that Indian merchants, traders and others responded with great acuity to this monetary order and its regulatory structures. They undertook specific forms of trade including gold, currency exchange and commodity re-exports, and mapped particular commercial geographies around these commodities with Dubai as their centre. In the process, they negotiated, adapted and subverted the monetary framework and its conceptions of space and territoriality as well as its organizing principle of stable exchange rates. With exchange rates that could be manipulated by private traders and profits engendered by price differentials of currencies across borders, the rupee in its paper currency form alongside silver in its metallic and token coin forms continued to be traded for gold in practices that helped money markets in the Indian Ocean gravitate towards their pre-Bretton Woods contours. These practices identified as smuggling and other illegal trades and

1993): 575-591.

93 See Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital*, 23. Also see, Balachandran, "Britain's Liquidity Crisis," 576.

94 Leyshon and Thrift, *Money/Space*, 70.

situated in historical processes of migration, movement and consumption dispersed between Dubai, India, Southeast Asia and the rest of the Persian Gulf in the Indian Ocean form the principal themes of discussion in the dissertation.

Geographies of Commerce: Proposing an Alternate Framework for the Study of Dubai

Many of the themes and structures mapped out in the discussion so far have been attempts to justify the shifts in the terms of the discourse of the city in Dubai from its urban form to the processes of urbanization and the forces of history that delineate them. As it is with the city, so is it with the global city. My suspicion of the term 'global city' as it has been used in the case of Dubai, whether as non-place or as symbolic icon, stems precisely from the conviction I share with other scholars that urban forms must not be taken for granted as symptomatic of urban processes⁹⁵ that mark cities or the ways in which they function in reality. Like cities elsewhere in the world, Dubai is a material embodiment of social, cultural, political and spatial processes that must constitute the subject of history and be studied as such. Tied to pre-existing structures and rather long periods of economic, social and political change within the canvas of global history, these are processes that must be studied geographically, rather than as limited within the paradigms of a statist or nationalist history.⁹⁶ Looked at from this perspective, the global city argument on Dubai must be an analysis of its history of global relationality, and spatial interdependence manifested in and across different scales rather than one of its recently established external connections, hierarchical dependencies and top down urban development. In other words, it must be a thesis that not only accords a certain historical compass and a wider temporal and spatial scope to the city's globalization but also one that views the phenomenon as a different set of practices rooted in such history and spatiality—this history and spatiality existing at odds with the structural order and

95 Janet Abu Lughod, "The Islamic City—Historic Myth, Islamic Essence and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no.2 (1987): 155-176. Also see R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India 300 Bc to AD 1300* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6-7.

96 These in any case cannot offer us anything more than a past that is not older than forty years or so, nor does its politics allow us to engage with structures, processes and players that challenge the legitimacy of the state and its modes of governance.

abstract logic of 21st century global capital.

The conceptual framework and methodology that articulates the study of urban Dubai in its historical and spatial dimensions, I choose to call "geographies of commerce." The groundwork for commerce as its basis has already been discussed in earlier sections and need not be reiterated here. The theoretical insights for the project of "geographies of commerce" have been drawn primarily from Indian Ocean and Gulf Studies literatures, early travel writing and archival sources on the Persian Gulf, Indian economic and postcolonial histories, literatures on Islamic, African and Southeast Asian cities, the sociology and anthropology of space, place, capital, commodities and globalization, cultural studies, migration literatures and finally the discourses on smuggling, counterfeiting and illicit trades and the networks of criminality spawned by these. Each of these forms the key themes, concepts and methods in the chapters that follow. "Geographies of commerce" builds on the foundational concepts of space and place as essentially relational, processual and historical categories at the heart of urbanization, not just in Dubai but everywhere in the world. Space produced in and by the movement of capital, commodities, money and people, is not homogeneous, but fragmentary, diffuse, multiple and constitutive of particular social relations and historical forms, as also spatial, cultural and material practices.⁹⁷ The history of space is one that is related to human society and the social energies, forces and relations that impart it a certain identity and transform it into what we understand as place. To put it differently, place is space understood in its social specificity, as locality, as the domain of everyday life, of lived experiences and meanings, of human activity structured and repeated in time and space.

My use of place as it relates to Dubai in the dissertation, is an amplification in scalar terms, of Appadurai's concept of locality which is "a complex phenomenological quality constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the

97 The literature on space from which the argument has been taken include Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) and Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).

technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts.”⁹⁸ What this means is that places are far from "intimate," "spatially confined" and "geographically isolated situations" insulated against other places and the social institutions that animate them. On the contrary they are textured realities shot through with the imprints of multiple contexts pitched at diverse spatial scales as well as political configurations, say the local, the national, the regional and the global, even as they constantly impact on and shape these contexts.⁹⁹ Much of what the dissertation does is exemplify what Appadurai refers to as the reciprocal and dialectical relations of place and context and the ways in which such relations have shaped history in Dubai as also determined its course in spaces that were linked to it in imperial and post-imperial times.

Dubai as place, contrary to what officials and theorists of global cities would have it, is not a growth machine, a commodity that lends itself to marketing as a strategy towards wealth creation and the acquisition of symbolic capital. It is rather, the context and consequence of human experience, social agency, historical memory and the spatial bases of many different imagined communities and collectives. Its history as it is engaged with in the thesis is the history of place-making, beginning with the 19th century in the context of what Christopher Bayly calls the "tribal breakout" of the 18th century¹⁰⁰ and its wide ranging effects on imperialism and the concomitant political geographies of empire. Stretching through the 20th and early 21st centuries—the former defined by pearling, the evolution of new urban economies, local polities, smuggling, labour migration and the onset of an *Emirati* consciousness and the latter by globalization and a new phase of urbanization—the history of Dubai is a complex of and an interface between different spatialities and temporalities. It is as an urban formation existing at the intersection of multiple economic, political, social and temporal orders and a site affecting these diverse orders in its own specific ways, that the city deserves much academic attention. This however is not to call for a

98 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 178.

99 For a detailed discussion of the production of locality under conditions of contemporary urban life, see Appadurai, *Modernity*, 182-191.

100 For details see Christopher Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1989), 35-52.

cumulative approach or to pretend to be able to portray a comprehensive picture of the city by delineating these diverse orders and their social increments in chronological fashion. Any attempt along these lines would be to defeat the very notion of place as lacking a single identity at the heart of the argument on "geographies of commerce."¹⁰¹ In other words, it would be writing place from outside the frame of human agency and social relations and the multiple cultural and political perceptions afforded by these in what may be a return to the notion of place as an essential and stable entity.

The intent in the work, even as the need to evolve a methodology and a framework that will as Bill Freund proposes "give character to evolutionary change," is to reconstruct Dubai through the lifeworlds of Indian migrants and traders that have mapped and traversed the commercial, political, social and consumer geographies of the western Indian Ocean for more than a century now.¹⁰² In the 19th and early years of the 20th century, they were pearl traders, financiers and merchant capitalists dealing in credit as well as the trade in commodities between India, the Persian Gulf and other ports in the Indian Ocean. A new wave of migration to Dubai began in the mid-fifties following the partition of India which caused Hindu merchants and other communities from the province of Sind which was now part of Pakistan to migrate. This wave complemented the earlier generations of merchants now settled in Dubai with the two merging to create a distinctive kind of commercial economy based on the re-export trade, otherwise known as smuggling, in the city.¹⁰³ Yet another wave of migrants in quick succession followed in the 1970s, this time from Kerala, the southwestern coast of India and in the wake of the oil boom in the Emirates. This was however a more heterogeneous group and with hardly any mercantile history to their advantage. Yet the Malayalis hailing from the state of Kerala constituted the largest ethnic group of foreigners in the Emirates and permeated every sphere of public life, including labour, services and the lower orders of commerce in Dubai.¹⁰⁴

101 For the argument on place as imbued with multiple identities, see Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 147-155.

102 Bill Freund, *The African City: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

103 These migrations form one of the major themes of chapter 3 of the dissertation.

104 For details on the Malayali migration, see chapter 4.

It is through the optical lenses and narratives afforded by the lifeworlds of these diverse groups of Indians that the work looks back at the structures and contexts both defining and borrowing from Dubai and its concepts of the state, government, society and economy rather than the other way around.¹⁰⁵

In the dissertation, I construct "geographies of commerce" as a matrix of commodity, capital and community and as a structure within which economic values were created, subscribed to and resisted through social, cultural and political practices. The discussion in the preceding section on merchant capital and gold, silver and the politics of monetary value in the Indian Ocean feeds into the argument on "geographies of commerce" and need not be addressed here. What I wish to highlight here rather, is its historical dimension and dynamism as a conceptual tool. In other words, "geographies of commerce" has structurally and historically evolved from what Fernand Braudel¹⁰⁶ and Claude Markovits,¹⁰⁷ writing in connection with the pre-modern world of capitalism and the Indian trading diaspora respectively, refer to as 'trading networks,' to incorporate ordinary migrants, travellers, labourers, small-time entrepreneurs, couriers and other players, including consumers produced by more recent histories and regimes of physical and social mobility in the Arabian Gulf. These cumulative histories of trade, migration, entrepreneurship and consumption underlying Dubai's "geographies of commerce" have also been vital to creating the city's niche markets and cultural domains for commodity brands, including gold, and counterfeit goods elsewhere in the world. These markets and cultural spaces of consumption in taking Dubai and its commodity brands to newer geographies across Central Asia and Eastern Europe in what were its most visible forms of globalization are in turn constituting newer "geographies of commerce" as realms of new social realities and meanings.

105 Ethnographic analyses of the social, cultural and political discourse informing these lifeworlds and the lived experiences of the diverse geographies defining the city as part of the Indian Ocean world as well as of the 21st century global political economy are what contribute to the research perspective and methodological frame constitutive of "geographies of commerce."

106 Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century, Vol:1 The Structures of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 148-167.

107 The reference is to Claude Markovits, "Indian Merchant Networks Outside India in the 19th and the 20th Centuries," in *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims: Indian, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and China Sea Migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s*, ed. Donna R. Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerder (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 92-97.

“Geographies of commerce” are thus what people map through their everyday practices and processes of movements and mobilities as merchants, labour, tourists, couriers of commodities and currencies, small-time entrepreneurs, consumers and as family and individual affiliates of ethnic constituencies. They are the generational histories of migrant families and communities whose destinies as individuals and ethnic groups coincide with Dubai's destiny and are symptomatic of the shifts in its trajectory of urbanization. They can be represented as spatial connections, economic networks, financial conduits and circuits of culture in the Indian Ocean. Much more significantly though, the work engages with them as social contiguities defining the everyday realities of communities which move and experience the larger effects of their movement. Technologies of movement, communication and commerce certainly matter in constituting particular social and spatial connections as "geographies of commerce" but we must be careful not to reduce these connections to the effects of such technologies. If that were the case, every place that is linked to Dubai in the global context of urban networks as represented on the route map of an airline would ideally form a commercial geography in itself.

“Geographies of commerce” as conditioned by commodities and the ways in which they organize spatial experiences of mobile and sedentary communities in history is a major contention of the work. It is through commodities that old spatialities and the spatial histories of cultures live on in the social imaginaries of communities, often disrupting the spatial order and logic as well as the territorial geography of the nation-state. Commodities inserted into the domain and subjected to the logic of what David Ludden calls “territorial mobility” and the politics and regimes of economic and monetary values underlying such mobility constantly challenge these, thus creating their own spatialities and mobilities.¹⁰⁸ Spatialities here include the actual routes of transportation and commerce that commodities create and are implicated in as we have seen in the preceding paragraph. They also include spatial practices or ways of relating to space at multiple scales, ranging from the familial to the social and the national.

108 David Ludden, “Presidential Address: Maps in the Mind and Mobility of Asia,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no.4 (2004): 1065.

Spatialities of commodities defining Dubai make sense if looked at from the vantage points afforded by such phenomena as smuggling, illegal migration and counterfeiting and the “mobility of territorialism” that they reinforce across its (Dubai) urban canvas.¹⁰⁹ Mobilities of territorialism visible in the import businesses of the Bhatias,¹¹⁰ the dual base jewellery systems of the Malayalis¹¹¹ and the retail trades of the Malabar Muslims¹¹² have been produced, theoretically speaking, in the contestations, conflicts and compromises between mobility and territorialism. In other words, geographies of commerce and the mobilities of territorialism they encompass are actually social and territorial spaces in movement. They are the conduits of social and cultural meanings and simultaneously the spaces of economic investment and political synergies. “Geographies of commerce” are thus frames for the mobility of social life as well as of lives that represent social mobility.

In Dubai, these spatialities of commodities and their mobile territorialisms have been institutionalized as urban practices in significant ways and have been instrumental to shaping the city's global relations of trade, as we shall see in the following chapters. These mobilities, spatialities and commercial geographies have existed alongside and in opposition to the politics of commodities as linked to the territorial politics of nation-states and their border regimes as also the structural configuration as well as the changing dynamics of an international political economy. Much of what this dissertation does is address the intersections between these changing structures and the ways in which traders, migrants and entrepreneurs have negotiated them through the spatial, commercial and political logic of Dubai. Gold has, since the days of imperialism, tied Dubai to markets like London and banks in Zurich; textiles, electronics and household appliances, the trade in which Dubai continues to a key global player, have their sources in Southeast Asia, Japan and now China; and traders from the erstwhile Soviet republics in central Asia and Eastern Europe have contributed in many ways to its commercial architecture of globalization.

109 Ludden, “Presidential Address,” 1061-1063.

110 For details see chapter 3.

111 See chapter 4.

112 See chapter 5.

These movements and flows punctuating different phases of Dubai's migration and trade histories were initiated, co-ordinated and tapped into by Indian migrants and traders who besides galvanizing the requisite social capital around particular commodities, also defined the city's urban and global geographies of production, circulation and consumption in myriad ways and forms. It is the engineering of Dubai's global connections and conduits via the movements and flows of commodities in history and the articulation of its urban contours in step with these movements and flows that are at the centre of the argument on "geographies of commerce." With "geographies of commerce," we come to terms with a Dubai imagined differently to the one that urban scholars, with their focus on global city discourses, the Maktoums and their neoliberal citizens have foregrounded. It is a Dubai in which social processes of urbanization take precedence over discursive structures and practices often arbitrarily mapped onto its morphological contours. It is to sum up, what allows for a view of the city as sites of "fluidity and interactivity that crystallize the possibilities within which we re-imagine, re-make and re-experience urban conditions and the notion of the urban itself."¹¹³

A Brief Note on Methods and Sources

Scholars who have worked on contemporary Dubai as well as the larger Arabian Gulf have pointed to the many difficulties of doing research in as well as writing a history of the region.¹¹⁴ The absence of a culture of writing among its tribal and coastal societies, of textual forms of preservation of history and of the artefacts reifying what Pierre Nora calls the "memorial consciousness" of the nation,¹¹⁵ say the archives, museums etc., have all contributed to the anxieties of the historian working on Dubai. The National Centre for Documentation and Research in Abu Dhabi (NCDR), designated as the official National Archives of the Emirates by Federal Decree Number 7 of 2008, is only a recent development in the direction of a national

113 Aihwa Ong, "Worlding Cities or the Art of Being Globalization," in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, ed. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2011), 10.

114 For details see Andrew M. Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), 10-11.

115 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History," *Representations* 26 (1989): 12.

culture of documentation and preservation of historical records.¹¹⁶ Despite its proclaimed efforts at augmenting its archival holdings by bringing in collections from institutions and repositories around the world, the NCDR falls short in many ways, particularly in its reluctance to provide unmediated public access to these collections. I worked in the Emirates Library housed within its premises for two months in early 2012, trying to negotiate with the archivists to browse the catalogue on the collections available. Not only was I politely denied access to the catalogue but ceremoniously escorted back into the reading room of the library and treated to coffee like an important guest every time I made an attempt. Eventually, I was taken to an archivist who had been with the NCDR since its establishment in 1968 and asked to leave an inventory of the matter I was looking for with her. I was told that they would take anywhere between a month to two to retrieve everything and have the files photocopied before sending them over to me at the address I was asked to leave with her.

I returned to Johannesburg and had started to write up from the field notes and interviews conducted during my stay in Dubai when the files arrived. They were documents and photographs that the archivist, obviously in line with the politics of history espoused by the federal state, wanted me to have access to and reproduce in my writing and not quite what I had asked for. Interestingly, they were documents on Dubai produced from within the framework of the federation and a past that suited its political project, alongside reports and newspaper cuttings on Abu Dhabi and the other emirates. If I had hoped that the institution, the guardian of history and the federal state's ideologies of power, would supply me with details other than what was required to produce a history of Dubai no different to the genre I have critiqued in the initial pages of the chapter, I would have been putting on an act. I was attempting to write the history of trade in Dubai in the latter half of the 20th century and the social constituencies and the political attitudes that put trade before all else in the city. What this meant was that I had to deal with aspects that do not go down well with not just the ruling regimes of the emirates but its indigenous and Indian elite as well

116 See the web page of NCDR, <http://www.cdr.gov.ae/ncdr/english/index.aspx> (accessed August 12, 2012).

as the state in India. Smuggling, counterfeiting and the illicit origins of capital and urban wealth in Dubai, and the ideological ruptures, structural discontinuities and challenges to the historical memory of the Indian state were some of them. The archives, whether in the Emirates or India, were certainly not places to look for materials on these.

To make sense of what the archives mean to the work, it is important to understand it in its attempts to bring together the structural and contextual aspects of Dubai's history and reconciling that with the everyday lives and social practices of Indian migrants and others in the emirate and in India. Ann Stoler's observation on colonial archives as "both transparencies on which power relations were inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves" has been central to thinking the imperial dimension of Dubai's evolution and history in the 19th century.¹¹⁷ The records of the East India Company, the Bombay Presidency and the British Government of India housed in the Maharashtra State Archives in Bombay,¹¹⁸ hereafter MSA, have helped reconstruct the colonial geographies of power within which Dubai's establishment as a permanent settlement made sense. The historical developments in the imperial Indian Ocean of the 19th century, including the rise of the pearl economy and the larger structural changes associated with it have all been addressed using the papers of the colonial government sourced from the archives in Bombay. The National Archives of India, New Delhi, hereafter NAI, provided materials on imperial policies and local politics in the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf for the early years of the 20th century. The details on practices, and events constituting state-defined smuggling in the post-colonial period, including statistics have been sourced from *The Times of India* archives housed at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, hereafter NMML.

This work in many ways responds to the call for "anthropologization" of history, or a historical understanding of non-European cultures that scholars like Evans

117 Ann Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87.

118 Research at the MSA was undertaken for a consecutive period of 4 months between 2010 and 2013.

Pritchard,¹¹⁹ Marshall Sahlins¹²⁰ and Hans Medick¹²¹ have insisted on. The social and cultural perspective it brings to bear on the past in Dubai and the historical sensitivity that it invokes in our approach to the city puts critical ethnography at a premium in the work. It was through field research and ethnography undertaken over a period of one year in Dubai and Kerala between 2009 and 2013 and among the Sindhi and Malayali communities that I have been able to understand Dubai in its historical depth and complexity. The insights that I have gained during the many formal interviews, informal conversations and participation in special events have helped me come to terms with the city as a composite of collective relations and their metamorphosis in time, as a site of construction and representation of diverse modes of agency and social power and eventually as a set of contexts within which new cultural frames and concepts of interpretation of the selves and others of my subjects were generated.

As an ethnographer, I have had to encounter resistance in its various forms, particularly when it came to questions of transgressions of the border, of law and of the moral codes of societies. However, with increasing experience in the field and a greater awareness of the often clearly marked power relations between my informants and I, the ethnographer in me evolved strategies of building mutual trust and the exchange of information. I discovered these strategies from the very repertoire of my social being, my ethnicity as an Indian and a Malayali, my shared history of migration and of "being there" myself, as Clifford Geertz¹²² would have it, in ways both defining and different to that of an ethnographer's. My current status as a researcher based at a university in South Africa who had arrived in Dubai to gather the life stories and strategies of migrants amidst the fears, anxieties and uncertainties prevailing in the Emirates did evoke suspicion of all kinds among my informants. Interestingly, their realization of the power of my writing to grant the elite among

119 E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Anthropology and History*, (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1961), 20.

120 Marshall Sahlins, "Other Times, Other Customs: The Anthropology of History," *American Anthropologist* 85, no.3 (1983): 534.

121 Hans Medick, "Missionaries in the Row Boat? Ethnological Ways of Knowing as a Challenge to Social History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29, no.1 (1987): 76-98.

122 The idea of "being there" has been taken from Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (California: Stanford University Press, 1988), 1-24.

them, the extra fame that associated them with the Dubai, and to offer the others the anonymity even as I could have their voices heard, helped establish meaningful relations with many of them. Subsequently, I became a part of their lifeworlds, and a participant in their activities of narration, interpretation and production of meanings, much like themselves and the social subjects they incorporated, denied and colluded with in their everyday lives as migrants, traders, labourers, consumers and individuals. In that sense, much of what has been accomplished in this work is a recovery of categories of understanding and a translation of specific cultures of social existence that lend meaning to urban Dubai into the vocabularies of academic discourse.

Chapter two locates Dubai in the 19th century imperial world of the Indian Ocean. It addresses the historical developments informing different contexts ranging from the local to the regional and the imperial in making Dubai a place. Chapter three discusses Dubai in the decades following the pearl crisis and global depression and the ways in which smuggling, emerging as an alternative economy to pearl, created particular political and urban forms and practices within the emirate. Chapter four looks at smuggling through the act and meaning of consumption, particularly of gold and the ways in which these meanings are mapped on to the commercial landscape of Dubai creating spatial and discursive possibilities for its projection as a global city. Chapter five addresses globalization in Dubai through the Russian shuttle trade of the 1990s and its significance in producing a culture of counterfeit in the city.

Chapter 2

Pearls, Pirates and Politics:

Reclaiming Dubai as Part of Indian Ocean World Histories

Dubai, the second most significant emirate in the United Arab Emirates and home to its largest city, is situated on the Persian Gulf Coast and lies within the Arabian Peninsula on its southeastern side. It is bordered by Abu Dhabi, the capital of the Emirates, to the south, Sharjah to the northeast and the Sultanate of Oman to the southeast. The territory of the emirate covers an area of 4,114 sq km of which the city, including parts of New Dubai reclaimed from the sea and extending towards Abu Dhabi, takes up roughly 70 sq km. The city is situated at the mouth of a narrow islet or the creek called in Arabic as *Khor Dubai*, and spreads out on its shores towards Sharjah in the east and Abu Dhabi in the west. *Bur Dubai*, literally translated as mainland Dubai, on the western side of the creek was the major site of urban development in the early years of the twentieth century, reflecting the material prosperity ushered in by the pearling boom in the Gulf. The first commercial districts including the *Souk Al Kabir* or *Meena Bazaar* as it is more popularly known, and *Bastakiya*, currently preserved as major sites of historical importance were built by Arab, Persian and Indian merchants who had migrated from the southern coasts of Iran during the times. *Deira* on the eastern side of the creek was a settlement from as early as the 19th century. However it was with the construction projects undertaken through the 1960s to create wharfage, open storage and warehousing facilities at *Port Rashid*, that Deira began to garner greater attention as a site of urbanization along the lines of the mainland.

An extensive network of paved roads connecting spaces within the city and a highway linking it to Sharjah, had by the end of the sixties, consolidated and defined

Dubai's fundamental topography as a modern city. An emerging corridor of industry and logistics on the far western side of the emirate's territory in *Jebel Ali* complemented the emirate's urban geography in the eighties. Although planned otherwise,¹ Jebel Ali has remained more of a utilitarian shipping point and warehousing district for the city, the economic and cultural artery of which continued to be the creek. Spiraling global aspirations, the limitations of geography, the scale at which development was envisioned and the classes that such lifestyle altering development zeroed in on swept 21st century Dubai's urban life away from the creek and in the westerly direction towards Abu Dhabi. The New Dubai that has been celebrated as the city par excellence of the future and to which the earlier Dubai functions as a historical and cultural adjunct on the one hand and a worker's outpost on the other is a highway of supersonic expansion that stretches from Zabeel to Jumeirah on Sheikh Zayed Road. The city today has a resident population including expatriate workers of more than 2 million and is the highest in the country.² An additional million or more comprising mostly tourists, business travelers and residents of other emirates, it has been estimated, float in and around its many entertainment, leisure and institutional spaces³ on any given day.

Dubai, in the sense of a city characterized by continuity of settlement and political institutions of public governance is a twentieth century phenomenon. Like other cities in the Persian Gulf, say for instance Bahrain or Sharjah, it does not have what can be called a colonial past, nor are its urban structures by any means a legacy of colonial administration or governance. Evolving as an urban settlement in the 19th century around the creek, it developed as a native town with the tribal monarchic regime of the *Maktoums* at its head resting on a mercantile economy. This is not to say that Dubai developed independent of any kind of colonial or imperial influence or that it can be studied as devoid of such influence. The chapter vouches for and locates the city and its trajectory of development within the larger historical canvas

1 The initial plan was to build Jebel Ali, which is 17 kms away from Dubai's city centre as a city on its own. But the plan did not take off. For details see, Alexander Melamid, "Urban Planning in Eastern Arabia," *Geographical Review* 70, no.4 (1980): 473-477.

2 Dubai Statistics Center, Government of Dubai, *Dubai in Figures*, <http://www.dsc.gov.ae/en/pages/dubaiinfofigures.aspx> (accessed June 4, 2013).

3 *Dubai in Figures*.

of imperialism and its changing dimensions of the phenomenon over two centuries in the world of the Indian Ocean. As of now, it suffices to say that imperialism was an extremely complex phenomenon that even without a territorial dimension in Dubai and the region at large, was still instrumental in shaping the evolution and character of the city in more ways than one. This chapter explores these processes and their making of Dubai as an urban space through the frame of the Indian Ocean and the politics of empire defining it. The narrative of the city's evolution unfolds through an analysis of piracy, pearls and the mercantile politics of the emerging Maktoum city-state.

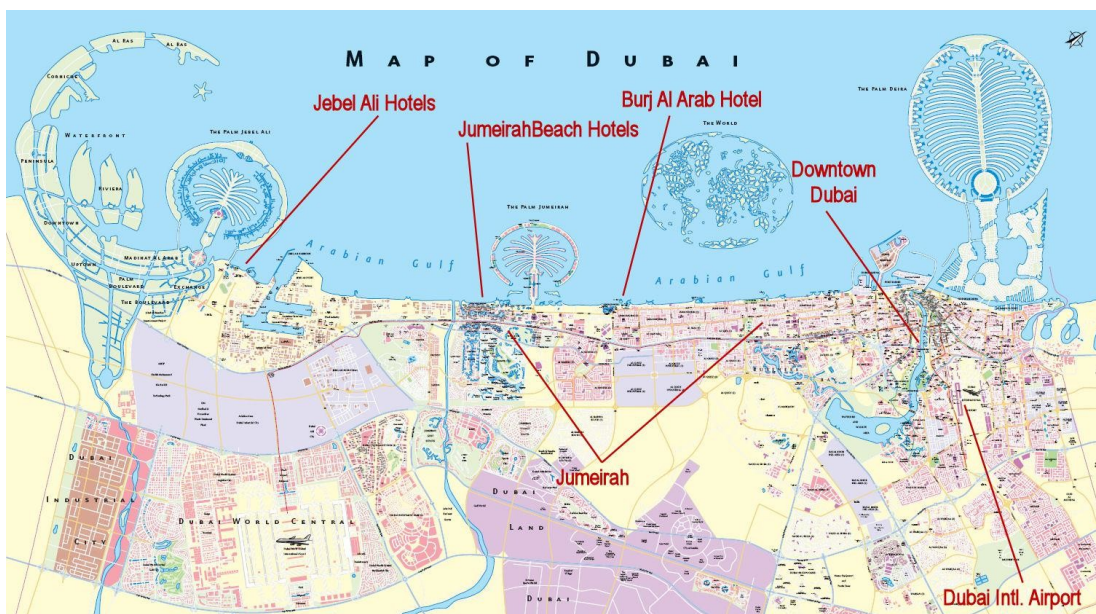


Figure 2.1: Dubai between the Desert and the Sea (Courtesy: Google Maps)

Migratory Origins: Between the Desert and the Sea

As a place Dubai was apparently a blank spot on the political map of the world until about the early decades of the 19th century when, as the records of the East India Company have it and the historical narratives of the *Maktoums* reiterate it, the latter migrated into its present day territory and constructed a permanent settlement there. The little that we know of Dubai around this time come from the writings of officials appointed to the company's Residency⁴ at Bushire or Bushehr in present day Iran

⁴ For details see the on entries Basra/Baghdad Residency (1756-1915) and Baghdad Embassy (1915-1933) in *Guide to the Records/Part X (25) A-K*, National Archives of India, New Delhi. Also see

which served as a radar for all kinds of commercial and political activity in the Persian Gulf. The British whose commercial interests in Persia and Turkish Arabia go back to the 17th century had set up a system of trading posts or factories as they were called to direct and oversee trade, source supplies and seek out new markets in the surrounding areas.⁵ The residency system which came into being in the latter half of the 18th century took off from the factories of the East India Company and was symptomatic, broadly speaking, of a shift in the interests of the company from commercial to political.⁶

The shift was brought about by the increasing competition for the trade of the Persian Gulf among the Dutch, the French and the English, the wars that were raging in Europe⁷ and the rising significance of India to contentions over economic power and political supremacy. In the Near East, for instance, the duties of the resident, the highest official at the residency, had by 1798 become exclusively political and for reasons that had more to do with Britain's rivalries with France and the balance of European power in Asia than with any form of political investment in or direct influence over the region itself. Britain's fear for the major part of the 18th century was that Anglo-French hostilities in Europe might lead to a struggle for the domination of India. To prevent this it was imperative that the East India Company at Calcutta received timely information on the outbreak of war in Europe. What preoccupied the officials appointed to the Residencies in the region were the routes for the post from Britain to India of which the one via Egypt and the Red Sea was called the direct route and the other through Constantinople and Basra, the overland route, and the safe and speedy despatch of mails. What this meant was that the Near

Edward Ingram, "From Trade to Empire in the Near East: III: The Uses of the Residency at Baghdad, 1794-1804," *Middle Eastern Studies* 14, no. 3 (1978): 278-306 and James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers and the British in the Nineteenth Century Gulf* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

5 J. B Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 64-98. For more details on the factory system see K.N.Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1760-1860* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978) and C. U Aitchison, "Treaties and Engagements Relating to the Arab Principalities in the Gulf," in *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries, Vol. XI* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1909), 4-6.

6 Ingram, "From Trade to Empire," 279.

7 The reference is to the war of Austrian succession fought from 1740-1748 and the Seven Years' War fought between 1754 and 1763.

East and the Persian Gulf, which was but one arm of the overland route, were important in only as much as they prevented France, Russia and even Germany from obtaining strategic advantage over Britain, a vital aspect in ensuring the latter's unchallenged mastery over India.

The Persian Gulf had not quite begun to figure except as a marginal geography in the imagination of the British until the closing decades of the 18th century when they entered into an alliance with the Imam of Muscat who was now obliged under the terms of the treaty of 1798 to deny the French any commercial advantage or maritime post in Muscat.⁸ Even so, the Persian Gulf remained peripheral to the scheme of British power in the East and was eclipsed in significance by the landed empires of the Ottomans, the Mughals and the Persians. This was reflected in the minimal degree of British interference and administrative control over the region until the First World War. Even during and after the war, the British only involved themselves in administering the foreign relations of the different proto-states (sheikhdoms as they were called) comprising the region while adopting a hands-off approach to the governance of its peoples and refraining from any kind of territorial claims over them.⁹ The region comprising Dubai, the other emirates of the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar were viewed and written about by residents and other officials in the 18th and 19th centuries from two distinct, but overlapping geographical, topographical and political frames of reference. The first, of the vast featureless desert was contingent on, as we have seen, the line of Britain's imperial presence in Turkish Arabia and parts of what were then called the Near East in the 18th century. The second premised on the sea, was related to the changing dimensions of the British establishment in the 19th century in Bombay and the coastline of western India and offered a relatively more focused view of the region as littoral societies along the Persian Gulf and Oman (this forms the substance of the discussion in the section on the imperial context of maritime urbanism). Much of what this chapter attempts to do is analyze these frames and the kind of structures and politics that lent

⁸ For the text of the treaty, see C. U Aitchison, "Treaties and Engagements," 287-288.

⁹ See Michael Fisher, "Indirect Rule in the British Empire: The Foundations of the Residency System in India (1764-1868) *Modern Asian Studies* 18, no. 3 (1984): 395.

them meaning as also indicate the ways in which Dubai was placed geographically, politically and economically within each of them. These frames themselves evolving as part of particular historical and political developments in the world of the Indian Ocean structure both the argument and layout of the chapter and position the sources available for a historical study of Dubai.

To return to the question of the migration that created modern day Dubai, Lieut. A. B. Kemball, Assistant Resident for the company at Bushire,¹⁰ writing in 1844 described the event as a move of about 800 persons belonging to the *Al Bu Falasah* and *Rumthath* tribes towards "Debye" in the year 1833 under the leadership of Obed Bin Syed and Maktoum Bin Butye. These tribes, he adds, had seceded from the *Bani Yas*, a tribal confederation based in Abu Dhabi. The secession followed the murder of Sheikh Tahnoon Bin Shakhboot, the ruler of Abu Dhabi and head of the *Bani Yas* and the subsequent rise to power of Sheikh Khalifa, his brother. Obed Bin Syed died not much later than they had moved to Dubai and Maktoum assumed charge of the tribes. Meanwhile, hostilities with Abu Dhabi continued and raids and plunder of property on both sides were not uncommon. In 1841, Sheikh Maktoum obtained permission from the Qawasim, a seafaring tribe whose authority extended over Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah and other pockets of the northern emirates, to build a fort at "Derah" or present day Deira along the coastline between Dubai and Sharjah so that he could provide his people with a secure residence. This arrangement, Kemball points out, was necessitated by fever and the rising mortality in the town of Dubai which had to be abandoned, leaving only about 25 men to its care. At Deira new huts were built and camps set up at the pleasure of the Qasimi chief, Sheikh Suggur of Sharjah to whom Sheikh Maktoum furnished "a written document, duly signed and sealed, setting forth that the ground to be occupied belonged to Sheikh Sultan Al Suggur and that the tower was to remain there only as long as he thought it proper and was to be destroyed upon his requisition to that effect."¹¹

10 For details refer, Memoranda on the Resources, Localities and Relations of the Tribes Inhabiting the Arabian Shores of the Persian Gulf, in Chronological Events Connected with the Government of Muscat from the Year 1730-1834 submitted to the Government on 6th January 1845 by Lieut. A. B. Kemball, Bombay Artillery, Assistant Resident at Bushire. Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government No. XXIV, the Maharashtra State Archives, Bombay.

11 A. B. Kemball, Memoranda on the Resources, Localities and Relations, .

In the years following the tribal migration to Dubai there were numerous instances of raids and attacks on the town of Dubai, initially by the chief of Abu Dhabi and later by the one of Sharjah, sketchy details of which are found in Kemball's account. Kemball, however was no historian, he neither provides a background to nor furnishes an explanation for these events. He also does not report on the specific state of affairs defining the dominions of these warring chiefs, the nature and strength of their individual tribal communities or the territorial extent and boundaries of their sheikhly authority, an approach that was not without adequate reason. A cursory look at the rubric under which these events are listed provides the clue, to such lack of interest on the assistant resident's part. *Memoranda on the Resources, Localities and Relations of the Tribes Inhabiting the Arabian Shores of the Persian Gulf* indicates the physical geography that Dubai and the other sheikhdoms were a part of and the ambiguity of its political stakes for the Company.

The organization of society and ways of life along tribal lines with no stable administrative structures or permanent tributary relations to a particular state or empire posed challenges of a different kind. As a result, many of the aspects of their existence, including migration, raids and the state of perpetual warfare were subsumed under tribal practices not amenable to narrative forms of history. His description then is a loose account of the general tribal constitution and practices as random events on the Arabian shore as a whole.

The inhabitants are divided into a number of large tribes, acknowledging each its feudal superior, which are again sub-divided into branches or clans composed of the relatives and dependents of some connexion of the general head, or of a powerful and wealthy individual.

The superior of the tribe collectively has the general control of all, possess the right of claiming at his pleasure their military services, and appropriates the small taxes that are levied.

The *Kazee* or Ecclesiastical Judge constitutes the only tribunal and decides upon all cases according to the Mohammedan law.

It is by no means uncommon for one of the branches of a tribe, to the number sometimes of several hundred individuals, in order to escape excessive taxation and oppression or with a view to secure to themselves greater immunities and advantages, to secede from the authority and territory of their lawful and acknowledged chief into that of another, or to establish themselves and build a fort on some other spot and assert and maintain

independence; nor is it a matter of great moment that the chief they are about to join is a rival at implacable feud with their own; the advantages attending any numerical increase of subjects ensure them welcome asylum and protection. It will not escape observation that the facilities thus mutually offered to seceders on the one hand, and the loss of authority and revenue consequent on their secession on the other, act, vice-versa as a salutary check to the tyranny and oppression of the respective chiefs.

The Arabs of the coast are more or less connected with the Bedouin tribes of the interior, either by ties of relationship or from consideration of mutual interests and defence.

Of so great importance is their alliance or forbearance considered by the maritime chieftains, that these, particularly Sultan Bin Suggur who is especially interested in maintaining a sort of balance of power, find it their best policy to conciliate them by repeated and considerable presents.

To go over from one chief to another, with whom they may be or have been at feud, and even to plunder the territories and subjects of their patron, should he not coincide in, and follow out their views of ambition, honour or revenge, or withhold the usual payment of blackmail are shown by the sketches of the Arab tribes to be of constant occurrence with these fickle allies.¹²

Kemball's perception of sheikhdoms as vacillating territories of constantly inflecting tribal communities with fragile and ephemeral political affinities existing under circumstances of political despotism and economic oppression echoes in many ways the tradition of writing on Arabia that began with Carsten Niebuhr¹³ in the 18th century and continued well into the latter half of the 20th century. Arabia was perceived as a vast geography of mostly hostile desert roamed by Bedouins and dotted rather occasionally by coastal hamlets and interior villages of settled tribal populations. The physical struggle of traversing it coupled with the complex social relations and political rivalries among its inhabitants rendered the colonial project of "knowing" it rather difficult. Of all the places in Arabia it was the southeastern arc constituting the territory of the modern day Emirates that was the least explored and hence the least known.

Even Palgrave¹⁴ who undertook an expedition in 1864 across the breadth of Arabia from Maan¹⁵ in the west to Muscat in the east completely bypasses the part where

12 Kemball, "Memorandum," 93-94.

13 Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East*, Vols 1 and 2, trans. Robert Heron (London: Edinburgh, 1792).

14 The reference is to the expedition to Arabia undertaken by William Gifford Palgrave in the year 1864. Palgrave was an English scholar of Arabic and a Jesuit priest. For details see Rashid Shaz, *In Pursuit of Arabia* (New Delhi: Milli Publications, 2003), 75-79.

15 Maan is in present day Jordan.

Abu Dhabi and Dubai lie, opting instead to gloss over the first in the voice of the other tribes and inhabitants he meets with in the course of his journey. Part of the reason for his decision to skirt around these spots was their entrenchment within the geography of a desert lying on southern and eastern ridges of the peninsula and one that was a desert in the full sense of the term—"hopeless, irremediable sterility and desolation."¹⁶ They were not on routes that connected villages in the interior with market town and trade centres like Mecca and Medina in Arabia or port towns like Sur and Muscat in Oman and provoked little commercial interest. Where there were bedouin tracts, it was often dangerous even for settled populations of Arabs to travel, let alone Europeans. Thus it is as one among the three "troublesome neighbours" to the pastoral lands of Katar (Qatar), the others being Menaseer (Manasir) and the "restless bedouins" of Aal Morrah (Al Murrah) that we catch a glimpse into the village of Aboo-Debee (Abu Dhabi). The "Aboo-Debee" which he puts down as the nearest limits of the province of Sharja (Sharjah) is vague, even misleading on many grounds. It is most likely that he was actually referring to Dubai which as it stands now is not more than 12 kms distant from Sharjah. Palgrave is perhaps giving away the dominant epistemic frame of the 19th century, a frame that is European, modern and conflating the categories of place and people, even as he strives to reveal another world which did not fit in. The punch line of his description of the village, "the marauding and assassinating bedouins of Beni-Yass, formerly pirates too, though now repressed at sea by the British flag, occupy this unfertile spot" confirms our suspicions in no uncertain terms.¹⁷ It is also probable that the tribes he was in conversation with, like the Menaseer and Aal Morrah Bedouins¹⁸ who furnished him with details of the *Dahna*, referred to the village as belonging to and a dependency of Abu Dhabi, the seat of Bani Yas power in the day. In terms of topography, it was Arabia or the Arabian Peninsula rather. However, the fact that it was referred to as Oman in political terms even when the Sultan exercised far less authority over it than he did over Bahrain or Qatar only obscured the terms of the political configuration

16 W. G. Palgrave, "Observations made in Central, Eastern and Southern Arabia during a Journey through that Country in 1862 and 1863," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 34 (1864): 113.

17 Palgrave, "Observations," 145.

18 Palgrave. "Observations," 122.

on which it rested and the nature of political power that defined it.

It is only with a much later generation of scholars like Frauke Heard-Bay, Rosemarie Said Zahlan and Hendrik Van der Meulen¹⁹ writing in the context of and analyzing state formation in the United Arab Emirates that we get to have a more specific picture of tribal existence, the nature and dynamism of their traditional economies, seasonal occupations, the social and cultural meanings of life in the desert and a sense of a tribal group as a polity on its own terms. While Heard-Bay gives us insights into tribal or more specifically *Bani Yas* life, economics and society and argues for the particular constitution of its politics as mechanisms with which to manage the scant natural wealth in the southeastern region of the Arabian desert, Van der Meulen points up the enduring significance of tribal relationships and kinship bonds in the federal political system of the Emirates whose national economy remains contingent on oil. The framing of the tribe, now synonymous with the *Bani Yas*, as central to political life in the Emirates, evident in the work of Rosemarie Said Zahlan and Frauke Heard-Bay was enabled by Abu Dhabi's rising hegemonic powers as an oil state and its institutionalization as the seat of the Federation. It was in many ways instrumental to bestowing legitimacy on the new ruling dynasty of Abu Dhabi and the Emirates as a whole—a legitimacy that was grounded in the past when the Bani Yas was the dominant tribe in the region and the Al Bu Falah, the family of the ruling *Nahyans*, their leaders.

A view that foregrounded the tribe as a pristine community that leapfrogged from the oases of Liwa and Al Ain into the seat of power in Abu Dhabi with a short span spent on the pearl coasts²⁰ reined in Dubai's political brand of mercantilism as an adjunct to the economic policies of the emergent tribal federation and subsumed the emirate within the structures of the latter. This is not to say that Dubai was non-tribal in its political orientation or that it had set aside its tribal past in lieu of a mercantile future.

19 For details see Frauke Heard Bey, "The Tribal Society of UAE and its Traditional Economy," in *United Arab Emirates: A New Perspective*, ed. Ibrahim Abed and Peter Hellyer (London: Trident Press, 2001), Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates: A Political and Social History of the Trucial States* (London: Macmillan, 1978) and Hendrik Van der Meulen, "The Role of Tribal and Kinship Ties in the Politics of the United Arab Emirates" (PhD diss., Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 1997).

20 Frauke Heard-Bey, "Tribal Society of the UAE", 110.

Indeed, Dubai was as much Bani Yas as Abu Dhabi was, at least at the level of its leadership. Nevertheless, with Dubai there is a sense of the tribe as a dynamic entity acted upon and responding to historical and structural forces of change at a level beyond the economics and politics of the tribal order in Arabia, evidence in the 20th century for which we have seen at the beginning of the chapter. It is important to take note of this dynamic view of tribes if we are to understand Dubai's migratory origins in the desert and the coastline at once and to come to grips with its peculiar practices of urbanization.

Pearls and the Waves of Urbanization in the Persian Gulf

Recent studies on the Persian Gulf have brought to the fore the question of the urban, its multiple manifestations and historical forms as responses within tribal communities to a spectrum of political and structural changes in the larger world of the Indian Ocean. Robert Carter's analysis of archaeological data read alongside a range of literary and historical sources on pearl fishing in the Gulf offers fresh perspectives on the evolution, nature and modes of functioning of coastal settlements rigged out by such tribes as the Hawala in Bahrain, Utub in Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain, the Bani Yas in Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the period between the late 18th to the mid 20th centuries.²¹ Pearl fishing was recorded as an activity prevalent in the region around the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea from as early as the 6th century BCE.²² The islands of Bahrain, referred to as *Tylos* by Pliny, were noted for its pearl fisheries and its premium quality of pearls which were highly valued in ancient Roman society.²³ Their significance in the jewellery of pre-Islamic and Islamic empires including those of the Sassanians and Abbasids also finds mention in a range

21 For details see, Robert Carter, "How Pearls Made the Modern Emirates," in Proceedings of the International History Conference on New Perspectives on Recording UAE History (Abu Dhabi: National Centre of Documentation and Research, Ministry of Presidential Affairs, 2009): 265-281.

22 Archaeological evidence shows that pearls formed a vital component of inter-regional trade, particularly that between the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia. The pearl fishing activities of the Gulf were thus implicated in one of the world's oldest long distance maritime trading networks. See Robert Carter, "Boat Remains and Maritime Trade in the Persian Gulf During the Sixth and Fifth Millennia B.C.," *Antiquity* 80 (307): 52-63.

23 Richard LeBaron Bowen, Jr., "The Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf," *The Middle East Journal* 5, no.2 (1951): 161-180. Also see Robert Carter, "The History and Prehistory of Pearling in the Persian Gulf," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, no. 2 (2005): 162-164.

of sources dating to their times, apart from Byzantine, Syriac and Christian texts.²⁴

Pearling was centered, broadly speaking, on a dual spatial order until the political movements and market expanse of the 18th century reconfigured it along new lines. To the first order of spaces belonged towns like Bahrain, Rishahr and Julfar²⁵ which were permanent settlements with pearl banks along its coast and market centres both on the coast and hinterland. They were towns of great mercantile and commercial significance inhabited by pearl merchants from India, Persia, the rest of Arabia and key revenue points for empires, particularly in Persia. Pearling played a crucial role in the capital formation of the Sassanian empire in pre-Islamic times and has been considered to be at the core of expansion of trade and development of port towns along the Persian coast. Although it is not clear as to the extent to which the activity was taxed, there is evidence illustrating the financing of pearling expeditions by the Sassanians and the existence of an elite market for the catch during their reign and the revival of trade routes. Of the second order were seasonal pearl banks and temporary pearling encampments that had their fortunes and destinies tied to the economic and political conditions of empire, its demand for pearls, levels of taxation and the share of profits the pearling fleets were entitled to. Pearl fishing in these second order spaces concentrated mostly on the Arabian side of the Gulf was hardly lucrative except for intermittent periods of a rather brief span until about the early seventeenth century. This was because unlike the former, the latter were environmentally marginal zones with very little supplies of potable water and other resources to support a substantial population and an economy that could sustain them. They were resorted to only when the demand for pearl was rather extensive and its price considerably high. Even in boom times habitation in them was restricted to the two pearling seasons in a year and to the crew of the pearling fleet. It is interesting to note how these seasonal camps, even the entire region between Bahrain and Julfar slip in and out of textual sources that belong to different periods in history, thus illustrating the paramount importance of pearls to their configuration

24 Carter, "History and Prehistory of Pearling," 144.

25 Rishahr was the name for Bushire or Bushehr on the Persian Gulf coast of Iran. Julfar was the name for modern Ras Al Khaimah in the UAE. For details see, David Whitehouse and Andrew Williamson, "Sassanian Maritime Trade," *Iran* 11 (1973): 37-38.

as places in the social life of communities. Al Idrisi writing in the 11th century portrays the region in question as a cluster of many desert islands but makes no reference to pearling anywhere on the islands, leaving us to infer that these seasonal banks may have fallen into disuse at that time. Four centuries later, Gaspero Balbi comes up with an entire list of islands like Sir Bani Yas, Das and Dalma in present day Abu Dhabi and coastal settlements like Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman etc., as places frequented by pearl fleets, although we must not discount the fact that his attention to detail in this regard stemmed from his commercial interests in pearls.

The fluctuating geographies characteristic of pearling for the larger part of its history gave way to a new more stable pattern dispersed across multiple sites, even as its centres shifted from the Persian to the Arabian side of the Gulf in the latter half of the 18th century. While Bahrain continued to thrive as a flourishing centre of pearling and a mercantile town, Kuwait, Qatar and Abu Dhabi were all new coastal centres that emerged in the course of the long and turbulent 18th century. Scholars like Carter and others have attributed the explosion of new pearl fisheries and coastal towns along the breadth of the Arabian coast of the Gulf from Bahrain to Sharjah to the changing dimensions of tribal migration and politics in the wake of the slackening and the ultimate loss of Safavid hold over Bahrain. With the dissolution of Persia's centralized control over taxes, the scramble for the pearl revenues of the coast of Bahrain became a dominant feature of tribal politics impelling movement and settlement along new lines and in new directions. Groups and families of tribes both from the coast and the inland terrain of the Arabian desert spread out to Qatar and further east to partake of the new economic opportunities and social and political benefits afforded by pearl. Alongside changes within the Gulf was the increasing demand for pearls in India and elsewhere in the world which made pearl fishing a highly lucrative pursuit for several inland tribes some of whom like the Qubaisat and the Rumaythat, sub-tribes within the Bani Yas switched over completely to a life of the seas.²⁶ Interestingly for the work, it presents new ground with which to think the celebrated Maktoum migration and the making of Dubai in the 19th century, the discussion with which the section opened.

²⁶ Carter, "How Pearls Made the Modern Emirates", 275.

If the foundations of modern Dubai were laid in the process of migration to the coast, the case of Abu Dhabi, as illustrated by Carter, Fuccaro²⁷ and others was no different. That migration built up to a different trajectory of growth Abu Dhabi culminating in the oil urbanism of the seventies and the tribal state that reinforced it is another matter altogether. Abu Dhabi, a term that now represents all territory under the jurisdiction of the emirate began as an island northwest of Liwa where the Bani Yas, a tribal confederation that claim origins from Nejd in Central Arabia and the interior of Oman had consolidated their first capital in the early part of the 18th century.²⁸ Liwa then was a cluster of around forty oasis settlements in the Dhafrah region which the Bani Yas shared with the Manasir. Abu Dhabi is believed to have been first inhabited in 1761. The discovery of a fresh water source may have been incidental to its founding but its expansion into a settlement with forts, watch towers and about 400 houses²⁹ in just over two decades was, as Carter insists, certainly more than a bedouin strategy to protect the newly discovered water source.

Unlike the bedouin economy which was more or less subsistence and barter based, the pearl economy into which Abu Dhabi inserted itself revolved around cash that accrued to the sheikh in the form of taxes on boats, royalties on pearls and other dues extracted from merchants and crews of pearling vessels for the protection of property and lives from Bedouin raids as well as pirates at sea. J. C. Wilkinson who studied the social, legal and political foundations of territorialism in the tribal constituencies of Oman and the Emirates points to the significance of a pearling port in raising the status of a sheikh to that of a ruler in these parts.³⁰ The sheikh in tribal societies in Arabia and the Middle East, as anthropological studies have shown, was a leader in a "political egalitarian system" where leadership was based on social consensus and had to do primarily with mediation of disputes within the tribe and the organization

27 Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 45.

28 Christopher Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond* (London: Hurst and Company, 2011), 4-5; Frauke Heard-Bey, "The Tribal Society of UAE," 102.

29 Alan Rush, ed. *Ruling Families of Arabia: The United Arab Emirates* (Slough: Archive Editions, 1991), 29-30.

30 J. C. Wilkinson, "Traditional Concepts of Territory in Southeast Arabia," *The Geographical Journal* 149, no.3 (1983): 301-315.

of raids and wars.³¹ In societies where conceptions of sovereignty and government or *hukm* were based on control of territorial resources as against their exclusive ownership, it was not unusual to find limitations on sheikhly authority more apparent than its strengths, particularly when it came to the enforcement of decisions made by the sheikh. However, with the onset of pearling, and the demographic and economic changes it engendered, the territorial, social and political dimensions of tribal power altered bringing in newer institutional meanings and structures to sheikhly authority and influence. Since the pearl banks constituted a resource rather vulnerable to depredations from multiple quarters pitched at various scales of the economy, they had to be, in order that the industry remained lucrative, subjected to taxation in one form or another. The basis of protection taxes were levied on all aspects of the industry giving it the contours of an economy streamlined more or less along political lines and forging the division of tribal society along new lines. The revenue apparatus and the flow of tax monies to the sheikh as the protector of the coast and the industry enabled the creation of fledgling states with increased and more permanent forms of control over their territorial resources.

As for Abu Dhabi, all these changes translated into the expansion of Bani Yas power now beginning to be consolidated over desert and islands along the coast, with the latter providing the wealth and resources required for a life of relatively greater ease, influence and prestige in the former. The sheikhdom now had its officials, retinue of guards and tax collectors some of whom drew salaries for services rendered to the ruler. To be sheikh was now more prestigious, rewarding and formidable than ever, a development vital to explaining the squabbles within the Al Bu Falah prior to consolidation of the reign of Khalifa and subsequent secession of the Maktoums. Besides, Abu Dhabi's strategic position on the island affording it a broader perspective of the coastline enabled increased surveillance and control over its territory and improved mechanisms of defense against attack. All of these developments in the direction of the Bani Yas' rising maritime power were viewed

31 Thomas J. Barfield, "Tribe and State Relations: The Inner Asian Perspective," in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 159-160.

with suspicion by the Qawasim whose maritime supremacy in the Persian Gulf had been unchallenged for a while even by the powerful Omanis of the East Coast. In the desert and for the Wahhabis looking to extend their territorial expanse beyond the borders of the Nejd, Liwa with its newfound wealth was a potential source of revenue, vulnerable to proselytization and political control by the newly emerging state.³²

The Bani Yas had a history of conflicts with the Wahhabis through the 18th century. Despite the major part of the raiding unleashed on their oases settlements they evaded tributary control and domination by the latter. With the Qawasim however, fighting broke out only in the early years of the 19th century and had to do as much with access to and control over Dubai as with the rivalries emerging in the wake of the Bani Yas' rise to eminence as a regional power. Dubai, ever since the consolidation of Abu Dhabi had served as some sort of a border between the territories subject to the control of the Bani Yas and those dominated by the Qawasim. Deira on the western side of the creek separating the two territorial components of modern day Dubai was under the protection of the Qawasim sheikh of Sharjah and Dubai was more or less a dependency of Abu Dhabi.³³ While much of the feuding was brought under control and to the advantage of the Bani Yas in the years following British maritime intervention in the region, the infighting among the Al Bu Falah for the ruler's position called for a twist in Bani Yas' relationship with the Wahhabis. Khalifa who with the help of Sultan had murdered their brother Tahnoon, the sheikh of Abu Dhabi, and consequently lost the trust of the Bani Yas sought protection from the Wahhabis. To this effect they collected money and gifted it as tribute to the Wahhabi governor, thereby enraging their fellow tribesmen whose efforts at warding off the Wahhabis for so long were defeated and their pride deeply hurt. In response to the autocratic ambitions of Khalifa as sheikh of Abu Dhabi and the new power equation with the Wahhabis created to that effect, a coup was

32 The Bani Yas were closer to the Omanis in their religious beliefs. They adhered to the more moderate Maliki school as against the Wahhabis who followed the stricter Hanbali School of Sunni Islam.

33 See Report on the Piratical Tribes, submitted to Francis Warden Esq. Chief Secretary to Government, Bombay on 27th February, 1823. File No.8 of 1823 in Political Department, Vol. 37/132 of 1823, Maharashtra State Archives, 212-270.

attempted, as per the conventions of tribal politics, from among the families and clans of the Bani Yas. Unsuccessful as it was the rebels led by Obed Bin Syed Al Falasi and his nephew Maktoum Bin Buti Al Falasi had to flee Khalifa's rage and set up camp at Dubai, which given the conflictual state of affairs between the Qawasim and the Bani Yas the Falasis presumed was not easy for Khalifa to attack.

Nonetheless, attacks and raids continued with Khalifa trying different strategies to choke Dubai's trade and supply routes in the interior and entering into fleeting alliances with the Qawasim to reduce Dubai to its control. Maktoum, the judicious politician that he was, kept both powers at bay by switching alliances and playing off Abu Dhabi against Sharjah until well into the 1850s. There were conflicts between these different sheikhdoms in the later decades of the 19th century too; however, they can only be made sense of from within a canvas of history that has a scope wider than what we have seen so far. The structures and politics of the conflicts defining these petty skirmishes between sheikhs now subsumed under piracy change with significant consequences for Dubai's urbanization and become embedded in a scheme of empire, its geographies, economics and ideologies. Much of what follows is an attempt to uncover Dubai within the frame of empire and its practices in the region.

Piracy, Politics and Trade: The Imperial Context of Maritime Urbanism

Dubai's entry into the documented sources of the East India Company preceded its founding event of the *Maktoum* migration by a little over a decade. In 1820, following the assault on the Qawasim by the British in Ras al Khaimah, the third in the series of naval expeditions³⁴ sent out to chastise the aggressive seafarers of the Persian Gulf, a set of agreements were concluded with different sheikhs on its Arabian shores. Called the preliminary engagements, these were a preface to the

³⁴ The first of these expeditions by the British was in 1806 after which a treaty was signed with the Qawasims which enjoined them to respect the British flag and property and to refrain from the plunder of vessels touching their coastline in Persia. The second was in 1809 when the strongholds of the Qawasim in Ras Al Khaimah, Lingah, and Al Shinas were captured by the British and their piratical fleets at sea destroyed. For more details see, C. U Aitchison, "Treaties and Engagements Relating to the Arab Principalities in the Gulf," in *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries, Vol. XIII* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1909):152. Also see Chapters II and III of C.R. Low, *History of the Indian Navy, 1613-1863* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

General Treaty of 1820³⁵ which formally marked the beginnings of British interference in this part of the world besides creating a new political geography along its coastline. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Hazza Bin Zaal of Dubai along with the sheikhs of Bahrain, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, and Abu Dhabi and the chiefs of other tribes committed to the terms of the treaties³⁶ primary among which was the dictate enjoined on them to refrain from acts of "plunder and piracy" by land or sea.

The articles of the preliminary engagement say very little about Dubai or any other chiefdoms as places with settlements, communities and social conventions of public life. We are certainly given to understand the obvious, that all of them had the trappings of a town whose inhabitants engaged in piratical activities. They had towers mounted with guns and possibly prisoners taken captive in the course of plunder. There were vessels too that the sheikh and his dependents used for, besides predatory activities, fishing and pearling in the waters of the Gulf. Nonetheless, these and the articles of the General treaty, soon to be followed by others, offer us a window into the broader set of commercial and political circumstances under which they were drawn up, the alliances and rivalries that underpinned them, the goals towards which they were directed and the ways in which the Arabs made parties to the treaty were to be framed as part of these goals.

Dubai's evolution and establishment as an urban space in the 19th and early 20th centuries, not unlike that of the other port towns in the Arab Gulf, can scarcely be understood outside of the maritime geographies and political structures that it was incorporated into via the treaty regime of the British. Nelida Fuccaro writing on Bahrain draws attention to these structures and frameworks, describing it as "a new port regime" established under the aegis of the Government of India.³⁷ The new imperial port regime acted as the bulwark against forces intrinsic to tribal polities that had deferred urbanization even after a regional economy in pearls had fostered

35 For the English translation of the text of the treaty, see C.U. Aitchison, "Treaties, Engagements and Sanads," 169.

36 Sheikh Zaal was a minor, therefore the preliminary engagement dated 9th January, 1920 was signed on his behalf by a certain Ahmed Bin Futeiss, and the General Treaty dated 15th January, 1920 was signed by his uncle Saeed Bin Syuf.

37 Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories*, 43.

settlements along the Arabian coastline since the mid-18th century. Various referred to as the politics of protection, informal empire and the trucial system, the trajectory and nature of urbanization that the new order set down continues to define contemporary Dubai, marking it out as a city with a distinctive urban character and spirit among other cities in the Arabian Gulf. The argument here is not that Dubai was singled out in history for the kind of urbanization that the dissertation attempts to elucidate. Instead it is the particular history and spatial politics of Dubai reinforced by the divergent trajectory of oil in the constitution of its city and state that is vital to preserving the historical continuities of an urbanism more or less rejected by the other cities in the wake of the oil euphoria that took over their urban, social and political imaginations in the latter half of the 20th century.

The pretext as we have seen on which Dubai and the rest of the territories inhabited by the maritime tribes of southeastern Arabia was incorporated into the treaty was the piratical threat they posed to British and indigenous shipping in the sea lanes of the Persian Gulf and the western Indian Ocean. The Muscat Arabs as the maritime tribes of the region were called, and not without adequate reason as we shall see, were notorious for their predatory activities at sea even in the 17th century. Europeans like John Fryer³⁸ observing them at Surat on his travels to the East and as early as 1677 had remarked thus:

They are true Rovers both by Sea and Land; they are constantly upon the Plunder with Portugals, but care not to engage where nothing is to be gotten but Blows, wasting those Places that lie most open on the Sea-Coast and unguarded.

These have lately fitted themselves with good stout Ships at Surat, their own Country supplying them with no Materials for Building; their non-payment whereof, according to the Contract with the Governor, at present has put a stop to their increase that way in Shipping; and has kindled matter for farther alarming the Merchants: For the Governor for his security has seised the Imaum's Vockeel, nor intends he to enlarge him till the uttermost Gosbeek be paid.

On this Pretence they begin to interrupt the Merchants, on the Seas, seising their Vessels and furnishing themselves at cheaper Rates.

Nor does their late Enterprize over the Portugals make them less formidable; so that if they

38 John Fryer, *A New Account of East India and Persia in Eight Letters: Being Nine Years Travels Begun 1672 and Finished 1681: Containing Observations Made of the Moral, Natural and Artificial Estate of Those Countries* (R.R, London: 1698), 119-120.

be not be checked by these Knights of Lisbon, they will infect this Ocean, no less than the Moors of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoly, do the Narrow Seas in the Mediterranean, especially the Gulf of Persia in which Mouth they are conveniently feated and villainously inclined; in which it concerns them to omit no Diligence.

It is obvious from Fryer's observations that much of the predation that the Arabs were involved in had to do with assaults against the Portuguese whom the rising Yariba state of Oman had chased out of Muscat, the major port of the latter in the Persian Gulf after the loss of Hormuz, in 1650.³⁹ Portugal had failed miserably in its imperial designs in the western Indian Ocean by the mid-seventeenth century. They could never monopolize the spice trade, nor were they able to cut off Ottoman access to trade routes between the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, the primary objectives defining their presence in the East. They had lost Hormuz to the Safavids in 1622, following which came the fatalities of Muscat, Malacca, Ceylon and their remaining possessions on the Malabar coast, all of which except for Muscat they had to cede to their main competitors, the Dutch. Owing to such humiliating defeat at the hands of the Safavids with whom the Portuguese had been in alliance for a while, the latter embarked on an aggressive course of action turning into a "predatory naval power desperate to gain its former supremacy," taking islands like Qishm and Kong and exacting tribute from them. Additionally, they spent the decades until the collapse of the Safavids in 1722, fighting the Omani Arabs whose retaliatory campaign against the Portuguese involving the seizure of their ships and cargoes and assault of their crew extended along the coasts of the Persian Gulf, western India and Eastern Africa.

Much including the semantic, political and pragmatic dimensions of piracy had changed in the Indian Ocean since the advent of the Portuguese in the closing years of the 15th century. Whereas in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, the sea had for centuries been a site of multiple forms of maritime violence, ranging from commercial predation and freebooting to privateering and naval warfare between city-states, the Indian Ocean was a thoroughfare of indigenous economic activity and

39 For details on the rise and fall of the Portuguese in the Persian Gulf, see Rudi Matthee, "The Portuguese Presence in the Persian Gulf: An Overview," in *Imperial Crossroads: The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf*, ed. Jeffrey R. Marcis and Saul Kelly (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 1-12.

maritime pursuits with no state or power claiming rights to the sea.⁴⁰ It was an oceanic space to which was alien notions of exclusive maritime sovereignty and where, as Janet Abu-Lughod rightly observes, several "locally hegemonic powers" co-existed with no single power ever dominating the system.⁴¹ Divided into interlocking circuits along the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, the western and eastern coasts of the subcontinent, the Straits of Malacca, the islands of Java and the ports of the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean was a bed of "contrasting richness" with distinct cultural zones, multiple economic ridges and complex articulations of political sovereignty.⁴² Its geographically, ethnically and culturally diverse mercantile societies were set in intertwined political systems ranging from landed empires and states to tribal chiefdoms and maritime polities. Rulers and administrators within these overlapping political arrangements often traded for themselves not as rulers but as merchants alongside other merchants, a practice far removed from the "monarchical capitalism" that had begun to characterize Spain, Portugal and other European nations in the Middle Ages.⁴³ In an environment of economic competition as opposed to political control and the exercise of monopoly over commerce, it was on the contrary, not uncommon for merchants trading in the Indian Ocean to accumulate the kind of wealth that helped finance the state in times of difficulty, a possibility that set them free of any kind of political allegiance to the latter.⁴⁴

When the Europeans made their foray into the Indian Ocean in the numbers that they did in the 15th century, they brought much more than their past rivalries and inherited notions of trade, piracy and the state to its waters. While there is no denying the

40 Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2003)

41 Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 253.

42 K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 67-71; Ashin Das Gupta, "Introduction II: The Story," in *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800*, ed. Michael Pearson and Ashin Das Gupta (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1987) and Himanshu Prabha Ray and Edward A. Alpers, ed., *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean World* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

43 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Written on Water: Designs and Dynamics in the Portuguese Estado da India," in *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, ed. Susan E. Alcock et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46-51.

44 Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 17.

incidence of violence, or the presence of privateers and pirates before the Europeans, it must be said that they, beginning with the Portuguese in the 15th century, did much to add to its existing perceptual repertoire and its realtime manifestation on the deep seas and in inland waters. The doctrine of *mare clausum*⁴⁵ and the numerous papal bulls that had secured for the crown sovereign authority over all the seas and lands it might discover in the Atlantic complemented by the papal grant of monopoly of commerce within these regions were put to use in the Indian Ocean with major implications for the commercial arrangements and punctuated sovereignties of the latter. In accordance with the papal ruling that other nations could not trade without license from the Portuguese sovereign whose authority could be enforced by the use of naval force, the Portuguese initiated a series of operations that added newer dimensions to the perception, practice and political prospects of piracy. Controlling the movements of merchant shipping through regular naval patrols, the enforcement of customs duties and *cartazes*,⁴⁶ or safe-conduct passes to local merchants, and the outlawing and confiscating of the seaborne property of those that violated the dictates of the *Estado da India* were some of them. Frequent raiding expeditions and the brutal violence of competition unleashed on offenders, particularly the merchants of Gujarat, Malabar, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, in whose hands rested the trade in spices were justified in the name of protecting trade that was licensed and made legal under Portuguese authority. In short they introduced a system that as Michael Pearson observes was “a vast protection racket, for the Portuguese were selling protection from violence which they themselves had created.”⁴⁷

45 The doctrine of *mare clausum*, meaning the closed sea under the sovereignty of a power and restricted in terms of use by other states was derived from the notion in ancient the Roman Law of *mare nostrum*. The *mare nostrum* as it was conceived of by the Romans meant subjugating the Mediterranean sea to European rule. *Mare clausum* was set against *mare liberum* which meant the high seas open to all nations. In medieval and early modern times, these doctrines were used by different powers in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean to legitimate and further their individual dominion over the seas and the lands adjoining them. They formed the underlying principles of the dual naval and commercial aspect of sea power and constituted the legal basis of the system of European thalassocracy. For more details on *mare nostrum* see Michel Mollat du Jourdin, *Europe and the Sea*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993). For a detailed history of the uses of these doctrines in the Nordic, Atlantic and Mediterranean seas, see Bo Johnson Theutenberg, “Mare Clausum et Mare Liberum,” *Arctic* 37, no.4 (1984): 481-492.

46 K. S. Mathew, “Trade in the Indian Ocean and the Portuguese System of Cartazes,” in *The First Portuguese Colonial Empire*, ed. M.Duffy, B.J.Coles, M.D.D. Newitt and I.A Roots (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1986), 69-84.

47 See Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 120-121.

The Portuguese may not have been able to forge an imperial system the way the British did in the 19th century, yet the regimes, imaginaries and ideologies of power they provoked were crucial in rapidly politicizing the world of the Indian Ocean and transforming it into a "territorialized" space of competing commercial rivalries and political interests. Players on the western coast of India and the Persian Gulf aspiring to higher levels of sovereignty in the 17th and 18th centuries were in fact only adapting Portuguese piratical strategies and state-sponsored tactics of violence⁴⁸ to serve an assortment of political purposes, including the filling in of power vacuums left behind by declining landed empires, staging bouts of resistance against newly rising imperial claims and the stifling of potential maritime rivals.⁴⁹ A case in point are the Marathas collecting coastal revenues to finance their campaigns against the Mughals in India and to compete with Surat which was the principal Mughal port in the early years of the 18th century.⁵⁰ The Omani depredations exceeding their Portuguese targets and spilling over to Maratha, Mughal and European shipping, resulting in prolonged naval battles between these different maritime players is yet another example.

The Portuguese were able to project a hegemonic understanding of maritime piracy and an ethnicized, even religious notion of pirates, both of which were deeply rooted in their history of crusades and conflicts with the Turks and other Islamic rivals in the Mediterranean, a point one cannot miss in Fryer's remark on the Arabs. Progressively, and by the end of the 18th century, when the British were beginning to consolidate their power in the Indian Ocean Portuguese impressions of piracy had acquired the status of an absolute truth that could implicate practices and players anchored in a very different set of historical, political and maritime traditions to Europe's. Then and in the 19th century the British marshaled piracy in all its political

48 For details on piracy as a state-sponsored program of the Portuguese see Michael Pearson, "Piracy in Asian Waters: problems of Definition," in *Pirates, Ports and Coasts in Asia: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. John Kleinen and Manon Osseweijer (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010), 15.

49 For a textured account of piracy as it was mobilized in the western Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf in the 17th and 18th centuries as well as the distinct cultural perceptions and vocabularies of piracy in history with which they could be read, see Patricia Risso, "Cross-Cultural perceptions of Piracy: Maritime Violence in the Western Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf during a Long Eighteenth Century," *Journal of World History* 12, no.2 (2001): 293-319.

50 Risso, "Cross-Cultural Perceptions of Piracy", 302-305.

potential as a master signifier to cover any kind of maritime activity that was deemed a challenge to their evolving maritime empire including competing claims to resources and pre-existing commercial practices. An empty category that could quite conveniently be filled in with changing sets of players and practices and according to the changing needs and priorities of empire, it also offered legitimate grounds for political intervention in spaces that were defined almost exclusively in terms of it. Thus it was not the Muscat Arabs that Fryer had seen in the 17th century but the Qawasim involved in maritime conflicts with the former who had now forged an alliance with the British that predominantly figured as pirates in the imperial imagination of the 19th century.

The structures and semantics of empire however, had changed drastically in the days since the Portuguese and so had the modes in which it operated. The papal regime of Catholic law that the Portuguese had taken recourse to, constituted their rivals, principally the Turks and Muslim traders, as structurally, even geographically outside of law and empire,⁵¹ thereby justifying the concerted efforts of the Portuguese at their systemic commercial and political marginalization within the world of the Indian Ocean. The British in spite of their monopolistic trading policies whether of the Company or Crown, believed in an architecture of power that was rather inclusive and co-opted indigenous merchants, rulers and even so called pirates to their commercial and political advantage. They attempted to create an order of things, an imperial political economy within which alliances with native players at different levels of what Sugata Bose calls a "layered sovereignty," were more permanently entrenched and stable.⁵² In the case of Dubai and the pirate towns along the Arab

51 Theutenberg in his illustration of the papal benediction of the Doge of Venice, which was an annual ceremony marking the sovereignty of Venice and its dominion over the sea, points up the political background to legal doctrines and clauses in the Christian world of the Middle Ages. He affirms that Venice on the Adriatic Sea was a "useful barrier to further expansion in Europe by the Turks and served as a scourge to the Saracen pirates." See Theutenberg, "Mare Clausum et Mare Liberum", 488-489. Michael Pearson talks about how such law having structurally precluded Muslim traders, whether Arab or Turkish, shaped Portuguese practices of surveillance and control in the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese forcing their ships to stop at ports or towns controlled by them and even prohibiting their travel if they were from spaces deemed hostile must all be considered in the light of these historical and legal developments in the Mediterranean. The Muslim traders in the Portuguese scheme of things were illegal not so much because they were defiant to existing laws as they were structurally precluded and by default illegal in the Christian law governing nations. See *The Indian Ocean*, 121.

52 Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge:

Gulf coast, it was the treaty regime that set off a series of developments towards urbanization and steered them along the imperial course of history the ramifications of which continue to inform their economies and politics in contemporary times.

It is difficult to assess the immediate effect of the 1820 treaties on the pirate towns themselves especially since raiding and conflicts on land and to some extent at sea continued among them and well into the latter half of the 19th century. Nonetheless, the disciplinarian tactics of the British enforced through naval patrols and surveillance at sea froze existing local and regional political structures, somewhat striking a balance in power between the command of the Qawasim and that of the Bani Yas. More stable and consolidated maritime bases in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah whose sheikhs were now held responsible for the conduct of their townsmen and the desert tribes owing allegiance to them proffered the tribes and their territories a distinctive identity as well as a legitimate purpose in the evolving maritime order dominated by the British. Captain J. McLeod, Resident in the Persian Gulf, undertaking a tour of the Arabian ports in 1823 and reporting on the general state of calm prevailing in them, drew the Chief Secretary's attention briefly to a shift in the commercial ventures of the various chiefs residing there—a shift enabled by the stipulation within the treaty that the latter could trade with ports that were allies of the British.⁵³ While most other sheikhs had three or four boats that were employed in fishing, Sultan Bin Suggur, McLeod observed, had "many fine vessels" of which at least 30 had a carrying capacity of between 50 and 100 men and was now building a *buggala*⁵⁴ of about 120 tonnes for trade to India. By 1844, there is clear evidence to show that Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah and Abu Dhabi had been trading with India and Africa besides being involved in pearling and the Gulf trade alongside Dubai.⁵⁵

A controversy that arose in 1847 over customs duties to be paid by vessels belonging

Harvard University Press, 2006), 41.

53 Report on the Piratical Tribes, submitted to Francis Warden Esq. Chief Secretary to Government, Bombay on 27th February, 1823. File No.8 of 1823 in Political Department, Vol. 37/132 of 1823, MSA, 212-270.

54 A *buggala* is the term used for a dhow in the Persian Gulf.

55 Statement of the Maritime Resources of the Piratical Ports on the Arabian Coast, Memoranda on the Resources, Localities and Relations of the Tribes Inhabiting the Arabian Shores of the Persian Gulf, submitted to the Government on 6th January 1845 by Lieut. A. B. Kemball, Bombay Artillery, Assistant Resident at Bushire, MSA.

to these sheikhs and their subjects trading with Canara on the western coast of India sheds light on the commercial milieu that had as early as 1839 begun to bind the Arabian Gulf and British India.⁵⁶ The exchange of correspondence on the issue between different officials and departments of government, including the Collectors of Customs at Bombay and Canara and the Secretaries to the government and the Board of Revenue hinges on a certain notification published by the Government of India on 9th January 1839 regarding the status of ports of Arabia, the Persian Gulf, Red Sea and Oman within the imperial domain of trade. The notification stated that “the goods exported into the several ports of the Presidency of Bombay in the vessels of any of the states and territories herein undermentioned on which British vessels are received and treated on terms as favorable as native vessels and likewise goods exported from the ports of Bombay in the vessels of such states and territories shall be treated and dealt with in all respects as goods imported and exported in British Bottoms.”⁵⁷ What this meant for the vessels of the Arab chiefs and their subjects was their exemption from payment of double duties on trade with ports in British India. It was a privilege made available in return for their deference to the imperial order, the telltale sign of which was their having to carry registers and passes signed by the Persian Gulf Resident on their trading expeditions.

Sources directly pertaining to the trade in question as well as statistics on its volume and records of shipping are scanty at least until the 1880s. Officials writing in connection with the measures taken by the residency and the government to ensure that peace was maintained on the waters of the Persian Gulf refer often tangentially to the success of pearl fishing in a particular season, petty instances of aggression on pearl banks and the increase in the trade, movement and even theft of slaves in these territories. Kemball relating the circumstances under which the maritime truces, entered into for the first time in 1835, and the enthusiasm of the chiefs to have it

56 Letter from Officiating Secretary to Government of Fort St. George to Secretary to Government of Bombay File No. 34 of 8th January, 1847 enclosing Collector's Report No. 41 of 1847 and Letter from Major Hennell, Political Resident at Bushire to Secretary to the Government of India of 8th September, 1847 in Vol. 79/1961 of 1847, MSA.

57 Minutes: Reported H.C. No. 82 of 1847 enclosed in Letter from I.L. Blanc Esq. Collector of Canara to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue No. 98 of 28th October, 1846 in Vol. 79/1961 of 1847, MSA.

renewed until the permanent truce was established in 1853, gives us good reason to believe that there was a steady increase in pearl production and the associated carrying trade of provisions and general merchandise in the years following the 1835 truce.

A letter despatched to the Secretary to the Government of Bombay on 23rd November 1846 by the Political Resident and enclosing the extract of a letter from Moollah Hussein, the native agent at Sharjah, comments on the modes of capture of slaves at Zanzibar and the Swahili coast and their transportation to the ports of the Arab Gulf during the trading season in the latter.⁵⁸ Hussein's sketch of the regional geography of the slave trade drawn out between the Swahili coast in Africa, Sur and Muscat in Oman and the ports of the Trucial Coast, and his description of the districts of the Gulf Arabs as so full of slaves that it was not unusual for them to outnumber the freemen of the towns, both point to the flourishing trade in pearls in the mid-19th century.

While British political interests along the coast remained intact through the period following the treaties, their commercial and shipping investments in the region were rather negligible. This was to change in the mid-19th century when the British India Steam Navigation Company supported by mail subsidies from the Government of India launched its steamer services to the Persian Gulf.⁵⁹ The British policy of granting mail subsidies to private shipping companies had been in existence since 1837, and was instrumental to the expansion of private British trade⁶⁰ on the one hand and the extensive reach of empire on the other.⁶¹ We have in the beginning of the chapter looked at the indispensability of the post and the flow of information to the survival of empire and the relevance of the 18th century Near East in all of this. The state of affairs in the 19th century had remained more or less as then, except that it was the Russians that now posed a threat to British India. The Russians had in

58 See pages 203-205, Vol. 79/1961 of 1847, MSA.

59 Stephanie Jones, "British India Steamers and the Trade of the Persian Gulf, 1862-1914." *The Great Circle* 7, no.1 (1985): 23-44.

60 Freda Harcourt, "British Oceanic Mail Contracts in the Age of Steam, 1838-1914." *Journal of Transport History* 9, no.1 (1988), 1-18.

61 Frank Broeze, "The Ports and Port System of the Asian Seas: An Overview with Historical Perspective from c. 1750." *The Great Circle* 18, no.2 (1996), 73-96.

1826, defeated Persia, conquered the latter's territory and forced the Shah to pay a huge indemnity to the Tsar.⁶² Persia's loss and entry into treaty relations with the Russians had much to do with Britain's failure to abide by the Treaty of Tehran (1814) which enjoined upon the British to provide military aid to the Shah in the event of an attack by a European power. This soured relations between Persia and Britain, hence the need to consolidate power on its own terms and look away from Persia as an ally in its project of the defense of India. The collaboration between British private capital and the state in the field of commercial shipping and the concomitant opening up of new markets in hitherto unexplored territory in the Near East and Persian Gulf was the means envisaged towards the accomplishment of such ends.⁶³

The shipping lines of the British India steamers and their timetables of regular services with fixed times of departure and arrival created in the western Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and the Near East, a commercial and political geography centered on different kinds of ports and the production and transit of specific commodities like opium and arms, apart from the trade in provisions like rice, coffee, sugar and cotton piece goods. It is important to distinguish between the two interlinked systems of trade, indigenous and European, defining the hierarchical order of this imperial port geography that was beginning to be institutionalized with steam shipping and subsidized mail services in the mid-19th century in order that we understand Dubai's evolution as a native town in the early part of the 20th century.

In the western Indian Ocean or the Arabian seas, Bombay which was only secondary in importance to Surat until the decline of the latter,⁶⁴ had begun to rise to prominence during this period as its premier port. Nevertheless, it was not a port that relied excessively on foreign trade like its predecessor but one to which the trade of other newly emerging steamer ports on the BISN shipping line were of equal or even greater significance. Frank Broeze argues that the rise of Bombay gave a fillip to

62 J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

63 Jones, "British India Steamers", 26.

64 For details on Surat and its decline see Ashin Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500-1800*, ed. Uma Das Gupta (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 351-368.

indigenous shipping and related commercial activities of the Baniyas, Arabs and Parsis,⁶⁵ who now began to permanently settle in the city alongside migrant laborers and workers from the hinterland. Amar Farooqui, points to the shift in the direction of European trade from the west to Madras on the Coromandel coast and Calcutta on the Bay of Bengal and Bombay's new role as the supplier of opium to the eastern ports from where it was shipped to China in exchange for tea, one of the key items of English trade.⁶⁶ The trade in opium was a private, "particularly indigenous enterprise" that strengthened Bombay's economic connections with the opium and cotton growing interior on the one hand and created a new form of commercial partnership between British companies like Jardine Matheson and Co and indigenous Bombay-based opium merchants like Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy on the other.⁶⁷

Bombay's opium revenues helped finance its other indigenous trades particularly with the ports of the Persian Gulf like Bushire, Bandar Abbas, Basra and Lingah from where it imported dates, almonds, gums, hides, specie and pearls in exchange for coffee, sugar, rice, and cotton piece goods. Of these, all the others except Lingah, were ports that had substantial trade with Britain especially in firearms, cotton, wool, carpets etc. Unlike in Bombay and Calcutta, where established private trading companies that managed the sourcing, shipping and distribution of opium, cotton and other commodities existed from the 17th century, these ports had no such arrangements before the BISN started its services on the Persian Gulf route. British merchant firms and shipping agencies like Gray Mackenzie and Co., and Gray Paul and Co., could be established and their activities carried on only with the help of indigenous partners. The latter sourced supplies from producers and artisans within the catchment area of these ports on their behalf and acted as intermediaries in the Persian Gulf trade to Europe.

In the sub-imperial maritime network created by the BISN in the western Indian Ocean with Bombay as its principal artery and core port, Lingah held a distinctive

65 Broeze, "The Ports and Port System of the Asian Seas," 75-76.

66 Amar Farooqui, *Opium City: The Making of Early Victorian Bombay* (Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective, 2006), 1-16.

67 Amar Farooqui, *Smuggling as Subversion: Colonialism, Indian Merchants and the Politics of Opium, 1790-1843* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005), 209-220.

place as a transshipment centre between Bombay and Bahrain, Dubai and Sharjah, although it was perhaps the least important insofar as the Gray Paul, the official shipping agency⁶⁸ of the BISN at the port, was concerned. It hardly catered to the British trade and nor did it have a hinterland unlike Bushire that could support the production of opium or dates for export. Its history as a re-distribution centre for pearls brought in from Bahrain, Dubai and Sharjah and provisions brought in from India was short-lived since by the turn of the century the high taxes imposed by the Persian government on its trade sometimes up to 400 per cent on certain goods had begun to shift all trade away from the port to Dubai.⁶⁹ Dubai by 1903, had begun to embark on a new phase of commercial and political history as a place with a potential for an urban future with national, regional and global dimensions.

Dubai, An Indian Ocean City-state in the Twentieth Century

Dubai could take off from where Lingah left off on the course of the transshipment trade connecting western India and the Persian Gulf because its merchants, Arab, Persian and Indian, had been involved in Lingah's trade even before it had become a port of call for the BISN steamers on the Bombay-Basra route. The city's pearl exports had grown ten fold between 1870 and 1890⁷⁰ which was an incentive for more of these merchants from Persia and India to make Dubai their commercial base. The Indian merchants or Banias financed the annual pearling expeditions in Dubai, Sharjah and the ports of Oman, via the banks in Bombay, buying back pearls from the fleets in return for the cash advances and the supplies of provisions made to the crew of the pearling vessels and their families. In 1891 when Gray Paul and Co., opened a shipping office in Dubai, some of them began to work as representatives for them, co-ordinating the sourcing and shipping of pearls and other commodities and organizing their movement into and out of the ports. As British Indian subjects, they also functioned as intermediaries between the shipping agents and officials of the BISN and local Arab traders, securing a niche for themselves as traders of textiles,

⁶⁸ The office of Gray Paul and Co., was established here in 1875.

⁶⁹ Mohammed Al Fahim, *From Rags to Riches: A Story of Abu Dhabi* (London: Centre for Arab Studies, 2005).

⁷⁰ Davidson, *Dubai*, 22-23.

provisions and other goods in the markets of Dubai. Today, one can find in Dubai, the descendants of some of these Banias, particularly of the *Thattai Bhatia* community of Sind, whose claims to have been pioneers of the wholesale trade in foodstuff and textiles in Dubai make sense if looked at in the light of this information. As Lingah faded into insignificance, they relocated their base to Dubai like the Persian and Arab merchants who had hitherto looked to the Persian port for their commercial enterprises, recreating in turn the Lingah's economy within the territorial confines of Dubai. A steady stream of artisans, clerks, shopkeepers and pearl divers from Persia, Iraq, Bahrain, Oman and the interior regions of the Emirates followed the Persians and the Indians, adding to the changing social, economic and demographic profile of the city and taking its spatial expansion in a new direction.⁷¹

This new phase of economic and urban expansion was facilitated by the 1904 declaration of Dubai as a tax free port made by Maktoum Bin Hashar, the sheikh of Dubai under pressure from his *majilis*. The *majilis* was a council of merchants, a polity where they played a key role in decision making, economic affairs, and urban policy and where the ruler himself was, as Al-Sayegh observes, a "paternalist merchant prince."⁷² The portrait of the ruler as "paternalist merchant prince" may be slightly misleading since it could persuade the reader to equate his position with or place him above the Persian and Indian merchants trading in the city, something that was not quite true until at least the decline of the pearl industry through the early 1930s. For unlike the latter who were part of an imperial structure of commerce and its concomitant political order manifest during the times in the British Government of Bombay, the ruler was a local figurehead deriving his political legitimacy from the desert tribes and their customary notions of leadership. Even as the ruler of the town, he did not have access to the kind of financial resources that the merchants had at their disposal and was dependent almost entirely on pearl taxes and customs revenues. With his fortunes tied almost irrevocably to the fluctuations of the market it was not infrequently that he had to turn to merchants who provided him with financial assistance in return for greater political privileges and a seat in the *majilis*.

⁷¹ Jones, *British India Steamers*, 28-30.

⁷² Al-Sayegh, "Merchants' Role," 87-102.

Even as Dubai took on greater functions as a port and had about 34 steamers of the BISN calling on an annual basis from 1905 until about 1930, it remained a modest town of about 10,000 people of whom 7,000 were employed in the pearling sector.⁷³ There were no modern institutions of state or urban governance and no infrastructure in the form of bridges, roads or concrete structures. Some of the pearl merchants established schools of which the Al Ahmadiyyah School started in 1903 was the most renowned, and a hospital. The creek remained in many ways the lifeline of the city. For one it was the entry and exit point defining the activities of the city's pearl economy. It was also what separated the three spatial constituents of Bur Dubai, Deira and Al Shindagha defining the Dubai of the 1930s.

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped the dual frames of the desert and the sea from which Dubai's history has been written by colonial officials. It has laid out the diverse contexts and the scales through which Dubai emerged historically, thus elaborating on the specific forms of economic, social and political activity underlying the making of the city as a place and an Indian Ocean city-state in the 19th century. It is the specificities of the Indian Ocean city-state and the forms of mobility, power and politics defining it that sees Dubai through the barren years of the 20th century following the demise of pearling and the onset of the economic depression in the 1930s. What the specificities were and how they were tapped into by merchants, traders, entrepreneurs and others form the major theme of discussion in the following chapter.

⁷³ Stephen J. Ramos, *Dubai Amplified: The Engineering of a Port Geography* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 59.

Chapter Three

After Pearls, Before Oil:

Trade, Smuggling and Urbanization in Dubai

A new and extended chapter in the urban history of Dubai began in the early 1930s. Marked by economic depression worldwide and declining pearl fortunes in the Persian Gulf, the long decade witnessed the newly emerging Indian Ocean city-state thrown into political disarray. In response to such turbulence within its local context as well as the developments associated with the Second World War in the imperial Indian Ocean, including the restrictions on trade,¹ the merchants of Dubai embarked on an uneasy realm of commerce, identified in the popular memory with smuggling. The principal concern of this chapter is the phenomenon of smuggling as it defined Dubai's urban character and economic trajectory over the latter half of the 20th century. *Smuggling* is addressed in relation to Dubai's commercial relations with India in the imperial Indian Ocean and the ways in which these relations tied into later waves of Indian migration into the city and the larger Persian Gulf in post-imperial times. Scholars like Ahmed Kanna and Neha Vohra have commented on the phenomenon and its imaginaries as centered predominantly around the illegal transfer of gold into India following decolonization in the subcontinent in 1947.² I add to the existing literature on smuggling in Dubai by historicizing it in the shifting context of the post-colonial state in India and its economic policy designs of 'developmentalism' and import substitution as well as examining the actual processes of transfer and 'contrabanding' that were categorized as smuggling in the discourses of the newly formed state. I also examine the nature of the urban economy in Dubai that stemmed from and reinforced a particular sociology of smuggling, grounded in

¹ See page 97 of the chapter.

² Kanna, *Dubai*, 60; Vohra, *Impossible Citizens*, 93-96.

ethnic hierarchies and marked by the conjunction of the formal and the informal both within its territorial confines and across the border in India.

It would be futile to attempt to define smuggling since it encompasses a range of diverse practices pitched at differing degrees of 'illegality' and undertaken in response to the differential policies of political regimes whose legitimacy rests on territoriality and the institutions that define and enforce it. We have seen in the preceding chapter how with the Portuguese 'territorializing' the waters of the Indian Ocean, its hitherto unregulated maritime trades were made illegal except in the event of payment of customs duties to the *Estado da India*.³ The early efforts of the Portuguese to identify smuggling in its rather crude forms in the maritime space of the Indian Ocean gave way to a different political vocabulary of smuggling during the early 20th century in the Persian Gulf. It was the clandestine trade in arms directly or otherwise to the enemy or its allies during the Second World War that defined smuggling for the British empire. With the post-colonial Indian state coming into power, smuggling was essentially any trade that evaded taxes, thereby depriving the state of its revenues, most importantly of its earnings in foreign exchange, and jeopardizing its policy of boosting domestic manufacture. Smuggling was thus more of an economic offense against the state and perceived as that which challenged its developmental ambitions and its emerging political economy of industrialization. With the onset of globalization, it has become even more difficult to frame smuggling as it is often found lurking in the shadows of legitimate transactions defining international corporations, private individuals and nation-states. Carolyn Nordstrom draws attention to the global shipping industry to illustrate this point, highlighting the ways in which legitimate trades routinely intersect with a range of practices constitutive of smuggling on shipping routes and in ports.⁴ What makes smuggling doubly resistant to definition in current times is that multiple practices and domains of 'illegal' or 'illicit' economic activity as the case may be, are crammed together in a perspective that aligns it to international organized crime networks and

3 For details see, page 66-67 of chapter two.

4 Carolyn Nordstrom, *Global Outlaws: Crime, Money and Power in the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 117.

makes it coterminous with underworld mafias, traffickers and international terrorists. Economic insurgency is seen as coalescing with political insurgency in acts that strike at the very foundations of international law and order and threaten the security and legitimacy of nation-states everywhere.⁵

Smuggling is a phenomenon that has intrigued both imperial and post-colonial states alike in the larger arena of the Indian Ocean World. Scholars like Amar Farooqui, Claude Markovits and John F. Richards⁶ have worked out the political economies of opium smuggling in 19th century India, while others like Carl Trocki have elaborated on the role of the drug in “laying the foundation for European colonial structures in Asia, both economic and administrative.”⁷ Richards has focused on the peasant production of opium and its contribution to the finances of British India and Markovits the ways in which opium producing areas in western India, particularly Sindh was integrated into the British imperial trading system. Farooqui interestingly, has looked at opium smuggling as an act of subversion and the conduit for the rise of indigenous capitalism in western India. Eric Tagliacozzo, has drawn up a comprehensive picture of smuggling in the region in the 19th century, focusing on its many key questions, say of the state, borders, law, technologies of surveillance and institutions of enforcement of border regimes, commodities, violence and the pre-colonial histories of smuggling as open trade.⁸ This chapter borrows insights from Tagliacozzo's work on the phenomenon, including notions of the border as a physical, economic and political construct symptomatic of the ideologies and anxieties of the state. It addresses smuggling as a set of activities emerging and existing in parallel to the territorial expanse of the state and its transformation as a

⁵ I have taken this argument from R.T. Naylor, *Wages of Crime: Black Markets, Illegal Finance and the Underworld Economy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁶ Amar Farooqui, *Smuggling as Subversion: Colonialism, Indian Merchants and the Politics of Opium, 1790-1843* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005); Claude Markovits, “The Political Economy of Opium Smuggling in Early Nineteenth Century India: Leakage or Resistance,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no.1 (2009): 89-111; John F. Richards, “The Indian Empire and Peasant Production of Opium in the Nineteenth Century,” *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no.1 (1981): 59-82.

⁷ Carl Trocki, *Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy: A Study of the Asian Opium Trade, 1750-1950* (London: Routledge, 1999), xi.

⁸ Eric Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States Along a Southeast Asian Frontier, 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); “Ambiguous Commodities, Unstable Frontiers: The Case of Burma, Siam and Imperial Britain, 1800-1900,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no.2 (2004): 354-377.

legal landscape. Furthermore, it resists the tendency to engage with smugglers as ontological categories whose lives, identities and commercial activities are singularly defined by the phenomenon of smuggling.

Smuggling has also formed a critical area of interest outside the commercial and political realm of the Indian Ocean, besides contributing in many ways to the discourse on globalization, its historical trajectory and its contemporary dimensions of illicitness. Peter Andreas who refers to the US as a nation of smugglers, revisits American history and the rise of its particular form of capitalism as tied primarily to smuggling and the politics of state interaction with it. The diverse forms of state interaction ranging from “collusion and toleration to discouragement and condemnation,” that Andreas points out, reveal the dynamics of smuggling and state-making as mutually defining and inseparable processes in history.⁹ Andrew Wender Cohen signposts the significance of the tariff in conceptions of the country's 19th century political economy, highlighting how its evasion and the import of foreign goods in contravention of its policies, were construed by the state and treasury officials as violations of national identity.¹⁰ In the age of globalization where smuggling is collectively taken to mean the illicit traffic in drugs and arms, money laundering and the international trafficking in women and children, scholars like Gargi Bhattacharyya¹¹ have illustrated its significance as “an alternative route into the global economy,” while Castells and others¹² have rendered it a parallel global economy, rather a global criminal economy in itself.

To begin to understand smuggling in Dubai, it is, as Nordstrom, writing of economic globalization reminds us, “useful to see the world as traders always have.”¹³ It is a world in which movement is paramount and stasis unwarranted. Borders, laws and other regimes of territorial sovereignty, whether of the imperial colony or the nation-

⁹ Peter Andreas, *Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

¹⁰ Andrew Wender Cohen, “Smuggling, Globalization and America's Outward State, 1870-1909,” *The Journal of American History* 97, no. 2 (2010): 371-398.

¹¹ Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Traffick: The Illicit Movement of People and Things* (London: Pluto, 2005), 32.

¹² Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000).

¹³ Nordstrom, *Global Outlaws*, 115.

state that work to frustrate movement are secondary, sometimes even tertiary and spell out other meanings and possibilities for those that transgress them. They are not so much regulated national institutions as unregulated opportunities, nor are tariffs obligations as much as they are obstacles.¹⁴ Dubai offers an interesting case study in smuggling which as reported in the international and Indian press, prevailed well into the 1980s and as I write about it in 2014, is resurfacing with even greater force than in the past.¹⁵ We have seen in the previous chapter how Dubai had emerged as a mercantile city-state in the early years of the 20th century, meaning that it espoused a view of the world not entirely different to that of a trader's. The trader's view permeating and defining multiple levels of the social and political hierarchy existed at odds with the laws of the modern state and its ideologies of political and economic legitimacy elsewhere, particularly in India. While for India, smuggling was trading outside the state's vision, much as it was elsewhere in the developing and developed worlds, in Dubai it was only legitimate trade as was the case before India embarked on its policies of economic nationalism.¹⁶

India, on grounds ranging from the historical, to the economic, political and the cultural suffered major setbacks as a result of this view of the city-state's, and hence provides the ideal site from which to engage with smuggling as it defined the urban economy and its social relations in Dubai. It is in the acts, processes, interactions and hierarchies constitutive of smuggling in the post-imperial Indian Ocean world, the chapter argues, that the contemporary histories of India and Dubai, and the Arabian Gulf at large remain intertwined and inextricable from each other. It was smuggling which to a large extent institutionalized Dubai's imperial geographies of commerce in post-imperial times through aligned practices as migration and the tenured visa system all of which have remained marginal to Indian history even to

14 Nordstrom, *Global Outlaws*, 116.

15 For details see Sarika Malhotra, "Yellow Peril," *Business Today*, December 8, 2013 <http://businesstoday.intoday.in/story/gold-smuggling-resumes-in-india/1/200605.html> (accessed January 31, 2014).

16 For details on economic nationalism as an ideology, see Eric Helleiner, "Economic Nationalism as a Challenge to Economic Liberalism? Lessons from the 19th Century," *International Studies Quarterly* 46 (2002): 307-329. For the programme of economic nationalism in India see Vivek Chibber, *Locked in Place: State-Building and Late Industrialization in India* (Oxford: Princeton University press, 2003).

this day.

Methods and Sources

This chapter is premised on an understanding of smuggling as an abstract category in the service of power regimes that have aimed to freeze pre-existing mobilities of people, capital and commodities in a bid to establish a particular order of hegemony over their subjects. The discourses informing such abstraction have been political, legal and economic, and less frequently, social. The narrative on smuggling here is reconstructed partly on the basis of these discourses through newspaper reports, editorial columns and features in the Indian and international press. As for the social history of smuggling, I have traced its pathways, networks and the hierarchies defining its multiple processes through field research and ethnographic material collected in Dubai, the other emirates and parts of Kerala in India.

I situate smuggling in the context of migration and the changing contours of the political space in the Indian Ocean as well as the economy in Dubai. Therefore, it is mostly through the histories of migration that I recoup aspects of smuggling. As pointed out earlier, smugglers could never be engaged with as ontological categories since there was hardly anyone who did not smuggle even once in their sojourn in Dubai. This is not to say that it was never a large scale activity involving multiple players and structural hierarchies, nor that it was a purely economic activity free of political undertones. The point on the contrary is that individuals, mostly migrants and makeshift syndicates moved in and out of smuggling in line with changing financial circumstances and social and political possibilities on either side of the economic border.

The migrant frames of reference, each of which is distinctive in itself, yet differently placed in relation to the other and entrenched in divergent social, economic and political locations in their connections with Dubai provide different insights into the phenomenon of smuggling. Two communities, the *Thattai Bhatias* of Sindh and the *Malabar Muslims* of Kerala, some members of which I interviewed extensively as part of my ethnographic fieldwork, are at the centre of the discussion owing to the

very specific and intimate functions they performed within the commercial economy of Dubai. Others from Sindh referred to as *Sonis* and *Sindhis*, and those from Kerala called *Malayalis* also figure in the work in some detail.

The Thattai Bhatias were the pioneers of mercantilism, not just in Dubai but the whole of the Persian Gulf and Oman and were believed to have had trading settlements in Muscat from the 15th century at least.¹⁷ In the 18th century they were supplanted by the *Kutchi Bhatias* and a group of *Khojas* from Sind known as *Luwatiyas* in Muscat, owing to which a vast majority of them settled down in Zanzibar while a small group moved to Bahrain, Kuwait and Dubai where they played a huge role in the pearl trade up until the 20th century.¹⁸ With the province of Sind going over to Pakistan and the loss of Thatta and Karachi as commercial strongholds the Thattai Bhatias became among the many trading communities of Hindus in Sind displaced territorially by Partition. Today they figure among the many diverse groups of Sindhi diaspora that are spatially dispersed across the Persian Gulf, North America, Southeast Asia and East Africa.¹⁹

The Malabar Muslims, otherwise called the Mappilas have figured in many historical accounts and colonial documents as peasants, traders, sea pirates and rebels of empire. Unlike the Bhatias, they are neither a homogenous group nor a trading diaspora, yet have a history that ties them in more closer, even intimate social relationships with the Arabs at least from the 7th century.²⁰ With the advent of the Portuguese, they lost their predominance as merchants and traders in the Indian Ocean, a state of affairs which continued well into the days of British colonialism. They moved into Dubai and other parts of the Gulf in post-independence times.

17 Claude Markovits, "Indian Merchant Networks Outside India in the 19th and 20th Centuries: A Preliminary Survey," in *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims: Indian, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and China Seas Migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s*, ed. Donna R. Gabaccia (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 96-97.

18 Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750-1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

19 Markovits, *The Global World*, 11-12.

20 Roland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1976). Stephen F. Dale, "Trade, Conversion and the Growth of the Islamic Community of Kerala, South India," *Studia Islamica* 71 (1990): 156. Also see Prema Kurien, "Colonialism and Ethnogenesis: A Study of Kerala, India," *Theory and Society* 23, no. 3 (1994): 385-417.

They were labour migrants even before oil had become a source of income in Dubai inserting themselves into its diverse commercial circuits in varying capacities. As oil began to bring in more stable returns, they took up a whole host of jobs ranging from dock and construction workers, drivers, cooks and cafeteria labour and couriers and lower level operatives associated with smuggling rings. More of their place in the fledgling economy of Dubai in the 1970s and 80s will be discussed in the following chapter.

Smuggling, A Kaleidoscope of Economic and Political Activity During and After Empire

Travel narratives, popular histories and academic writing on Dubai often tangentially refer to smuggling as an economic activity that characterized the period from the 1950s up until the 1980s. Indian newspapers of the times, particularly the Bombay editions of national dailies like *The Times of India*, provide us with significant details and figures on the illegal traffic in gold, as also consumer electronics, home appliances, imported liquors and cigarettes as well as textiles and cosmetics that linked Dubai with Bombay and other ports on the western coast of India. Smuggling, read against a timeline roughed out by the Indian press can broadly speaking, be slotted into three phases between independence and the partition of the country in 1947 and the onset of liberalization in 1992—the first of these stretching from 1947 to 1954 when economic nationalism was only beginning to emerge as a political ideology; the second and the most important phase from 1954 to 1974 when smuggling transformed into a full-fledged industry enabled by proliferating social networks and rapidly advancing mobile and communication technologies; and the final from 1977 to 1990 following the lifting of the emergency, the spiraling labour migration to the Gulf and the return to normal of the activities of smuggling outfits.²¹

Between 1947 and 1954 alone, it was reported that about 1.3 million ounces of gold was illegally imported into the country, and this was not including other goods for

²¹ For details see S. Dharmarajan, “Gold Smuggling on Way Out: Some Facts and Figures,” *The Times of India*, December 26, 1974, 6.

which we have hardly any statistics.²² It was estimated by bullion dealers in London that the figures for the gold purchased by Middle East buyers ranged between 6 million ounces in 1964 and 11 million ounces in 1971.²³ Interviews with bankers in Dubai revealed that the city's monthly outflow of gold destined for India alone was at least 21 tons a month between 1966 and 1971. With the help of these figures the annual drain on foreign exchange on gold alone was at put down at 250 crore rupees a year, while an approximately equal amount was considered to have been spent on other smuggled goods.

Periodic cutbacks in the phenomenon did occur particularly in the 1970s but this was not to remain consistent for long or to effect a paradigm shift in social attitudes towards smuggling. For close to two years between 1971 and 1973, the country witnessed a decline in the smuggling of gold which was relegated to the fourth place in the list of contraband items after textiles, wrist watches and miscellaneous goods like household appliances and their spare parts. According to figures provided by Timothy Green, representative of a London based bullion firm, Dubai's imports from London showed a downward trend—from 260 tons in 1970 to 212 in 1971 and 140 tons in 1972 and 1973.²⁴ This slump was registered as a result of a whole host of factors. On the domestic front was the stepping up of surveillance by the Indian Navy along the western coast following the Bangladesh Liberation War in March 1971, and the drought in Maharashtra in 1972 and 1973 when distress sales of jewelry by the rural population led to a decreased demand for the metal.²⁵ On the international scene, the devaluation of the US dollar in February 1973 and the subsequent rise in the international price of gold from US\$ 38 to 42. 22 an ounce made very little dent in the price of the metal in Indian markets, meaning there was little to be gained from smuggling.²⁶ The next phase when smuggling was recorded

22 For statistics and a description of the method by which figures of gold smuggling were arrived at see "Tungku's Travels: Smuggling Gold," *The Times of India*, July 31, 1971, 8.

23 "Gold Smuggling on Way Out: Some Facts and Figures," *The Times of India*, December 26, 1974, 6.

24 "Distress gold sale by the drought-hit," *The Times of India*, May 31, 1973, 1.

25 "Distress gold sale," *The Times of India*, May 31, 1973, 1.

26 Peije Wang, *The Economics of Foreign Exchange and Global Finance* (New York: Springer, 2009), 24. Also see "Distress gold sale," *The Times of India*, May 31, 1973, 1 for India's unenthusiastic response to international gold prices.

to have hit an unprecedented low was during the emergency in India, when the authoritarian Indira Gandhi regime of the Congress party detained scores of 'smugglers' under the COFEPOSA (Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act, 1974), a move that rendered it impossible for these men to liaise with their bosses in the Gulf for the transfer of contraband.²⁷ This steep decline with Dubai importing no more than a total of 5 tons of gold in 1975 was a rather short-lived phenomenon and smuggling was reported to have kicked back to its pre-emergency levels soon after the emergency was lifted in March 1977.

Smuggling was to be found literally everywhere particularly during the second and third phases. It existed in numerous forms and practices with very few individuals and hardly any foreign manufacture escaping its vast sweep. Even as early as 1968, it was reported to have been 'over-crowded'²⁸ like any other profession in India and by 1977, there were according to Yusuf Patel, who was a notorious smuggler himself, "about 3200 smugglers in India" alone.²⁹ Arab dhows fitted with engines and manned by Arabs, Indians and Pakistanis carried consignments of gold, diamonds, Japanese textiles, cigarettes and wrist watches from Dubai and had them transshipped to fishing vessels and country craft in Indian waters in the night in the fifties and the sixties. Air hostesses flying from and via Dubai carried gold and foreign currency hidden in handbags with false layers,³⁰ male passengers lugged gold and diamonds in their clothes, shoes and suitcases with false bottoms.³¹ Other airline staff concealed gold in the bathrooms of flights,³² wheeled them in flasks and ovens on food trolleys into flight kitchens on the ground³³ and 'shortlanded' all kinds of contraband goods in

27 For the definition of the act and the grounds and conditions of detention under the act, see COFEPOSA Act (Act 52 of 1974) in Acts and Subordinate Legislation, published online by the Ministry of Finance, Government of India, <http://finmin.nic.in/law/cofeposa.pdf> (accessed August 2, 2013). Also see "Campaign Against Smugglers: Assessing the Impact," *The Times of India*, September 26, 1974, 4; "Gold too Costly for Indians: Dubai Smuggling Wanes," *The Times of India*, August 18, 1975, 7 and "Gujarat Coast No Longer A Smugglers' Paradise," *The Times of India*, April 24, 1976, page 11.

28 Kumud Khanna, "Smugglers' Paradise," *The Times of India*, January 7, 1968, 8.

29 "Smuggling was there even during Emergency," *The Times of India*, July 28, 1977, 7.

30 "Smuggling Bid Foiled," *The Times of India*, July 21, 1968, 6.

31 "Two held at airport on smuggling charge," *The Times of India*, November 3, 1982, 3.

32 "Airlines staff held for smuggling gold," *The Times of India*, February 13, 1987.

33 "Three Convicted for Gold Smuggling," *The Times of India*, February 17, 1983, 4.

undeclared baggage. While gold concealed in consignments of books, tape recorders, refrigerators and air conditioners was also a popular technique of smuggling, there were even more skilled cavity specialists that hid gold in the cavities of their bodies while flying to India. Consignments of foreign currency concealed in vegetable and fruit packages due for shipment by flights to Dubai were intercepted in an incident or two while smugglers like Haji Mastan smuggled silver into Dubai on flights from Bombay and brought back slabs of gold with the profits made in the sale of the metal.³⁴ Traders also sent huge consignments of silver to corporations and mercantile houses in Dubai, sometimes close to a ton, labeling them as licensed export items like textiles and hand looms.³⁵ Other more innovative ways of financing the purchase of gold also existed such as the withdrawal of foreign exchange on the basis of forged 'A' forms (these were meant for procuring foreign exchange for studies abroad) through personal links in the Reserve Bank of India.³⁶

A clearer view of the phenomenon from the other side emerges with the post-colonial Indian state beginning to press for diplomatic presence in Dubai in the early 1960s in a move that the officials at the Political Agent's office suspected was related to its urge to curb smuggling into India.³⁷ As is evident from the report of the Patrick Fyere, the Commercial Officer at the Political Agency stationed in Dubai, smuggling was certainly the lynchpin of the economy in the 1960s. Classifying it as “gold smuggling” and “the smuggling of anything else,” he signposts the nature of Dubai's trade that was at the core of the phenomenon, tying the city into the economic and political lives of other economies in the Indian Ocean region, say Iran, India, Pakistan, Oman and Hong Kong on the one hand and those of Europe on the other.

It is hard to say how much of Dubai's brisk but uncatalogued trade with the interior—Oman and Saudi Arabia—is smuggled; but since the lowest rate of duty on goods imported into the Sultanate is 17 ½% and on some goods duties are up to 100% and since Sultanate customs officials are known to be corruptible and the border is long, no doubt much is

34 “Watch Haul only of Rs 89. Lakhs,” *The Times of India*, July 8, 1983, 9; “Smuggling Silver out of India: One held,” *The Times of India*, October 5, 1969, 8.

35 “Bail for Suspect in Silver Haul Case,” *The Times of India*, March 10, 1983, page 3.

36 “Racketeer “kingpin” arrested,” *The Times of India*, September 22, 1976, 1.

37 For details refer the confidential report on smuggling prepared by Patrick Fyere, Commercial Officer at the Political Agency, Dubai in “External Relations” of the *Annual Records of the Gulf, UAE, 1962* (Slough: Archive Editions 1993); 514-518.

smuggled.

Gold is smuggled from Dubai to India because the price of gold in India is almost twice the price of gold on the world market (the price of gold in Pakistan is rather less than that of gold in India); the reason for this difference in price is that a traditional love of gold ornaments and a desire to find a hedge against inflation have created a keen demand which is impossible to satisfy officially because of currency shortage.

While no exact figures are available, I believe that the value of gold imported into Dubai and re-exported may be rather more than the total value of all other imports, perhaps as much as £ 10,000,000 per annum.

Gold is bought with free dollars from London, Zurich, Paris or New York; most comes from London. It is flown generally into Dubai already cast in 10 tola bars and stamped with sassy marks (ten tolas are 1800 grains troy and worth about £ 47). A single shipment from London may be worth £ 250,000 at world prices.

All sorts of craft take the gold from Dubai to India or Pakistan; large and small country craft, steamers and sometimes aircraft. Probably most goes by country craft (often small launches fitted with 200 or 300 hp British engines and capable of 17 knots).³⁸

Much more significant, however, than the description of the phenomenon by the Commercial Officer is the manner in which correspondences between officials on the issue betray the Residency's politics in addressing and engaging with it. The spatial frames from which smuggling was looked at were different in times of empire and after it, and so were the political dimensions of these. During imperial times, smuggling was the clandestine movement of such articles as cloth, tea, rice and sugar, besides rupees and silver coinage from the coastal districts to the interior of Oran where these commodities undercut British prices and destabilized the empire's trade in these goods.³⁹ Much more serious was the question of the illicit trade in firearms among the various peoples of the Gulf littoral for military use against the British and Persian authorities, particularly during the Afghan wars.⁴⁰ This trade was essentially a British trade. In other words, "the rifles were made in England, the exporting firms were British, the ships that carried the arms were British and the firms that handled the trade in Persia were British."⁴¹ Dubai was implicated in this imperial geography in ways radically different to those of its post-imperial variants

38 Patrick Fyfe, Commercial Officer at the Political Agency, Dubai in "External Relations" of the *Annual Records of the Gulf, UAE, 1962* (Slough: Archive Editions 1993); 514-518.

39 "Bushire Diaries for the Year 1935," in File No. 84-N/35, Foreign and Political Department, NAI.

40 Arnold T. Wilson, *The Persian Gulf: An Historical Sketch from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1928), 269-271.

41 Wilson, *The Persian Gulf*, 271.

of smuggling. It was through Oman that was considered the centre of the traffic in arms in the late 19th century that Dubai and other ports like Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait became nodal points in this circuit linking India with Persian territory in the Persian Gulf. Since Dubai was a pearling centre to which divers and slaves were brought in from Oman, particularly the Batinah coast, it was assumed that the large number of rifles sold locally to tribesmen in the interior of Oman reached the coast via these seasonal migrants. It was Dubai's location on the slave route from Persia to Oman and the Trucial Coast that made it a centre for the reverse traffic in arms into Persia and Afghanistan, a fact noted by the officers of the Admiralty during the early years of World War I.⁴² The imperial policy of curbing smuggling placed undue emphasis on crackdown at the point of importation rather than at source, meaning that the pursuit of smugglers became the sole responsibility of governments into whose territories goods were smuggled.⁴³

That smuggling in post-imperial times whether of gold or other articles was not something which in the view of either the Political Agent himself or the officials associated with the Commonwealth Relations Office warranted legislation must be read in some sense as the legacy of this imperial policy. Since Dubai was one of the last outposts of empire in the Indian Ocean, officials had even begun to take on a more liberal view of the phenomenon conceding that, "however great the annual loss to India arising from gold smuggling through the Gulf, this traffic is a natural feature of Gulf life and is not regarded by the local Rulers as in any way illegal."⁴⁴ Besides, legislation in Dubai which was still considered the prerogative of the British Government, could only be enforced in principle through exchange control. In real terms however, limited territorial control underlying British hegemony in the region rendered the Exchange Control Act powerless "in actually preventing any transaction of even the most undesirable kind in these states."⁴⁵ The nature and terms of British

42 For details see, Extract from A Handbook of Arabia Vol. I, Prepared on behalf of the Admiralty and War Office, Admiralty War Staff, Intelligence Division, 1916 L/P&S/20/E 84, NCDR.

43 During the third Afghan War of 1879-80, the British had forced the Shah of Iran to prohibit the import of arms into Persian territory while nothing much was done to stop their traffic into the Indian Ocean from Britain. Wilson, *The Persian Gulf*, 270.

44 The Political Agent A.J.M. Craig's confidential letter dated October 16, 1962 "External Relations" of the *Annual Records of the Gulf, UAE, 1962* (Slough: Archive Editions 1993), 525.

45 "Dubai—Gold Smuggling into India," letter dated September 17, 1962 "External Relations" of the

intervention in the Indian Ocean had also drastically changed following the decolonization of India. This was to the effect that the British administrators had no legal prerogative to interfere with the gold trade which became 'illegal' and therefore smuggling only when it actually took place in Indian or Pakistani territory where it was an unmistakable legal offense. It was thus in the power and interest of these governments to curb it. In any case, anti-smuggling legislation was of very little consequence insofar as the British exchequer was concerned and hence not deserving of much attention on the part of British officials.

Smuggling which started off as a major concern for the colonial and imperial governments in the wake of imperial rivalries and war in Europe had thus by the end of the days of empire become an irrelevant issue for Britain and a rather serious one for India. The post-colonial state had inherited the structural legacies of British India's political administration and financial management and along with these the crises inherent in them. Imperial Britain's problems, including the loss of gold and foreign exchange reserves and the domestic crisis of the rupee were thus transferred to and became the newly emerging nation-state's problems.⁴⁶ Since the problems were hardly new, the solutions proposed were no different. The 'license raj' as the post-colonial regime came to be retrospectively called, continued to impose in much the same manner as its predecessor, import controls on gold as well as restrictions on foreign exchange. What was new nevertheless, were a more rigid sense of a border and an ideology of nationalism as legitimizing features of the state, its moral and political cultures as well as its legal system, all of these making sense within "an international system driven by co-operating or conflicting national political economies."⁴⁷

Smuggling acquired new dimensions within the territorial boundaries of the Indian state which under Nehru, its first Prime Minister, launched a totally non liberal economic regime as a significant pathway to nationalism and the reinforcement of

Annual Records of the Gulf, UAE, 1962 (Slough: Archive Editions 1993); 526.

⁴⁶ For details see page 28-32 of chapter one.

⁴⁷ Christopher Alan Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 234.

nationalist identities. Import-substitution along with tariff and exchange rate policies specifically adopted to protect the domestic economy characterized independent India's political economy and its particular form of developmentalism well into the late 1980s.⁴⁸ The closed statist model of development with its suspicion of open trade, emphasis on public sector industry and socialist proclivities was one that relied heavily on tariffs and quotas as well as indirect taxation of consumer goods.⁴⁹ Imports, in principle to be undertaken solely for purposes of production for export, were subject to the state's approval granted in the form of import licenses, a process mired in bureaucratic red tape and political corruption, leading to powerful interest groups monopolizing state resources. Looked at from the perspective of the state in India hostile to private capital for the major phase of its post colonial history, any attempt at trade or even imports for personal consumption could have been smuggling.

A broad and sweeping approach espoused by the state to smuggling was nowhere more visible than in the changing landscape of the law, as well as that of the bureaucracy and institutions that were created to prevent infringement of the law and enforce it. A customs barrier was raised between India and Pakistan for the first time in March 1948⁵⁰ deeming as illegal the transfer of goods across their borders and closing off all legitimate possibilities of individual commercial activity between them. Transgression of the border was the first and the most offensive of acts constitutive of smuggling and a violation of the law in criminal terms. However, aligned to and deriving from it were other illegal acts or economic offenses as it were, including the possession of gold and warranting proceedings under non-criminal revenue jurisdiction. Such proceedings included the confiscation of goods by customs or the order to payment, in lieu of confiscation, tariffs and rates evaded as well penalties imposed for attempts to breach statutes prohibiting the import and export of goods.⁵¹

48 See Atul Kohli, *State-Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15 and 263.

49 Kohli, *State-Directed Development*, 266.

50 See *Amba Lal vs The Union of India and Others* on 3 October, 1960, 1961 AIR 264, 1961 SCR (1) 933.

51 For details see the Supreme Court verdict in *Thomas Dana vs The State of Punjab* of 1958, 1959

The post-colonial legal approach to smuggling owes much to the colonial history of customs and the beginning of its administration along modern lines in the 19th century in India. Legislation against the transfer of contraband cargo into Indian territory had therefore not been wanting at any stage in its post-colonial history. A number of regulations, acts and statutes pertaining to diverse aspects of cross-border economic activity ranging from the Sea Customs Act of 1878, the Indian Tariff Act of 1894 to the Indian Aircrafts Act of 1911, Land Customs Act of 1924 and the Indian Customs Act of 1934 all inherited from the colonial past were drawn upon to prosecute smuggling, particularly of gold in post-colonial times.⁵² However what was different despite the legal infrastructure inherited from colonial times was the conception of the territory of India, the borders defining it and the political ideology legitimizing the two. Despite the existence of so many laws the colonial Indian economy was based on a broader notion of imperial space rather as against the notion of national space defining the post-colonial state. Besides, that the colonial economy was in reality a laissez faire economy geared to the advantage of British traders rather than one set up to promote growth in the colony is something attested to for a fact by several scholars.⁵³ The post-colonial nation-state unlike the colonial authorities had to take a much more restricted territorial view of smuggling. The fact that smuggling could be addressed only from within its borders took legislation to unprecedented levels permeating every aspect of economic life defining the state.

All kinds of import and export activity undertaken by individuals or firms were prohibited in the immediate years following independence unless they were carried out with a license granted by the Central government and in accordance with the Imports and Exports (Control) Act of 1947.⁵⁴ Licenses were, in “a permit-license-

AIR 375, 1959. Supl (1) 274.

52 See Ram Singh, *International Trade Operations* (New Delhi: Excel Books, 2009), 343-346. Also see, Germano Franchescini and Francesco Misuraca, *India: Commercial Law, Customs and Taxation* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Kluwer Law International, 2011).

53 See Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 73-83.

54 For details on the Imports and Exports (Control) Act 1947 and a discussion of events that were interpreted as a breach of its provisions, see the supreme court judgement in *Amba Lal vs The Union of India and Others* on 3 October, 1960, 1961 AIR 264 1961 SCR (1) 933 and *M.G. Abrol vs M/S. Shantilal Chhotalal & Co* on 27 July, 1965, 1965 AIR 197 1966 SCR (1) 284 and the Calcutta High Order in *Tarka Nath Sen and Others vs Union of India and Others* on 14 March, 1975, AIR 1975 Cal

quota Raj”⁵⁵ granted only to those industries and firms that relied on imports of essential goods deemed necessary for boosting production within the domestic industrial sector and subsequently expanding India's export capabilities. The Sea Customs Act of 1878 which provided for the confiscation of any goods, the importation of which was prohibited or restricted and the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act of 1947⁵⁶ barring the bringing into India of gold from outside except with the general or special permission of the Reserve Bank of India, were the key legal enactments that customs authorities and judicial magistrates called on to prosecute those individuals found in possession of substantial quantities of the metal. However, these were cases where the focus of the law was on 'smuggled goods' rather than the act of smuggling itself and which demanded that the individual against whom charges were pressed prove that the gold or whatever prohibited articles found belonging to him were not 'smuggled.' On the other hand, where the whole sequence activities that could be clubbed under smuggling or the conspiracy to undertake such acts in an organized manner was concerned, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CPC) provided for prosecution along criminal lines.⁵⁷

Lost, not surprisingly, in the official stories on smuggling whether in the Political Agency's documentation, the reports of the Indian press or the judgements on legal cases of smuggling are the social and the political dynamics of the phenomenon in Dubai. India may have gained independence from colonial rule in 1947, but Dubai was until the formation of the federation of the Emirates in 1971, part of the residual

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55 The term was first used by C. S. Rajagopalachari, a fierce critic of Nehru's economic policies. See Seetha, “The Lost Heroes of Economic Freedom,” *Forbes India*, August 23, 2013, <http://www.forbesindia.com/printcontent/35915> (accessed November 15, 2013).

56 For details on the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act 1947, see *Collection of The Acts of The Central Legislature and Ordinances of the Governor General for the Year 1947*, (New Delhi, Manager of Publications, Government of India Press), 1948.

57 The Supreme Court judgements in the Mohammed Hussain Umar Kochra etc., vs K.S. Dalipsinghji & Anr., etc. case (1969) 1970 AIR 45, 1969 SCR (3) 130 and Jagannath Sonu Parkar vs The State of Maharashtra (1962) 1963 AIR 728, 1963 SCR Supl. (1) 573 for the legal approach to conspiracy in the case of smuggling. Also see, “Secret Document, Coded Letters, Maps Seized: Disclosure by CBI in Walcott Case,” *The Times of India*, 23 February, 1966, 1 and “Gaokar gets 7 years R.I: gold smuggling,” *The Times of India*, February 19, 1970, 7 for a discussion of the financial and operational geographies of smuggling rackets and the nature of the conspiracy that makes these geographies and networks meaningful in the movement of contraband gold and other goods into India.

geography of the now defunct British Raj in India. Its external affairs, including those of trade continued to be administered by the Political Residency system, although under the aegis of Her Majesty's Government in Britain. Viewing it from the other side, the chapter argues for smuggling as both politics and economy in Dubai rather than simply as a series of cross border transactions from and to India. It expands the geographical scope and scale of the phenomenon beyond the local and the regional to the global and analyzes the ways in which the city's regime as well as its mercantile and migrant constituencies placed themselves at the intersection of these to trigger off urban development in the emirate. It also locates it in the history of the post-pearl economic crisis and examines the ways in which both local and imperial politics colluded to produce and reinforce smuggling as a lucrative economic activity and a significant commercial pursuit in Dubai.

Smuggling, A Political Counterweight to Dubai's Post Pearl Economic Crisis

By the closing years of the 1920s, there were colonial reports of the collapse of the pearl industry on the Trucial Coast owing to the falling demand for pearls in the world market and the financial difficulties it posed for merchants and financiers who were now unable to invest in pearling fleets that made their seasonal expeditions along the Arabian Gulf.⁵⁸ Many Dubai-based pearl merchants like Muhammad Bin Bayat and Ahmad Bin Dalmuk were rendered bankrupt and had to borrow heavily and at 'exorbitant rates' from Hindu merchants in Bombay and Dubai whom they often found difficult to pay back. The risks incurred by the latter during times of crises were duly emphasized by the Political Resident who nevertheless and like the British Government of India remained biased towards them as British subjects. This was evident in the Political Resident using his authority to persuade the ruler to exert pressure on his merchant subjects for the immediate repayment of debts.⁵⁹ Although not unprecedented, the particularly adverse circumstances surrounding the pearl industry including plummeting prices and dull markets in the 1930s made the

⁵⁸ See Chapter VIII, Administrative Report of the Persian Gulf for the Year 1929 (Simla: Government of India Press) in File No. 192-S of 1930 in Vol. 158-N (1930), Secret Department, NAI.

⁵⁹ Al-Sayegh, "Merchants' Role," 94 and Abdullah Morsy, *The United Arab Emirates: A Modern History* (London: Croon Helm, 1978), 104.

Political Resident's coercion more objectionable than ever to the pearl merchants of Dubai who, in protest, began to enter into conflicts with the ruler.

Given the rather turbulent political situation, it would have made sense had the ruler whose exchequer drew substantially from pearl revenues and customs duties on trade intervened on behalf of the merchants and pushed for a waiver on the part of the Indian financiers, both for his own sake and as a pacificatory gesture towards the latter. That it did not happen had to do with new sources of revenue accruing to the ruler in the form of ground rents on air routes and concessions on oil that diminished his stakes in the pearl trade and set him free of any obligations to the merchants within and outside the majilis.⁶⁰ In the new monies accruing on a regular basis to the ruler from sources other than private forms of commerce lay the future of the Maktoums as a dynastic regime at the helm of a tribal polity which following the formation of the federation of the UAE came to be known as the emirate of Dubai. However, the process by which the ruler consolidated his economic base and political authority over the merchants was gradual and far from complete even in the 1970s, a state of affairs to which the British themselves contributed in significant ways. The British recognized that any independence that the ruler may have been able to attain from the merchants would be short-lived and fatal to the status not only of the ruler but of the empire as well, particularly since keeping the Maktoum line intact was crucial for the latter. A letter written by Sir Trenchard Fowle, Political Resident in the Gulf to the Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs Department on British Policy on the Arab side of the Persian Gulf sheds light on British fears and anxieties:

Briefly then, the old patriarchal traditions of life in the Arab states are being broken up, as they have been in so many other Asiatic countries, but even more rapidly, and with this break up will come the inevitable consequences already indicated. Some of the local agitations and movements will be directed against the local Rulers, but some will certainly be directed against us. Hardly a fortnight passes without an attack being made in the Arab Press of Iraq, Palestine, Syria or Egypt, against His Majesty's Government and its policy towards the Arab States of the Gulf. Under the convenient term of "colonization" accusations are sometimes brought that it is our policy to disunite the Arab States, and on other occasions to unite them; in each case for our own nefarious ends; that we undermine the independence of the States, and use our influence to favour our subjects and foreigners

⁶⁰ For more details on the majilis, see page 75 of chapter 2.

generally to the detriment of the local Arab: and so forth and so on.⁶¹

This view of the Political Resident's emphasizing the threat that a dissatisfied population posed to empire makes clear why the ruler was asked to pay off in installments and over a long stretch what the merchants owed the Indians, form an executive council and undertake some of the political and social reforms pressed for by the merchants and the opposition in the majilis, including the organization of customs, law and order and education.

The onset of the Second World War in 1939 brought with it greater difficulties for Dubai whose existing conduits of commercial revenues, particularly the carrying trade to and from the Persian Gulf, were further choked by formal restrictions imposed on it by the British. The geopolitical conditions in Persia had changed drastically in the years following the First World War and the rise to power of Reza Shah who sought to bring about an end to foreign meddling in the affairs of Iran and the long run of political instability engendered by it. In his ambition to carve out a modern independent state in Iran, Reza with the active assistance of the Germans launched a new industrialization campaign aimed at economic reconstruction and the general advancement of society. The Germans in the inter-war years built textile mills, roads, railways and other infrastructure that helped connect parts of Iran, particularly the north and south, and extend Tehran's reach over them.⁶² Russia and Britain whose vested interests in the north and south of Iran respectively and imperial rivalries over the region as a whole could be traced back to as early as the 17th century viewed German presence in Iran as a serious threat to their commercial and political ambitions. Subsequently, and in view of the potential danger that lay ahead, the British brought pressure on Tehran to hand over its finances and the control of its newly formed national army to Britain.⁶³ Despite these, Germany's trade with Iran continued to flourish, often exceeding that of Britain's and Russia's until the Anglo-

61 "Policy on the Arab Side of the Persian Gulf," File No.194-N/39 Serial No. (1) of External Affairs Department, Secret Department (1939), NAI.

62 Kristen Blake, *The US-Soviet Confrontation in Iran, 1945-1962: A Case in the Annals of the Cold War* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2009) 12-13 and Kaveh Farrokh, *Iran at War:1500-1988* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2011).

63 See Michael P. Zirinsky, "Imperial Power and Dictatorship: Britain and the Rise of Reza Shah 1921-1926," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 4 (1992): 640-641.

Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941 and the subsequent enemy blockade of Germany diminished it considerably. The blockade struck a severe blow to the trade of the ports of the Arab Gulf whose economic lifeline, given the long span of recession in these parts, was almost singularly the carrying trade to the southern coasts of the Persian Gulf littoral.⁶⁴

Interestingly and insofar as Dubai was concerned, the new policy measures adopted by the British including the creation of a War Trade Bureau⁶⁵ the same year, contained within them prospects for survival, even better economic returns and a more manageable political situation. The Bureau's functions were to streamline trade, control exports from the Allied ports and colonies, introduce and implement licensing and collect intelligence on specific traders or consignments shipped to the Persian Gulf. Apart from sanctions imposed on the export of gold, silver, currency, particularly Indian rupees, and petroleum products⁶⁶ it also rationed provisions and foodstuff entering the Gulf, so as to completely cut off southern Iran's supplies and "prevent commodities useful from the economic warfare point of view from reaching enemy countries." What this meant for Dubai, Sharjah and the other sheikhdoms on the Trucial Coast was that each of them was allotted quotas of staples such as wheat, rice, sugar and tea which on a weekly basis was delivered to the ruler who was held responsible for the distribution of these to his subjects.⁶⁷ Given the particularly turbulent conditions in which Dubai found itself and realizing that they were equally threatening to imperial interests, the sheikh could use his influence to press for more supplies of each of these commodities citing that the bedouins were not rightly accounted for in the Bureau's numbers. He could then clandestinely pass on the surplus to his merchant subjects who embarked on a scheme to 'smuggle' them at inflated prices to the southern coast of Persia.

64 Graeme Wilson, *Rashid's Legacy: The Genesis of the Maktoum Family and the History of Dubai* (London: Media Prima, 2006), 90-91.

65 For details see, No. 20 (6)--E.T/41 of July 4, 1941, Department of Commerce, Government of India, in File No. 15 (94) -W of 1941 (Secret), Near Eastern Department, NAI.

66 See "Exchange Control in Bahrain," File No. 409-N/41 of 1941, "Export of Sovereigns by the Saudi government against payment in US Dollars," File No. 402-N/41 of 1941, and "Shipment of Kerosene, Petrol and Petroleum products to ports in the Persian Gulf," in File No. 620-N/41 of (1941), Near Eastern Department, NAI.

67 Wilson, *Rashid's Legacy*, 91.

Looking the other way at smuggling in Dubai, the British helped restore the city-state's political edifice and balance it in terms of its dual constituencies of power—the one tribal, symbolic and embodied in the ruler and the other mercantile, real and distributed across a wide spectrum of economic players. Smuggling and the urban economy it gave rise to, the chapter argues, can only be understood against this dual constituency, the ways in which they intersect with and mediate, as also challenge each other in the day to day affairs of Dubai. The discussion in chapter one on the nature and dynamics of the commercial consensus, had illustrated the ways in which this dual constituency worked using the example of Al Tajir.⁶⁸ The dual constituency of power however, required more than the social category that the Al Tajirs represented for effective translation into an urban economy. Indian merchants, traders, entrepreneurs and others creating, consolidating and integrating into the urban economy in Dubai in diverse capacities and at multiple levels become important precisely because of their contributions to the dual constituency as an efficacious political and economic model. What follows is a discussion of migration, smuggling and the related ways in which they created and were made part of urban history in Dubai.

The creation of Dubai's urban history is also the history of the production of a specific geography of commerce linking India with the city. In spatial terms it is a continuation of the earlier pearl geography in which mercantile capital flowed from India to Dubai and pearl from Dubai to Bombay. However, in social, economic and political terms it meant much more than a conduit of migratory and capital flows. This evolving geography can only be understood in the historical contexts of decolonization and the Partition of India in 1947, events defining the other side of a new territorial, political and economic entity as the maritime border drawn between the western Indian Ocean and the coasts of the Arabian Gulf. Decolonization and partition had splintered communities and their shared histories, among other things, of trade, capital and mobility. The idea and reality of a border between what had hitherto been common territory introduced dimensions of illegality and criminality to commercial transactions that violated it. Nevertheless, cross border trading even as it

⁶⁸ For details see, page 19-20 of chapter one.

brought in enormous challenges and risks to those who pursued it also created plenty of opportunities for those who were willing to confront challenges and take risks. Smuggling thus became an extensive activity characterized by shifts, tensions and power relations between different ethnicities and communities. These power relations and their dynamics are in many ways symptomatic of the social hierarchies and relations of ethnicities living, working and trading in Dubai as a whole.

Partition, Refugee Migration and the Pioneers of Dubai's Gold Trade

Maghanmal Jethanand Pancholia arrived in Sharjah in the year 1942.⁶⁹ Born in Thatta, a village in the province of Sind lying on the northwestern part of undivided India, he was all of eighteen years when he reached the shores of the Gulf, following in the trails of his father and the other elders of the Bhatia community from which his family hails. Today as a gentleman in his late eighties, he is revered by younger generations of both Indians and Arabs as a Dubai veteran much like Sheikh Rashid himself, the father of the present ruler Sheikh Mohammed and the architect of modern Dubai. Affectionately called Magabha, he is the last surviving Bhatia of a generation of merchants that set out to be a part of the mercantile pursuits associated with the early 20th century pearl boom along the coast of the Arabian Gulf. I met him at a book release function of the Thattai Bhatias in Dubai in the December of 2011 to which I was invited by one of the authors of the book himself. Bharat Chachara and his wife Deepa had co-authored and co-published *Pancha Reeti Rivaj: Our Rites and Rituals, A Glimpse into Thattai Bhatia Traditions* to help the younger generations of the Thattai Bhatias living in Dubai and elsewhere in the world as diasporic communities, observe the customs and keep alive the traditions of their past defined by their homeland in Thatta.

Despite his failing health he visits his office, The Arabian Trading Agency, which is one among the many trading companies he owns with his sons and grandsons in the city, on an almost daily basis. When I met him at the Agency office, in one of the buildings just across the Dubai Museum in Bur Dubai, in the middle of December

⁶⁹ I conducted interviews with Maghanmal Pancholia between December 9th and 26th 2011.

2011, he spoke to me at some length as the author of *Footprints: Memoirs of an Indian Patriarch* (2009) about his 70 year old relationship with Dubai. He recounted in a language and style not so different to that of the narrative in the book, how the history of his life as an entrepreneur and an Indian was intertwined with that of the city's and how the community of Thattai Bhatias have since the 1940s made Dubai their home, contributing to its urban institutions and character in a multiplicity of ways. Magabha's personal history frames Dubai within a certain dynamic of trade that necessarily highlights its social and urban dimensions through the transition times of the forties and the fifties. It draws together the receding commercial world of the pearl merchants, the crisis-ridden society of debtors and impoverished townsmen, and the emerging order of a migrant economy in the aftermath of the political upheavals of Partition and the subsequent territorial re-organization of the subcontinent. In the methodology that the chapter uses to address questions related to smuggling as looked at from the other side of the border, his narrative becomes the encasing layer that mediates and binds together other narratives and counter-narratives around the phenomenon as well as its later phases in the seventies and the eighties. His account of the transition phase from the pearl to gold trades and preceding the smuggling boom of the 1960s bridges gaps in our understanding of Dubai's history, while giving us valuable insights into the many uncatalogued economic intersections defining the rapidly changing political geographies in the Indian Ocean. It also lays bare the contexts in which the project of modernization and the institutions of urbanity evolved in the city amidst 'other' economic activities and in which he and other migrants were shareholding participants.

Magabha's ties with Dubai which he refers to as 'my adopted homeland' in his memoirs⁷⁰ began when he was sent away to work with his elder brother Parmanand. The year was 1944, a time of war almost everywhere in Europe and one of severe economic crisis in the rest of the world. The collapse of the pearl industry a decade ago had brought his family a great deal of misfortune since the major part of finances they had made towards merchants and pearling crews remained unpaid. They had embarked on many alternatives as strategies to survival in the unforgiving climate

⁷⁰ Maghanmal Pancholia, *Footprints* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2009), 53.

and harsh economic and political environment on the coast, one among which was Parmanand's modest gold and currency exchange business.

The switch to the new business was not very difficult. We were merchants who had arranged cash for all kinds of purchases in the Gulf, remitted proceeds from the pearl sales to Bombay and Karachi and did safekeeping for Arab and Iranian merchants. Because of all these we were fairly well known and had a firm reputation in both Dubai and Sharjah. We offered banking services to the pearl merchants traveling to or based in Dubai during the pearling season, but there were also divers, haulers and bedouins who approached us for cash. The latter often in debt, sold their meagre holdings of gold jewelry in exchange for cash to buy food, cloth and other basic necessities of life. We bought up their used gold jewelry, melted them and sent them over as *tola*⁷¹ bars to merchants in Bombay. Parmanand knew how to melt gold, in a while I learned the process too. We had a local Arab to help with melting gold especially when it was far too much for the two of us to do. Today, his son, he is probably my son's age, is a billionaire in the city. We made 4 *annas* in profit for every *tola* that we melted and sent to Bombay. Sometimes we made as much as 500 rupees a month.

In Bombay, import restrictions on the metal were far less rigid than in Bahrain, Kuwait and parts of the Middle East. With word spreading of our business, people from as far as the Persian Coast came in to Dubai with their possessions in gold and took foodstuff, cloth and currency back. The Indian rupee offered in return for gold was used to buy provisions and other goods in Dubai, but there were those traveling from and to Iran that also took back Iranian *tomans* for their travel fare to and other expenses in Iran. This business later became The Oriental Exchange Co., it is today run by Parmanand's sons.

While gold and currency helped wind a new financial circuit in an economy on the verge of collapse in Dubai, on the subcontinent, they became the drivers of the migration of refugees from Thatta, Karachi and parts of upper Sind in the newly formed Pakistan to Bombay in India. As a result and the imminent takeover of the province of Sindh by the state of Pakistan, the Bhatias and other communities of Sindhi Hindus were forced to sell their stocks of gold jewelry which constituted their only movable assets to pay for their journey to and settlement in India. Parmanand who had gone to Karachi to help the family living in Thatta move to India, continued, alongside a few others, to buy off the gold of Sindhis and pay them the money for their travel and maintenance, thus facilitating the actual physical movement of their compatriots to India. Magabha reminisced how the whole exercise was only a temporary measure and lasted for no longer than six months at

⁷¹ A *tola* is a unit in which gold is weighed. A *tola* is normally found as a bar of gold weighing 10 grams. One would find two tola bars, five tola bars, ten tola bars etc. Magabha and a Dubai-based Arab, whose family he still keeps in touch with, helped Parmanand test the purity of gold which was often found in the form of 21, 22 and 24 carats.

the end of which all Bhatia and Sindhi businesses in Karachi were wound up, since Karachi was going over to Pakistan. In Bombay, where the post-independence temper was one of public sector industrialization and domestic manufacturing, the Bhatias could not find an economic niche for themselves. Nonetheless, they built homes and community institutions on government grants of land, settling their women, children and elders there even as younger Bhatia men migrated to Dubai where, in the commercial freedom and political leeway granted them by the ruling regime, were to be found new economic opportunities and avenues for growth.

The Thattai Bhatias, following partition, spearheaded an influx into Dubai that was to define the city's commercial temper and spirit in many ways. The gold trade, an already existing niche that they had created, became a realm of opportunities for yet other communities who magnified its scale and volume several times over and transformed it into an economy with global scope and dimensions. Of the many Indian migrants to take advantage of the possibilities offered by gold in Dubai, the Sonis among others from Sindh were, as we are given to understand from Magabha's narrative, vitally important. We learn from Vohra's account the significance of Sonis,⁷² as agents within the now receding framework of a maritime network of 're-exports' that was both central to Dubai's evolution as a golden frontier of the subcontinent and its metamorphosis into a global city in the latter half of the 20th century.⁷³ Magabha, though, speaks of the community as in many ways his customers in the late forties when Sonis started migrating in large numbers from Sindh.

The Sonis are basically a community of goldsmiths. They came to Dubai mostly after partition, although there were quite a few of them here even in the early forties. They came from Kathiawar, Gujarat, Mandvi and other parts of Sindh, including Thatta. In the fifties, there were hundreds of them here in Dubai, but you could also find them in other parts of the Gulf. Today, most of them are very successful businessmen particularly in the jewelry and precious metals trade and figure among the wealthiest of Indians based in the Gulf. Just walk through Gold Souk and you will see that many of the Indian shops there are owned by Sonis.

Magabha recalled that his idea of starting a gold import business in the early 1950s

72 The term Soni derives from *sona*, the Hindi word which means gold.

73 Neha Vohra, "From Golden Frontier to Global City: Shifting Forms of Belonging, "Freedom" and Governance among Indian Businessmen in Dubai," *American Anthropologist* 113, no. 2 (2011): 306-318.

was provoked by an unprecedented demand for the metal among the newly migrating groups of Sonis and other Sindhis. The London gold market had reopened in 1954 after a fifteen year period of adjournment and the IMF's restrictions on the purchase of gold for non-monetary purposes had been lifted. What this meant was that bullion firms in London were at liberty to sell gold to licensed dealers trading in sterling or the US dollar at fairly stable prices with the metal remaining in constant demand in the Near and Far East quarters for the major part of the fifties and the sixties.⁷⁴ The price of gold had remained stable at 35 dollars an ounce from at least 1934 to 1968 when the two-tier pricing system of gold came into being and non-monetary gold was left to find its own price in the international market.⁷⁵ It was when gold was priced at 35 dollars that Indians apparently were willing to pay up to double the amount to possess an ounce of the metal.⁷⁶ He also remembers buying from Johnson Matthey and Samuel Montagu, two among the six prominent bullion firms registered with the London gold market at the time, 24 carat bars weighing 5 or 10 grammes for the market in Dubai. Known better as biscuits and tola bars, these 5 and 10 gm wafers stamped with their dealers' names or 'foreign markings' as was described by the Indian press, were the preferred and most sought after forms of gold during the time here.

The uses of gold when Magabha started his import business in the Dubai of the early fifties were not many, although he admitted that by the time he had given up on it which was not much later than a year or two, they had proliferated beyond what he could imagine then. The new found oil wealth in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain translating into consumer demand for gold among the indigenous population was, as testified by Magabha and some other early migrants, what defined some of them. The Sonis undertook orders for ornaments from rich Arab households in these

74 "First Anniversary of the London Gold Market," *The Economic Weekly*, April 1955, 419-420.

75 With the two tier pricing system coming into existence, a distinction was made between gold for monetary and non-monetary purposes. While the former was still priced at 35 dollars an ounce and was a transactional agreement between Central banks, the latter was tied to market conditions and subjected to the fluctuations of price vis-a-vis the dollar. For details, see I.S. Gulati and Ashoka Mody, "International Gold Price Movements, 1972-1982," *Economic and Political Weekly* 17, no. 46/47 (November 13-20, 1982): 1861-1870. Also see I.S. Gulati, "Changing Role of Gold," *Economic and Political Weekly* 5, no.3/5 (January 1970): 87-92.

76 Kumud Khanna, "Smugglers' Paradise," *The Times of India*, January 7, 1968, 8.

countries while buying up the gold required for them in Dubai, a trend that continued well into the seventies and despite their entry into the retailing trade. This was not an activity that brought in huge margins to begin with. However, with a floating population in the emirate drawn from among groups in the subcontinent, Iran, the Near East and the Arabian Gulf and its previous history of transit and the movement of goods between these parts, new and more prospective uses for the metal were in the offing. Indeed, no sooner had the possibility of buying gold in the Gulf been sighted than immigrants working for oil companies in these countries and going back to India on leave or at the end of their labour contracts started to take advantage of it. Many of those now settled in Kerala with their families comprising two generations or more and who I interviewed told me how they often stopped by at Dubai where small retail shops selling gold and silver jewelry and owned by the immigrant Sonis could be spotted in the present Gold Souk area of Dubai by the late fifties.⁷⁷ It was here that they bought gifts in gold for their wives, sisters and cousins back home or as personal assets for themselves. Dubai gold, they reminded me, had a particular appeal for Indians since not only were the designs crafted by the Sonis unmistakably Indian but the gold content in them was much greater than that of jewelry made in India and was therefore certain, in the event of a sale, to fetch better prices there.

A particular facet of history that calls for attention here and which puts many of these developments in perspective is the post-war shipping line of the British India Steam Navigation Company, the migration regime it helped trigger off and the ways in which these fed urban development in Dubai. Revived in 1947 to facilitate the movement of employees and goods for oil companies in Iran, the Near East and the Arabian Gulf, the Bombay-Gulf line had by the early fifties also begun to carry several new migrants looking for entrepreneurial opportunities to and from Dubai. Fyere writing in 1962 for the Residency and in connection with the issue of smuggling refers to the presence of significant numbers of the latter as deck passengers on ships that called at Dubai on a weekly basis.⁷⁸

At one time, most goods were smuggled by deck passengers, Indians from Bombay or

⁷⁷ These interviews were conducted in Adoor and Thrissur in Kerala between 2011 and 2013.

⁷⁸ "External Relations," *Annual Records of the Gulf, UAE, 1962* (Archive Editions 1993); 514-518.

Pakistan who came from Karachi via Gwadar. They would stay in Dubai for a month or six weeks, buying small quantities of whatever was then cheapest in Dubai and dearest in India and Pakistan—it might be radios, candles or irons. Each man would spend up to £300 and the weekly ships brought as many as 40 a trip. This trade has almost stopped in the last year because changes in customs regulations in India and Pakistan have made it more expensive for the traveller to get his goods through customs and also because the stricter regulation of migrants in Dubai has made lending more difficult; nonetheless goods still find their way into India and Pakistan.

Interviews with migrants and that were passengers on some of these ships in the 1950s add details to Fyere's remarks, highlighting the activities of these self-enterprising deck passengers on the voyage from to Bombay. George and Molly Thomas, now 88 and 81 respectively, were one of the earliest couples to have migrated to Saudi Arabia from Adoor, a small town in Southern Kerala.⁷⁹ George Thomas travelled from Bombay where he was employed with the Indian Railways and recruited to work as an accountant for The Arabian American Oil Company, popularly known as Aramco, in 1951. Molly whom he married in 1953 on one of his annual visits to India joined him in Dhahran where Aramco is based in 1954. They returned to Bombay at the end of George's contract in 1958 when he rejoined the railways never to travel to the Gulf again. George's cousin, Abraham was with the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BPC) and was one among the many Indians employed on its clerical staff during the fifties. Abraham and his wife lived in the family quarters of the BPC where the Thomases often stayed during long weekends or when stopping by on their way to India for vacations. It was during these voyages that the couple encountered other variants of deck passengers shuttling between Bahrain, Dubai and Bombay on BI liners.

⁷⁹ Interview with the author in April 2009.



Figure 3.1: Map of Kerala (Courtesy: www.mapsofindia.com)

Molly in particular, vividly remembered how the Sindhi women, most of them boarding from Dubai, would plonk down on the floor of the ship around piles of merchandise that they were carrying to India working on them through the heat of the day. Images of them sitting around Persian carpets and rugs hemming them in the sun and getting them ready for sale in Bombay while their menfolk packed dates, piece goods, candles, chinaware and even English crockery, she said, were fresh in her memory as though they only happened yesterday. George added that they also

carried carried cigarettes, perfumes and other forms of expensive toiletry with them, say Nivea, Cream 21 and Brut which were huge hits among foreign goods in India. A part of their baggage heaped onto the very deck space they sat and slept in were refrigerators and semi-automatic washing machines, the insides of which were possibly stuffed with more of these cosmetics and toiletries. When asked if these people were 'smuggling' these goods, he commented that every individual act of overseas trade post-independence in India was smuggling. Nonetheless, to have looked at the activities of these people who were clearly struggling to make a living or perhaps only continuing in the trails of the past, with the unconditional view of post-colonial law would have been so unfair. It was only obvious in the course of the conversation that George's view of smuggling, refracted through about five decades of the history of the phenomenon was tainted by its other and more persistent images of the dhow traffic and the adventures around gold trafficking along the west coast in the seventies and the eighties.⁸⁰

It is important, having said that of George's take on smuggling, to highlight the ways in which the politics of British shipping and other forms of private capital in the post-imperial Indian Ocean world intersected with that of urbanization in Dubai to catalyze these early practices of smuggling into its territorial waters. The 'D' class passenger-cargo liners dedicated exclusively to the India-Gulf service shipped such essentials as wheat, grain, coffee, sugar, oil and cloth besides construction and building material required for company towns and new building sites in the oil rich Gulf. As for passengers, there were apart from those migrants with renewable employment contracts and recruited by BI shipping agents,⁸¹ only a handful of British officers on each of the voyages. Unlike in colonial times, there were no mail subsidies to share the cost of a voyage and the company had to look to other ways of making profits. Interestingly, these were the years when Britain's trade with Dubai was beginning to show a great deal of promise, a very welcome sign of revival in a post-war economy. While sales of sterling for the purchase of British goods by merchants in Dubai were reported to have been to the order of about £100,000 in

⁸⁰ See the last section of the current chapter.

⁸¹ Mackinnon Mackenzie and Co. Pvt Ltd. were the shipping agents for BISN in Bombay.

1948, the figure trebled the following year and with an upward trend continuing the following year.⁸² Dubai by then had “a business-like air about the place, thanks to the post office, the bank, a branch of Messrs. Gray Mackenzie and the offices of the Petroleum Development (Trucial Coast) Limited,” but with no successful oil concessions as yet and a resident population not exceeding 30,000, it certainly had no use for its own consumption of the kind of manufactured goods that were traded.

Clearly evident that a vast majority of these goods made their way to Dubai only to be shipped to India as consignments or by migrant workers and itinerant merchants that shuttled between Bombay and other ports in the Indian Ocean, the need to keep alive the BI services at large and the India-Gulf line in particular was as much Dubai's as it was Britain's. The ruler who earned 4 per cent on the value of goods imported into Dubai as customs duty was quick to sense it and tap into the economic opportunities and prospects emerging in the cracks of British commercial shipping as well as the new oil politics of the Gulf states. The Political Agency's pressure on the ruler of Dubai for some kind of administrative reform had begun to bear fruit in the mid-fifties and steps were taken towards the re-organization of customs and the establishment of a legal system, a police force and a municipality with the help of British consultants and expatriate functionaries from Iran, Iraq and India.⁸³ At the level of organization of city space, “the vegetable market was completed, the roofing of the suq with asbestos was continued, some new roads were opened, existing roads were well maintained and work was begun on fencing cemeteries.”⁸⁴ While instrumental to and symptomatic of a nascent form of urban development hard to come across elsewhere in the lower Gulf, an exception perhaps being Sharjah, it was evident that these alone could not have ensured Dubai the commercial traffic it had begun to witness with the opening of the BI shipping line.

It was the increasing awareness of such a state of affairs that led to the initiation of

82 See the 1950 entry by H.J. Evans, “A Note on the Wealth of Dubai,” in *Arabian Gulf Cities: Doha, Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah*, ed. Richard Trench (Slough, UK: Archive Editions 1994), 309.

83 See B.A.B. Burrowe's letter of October 17, 1956 in “Municipality of Dubai, 1015/3/20/56,” *Arabian Gulf Cities: Doha, Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah*, ed. Richard Trench (Slough, UK: Archive Editions, 1994), 325-326.

84 “Municipality of Dubai,” 330. Also see Dubai, BT 1102/39, 331-333.

infrastructural projects undertaken in the 1950s, including the dredging of the creek and the building of a modern port and warehousing facilities and the novel and interesting kinds of financial arrangements at the core of these. The capital development projects in the earlier part of the fifties were all implemented with funds from the British Government channelled through the Trucial States Council that came into being in 1952. However, with Dubai becoming increasingly significant to the newly emerging oil economies in the Gulf as a regional capital of trade, the latter began to step in with loans and grants that were over the course of the sixties and the seventies replicated in the Northern emirates of Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah and their dependent territories. Kuwait advanced a loan of 400,000 dinars in 1958 towards the development of the port, following which Qatar provided funds towards the bridging of the creek.⁸⁵ Private mercantile capital also began to define development at this stage in the city with influential merchants like Magabha and others becoming shareholders in such ventures as the Dubai electricity⁸⁶ and telephone companies. Yet another financial source fueling Dubai's urbanization was overseas banks, the first of which to be set up in Dubai was the Imperial Bank of Iran. The Imperial Bank had started its operations in the 1940s in Kuwait, Dubai and Oman and was for a long time the only bank in them.⁸⁷ However, unlike in Iran where it served as a state bank with a range of obligations including the issue of currency, in the Arabian Gulf it functioned more or less as an agency dealing in foreign exchange. Its involvement in Dubai's development started only after 1952 when it was re-christened as the British Bank of the Middle East following the winding up of its operations in Iran. Looking at it in the particular case of Dubai it was a move that was necessitated by the prospects of its gold trade for private British banking capital as much of the changing political scenario in Iran, a factor that is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

85 For details see Extract on Communications, Public Utilities, Health and Education from 'An Economic Survey of the Northern Trucial States' Vol. II, July 1969: 98-101.

86 For a history of the Dubai Electricity Company to which Magabha was invited to be a founder shareholder, along with a few local and Indian merchants, see *Footprints*, 79-81.

87 Geoffrey Jones, "The Imperial bank of Iran and Iranian Economic Development, 1890-1952," *Business and Economic History*, II Series, Volume 16, (1987): 73.



Figure 3.2: Dubai in 1959 (Courtesy NCDR Abu Dhabi)

An Urban Economy and Sociology of Smuggling

What all these point to, among other aspects of smuggling, is Dubai as the transit point for gold, silver, currency and other smuggled goods into and out of India. Was Dubai called the gold smuggling capital of the world simply because of its laissez-faire policies and its hands off approach to whatever passed through its territory and as claimed by its officials? Or was there more to the plot than travelers, migrants and an advantageous geography? Investigative reports and features ran by international dailies as well as testimonies of Indian migrants reveal that Dubai's was certainly a much greater role than is often made out to be. The transfer of gold in Land Rovers to banks and the packaging of illicit cargoes in dhows along the creek may have been the visible side of smuggling in the city.⁸⁸ However, what was masked by these visible and everyday signs of smuggling in Dubai were closed syndicates of merchants or oil barons that invested in and financed these activities and insurance

⁸⁸ Willaim Tuohy, "Dubai's Golden Fleece," *The Guardian*, January 13, 1971, 11.

companies that protected smuggled goods against confiscation.⁸⁹ At the topmost rung was the syndicate, transnational in its operation although mostly physically based in Dubai, some levels down in the structural hierarchy of what was called a smuggling racket was the agent based in Dubai, often with a counterpart in Bombay and further below was the gangster come to be identified in the popular imagination as 'the smuggler.' With a complex social organization in which the smuggler was separated by a chain of command that could be traced down to fourteen rings in Dubai, smuggling worked more or less as an industry and a highly lucrative one particularly for investors and financiers at the higher end of the chain.⁹⁰

The mode of operation in which investors bought up gold directly from banks in Dubai—the British Bank of the Middle East (BBME) and the First National Bank of New York were reported to have been key players in the import business—were the primary forces upscaling smuggling to a global trade worth billions of dollars in the emirate.⁹¹ The established practice until the banks took over the import business in gold from Magabha and other relatively smaller merchants like him was of sending cash in advance, a week or sometimes even a month earlier, for the consignments. Although the risks involved in the deal and the physical transfer of the bars were minimal, there was no certainty that the imported gold would all have been sold quickly in Dubai, particularly since the firms in question did not operate on the basis of orders from clients. Magabha told me how individuals often approached him for no more than a 5 or 10 tola bar at a time. This meant that business, whether at the importation or the exchange phase was far from stable, hence it was not unexpected that they would close down soon after the banks arrived on the scene.⁹² With the entry of banks into the circuit, the terms defining the transaction in gold underwent a radical change, incorporating wealthier and better organized players and thereby strengthening Dubai's position in the international market. The London based bullion dealers and Zurich bankers sent the metal in boxes each containing 100 or

89 For details on the insurance premium see, B. R. Shenoy, "A Close at Foreign Aid: II-Need to Stop Leakages," *The Times of India*, August 28, 1970, 10.

90 Kumud Khanna, "Smugglers' Paradise," *The Times of India*, January 7, 1968, 8.

91 See H.R. Vohra, "Gold Fleet Traced to Dubai," *The Times of India*, February 27, 1968.

92 As reported to the author.

200 bars of gold, each stamped 999 to indicate 99.9% purity and each weighing about 10 tolas, as air freight to these banks which only had to remit payments after the consignments were sold out.⁹³ A major move in which international banks were beginning to act as warehouses, intermediaries and facilitators in the interests of private western capital, it helped ground Dubai and consolidate itself in remarkably innovative ways as the centre of the global trade in gold.

Agents working for syndicates took charge of the consignments from these banks and engineered, even supervised their physical transfer, the sequence beginning in Dubai, continuing in the other emirates like Ras Al Khaimah and terminating along the coastline in Bombay and Karachi. Some of these agents themselves ran businesses in Dubai but given the risks that the transfer of gold in Indian waters entailed and the prices that it fetched in the country, the latter was preferred to their other pursuits as a more profitable enterprise. The gangster who was often the agent's counterpart in Bombay was to oversee the penetration of gold into Indian territory and keep vigil over its transfer to clients who had them melted at private refineries in the city.⁹⁴ The process of melting erased the foreign markings found on bullion and bars and watered down their purity to meet the retail standards prescribed by the government for the market in India, thus blotting out any signs of their smuggled history. It was primarily within the gangster's territory in India, more precisely Bombay, that smuggling crossed over into the domain of the underworld, competitive, nefarious, criminal and violent to its last rung. The social organization however, was not always rigid and it was not unusual for the agents and gangsters who took reasonably good cuts in transfer deals to rise to the ranks of syndicates and partnerships themselves. These syndicates and partnerships though never enjoyed the anonymity and abstract identity of the syndicates they may have started off working off. On the contrary they have been in the half a century of India's history of smuggling its most

93 As reported to the author by an Indian migrant who worked as an informant with diplomats sent on detective duties by the Indira Gandhi regime in the 1970s into Dubai and Sharjah. He now lives in Dubai and is a businessman of repute; hence revealing his personal identity would jeopardize his security in the Emirates.

94 For a description of smuggling arrangements within Bombay and other territories of India, see B. R. Shenoy, "A Close at Foreign Aid: II-Need to Stop Leakages," *The Times of India*, August 28, 1970, 10 and Anjali Chanda, "India—Paradise for Smugglers," *The Times of India*, May 23, 1971, 5.

visible and targeted figures, and the pioneers of Bombay's mafia raj. Newspapers, Indian cinema and even popular accounts begin and end with gangsters, romanticizing their lives, adventures and lives of glamour and glory while remaining remarkably silent on the upper echelons of financiers and investors operating within the diverse yet intermeshed commercial geographies of and across the Indian Ocean, straddling multiple legal systems and political orders in different countries in South and Southeast Asia as well as Europe and the Middle East.⁹⁵

The lowest rung in the circuit of smuggling, the courier who was often the one caught in the act of smuggling by enforcement authorities and therefore branded as the law breaker in the popular imagination constitute an interesting category in themselves. Although couriers hailed from everywhere in India, I was repeatedly told by my informants from among Malayalis, particularly the Malabar Muslims, that they were in the majority when it came to the question of couriers operating for smuggling rings in the seventies and eighties. Most of these men were illegal migrants, meaning they had no authorization to travel outside of the country. They had no visas, no jobs or business interests in Dubai and often made it to the city clandestinely on dhows or launches sailing from Kathiawar, Kutch and Calicut. Mr. Ahmed Koya, a sixty-two year old gentleman I met at Beypore in Calicut in 2011 during the course of my ethnographic research in town, recounted his experiences of the voyage to Dubai aboard a launch owned by a Gujarati merchant from Kathiawar in in 1971.⁹⁶

My father had friends among many Gujarati merchants who came into Calicut to buy timber, and coir for export to Dubai, Kuwait and other Arab ports. When my father fell ill and the burden of a whole family fell on my shoulders as a twenty one year old, I decided

95 For details on the transnational geographies of smugglers see "Smuggling Ring in Pakistan Smashed," *The Times of India*, June 11, 1969, 11. Transnational geography of smuggling constituted a key theme in major Bollywood films of the 1970s and 1980s. The most popular of these were *Deewaar* (1975) directed by Yash Chopra and starring Amitabh Bachchan and *Don* (1978) directed by Chandra Barot also starring Amitabh Bachchan. Also see S. Hussain Zaidi, *Dongri to Dubai: Six Decades of the Mumbai Mafia*, New Delhi: Roli Books, 2012; Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2004, 201-270.

96 The interview was conducted and recorded in October, 2011 in Malayalam. Mr. Koya lives by the sea shore in Beypore, a small town in Calicut with his wife, children and grandchildren. His sons are now in Dubai and run the stationery business that their father started in the late eighties in Dubai. The two brothers and their cousins take turns overseeing business in Dubai. The translation of the excerpt from the interview is mine.

to make the best use of his contacts among these Gujaratis and go to Dubai with them. For me and many others like me in Beyppore, it was a dilemma that pushed us to take the extreme step of embarking on a voyage that perhaps would not have seen us back with our families and friends. But when there's grinding poverty, even death in front of you, you do not care...you might as well die on board and be cast into the sea rather than have your family pay for your funeral. That way your family could not have reminded you of the futility of your existence as a young man without a job and with no money to feed them.

The Arabian sea we grew up with could only mean two things for us...it was either death or life, we stood in fact, between life and death on its shores. Fortunately for me it brought life, money, happiness and a standing in the society resting on a whole foundation called Dubai. Several others perished on board and died without leaving a penny behind for their families.

The voyage was long, it took me about 21 days to reach the shores of Khor Fakkan, a port more than a hundred miles from Dubai. I ate once or twice in a week, a plate of rice was food and a small tumbler was water for the week. It was hot and dreadful, I could have died. On top of it all I had to hide among huge coir stacks when customs officials came aboard to look for traces of human smuggling. It was smuggling since I paid 200 rupees for the voyage at my own peril to the chief sailor whom we called the nakhuda...sometimes the proceeds of the business were shared between the ship owner and the nakhuda, while at other times the nakhuda secretly took on board a couple of men and made some pocket money from their fares. It was smuggling again because these launches were not authorized to carry passengers which happened to be the prerogative of the steamers and the airplanes.

The launches started at Kathiawar or some other port in Gujarat, where they loaded goods like wheat, coffee and other staples. They came down to Calicut from where they loaded rice, timber, bamboo poles and coir. You could never board a launch at Calicut. You often had to board from close to a deserted beach at midnight or in the early hours of morning. Ferries of fishermen that worked in concert with these Gujaratis as agents and for a commission took you to the launch anchored far away from the coast. You could never take the risk of a launch voyage if you didn't know swimming. The fisherfolk could simply ask you to jump off or throw you out into the sea in the event of a patrolling vessel approaching the ferry. At Khor Fakkan and Ras al Khaimah, where these launches often anchored before setting sail to Kuwait or Doha, you were asked to jump off at points sometimes 2 or 4 miles away from the coast. So many men have died during that last phase, for even if they were good swimmers, 21 or more days of starvation, dehydration and fatigue would simply drain them of all energy.

Koya's narrative forms the larger canvas of the tale of the illegal migrants of the seventies, the tale of smuggling of human resources and of labour. For most of them it was poverty and the urge to make it big, the spirit of adventure animating both these aspects of their lives that led them to Dubai. The city when these bands of men arrived was still in its infancy as far as industry was concerned. The oil industry, the banks, the airport, the municipality, all needed men, but men of a different genre, and not those of the credentials of Koya who could not keep accounts, plan and execute infrastructural projects, work in technical capacities and more important of all, read

and write English. Some of them had to find work as construction labour and dock workers or porters at the creek that did not pay them more than what they needed for their upkeep in Dubai or the other emirates. Some others did what Koya refers to as *allara chillara panikkal*, literally translated as odd jobs, for Indian, Iranian and Pakistani traders. That these odd jobs formed a major affiliate of the gold smuggling network and included the actual act of carrying gold in launches was something I learnt through several conversations with several informants in Dubai and Kerala over two years of field work. When asked what these were, he was quick to point out that they helped in businesses in textiles, cosmetics and other consumer goods like radios, stereos that were in huge demand in India, thus preempting my questions on smuggling and the involvement of men like him in it. He did tell me in few words that he was part of the dhow crew that transferred textiles for a *seth*⁹⁷ he was employed by in Dubai and who had his men at their ports of landing in Bombay but gold was never once mentioned.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed Dubai's post-pearl history of smuggling and the ways in which it has contributed to the evolution and consolidation of a mercantile economy based predominantly on gold. It has offered a nuanced notion of smuggling and examined the differential approaches espoused by imperial authorities, the post-colonial Indian state and the city-state in Dubai towards addressing and intercepting the phenomenon. The chapter has addressed the multiple social and historical dimensions of the phenomenon locating it in the context of the illegal arms trade in the Persian Gulf in the 19th century, the war time restrictions in the 1940s and eventually the import substitution phase in India's post-colonial history. In addressing all these it has argued for smuggling as a significant factor in creating a geography of commerce around gold and other contraband commodities as well as around specific communities, a geography that continues to be at the heart of Dubai's multiple urban processes and practices in current times. What needs to be addressed

⁹⁷ *Seth* is a term that is often used in India to refer to Gujarati, Sindhi and Marwari bosses and merchants.

further in providing a more textured picture of smuggling and its commercial geography is the role of consumption and the cultural and social contexts that defined and fueled smuggling on both sides of the border. This is taken up for discussion in the following chapter which expands further on the theme of smuggling as entrenched in an economy of re-exports enabled by specific forms and geographies of migration and the social meanings of commodities in these migrant communities.

Chapter Four

Mobility, Commodity Cultures and the Origins of Dubai's Urban Branding

On December 26, 1969, India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, addressing a convention organized by the women's wing of the Indian National Congress at Azadnagar in Bombay urged her women listeners to “refrain from using foreign-made goods,” and “to participate in the war against poverty by leading an austere life.”¹ The audience, a vast majority of which were men, also heard a plea by Mrs. Gandhi “not to spend money on gold ornaments.” The Prime Minister's statements were arguably made with a view to reinforcing India's socialist line, with its emphasis on agriculture, public sector, co-operatives and cottage industry, against rising conservative tendencies within the party.² However what was implicit in the appeal to women to exercise restraint on their part were signs of an impending political threat to the party, the state and the nation. This threat came in the form of smuggling and the loss to India of foreign exchange that she desperately needed to import fertilizers, raw materials, oil and machinery with which to produce for a domestic as well as an export economy.³

The trope of the woman as abetting smuggling, even legitimizing it, through her consumer appetite and her naivete was a dominant one in the Indian press during the major part of the 1960s and the 1970s. A commentary featured in *The Times of India* on January 7, 1968, that responds to state officials' portrayal of India as a “smugglers'

1 “PM asks women to avoid foreign goods,” *The Times of India*, December 27, 196, 9.

2 For details, see Sudipta Kaviraj, “Indira Gandhi and Indian Politics,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 21, no. 38/39 (September 1986), 1697-1708; Stanley A. Kochanek, “Briefcase Politics in India: The Congress Party and the Business Elite,” *Asian Survey* 27, no.12 (December 1987), 1278-1301; Sol W. Sanders, “India: Ending the Permit License Raj,” *Asian Affairs* 5, no.2 (1977): 88-96. Rajini Kothari. *Politics in India* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1970).

3 Walter Schwarz, “Running Fasters,” *The Guardian*, August 24, 1974, 11.

paradise” makes this clear, “The affluent Indian housewife who pays through the nose for her favorite make of contraband lipstick, face cream or shampoo at the street corner kiosk usually concurs, cribs and goes on buying.”⁴ Although it was the rich and the upper crust of Indian society that had the means to purchase these consumer goods, the lower strata, the author was quick to add, were emulating the elite in their materialistic instincts and fast acquiring what they could afford.

Smuggled goods, a vast majority of which were sourced from and brought into the country via Dubai as we have seen in the preceding chapter, were to be found literally everywhere in the country. Bombay with the greatest untaxed wealth in the country and large local markets set the precedent for both bootlegging as well as perfectly legitimate trades in smuggled goods that arrived at its ports or at other secure spots along its vast and serrated coastline.⁵ By the late 1970s, it was reported that even pavement vendors in the busy thoroughfares of such cities as Delhi and Calcutta, besides Bombay were openly selling smuggled radios, tape recorders, perfumes, “goggles” etc., thus giving us a fair sense of the scope of consumer demand for these foreign goods.⁶ In Kerala too, an informal trade and an economy of gifts in foreign goods including gold wafers and jewelry besides other consumer novelties as stereo sets, fabric, cigarettes and liquor was in vogue at least from the early 1970s when migration to Dubai and other parts of the Gulf was beginning to become a pronounced feature of social life in its many villages and towns.⁷

This chapter analyses consumer desire for particular commodities, say, gold, consumer electronics, fabric and cosmetics, and the distinctive social meanings these held for Indians, particularly the Malayalis within the larger context of the migration of the 1970s and thereafter to Dubai. It maps the ways in which such desire converged with smuggling as well as legitimate forms of commerce to create a specific kind of mercantile economy driving the course of Dubai's urban

4 Khanna, “Smuggler's Paradise,” 8.

5 “The anatomy of smuggling,” *The Times of India*, May 14, 1969, 5.

6 “Earmarking Zones for Hawkers Urged,” *The Times of India*, January 16, 1970, 10; Khanna K.C., “Coping with the Smuggler: Why the Law is still an Ass,” *The Times of India*, April 26, 1977, 8.

7 Insights on the trade in smuggled goods within migrant households were offered by several interlocutors, some of them migrants themselves, over several conversations held in small towns and villages in Calicut, Kerala and Dubai.

development in the 1970s and the 1980s. The chapter approaches 'smuggling' as it were from the vantage point of social relations and cultural practices within the Malayali community as against that of the political and legal imaginaries of the Indian state. The 1970s and the 1980s in the urban history of Dubai—sandwiched between its existence as an entrepôt and a re-export portal, and its rise to prominence as a global city—is vital to mapping Dubai's incipient phase of globalization and the uncharted course of its 21st century urban capital. This was the phase in which Dubai established itself as a place in the imagination of many different migrant communities of Indians, particularly those from Kerala which to this day constitute the largest ethnic majority of the Emirates' foreign population.⁸ It was a spatial entity that imbued many different kinds of commodities formally barred from sale and consumption in India with cultural meanings around the categories of class, individual success, family prestige etc., with these mapped back onto the urban landscape of Dubai in the form of a distinctive economy and culture of trade.

The chapter takes off from Jeremy Prestholdt's argument that an analysis of consumer interests provides insights into "shifting social relationships" as well as "processes of global interrelation," using it to study the emergence of Dubai as a global market place and a land of opportunity for Indians during the period.⁹ However, as vantage points for an analysis of the logic and changing course of Dubai's urban development, consumer desire and demand are not approached in a typological fashion as culturally static or historically given features of Indian society.¹⁰ Instead they are engaged with, following Georg Simmel and Arjun Appadurai,¹¹ as shifting responses to value—economic, social and political—created

8 Vicky Kapur, "A Gulf without Keralites could soon be a reality," *Emirates* 24/7, October 18, 2012 <http://www.emirates247.com/news/a-gulf-without-keralites-could-soon-be-a-reality-2012-10-18-1.479297> (accessed March 15, 2013), "UAE has 2.2 m Indians: 40% from Kerala," *Emirates* 24/7, May 13, 2013 <http://www.emirates247.com/news/emirates/uae-has-2-2m-indians-40-from-kerala-2013-05-13-1.506273> (accessed October 10, 2013).

9 Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 85.

10 For instance, a vast majority of commodities that were in huge demand in India were electronic goods, manufactured in industrial societies in the West and Japan and had no precedents in the Indian context. To attribute to them a blind consumer preference would be to drop one's analytical guard. A case must be made for gold too, which despite its religious and cultural uses dating back to antiquity, was, as the chapter illustrates, no exception.

11 See Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. David Frisby and trans. Tom Bottomore and

in the act of exchange. Exchange is the key word here, exchange meaning the historical context and the social situation of migration and the concomitant influx of commodities, rather than exchange as pragmatic activity in its individual instances. This is not to say that exchange, or more specifically flows of people and transfer of commodities as they were negotiated by Dubai, is to be looked at as the sole basis of commoditization or as the only catalyst for consumer demand in India. I take recourse to Appadurai again and his reading of Marx and Mauss, as also the works of Keith Hart and James Ferguson, to incorporate culture into the commoditization argument, and inflect it as a temporal practice defining imaginaries and practices of consumption in relation to Dubai.¹² Consumption thus set within the interrelated frames of capital and culture helps address the ways in which the circulation of commodities and gifts and the hegemonies underwriting their presence in the social lives of communities laid the foundations for the city's emergence as an urban brand.

The chapter complicates the notion of Dubai as an urban brand by foregrounding migrant understandings and experiences of the city refracted through commodities in transit on the one hand and its peculiar cultures of trade, capital and labour on the other. It problematizes brand building as a structural project and a marketing strategy undertaken by the *Maktoums* in the context of a ubiquitous globalization in the 1990s while introducing a social and cultural dimension to its trajectory beginning in the latter half of the 20th century. It is not, as it is argued here, in the tallest, the largest and the most exotic of thematic contradictions as indoor ski resorts, water theme parks and ice bars that we must locate the origins of brand Dubai, but in the social consciousness of communities defined by processes of migration, smuggling and the trade in specific commodities and consumer brands spurred by these. Brand Dubai may be projected in political and corporate discourse as an urban utopia with umpteen possibilities for investment, leisure and "supreme lifestyles," however, this remains an abstract notion, an image rather, of the city that

David Frisby (London: Routledge, 2004); Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

12 James Ferguson, "The Bovine Mystique: Power, Property and Livestock in Rural Lesotho," *Man, New Series* 20, no.4 (December 1985): 647-674; Keith Hart, "On Commoditization," in *From Craft to Industry: The Ethnography of Proto-Industrial Cloth Production*, ed. Esther Goody (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 38-49.

we call Dubai. This image, the "deterritorialized logo" of the city as Andrew Harris, writing of Hoxton in post-industrial London, calls it,¹³ conceals the texture and character of the place it represents, more so and for obvious political reasons in Dubai. It is important therefore to unravel the much longer and rather complex history of social imaginaries and meanings attached to Dubai emerging out of migration, smuggling and other flows if we are to come to terms with Dubai as a place and a city grounded in life. The intent is not in the least to downplay the significance of the regime's urban ambition or efforts at the level both of urban infrastructure and symbolic discourse to elevate Dubai to the status of a global city. On the contrary it is to understand how such ambition and effort on the part of the *Maktoums* borrowed from and built on a popular base, a social premise and a genealogy in a distinct geography of commerce informed by a multiplicity of processes and flows, most importantly of cultural practices and signs around gold as also other manufactured commodities.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the changing trajectory of migration in the 1970s to Dubai and the Persian Gulf using the particular case of Malayalis, the evolving structures of migration and the actual processes of movement of migrants and commodities between these locales. It then examines the emerging economy of trade in Dubai in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s through these structures of mobility and processes of movement as well as the transplantation of the cultural effects of the two onto the commercial landscape of the city. The later part of the chapter foregrounds gold and its changing commercial practices as markers of the transitions defining Malayali society at large with these transitions resulting in the creation of global brands in gold and the evolution of a global city in Dubai.

Methods and Sources

The argument made in the chapter rests on insights drawn from ethnographic research conducted in Dubai, Sharjah, Abu Dhabi and Fujairah in the Emirates and the towns of Thrissur, Calicut, Nadapuram, Vadakara and Adoor in Kerala, India,

13 Andrew Harris, "Branding Hoxton: Cultural Landscapes of Post-Industrial London," in *Brands and Branding Geographies*, ed. Any Pike (Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011), 187-199.

between 2010 and 2012. The interviews were predominantly in Malayalam and conducted among Muslim, Hindu and Syrian Christian migrants and their families working and living in these spaces. Of the latter two communities, a good number are return migrants who have settled in their hometowns in Thrissur and Adoor in central and south Kerala respectively. Almost all of them were professionals migrating to Dubai in the late and early and mid 1970s to work in petroleum companies, telecommunications and other nascent government sectors, hospitals, banks and engineering firms. Their children, many of whom form part of my generation or slightly older, continue to live in the Emirates, or are now based in the US or UK as professionals, mostly software engineers and business analysts.

The Muslim community or Malabar Muslims as I have referred to them in the previous chapter contributed ethnographic subjects and life histories for the study extensively and at various levels. This was partly since unlike the other two communities where there was hardly more than one male or sometimes female (in the case of nurses) migrating from a household,¹⁴ the Muslims particularly those from Malabar, followed a pattern of migration in which all the males in a generation or two migrated during various periods. Interviews, therefore, were conducted among extended families of migrants in Malabar as well as their relatives and friends in Dubai and the other Emirates. The ability of Muslim men to permeate diverse realms of a mercantile economy in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, their more intimate connections with other trading communities, particularly Sindhis for whom they worked in diverse capacities and the extent to which they have become a structural aspect of trade and commerce not just in Dubai, but the whole of the Persian Gulf have been instrumental to reconstructing the social milieu in question. These peculiar traits of the group were also tapped into by officers of the Indian state with secret diplomatic missions in the Emirates and other parts of the Gulf who used them as informants on smuggling rings and projects in the 1970s and the 1980s. I had opportunities to interview some of the Dubai based family members of these Indian

14 For a discussion of female migration from Kerala, see Marie Percot and S Irudaya Rajan, "Female Emigration from India: Case Study of Nurses," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no.4 (January 27-February 2, 2007): 318-325.

diplomats whose personal memories of their parents' interactions with informants and the household repertoire of smuggling narratives have significantly shaped the argument of the chapter. Customs officers who had worked at various airports in India offered insights on the actual processes of movement of migrants and couriers as well as transit of goods. These included the quotas permitted by the state and violated in acts of 'smuggling,' as well as strategies of negotiation and terms of the mutual consensus between migrants, couriers and agents of the state underlying such violations.

Other sources that have been used for the discussion in the chapter, particularly for its sections on gold, are articles and features in newspapers published from India and advertisements of jewellery groups in the Malayalam media. The latter were sourced from private collections of video cassette recordings of Malayalam films in the 1980s and the 1990s; a few of these advertisements and publicity campaigns have been uploaded on You tube. These cassettes are retained as personal archives and repositories of memories of life in Dubai in the drawing rooms of mostly Hindu and Syrian Christian return migrants in Thrissur and Adoor. I was given access to these during the course of my interviews conducted in their drawing rooms on the condition that I would return them undamaged after viewing them at my parents' house in Adoor. Interviews with shop assistants and senior executives in jewellery stores in Dubai have also been instrumental in terms of mapping the shifts in commercial practices around gold and the ways in which such shifts have contributed to the city's discursive formations as a global urban space.

Labour Migration in the 1970s and 80s: Malayali and the Mobility Complex

With the consolidation of the federation of the emirates in 1971 and the oil economy beginning to define the political and administrative spheres of the sheikhly regime, the terms of migration changed, and along with them, the scope and channels of commodity transfer. The fluid nature of the late 1940s' and 1950s' migration in which *Sonis* and *Sindhis* moved on a periodic basis between Dubai and Bombay or Daman etc., had by the mid-1970s given way to more regulated and tenured practices

of what now became international migration facilitated by the acquisition of passports and the provision of employment and visitors' visas. It was at this juncture that men and some women from different parts of Kerala began to migrate in large numbers to Dubai and other parts of the Gulf,¹⁵ to take up employment in oil companies, hospitals, banks and private commercial enterprises, besides construction firms and as the personal staff of ruling and other elite families.¹⁶ Scholars have studied the phenomenon, a predominant feature of social life in Kerala primarily as economic migration, focusing on remittances and the ways in which the latter have altered the course of social development in the state.¹⁷ Changing identities, gender relations and family structures effected by the phenomenon have also been addressed in significant ways by anthropologists, as also cycles of consumption and social mobility among particular communities and castes.¹⁸ Migration in this study is not a master category under which can be made subsumed the flow of goods, consumption and other related social practices. The approach taken rather is one in which migration is embedded as part of a larger matrix of flows in which people, commodities, signs, discourses and practices merge creating specific kinds of urban practices and formations in Dubai. It is in that sense a reverse gaze on the phenomenon which focuses on the actual processes of mobility rather than on migration as a framework in itself.

The temporary and contractual nature of labour migration institutionalized in the visa regime and the financial success it brought the vast majority of migrants, produced, I argue, a cultural motif of relentless movement and a sense of disquiet around

15 State publications on migration data from Kerala are virtually non-existent. The number of passports issued by each of the regional passport offices in Kerala serves instead as a rough index. In 1977, two passport offices in Kerala issued 170,000 passports whereas the following year it doubled to almost 300,000. For details, see *The Hindu* (Overseas Edition), February 9, 1980, 7.

16 Myron Weiner, "International Migration and Development: Indians in the Persian Gulf," *Population and Development Review* 8, no.1 (1982): 8-9.

17 K.C. Zachariah, E.T. Mathew and S. Irudaya Rajan, *Dynamics of Migration in Kerala: Dimensions, Differentials and Consequences* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2003); T.V. Sekher, *Migration and Social Change* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1997).

18 Fillippo Osella and Caroline Osella, *Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict* (London: Pluto Press, 2000); "Migration, Money and Masculinity in Kerala," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6, no.1 (2000): 115-131; "From Transience to Immanence: Consumption, Life-Cycle and Social Mobility in Kerala, South India," *Modern Asian Studies* 33, no.4 (October 1999): 989-1020.

immobility in Malayali society, regardless of whatever may have contributed to such immobility. This obsession with movement and the anxiety provoked by the ever present reality of having to return for good at some time is nowhere more apparent than in the volume of remittances migrants have sent home to Kerala and the circuits and social networks of mobility they have managed to establish since the 1970s. This was a different order of mobility to the one that the *Sonis* and the *Sindhis* were implicated in. It not only encompassed men and a few women moving in search of work or entrepreneurial opportunities but inaugurated a regime of commodity circulation along the lines of a gift economy as against the commercial transactions of the *Sindhis*. I do not read these networks of people and circuits of commodity flows, oriented in reverse directions, as distinct realms of migrant activity. Instead, I take recourse to Mauss' theory of the gift to engage with these as part of complete system, a complex of social, cultural and political practices, transactions and imaginaries defining the Malayali society at a distinctive phase of its developmental history.¹⁹ It was this complex system as the rest of the chapter shows that was at the heart of a distinct social and cultural geography linking Kerala and Dubai in the 1970s and the 1980s with material and symbolic gains for the latter in its 'globalizing' phase in the 1990s.

An employment visa, said Mr. Vishwanathan, a fifty five year old gentleman, who has lived in Dubai for thirty years and works with *Etisalat*, the federal government owned telecommunications corporation in the UAE, meant that you had a job in Dubai or elsewhere in the emirates even before you left India while with the visitors' visa, you only had possibilities of finding a job on landing there. There were “Arab, Iranian and Indian traders who were waiting to grab any young man who could speak, write and keep accounts in English, especially in the 1970s,” he added.²⁰ With an employment visa or work permit, known as the *pataaka* in Arabic, you could stay on in the emirates for a term of three or five years—three if you were employed by a private firm and five, if you were with the Municipality, the Shaikh's personal office,

19 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Trans. W. D. Halls, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1990).

20 Interview with the author January 12, 2012.

the electricity board, the telecommunications board, government run hospitals and other state owned institutions. A visitor's visa on the other hand was, in principle, meant for businessmen visiting from different parts of the world and was a short-term permit not exceeding 90 days of residence. It may have meant in the institutional sense of the term in the Emirates, a means to facilitate the movement of businessmen. However, among Malayalis, and others, particularly Malabar Muslims, who took advantage of it to bring in their friends, relatives and acquaintances into the Emirates, the system worked as a conduit for linked or chain migration.

A Briefcase, A Deal, Vacationing and Gold

A salaried job in the Gulf in the 1970s and 1980s paying several times more than what one could expect out of any job in India, meant a switch to a new middle class particularly among the Malayalis. Referred to as *Gulfkkar* or *Persiakkkar*²¹ in Malayalam, this class was not so much an economic strata as an imagined social profile bracketing all those who migrated to Dubai and the Persian Gulf, regardless of the degree of financial success that ensued in the act of migration or even the lack of it. The fragility of the category that I, taking cues from my informants, term the "foreign made middle class", was evident in the fact that one could qualify for inclusion in it by playing on the aspiration, or more precisely the obsession rampant during the times, to dress, look, even smell "foreign." A number of early migrants in Nadapuram and Vadakara were quick to point out how it was not difficult to convince their families and others in the village that they were truly *Gulfkkar*, even when being in Dubai or anywhere else in the Gulf had actually not had any impact on their financial standing. What helped pull off the whole theatrics of the display of migratory success, many of them shyly confided, were a set of commodities and a package of consumerist practices and styles, if not money itself and the 'magnanimity'²² to gift these commodities and money to an entire circle of family,

21 *Gulfkkaran*, the plural form of which is *Gulfkkar* can be literally translated as someone who hails from the Gulf. The same is the case with *Persiakkaran*, its plural form being *Persiakkkar*. The former was used in Thrissur, Malabar and the other northern districts of Kerala whereas the latter was used in the southern parts.

22 Magnanimity is the literal translation of the word *udaaramaskata* in Malayalam, a word that many of them used during the course of interviews.

friends, distant relatives and remote acquaintances. The commodities that defined their status as middle class migrants were "foreign shirts," often tailored out of synthetic material, trousers or bell bottoms as they were popularly called, expensive gold or silver plated watches say for instance Rado, Seiko, Citizen etc., heavy bracelets and chains of gold, cigarettes, strong perfumes or "scents," Johnnie Walker whisky, heavy framed sunglasses and Japanese made plastic slippers. These were articles and brands, they reminded me, that the salaried class of Hindus and Christians hailing from the south of Kerala bought and set trends around on their flight back home, which was as often as once every two years.

As part of his hand baggage on flight—this baggage, a Diplomat briefcase was a mark of his identity as a *Gulfkkaran*—could be carried a certain set of goods and in a certain quota as stipulated by import laws in independent India. James, a customs officer who had worked at the international airport in Trivandrum for a while recalled how prior to the 1990s, a passenger could only carry 2 litres of Johnnie Walker whisky, which he invariably bought at the Dubai Duty Free Shop.²³ With no technical gadgets to their aid, unlike their successors today who sit beside high resolution cameras and X-ray machines, customs officers of the day were required to physically check the contents of the briefcase, lest there be anything that the passenger evaded duties on.²⁴ The very first article one set eyes on as the treasure chest was opened, says James, was the whisky or what was popular in their lingo as foreign liquor, its golden hues beckoning you from within the two mighty glass bottles. Underneath the bottles would be placed a set of shirts and trousers, inner wear, an Old Spice After Shave and a Brut Fragrance For Men. Everybody simulated everybody else and brought home the same kind of stuff in the same kind of briefcase so much so that an officer always knew what the contents of the briefcase inevitably were. Apart from the suitcase, there was a radio or a compact cassette

23 James is a pseudonym. I met him at a family gathering in Cochin, Kerala in December 2012 when I was on my field trip. He insisted that he remained anonymous in the work with no details of his rank or the locations in which he was posted revealed other than those mentioned in the text.

24 It was only in the 1980s that the use of metal detectors, X-ray equipment and fluoroscopes became commonplace in airports in India. Even with those gadgets surveillance of passengers and random checking of baggage on suspicion that they could carry smuggled goods continued. For details see, N.B Sonawane, "Anti-Smuggling Steps," *The Times of India*, January 29, 1983, 3.

player, lugged much like a laptop and without the case on. Forming part of their cargo or check-in baggage were bigger suitcases into which were crammed bundles of fine cotton cloth and suiting material exported from Bombay, an iron box, three or four pairs of socks and Japanese manufactured synthetic *sarees* that could drape an entire village of women. The cotton cloth was often a whole *taka* or two, *taka* being an Indian unit of measurement for broad cloth. A *taka* could have twenty or fifty yards of cloth that was primarily used for shirts, trousers and suits. Shirting often came in fifty yards and the others in twenty.²⁵ Other complementary goods were watches, often four or five, alarm clocks, flashlights, video cassette players and cassettes besides talcum powder, bathing bars, body cremes, deodorants and other forms of toiletries.

A whole set of stores specializing in these "vacationing" or status goods, as they were referred to in parts of Kerala, began to establish themselves on the urban stage of Dubai, contributing to the Gulf migrant's flight to the country a customary ritual and a public spectacle. Most of them were an extension of those that had been in existence from at least the mid 1960s as we are given to understand from advertisements and publicity campaigns figuring in trade directories of the times. The sale too continued to be around sarees, readymade and children's garments, and fabrics in silk, nylon and tissue besides such brands as Diplomat, Brut, Yardley, Ray Ban, Nivea, Sony, Sharp, National etc., that Dubai and the rest of the Arab Gulf became synonymous with. The rites of purchasing endemic to the trip to India in the 1970s and 1980s, as some of my Syrian Christian and Hindu informants humorously recollected them, were akin to bureaucratic procedures in India and were often a year long, depending on the money they could pool in and the variations in the price of particular commodities available in stores in Dubai. The compulsion to offer these articles packed into suitcases in a communal ceremony of sorts over a couple of weekends, they said, far outweighed all the struggles, financial and physical, they may have had to undergo in the process. When asked why they had to buy and carry

²⁵ *Taka* is a term used among Indian traders in Dubai to this day. Irshad, a trader in a textile shop in Deira, Dasan a tailor specialized in shirts and employed in a readymade unit in the same area, Magabha and many others among my informants repeatedly used the term in their conversations and educated me on the measures in yards for different categories of fabric.

so much as gifts, they attributed their 'magnanimity' again to a kind of moral obligation and social conscience on their part as financially successful individuals towards those less fortunate than they were at the time.

For the Indian diplomatic mission in Dubai though, practices of shopping and transfer that migrants seemed to have institutionalized around particular categories of goods and their stocks in the city's stores could only be made sense of against the insatiable consumer appetites for them in India. Much more significantly, these articles and their modes of transfer were indices of the new channels and paradigms of smuggling gold and currency into and from India. Store assistants selling to passengers and potential smugglers were the sources, and as Vaidya,²⁶ the son of a diplomat posted in Dubai in the early 1980s, points out, the only sources, of information for consignments of gold that made it to India, since it was through and around the goods they stocked that gold and currency could enter legal channels of transfer, if only to circumvent them. Further, the impeccable order as they lay stacked within the suitcase and the degree of familiarity customs officials in India had with the scripted situation (the genre of goods, the number, often multiples of two and the order in which they were often arranged) helped investors, agents and couriers identify loopholes within the law and customs procedures that made the passage of gold and currency an often undetected everyday affair at airports in the country. For instance, an individual would carry 6 litres of Johnnie Walker, that is to say, 6 bottles in his briefcase. He would buy off the customs officer with two bottles since not more than two bottles were permitted to be carried into country by an individual—the act seemingly being an attempt to evade duties on the two extra bottles. This negotiation entered into with the officer would put the latter at a disadvantage to probe further for gold bars that may have been concealed amidst the 'takas' or within the cavities of goods in the suitcases checked in at the airline counter or in layers beneath the false bottom of his briefcase. Using these socially sanctioned bargaining techniques, the passenger would often cart into the country 6 or even 12 bottles of whisky packed between his hand and checked-in baggage. The power of these so called luxury goods to set off a negotiation and clinch a deal between an

²⁶ Interview with the author in Dubai on December 22, 2011.

officer of the state and a migrant in possession of these to the personal advantage of both parties, and in gross violation of the statutes of the state against the illegal transfer of gold cannot be overlooked if we are to make sense of Dubai's rise to prominence as an urban brand in itself.

The double deck audio cassette players particularly the National Panasonic ones had cavities within them (the battery space for 8 AA batteries) that could easily hold and in a completely clandestine manner a kilo or more of gold ingots. Additionally, they were sturdy, heavy, yet compact and easily portable. The company's iron box, the first of its kind available in Dubai shared the very same features as the compact cassette player and to this day continues to be a preferred model among middle class Indians in Dubai, the rest of the Arab Gulf and the Indian subcontinent. Heavy as they were by themselves, 500 grams or more of gold stuffed into their cavity did not make a difference as to be taken note of. Sturdy as these two articles were, they could be reassembled with much the same ease as they were dismantled, to play music and press clothes with no impact whatsoever on their use and exchange values. An extra advantage with the two-in-ones was that they were hand baggage and would not generally draw the immediate attention of the officials who worked with the logic that passengers always concealed illegal commodities where they were least prone to frisking.

The association in Kerala, particularly in the Malabar region, between one's being based in Dubai and one's social standing was rather flawed, even lopsided. It thrust onto the shoulders of the migrant who could not make it big, the burden of having to live up to the image of a successful, even wealthy individual, who could afford to gift the range of goods that qualified the *Gulfkkaran*. The social, familial and self-induced pressures of having to perform one's identity as a *Gulfkkaran*²⁷ through marked goods and brands began to implicate them into networks and outfits of smuggling as couriers. Those men, most of them Muslims, that could not be

27 *Gulfkkaran* has been referred to by Osella and Osella as the “gulfan” migrant in a reading of migration as linked to changing masculine identities in Kerala. Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella, “Migration, Money and Masculinity in Kerala,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6, no 1 (2000): 117-133.

employed in petroleum companies, banks and other nascent institutions in the Emirates for lack of accounting or technical skills or even the ability to read and write English on the lookout for other avenues to fund their flight as well as accumulate their gift reserves made the best choice as couriers. They began to carry briefcases packed in the formulaic pattern described earlier in return for airfares paid to see them through the flight to Bombay or in rather rare cases, Calicut.²⁸ The greater the risk incurred, or to be more precise, the larger the quantity of gold carried, the greater were the returns accruing to the courier. A briefcase or two with goods and gold carried in multiple proportions meant more money and a return ticket as well. Men willing to incur still greater risks put in an extra component, say an iron box with gold concealed in it and became little entrepreneurs in their own right.

Some of them used the payment for such assignments made by Hawala²⁹ agents in India, to settle debts they had incurred for their first voyage to Dubai, more often not by launches and dhows.³⁰ Some of the articles in the briefcase was sold to generate cash for their personal expenses and for the finances required to meet family obligations while at home. There were any number of men in the 1970s and 1980s, some of the now settled return migrants in Kerala recalled, who would have their debts paid off in Malabar by Hawala agents as remuneration for carrying the gold-stuffed briefcase safely to landing agents in Bombay. These Hawala agents would carry the cash in rupees to moneylenders and family members of the courier in Malabar before the latter himself often reached home. The return trip to Dubai with the profits made in the deal, was always by flight and with a valid visa stamped from India. The courier deal in smuggling was thus a means to legalizing the status of these individuals as authorized migrants in Dubai and the other emirates.³¹

28 Calicut International Airport started its flight services only in 1987. Until then, migrants mostly from Malabar flew to Dubai and the rest of the Persian Gulf from Bombay.

29 The term *Hawala* in Arabic means transfer. It is the term used to refer to the informal funds transfer system between South Asia, the Middle East and South-East Asia. In India it is also called the *hundi* system and exists alongside the formal banking sector. For details refer Mohammed El Qorchi, Samuel Munzele Maimbo and John F Wilson, *Informal Funds Transfer System: An Analysis of the Informal Hawala System* (Washington DC: International Monetary Fund, 2003), 4-6.

30 For details on illegal modes of migration by launches and dhows, see chapter 3, page 25.

31 As reported to the author by Vishwanathan and other informants who insisted that they remain anonymous in the work.

Others' Liberalization, Dubai's Urbanization

The cultural semiotics and the social sign-value of Dubai in relation to the commodities that were legitimately transferred or smuggled in by migrant groups cannot be grasped in their entirety unless, gold, the epic commodity defining economic life in the emirate is brought into the picture. Scholars have studied the very specific roles that gold as commodity has played in the social and cultural lives of specific communities in India, including its ritual uses, its aesthetic and symbolic values, and its status as forms of property that women possess within patriarchal regimes and dowry systems.³² Historians have also highlighted circuits in the Indian Ocean into which gold was inserted as a commodity at the centre of Europe's trade with Asia, particularly India, since the times of the Romans, thus giving us historical reasons with which to explain social and cultural attitudes around gold in Kerala.³³ Recent studies like those of Varghese's have also analyzed gold trade in its complex trajectory in Kerala (among the four south Indian states remains the largest consumer) constituted by players across the spectrum including diplomats, priests, artists traveling from the Persian Gulf, and the impact of its structures and practices on artisanal communities in the state's globalization context.³⁴ While borrowing heavily from these writings, I have tried to understand the cultural, social and economic dimensions of gold in Kerala as they were redefined through migration and smuggling. I have also mapped out how these were re-inscribed onto the commercial landscape of Dubai with significant political and economic repercussions for its state-led project of globalization and urbanity in the twenty-first century.

32 Nilika Mehrotra, "Cultural value of Gold," *Eastern Anthropologist* 51, no.4 (1998): 333-349 and "Gold and Gender in India: Some Observations from South Orissa," *Indian Anthropologist* 34, no.1 (2004): 27-39.

33 Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2010). Also see, "Indian Ocean in the Shaping of Late Medieval India," (Presidential Address, 74th Session of Medieval Indian History, Indian History Congress, Cuttack, India, December 28-30, 2013.

[http://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/32696103/My_Presidential_Address_as_sectional_President_of_74th_Session_of_Medieval_Indian_History_of_Indian_History_Congress_Cuttack_Orissa_.docx?](http://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/32696103/My_Presidential_Address_as_sectional_President_of_74th_Session_of_Medieval_Indian_History_of_Indian_History_Congress_Cuttack_Orissa_.docx?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJ56TQJRTWSMTNPEA&Expires=1393610577&Signature=zMYxulV0XZih%2BUiEilDa8SWNrpU%3D)

[AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJ56TQJRTWSMTNPEA&Expires=1393610577&Signature=zMYxulV0XZih%2BUiEilDa8SWNrpU%3D](http://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/32696103/My_Presidential_Address_as_sectional_President_of_74th_Session_of_Medieval_Indian_History_of_Indian_History_Congress_Cuttack_Orissa_.docx?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJ56TQJRTWSMTNPEA&Expires=1393610577&Signature=zMYxulV0XZih%2BUiEilDa8SWNrpU%3D). (accessed January 30, 2014)

34 George Varghese, K. "Skewed Trajectories: Gold and Globalization in Kerala," *Labour and Development* 9, no.1 (2003): 11-43 and "Globalization Traumas and New Social Imaginary: Vishwakarma Community of Kerala," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no.45 (2003): 4794-4802.

The phenomenal increase in and the renewed structures of the trade in gold sparked off by India's liberalization policy in the early 1990s provided Dubai with the much needed discursive and symbolic ground that marked its foray into its contemporary phase of hyper-urbanity as among other things the "city of gold" and the "jewelry destination of the world."³⁵ Gold became global Dubai's legitimate signifier besides one of its fundamental economic constituencies,³⁶ reinforcing its existing geographies of commerce and re-inventing its social and financial relations with such geographies along new lines of cultural domination and commercial hegemony. Nowhere was it more apparent in the 1990s than perhaps in Kerala, the fledgling urban spaces of which began to nurture an imagination of Dubai as worthy of being emulated economically, spatially and culturally. This imagination was best reflected in what I call the dual base system of the trade in gold jewellery that came into being during the times—the dual base meant a financial base in Dubai and a control and managerial centre in Kerala, sourcing staff, managing public relations and facilitating brand campaigning. Gold jewellery stores like Alukkas, Chemmannur etc., that started on a rather modest scale in parts of Kerala and had established themselves as strong businesses in the 1980s in Dubai began to look back to Kerala and cities in other regions in India in the late 1990s as commercial sites. In less than two decades, some of them have to their credit, chain stores across the oceanic space of the Arabian Sea, even the Atlantic, more or less along the lines of department stores in the West, say for instance, Walmart and Tesco.

With the liberalization of India's gold import regime in the 1990s, an epoch in Dubai's economic history as the smuggling capital of the world came to an end. The decriminalizing of imports, the slashing of domestic rates to tally with the international price of gold and the issue of licenses more liberally to dealers of gold within India meant that smuggling was no longer a lucrative activity for the

35 These two epithets of Dubai have been consistently used in official policy documents, advertisements, street hoardings and other forms of business correspondence since the mid-1990s within Dubai and abroad. I have taken the term from the web pages and press releases of the Dubai Gold and Jewelry Group. For details go to <http://www.dubaicityofgold.com/Facts-about-gold.pdf> (accessed May 5, 2012).

36 For details and figures on the place of gold in Dubai's economy go to <http://www.dubaicityofgold.com/amazing.htm>, (accessed May 5, 2012).

opportunistic. This however did not mean that Dubai lost its foothold in the global trade in gold. A set of schemes within the order of the gold import policy regime introduced specifically with the NRI or the Non-Resident Indian in view indeed worked to the commercial advantage of the city and helped it evolve a long-term strategy for urban growth on a global scale. The schemes in question launched in 1992 and revised once between 1992 and 1994 permitted NRIs returning to India every six months to bring in up to 10 kilograms of gold on payment of duties amounting to a meagre 220 rupees per 10 grams in foreign exchange.³⁷ Set forth as an immediate step to increase the flow of gold through official channels and to curb smuggling, these schemes only had to be juxtaposed alongside the revoked Gold Control Act, 1962³⁸ and the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1973 (FERA)³⁹ to formulate a business recipe hinged on and navigating multiple spaces, polities, economies and legal regimes. Gold bullion, previously outlawed, could now be imported into India at a modest tariff of 6 per cent and as a substitute for private holdings in foreign currency meaning that a vast majority of the citizenry, including migrants preferred to store their private capital reserves in the form of gold.

The Non-Resident Indian as the new privileged agency in the 1990s' gold import scheme became a convenient category for the *Maktoums* and their policy advisors whose programmatic response to the whole political drama of liberalization in India as a blueprint for Dubai's urban growth, deserves some attention. Many of my informants including Vishwanathan were quick to draw my attention to the genesis overnight of a concept as the Dubai Shopping Festival, popularly known as the DSF and the politics of it as tied in unequivocal terms to the onset of liberalization and privatization policies in India. Vishwanathan in particular was quite articulate about the role of gold in all of the spaces and events that summarily defined it in 1996⁴⁰

37 For details see, MoonJoong Tcha, *Gold and the Modern World Economy* (London: Routledge, 2003), 84-85 and Himadri Bhattacharya, *Deregulation of Gold in India: A Case Study in Deregulation of the Gold Market* (World Gold Council, Research Study No. 27, 2003), <http://www.thebulliondesk.com/content/reports/temp/india1.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2012).

38 The Gold Control Act was repealed in 1990, enabling the import of gold bullion into the country at a modest tariff of 6 per cent of the value of imports.

39 The repeal of the provisions of FERA, 1973 was a major policy reversal that was passed in 1993.

40 Noor Nazzal, "19 Years of DSF through the Eyes of an Employee," *Gulf News*, January 22, 2014, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/tourism/19-years-of-dsf-through-the-eyes-of-an-employee-1.1280559> (accessed January 16, 2014).

when the event was first launched,

If there was any way smuggling could have continued, I am convinced, there would have been no DSF, in fact there would have been no need for it. DSF was not in the beginning what you see of it today. In those days, and you probably remember it yourself, you may have been thirteen then, the Gold Souk was the quarter where the intended effects of DSF were most visible. Come Thursday evenings, Indians, mostly Malayalis, flocked to the Gold Souk⁴¹ like bees to a flower. All of us did, none of us were exceptions. Wives bought gold while we husbands waited around with you children playing, called in to the counter only when it was time to pay, or if the women were undecided, to confirm their choice of designs. Those of us who were going home on vacation bought quite a bit of jewellery. In the beginning and up until 2000, it was mostly held at the end of March or beginning of April, just before summer vacations for schools started and when the weather was still tolerable. It was in June that schools were closed and most families travelled to India, either to come back by mid-August or to have their children admitted to high school in Kerala. DSF, whose biggest sponsors were Malayali jewellers was well timed for NRI purchases of gold in those days. There were very few malls then in Dubai, so the whole DSF hype that you see around shopping malls and department stores today was in fact non-existent then.

To be honest, I really don't think anything much has changed since then, and I am talking about what happens in terms of actual sales that the festival is intended to promote. You might see lots of foreigners, what I mean to say is whites, around, but it is still gold that sells like hot cakes with Indians, especially Malayalis continuing to be the biggest buyers.⁴²

To my question as to whether it was only the regime that benefitted from the category of the NRI and the privileges it entailed with respect to gold, apart from those individuals and groups that fell within it, his response was intriguing. For me, it put into perspective the Gulf War of 1991 which I had lived through as a child in the Emirates and its significance in altering the mindsets of Indian businessmen based in Dubai and the rest of the Gulf. That the liberalization schemes of the Indian state purpose-built for the NRI were a blessing in disguise for those Gulf-based traders affected by the post war state of economic insecurity and suspicion was not something I was ready to articulate until Vishwanathan affirmed it himself. An allowance of 10 kilograms of gold per passenger every six months not only meant that gold flowed liberally to Kerala on an everyday basis but that there were now more NRIs than ever before in the history of migration from the state. Additionally, an overwhelming majority of them were made so singularly in relationship to gold and the dynamics of its flow towards Kerala where a dual base jewellery trade was

41 For a detailed description of Gold Souk, go to the next section.

42 Interview with the author on 26 January, 2012 at Al Shaab in Deira.

emerging and gaining ground by the mid-1990s. On the part of the administration and bureaucracy in Dubai, a relaxed visitor visa regime facilitating shopper tourism, more of which is discussed in the following chapter⁴³ ensured that such was the case.

Global Dubai, A View from the Gold Souk



Figure 4.1. Baniyas Road leading to the Gold Souk, Deira Dubai (photographed by author, December 2011)

The first of my efforts to trace the marginal pasts and other histories of the globalization project in Dubai took me to the Gold Souk, a retail quarter dedicated in principle to the sale and exchange of gold, and located in Deira just across the Creek at Bani Yas Road. The site where the Gold Souk stands today was in many ways where the commercial history of modern Dubai began in the 1950s and the 1960s. The Gold Souk is in fact, part of an earlier spatial and temporal order of urban Dubai, the median site of which was the Creek, arterially splitting the city's trade into wholesale and retail quarters or a Sindhi Bur Dubai and an ethnically assorted Deira.

⁴³ The reference here is to the Russian shuttle trade that dominated the trade in Dubai in the 1990s.

The division, quite stark and graphic in the accounts of my Bhatia informants seemed to me, an outsider to the spatial politics of trade in Dubai, quite arbitrary, if not far-fetched. For one, the temporal sense of a city that the Bhatias had was lacking in my case. My view of Dubai, on the contrary, was sifted through the perceptions of various other categories of traders and social groups of migrants, including Malayalis and North Indians who worked with very different sets of criteria for the given division of the city into Bur Dubai and Deira, a point discussed in the following chapter.⁴⁴ The invisibility of a scalar difference that the Bhatias were so vocal about, in a commercial landscape where wholesale trades often overlapped with retailing, signposted more the claims that the community made to history and space in Dubai than to the actual commercial geography of the city.⁴⁵

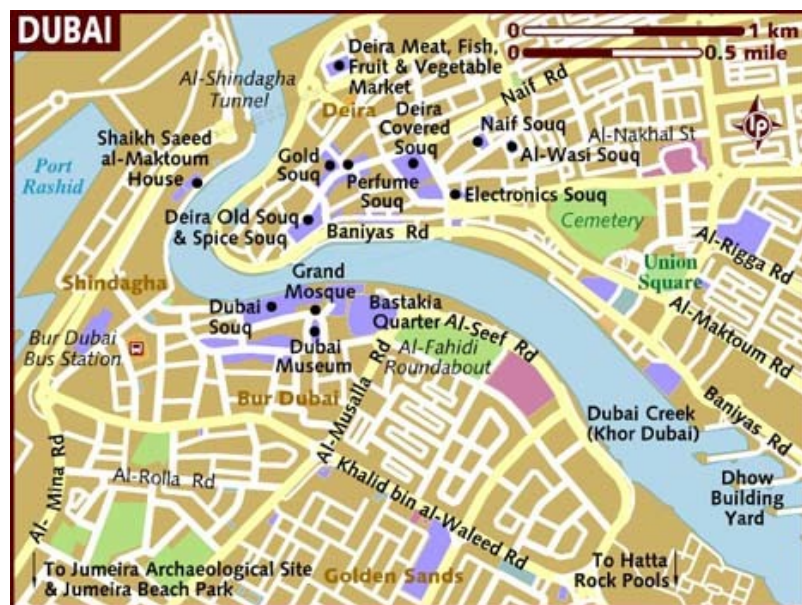


Figure 4.2. Map of the City of Dubai, UAE (Courtesy: Google Maps)

The Bhatias were some of those "foreigners" first offered land for commercial and residential purposes by Shaikh Rashid in Bur Dubai in the 1950s and 60s and perhaps, according to many of them, the only ones to have acquired such privilege at his royal pleasure. Today many of them own private buildings and apartments in Bur

⁴⁴ See Shafeeq's account, Chapter 5.

⁴⁵ It remains to be said that wholesale trade even in the case of Bhatias did not mean more than offices of trading establishments and licensed dealers in Bur Dubai where deals were made and contracts signed, a case in point being Magabha's Arabian Agency that we came across in the previous chapter.

Dubai, just across the creek and in the Meena Bazaar quarters as well as in the *Bur Juman* and *Oud Mehta* areas. A vast majority of these properties have been leased out to "newcomers" as they refer to traders and merchants who came in to Dubai much later than they did, while the community itself lives in *Jumeirah* and other high end areas of New Dubai. Bur Dubai is also the site of many of their community institutions including the Indian Association, the India Club, the Indian High School and the Hindu Temple that the Bhatias refer to as the *Shrinathji Haveli*. Looked at from this perspective, one can only interpret the Bhatia definition of a wholesale Bur Dubai as one belonging to an earlier social order in which the distinction between residential and commercial properties and the terms of their ownership and use were rather blurred.

The distinction between wholesale and retail trades in gold however, seems relatively more apparent to the lay person or a novice in Dubai. The dynamics of space, scale and visibility were rather different with gold and remain tied to a distinct history and the social and spatial hierarchies of smuggling in the city, much of which we have seen in the earlier chapter. The present site in Deira where the Gold souk stands was where a distinct strand in Dubai's urban history, manifest in dhows laden with gold and sailing out to the west coast of India from the waters of the Creek, began. It was yet again where Sonis sat at their little shops with minimal displays of jewellery waiting for orders for bangles, chains, necklaces and bracelets, from Arab businessmen and rulers in the 1960s and Indian families traveling home on vacation in the 1970s and 1980s. The Gold Souk is important, not merely for these historical reasons, but because the contemporary geography of gold retailing in Dubai has not in any real sense extended beyond the borders of the Gold Souk.⁴⁶ To be sure, there are branded jewellery outlets in malls and kiosks in supermarkets and department stores, nevertheless they do not serve except as marketing niches and advertisement tableaux for many of the chains stores and dual base jewellery systems referred to in the preceding section.

⁴⁶ There are gold retailing stores in Bur Dubai too; nonetheless, most of my informants were convinced that they are actually wholesalers and used to be once active in the smuggling trade.

I took a public bus one evening in December that took me on a 45 minute drive in a southern and later a southwestern direction from the Abu Hail metro station in Al Shabab to the Gold Souk. What I witnessed as I got off at the Gold Souk Bus station was a long corridor lined on the two sides by gold stores that could be readily distinguished in terms of the ethnicity of their owners and customers by the jewelry designs displayed on their windows and the scripts in which the names of the stores were embellished. The shops I saw in my immediate vicinity did not seem to greet me except as a tourist who should be looking at the exotic ethnic designs displayed in shop windows, feeling at one with the many white, Russian, Indian, Chinese and African tourists taking a stroll of the street at dusk. Nevertheless, tourist as I was, I was Indian, a woman and all by myself. “You could have been Indian from India, from the UK, the USA, Australia or even Singapore, but your merely being Indian and moving about the Gold Souk at seven on a December night could only have meant that you were on a buying spree preceding a vacation in India or elsewhere,” said Joseph George, a senior reporter at *Emirates 24/7* and who covers the themes that constituted the India-Dubai mediascape, ranging from law and diplomacy to commerce and entertainment⁴⁷. Joseph has had a serious interest in gold smuggling and the changing legal practices informing the transfer of the metal via the NRI channel into India ever since he moved to Dubai which was not longer than five years ago.⁴⁸ The topography of Dubai's gold retailing instantly placed me within its contours along ethnic lines which apparently translated into my personal choice and social propensities of consumption of the metal for those around me. The absolute resistance of the social and ethnic landscape of Dubai's retail trade to incorporate me as anybody but a researcher and an Indian researcher, meant that even nascent ethnographic advances at the site were out of the question.

47 Interview with the author in Dubai, November 30, 2011.

48 Two of Joseph's recent articles include “NRIs facing special gold scans at major Indian airports,” *Emirates 24/7*, May 02, 2012, <http://www.emirates247.com/news/emirates/nris-facing-special-gold-scans-at-major-indian-airports-2012-05-02-1.456769>, and “Rising gold prices reopen India smuggling route,” *Emirates 24/7*, October 19, 2011., <http://www.emirates247.com/crime/local/rising-gold-prices-reopen-india-smuggling-route-2011-10-19-1.424205> (accessed October 23, 2012).



Figure 4.3. Alley within the Gold Souk (photographed by the author, December 2011)

“If you want to buy gold, go to the furthest end of the street,” advised a Hindi speaking cart puller and a Bangladeshi citizen who noticed the perplexed look on my face and my very contemporary Indian combination of a *kurta*⁴⁹ paired with jeans. Now that he was convinced of my Indian-ness and therefore my status exclusively as a buyer what he presumed I should be doing was heading towards the latter end of the corridor where was based the Indian or more precisely the Sindhi/Gujarati contingent of jewelers. With my addressing him as “bhaiya” which literally means brother and thanking him in a Hindi that could only have been learnt in a classroom somewhere in South India, he reconsidered his suggestion for a moment adding “Madam, you must check out the Gold Centre too, you have Alukkas and Malabar Gold there. Lots of Indians buy gold there.” We parted after he gave me directions to turn back, keep to my left and to enter a large four storied mall of gold leading to

⁴⁹ A *kurta* is a long stitched garment worn like a shirt and over leggings, jeans or the traditional *shalwars*.

the main road, paying no heed to my curious query on his whereabouts in the Indian subcontinent, the nature of his work in Dubai, what he carried in his cart and the like. The smiles he flashed as I walked alongside him and the probing looks of other Bangladeshi, and Pakistani cart pullers, easily distinguished by their *lungis* and their *shalwar khomeez*⁵⁰ respectively, and the hushed whispers of young Indian men with cell phones in their hands vanishing into dark alleys joining the street as they discreetly chanted “Want ladies bags, watches, perfumes? Duplicates available of all brands,” warned me against getting too far with my curiosity. It was not a woman's fear of strange working class South Asian men bundled in ethnic bands with each conversing in their own dialects, mostly making stray comments at their own, that stopped me from asking questions to people I reckoned would have the answers. Everybody, whether cart puller, fake dealer or shop assistant seemed to be harboring a certain anxiety, a fear that pulsed through the entire space. It was a fear, I had seen and felt elsewhere in the city⁵¹ and corners in highly vibrant commercial streets in *Meena Bazaar* where dealers in fake goods had stakes in. My very 'innocuous' attempts at friendly chats with the young Malayali boys who walked about eyeing potential customers and chanting the same lines as those in the Gold Souk convinced them that I was a reporter for some regional news channel and on a mission of espionage. I could, if not a tourist or a buyer, have only been a journalist or an agent for the Dubai government who could report on dealers in fake goods and the nature of their stocks which could result in a big haul of illegal stuff for the Police. My supposed identity as a journalist was precarious not only for these fake dealers but also for the state that could only interpret my interest in the activities of the Souk as part of the conspiracy of international media to tarnish Dubai's otherwise enviable image of success. It was evident in the two hours I spent in the Gold Souk that everybody perceived everybody else through lenses colored in terms of ethnicity, professional identity, gender, whether one travelled as an individual or as part of a

50 A *lungi* is a piece of cloth draped around the lower part of the body with a twist or a knot at the waist. Sometimes it is also sewn into the shape of a skirt. It is a piece of clothing popular among both men and women in Bangladesh.

51 The “elsewhere” I am referring to here is the Meena Bazaar in Bur Dubai which was where I had my first encounter with a transnational racket dealing in fake goods, mostly leather goods, perfumes and watches. More of this is discussed alongside the question of fakes and brands in the following chapter.

family with children etc., and built up an atmosphere charged with suspicion operating at multiple levels. The refusal of the gold quarter of the city to accord any kind of legitimate identity to an individual except that of a consumer, I argue, is symptomatic of other quarters within the city and of the urban entity that Dubai is at large.

I left the Bangladeshi man besides whom I was walking and his cart behind me at the beginning of the Indian segment which housed shops with Sindhi/Gujarati names. They were shops with very little display of jewelry, old and unattractive signboards and had names that gave one little sense of them as brands quite unlike the groups that my cart puller acquaintance had referred to. I was not very welcome even as the men in these shops saw me peering intently at their windows from outside. My cultural sense of traditional business spaces, communities and practices in India, particularly of jewelers instantly told me that they were the Sonis and their descendants referred to in the previous chapter.⁵² With not many customers in them, their contrast to the gold brand shops and their indifference to any kind of marketing it was difficult to understand their current position in the commercial map of Dubai's many retail trades. Walking back from where the gold street branched into a readymade and accessories street I entered the Gold Centre, stopping at the entrance to most shops but refusing to make my way into them through the thronging crowds of mostly Indian shoppers. A vast majority of the shops in Gold Centre were retail units owned by businessmen from Kerala. Some of them, say Atlas and Malabar Gold were not more than twenty years old,⁵³ while others like Alukkas had established themselves in Dubai in the mid-1980s.

⁵² I immediately called to mind the insights Magabha had given me on the Sonis which helped me place them rightly in the spatial and social settings of the Gold Souk.

⁵³ The group Atlas, located on the second story, moved to Dubai from Kuwait after the war (1991) while Malabar Gold is a quite recent entrant and does not have a base older than 4 years in Dubai.



Figure 4.4. A Gujarati owned jewelry store in the Gold Souk (photographed by the author, December, 2011)

The quest for the history of Dubai's gold trade in occasional visits to the Gold Souk gave me a vague and punctuated sense of its ethnic and social dimensions. Nonetheless it was easier to lose focus than to gain it with a bazaar⁵⁴ like environment closing in on you, with your ethnicity slotting and overshadowing your personal interest in gold and with policemen hovering around you in civilian clothes, just in case your curiosity for fake stuff and your entering into a bargain with dealers in them led these officers of the state on to an exercise in busting these illegal rackets. It was necessary to have a more precise temporal sense of gold in Dubai's history and the shifts in its commercial practices over the decades. Conversations with acquaintances and friends in the media on the nature and objectives of my research on Dubai helped me surmount quite a few hurdles in my path. The barriers that my ethnicity posed to any such endeavor at the sites of history could now, I began to believe, possibly be tapped to actually break ground with potential

⁵⁴ I have used the term bazaar here quite loosely to indicate the physical organization of different retail units within the quarter of Deira dedicated to the trade in gold.

informants outside them.

Commodity, Gift, Brand: Gold and a Society in Transition

Suggestions, recommendations and a couple of phone calls later, I was at the marketing and corporate headquarters of the Joyalukkas Group⁵⁵ and in conversation with its Chairman and Managing Director Joy Alukka. Joyalukkas, which calls itself the "*world's favourite jeweller*," had its humble beginnings in an umbrella mart and a jewellery store in Thrissur, Kerala, more than sixty years ago. It is now an international retail chain of gold and diamond jewellery with more than 80 outlets and showrooms in cities in India, the Middle East, USA, UK and the Far East and has collections and designs in jewellery from across the world. Alukka had a casual air about him as he began talking about himself, rather the entrepreneur in him and the commercial empire that he helped build in less than three decades, demystifying Joyalukkas as a brand, and in the process, the very concept of brands itself.

“Joyalukkas is no big or global brand as you may take it to be, nor am I a big business magnate. This is all plain marketing, a strategy to survive, you see, in a highly competitive global marketplace,” were the words with which Alukka opened the first of the two conversations I had with him in January, 2011 in Dubai.

I was introduced to Alukka by Albert Alex, a senior media professional based in Dubai and an alumnus of the college I went to in Kerala in the late 1990s. Mar Ivanios, a Syrian Catholic arts and sciences college based in Trivandrum, Kerala, with its alumni chapters across the globe has a noted presence among the Malayali professional and business elite in Dubai. The remarkable inroads that the alumni community called *Amicos* had made into the public domains of Dubai's social and cultural life translated into access for me as a researcher into some of the exemplary realms of Malayali diasporic life and activity in Dubai. The story of my meeting with Joy Alukkas was no different. With Alex having put me through to him, Alukka was evidently expecting a routine set of very formal questions and a very different tone to the interview than the one I had taken on with him in his office chamber. It

⁵⁵ Joyalukkas Group of establishments are broadly grouped under two major holdings—Joyalukkas India Limited and Joyalukkas LLC, Dubai.

was evident that he was quite unprepared to meet a young scholar who had gone all the way from Mar Ivanios to a university in Johannesburg and was stopping by in Dubai to study the life histories of Malayali capitalists like him. However, having narrated my own Syrian Christian background and revealing my academic interest in Dubai as having evolved from a personal history of migration, he seemed more at ease and suggested we continue the conversation in the drawing room of his house in Karama,⁵⁶ where I could meet his family and where there would be no calls from his secretary or clients. At the Alukkases' home, I set the context for the rest of the evening's conversation by mapping the trajectory of gold trade in the two and a half decades of Malayali involvement in Dubai's retail history, duly emphasizing the transition from the traditional artisanal shop to the jewelry store, the gold supermarket, and mall to an international brand store and showroom, and the part played by Joyalukkas in all of these.

My decision to start off on the gold trek with the Joyalukkas group was not in the least bit arbitrary. It was its pioneer status in many aspects of gold retailing and branding and the role played by Dubai in according it such status that was of interest to the researcher in me. For instance, it was the first jewellery group in Kerala that based itself on the principle of economies of scale as a factor of growth setting up multiple jewellery stores in Thrissur, Calicut, Abu Dhabi and Dubai. It was called Alukkas Jewellery then. It was also the group, according to Alukka himself, that first used the family name of Alukkas as a marketing strategy and as a cultural signifier of gold jewellery in Kerala and Dubai. This he reminded me, was a Syrian Christian tradition of doing business and in vogue in Thrissur and other parts of the Christian dominated pockets in Central Kerala at least from the early 20th century and that they had only exported it to Dubai, like Chemmanur for instance. A range of advertisements in the late 1980s and early 1990s of Alukkas Jewellery appearing in video cassette recordings of Malayalam films exported to markets in Dubai and the Persian Gulf—these catering to a Malayali viewership based in the region, Kerala or

⁵⁶ Karama is a part of Bur Dubai where the richer South Asians and other foreign migrants have lived for the major part of Dubai's urban history. It is home to many South Asian businesses and commercial enterprises as well as social clubs and community institutions.

other parts of India—were what translated Alukkas into a distinct cultural signifier of gold among Malayalis.⁵⁷ These advertisements projected gold as a commodity central to defining Malayali social identity or more precisely Malayali femininity by virtue of the wedding ceremony and the institution of marriage. They depicted the bride, the bridesmaids and the women attending the wedding as decked up in gold and sharing moments of playfulness thus circumscribing the limits of social performance of their femininity around the jewellery collection. Men were present only as fathers, uncles or the groom. Their relationship with and affection for the bride were defined by the act of gifting her with a gold bangle or chain, which was an auspicious act, a blessing and in the case of the groom, a vow symbolizing protection, honor and commitment to his wife to be.⁵⁸

Joyalukkas became the brand that it is today, in 2001 when Alukkas Jewellery, the store established by Alukka. J. Varghese in 1956 in Thrissur, the commercial capital of Kerala and the district with the third largest number of Gulf migrants,⁵⁹ split into 4 business groups with each group carrying the name of the sibling that owned it.⁶⁰ Alukkas Jewelry was one among many jewelry stores in Thrissur that helped mould the cultural imaginary of a people around the yellow metal in the 1960s and the

57 These video cassettes which can hardly be found outside the private collections of mostly Gulf returnees now living in Kerala, have formed a valuable source for the work. Access to this category of sources has been restricted not merely by their being held as private possessions and the difficulty of procuring them. The technology of the video cassette has long become part of history and interests in its continuity as a medium of home entertainment are practically non-existent. What this means is that most of the video collections held by individuals in the 1980s and the 1990s have now degenerated through lack of usage and services and the digitization of cinema. My access to these video cassettes were mediated by my informal contacts with the family of Gulf returnees and my own social location as a Malayalee growing up in Dubai in the 1980s.

58 Go to http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8s_XaAzkF8&feature=related, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVm9FdmRC6k&feature=related>, (accessed July 22, 2011) to watch some of these advertisements that I have used to make the argument. Advertisements in the wedding genre were a significant break from those in the mid 1980s of jewelers like Atlas and Elite which portrayed ornaments and designs that formed part of their collections or included moving images of the display of jewelry in their shop windows.

59 K.C.Zachariah, E.T. Mathew and S. Irudaya Rajan, "Impact of Migration on Kerala's Economy and Society," Working paper No. 297, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram. <http://www.cds.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/wp297.pdf>, (accessed January 11, 2011).

60 The other three groups are Jos Alukkas, Paul Alukkas and Francis Alukkas. They have their own jewelry stores in Kerala and have expanded into other states in India but still lack a global presence and a brand name unlike Joy Alukkas. The Alukkases have diversified into many other businesses, including currency exchange and real estate over the last decade and are a visible force to reckon with in Kerala and the Middle East.

1970s, when the increased availability of 22 carat gold and the increasing number of Gulf migrants within the state began to endow gold with newer and more intense social values and meanings. With *Gulfkkar*, most of them unmarried and in their twenties coming home in considerable numbers after a 'successful' stint in Dubai, a gift economy based on the institution and set of rites constitutive of marriage and defined predominantly in terms of the exchange of gold began to evolve. Alukkas recalls his days as a young lad in his father's shop in Thrissur in the late 1970s when he witnessed the sharp rise in the number of customers all of whom were Gulf based, Gulf bound or both.

I have a shop now in every GCC country, in Qatar, I have three, in Muscat 5, in Saudi 3 and a shop or more in every emirate. When we had a shop in Thrissur, we had lots of customers from the Gulf coming over. The *Gulfkkar* in those days, were men who would come to Kerala to get married, after which they would go back. It was contact with them that gave me an opportunity to come to the Gulf. That's how I got to see lots of these things. These Gulf men would come to our shop to sell gold—I was witness to this at least from 1979 on. I only got a chance to come here in 1986. These men would come and exchange gold in our shops. People who would come to get married, eh, the groom who was a Gulf-man wearing bell bottom trousers and sunglasses would come to the shop, to do this.

Even as Alukka talked about *Gulfkkar* buying up gold on the occasion of their wedding, the hints at their doing so for that of their sisters, cousins and nieces were rather glaring. These were in fact cues that could have easily been lost had not a shared background in culture and social history annotated his unwitting silence on such practices and impelled me to look 'elsewhere' for affirmation. I had been told of practices of exchange and consumption of gold, cash, *sarees* and other articles centered around marrying off the women these men had blood and kinship ties with during the first round of my fieldwork in Malabar which preceded the ethnographic research in Dubai itself. The standard conversation in the village around a marital alliance with a *Gulfkkaran*, his sister, niece, or even a cousin for that matter were primarily appraisals of the volume of gold that would be exchanged, which depended on the prospective bride's proximity by blood to the *Gulfkkaran* himself. For instance, in the late 1970s the sister's dowry could go up to 35 sovereigns⁶¹ or more

61 A sovereign weighs 8 grammes and is a standard measure used in gold stores and other informal transactions in India. It does not actually relate to the purity of gold although in principle it ought to be 22 carats.

while he was often expected to give a cousin at least 10 sovereigns depending upon the class and caste they hailed from and the worth of the assets back home the migrant himself could lay claim to. In return he could claim from the family of his bride an equal or even greater number of sovereigns as part of the many exchanges and transfers constituting the marriage. Today the "going rate" as they call it is a hundred and ten sovereigns besides cash and other gifts which could include a car or a flat as well.

The moral obligation and social practice of gifting gold insofar as it applied to the migrant did not end with the wedding. An entire series of life-cycle rituals continuing through baby showers, christening, ear piercing, baptism, bangles and house warming ceremonies and carried it through to the betrothal and marriage of the next generation. It was a lifetime of giving away, as the wives of many of these men recalled, and the burdensome obligations borne by their husbands towards many of their extended families that badly affected their financial situation as a nuclear unit, no matter whether they lived in Dubai or Kerala. The force of these obligations and exchanges around gold, cash and other commodities, they pointed out to me, was so intense that weddings in many villages had been strategically timed in those days to coincide with the arrival of the brother, cousin or uncle from the Gulf.

What we see emerge in the course of the discussion is in fact a whole system of contractual exchanges involving men, women, gold and cash that defined a Malayali society hinged largely on Gulf migration in the 1970s and 1980s. This regime of gifting and exchange resembles in many ways that of Mauss' Polynesian societies except that it was characteristic not of a 'primitive' society but one that development theorists in the 1970s including Amartya Sen had termed "modern."⁶² The gift economy must not be construed as an anomaly in an otherwise "modern" society remarkable for its performance in education, health and other aspects of social life and for its phenomenal political consciousness (including high rates of participation in public life as citizens) owing to which Kerala was hailed as a model of

⁶² See Amartya Sen, *Economic Development and Social Change: India and China in Comparative Perspectives* (London: London School of Economics, 1995).

development.⁶³ On the contrary, it must be perceived as a fallout and a significant facet of the very modernity that made public individuals and in many ways suitable citizens of Malayalis in the wake of such developments as Colonialism, Christianity and Communism in the late 19th and early part of the 20th centuries in Kerala.⁶⁴ I do not wish to elaborate on these intertwined pathways to modernity in Kerala which scholars have addressed at some length. However what I do wish to accentuate here is the project of the formation and casting of the self in modernity, the incorporation of the individual self into a secular order of society and politics and the significance that both individuals and societies attached to its possible conduits in everyday living. The "reciprocal conception" of the individual and society that Norbert Elias⁶⁵ calls for and the "needing to become what one is" that Zygmunt Bauman reminds us of,⁶⁶ are the foundations on which the gift economy in question can be argued for. The greater the public visibility of the individual, the more intense had to be his/her investment in the private self. This was enabled by among other things, say the political and religious discourses of reform, commodities and their consumption. The gift economy, reviled by the developmental state as rooted in undesirable practices in a modern nation is, I argue, modernity's most palpable material form.

Gold, Commercial Modernity and the Route to Global Urbanity

The notion of the modern in the latter decades of 20th century in Kerala, as Prestholdt writing about consumer imports and cultural domestication in 19th century Zanzibar asserts, "was no longer simply temporal but had become comparative, cultural and

63 Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well-being: How Kerala became a 'Model'* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993); Govindan Parayil and T.T. Sreekumar, "Kerala's Experience of Development and Social Change," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 33, no.4 (2003): 465-492; Gemma Cairo, "State and Society Relationships in India: Explaining the Kerala Experience," *Asian Survey* 41, no.4 (2001): 669-692.

64 Historians and critics have offered modernity and its multiple facets in Kerala genealogies in colonialism, the onslaught of Christianity and the birth of Communism. Dilip M. Menon, "Religion and Colonial Modernity: Rethinking Belief and Identity," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no.17 (2002): 1662-1667; J. Devika, "Egalitarian Developmentalism, Communist Mobilization and the Question of Caste in Kerala State, India," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no.3 (2010): 799-820.

65 The reciprocal conception of society and individual is a perspective that foregrounds society as shaping individuals even as individuals constitute societies through their everyday actions the contours and limits of which are determined by the interlocking of the two. For details refer, *The Society of Individuals*, ed. Michael Schröter and trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Continuum, 2001).

66 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 32.

exclusive.”⁶⁷ The temporal, comparative, cultural and exclusive dimensions of the modern as it was mediated by Gulf migration and its practices of social mobility, commodity circulation and gift transactions in Kerala was nowhere more institutionalized for Malayalis than in the Dubai of the 1980s and the 1990s. To understand Dubai and its commercial arena in gold as the site of such institutionalization, I turn to the personal memories of Joy Alukka who had pioneered its many concepts and strategies as well as some of his staff in Dubai who through their own interactions with customers implement and sustain them on a daily basis.

Alukka's account of Dubai's gold trade prior to his entry into it in the latter half of the 1980s is marked by a sense of a long and stretched out temporality (although the period he alludes to is not longer than three decades) in the course of which nothing as it pertained to commercial practices changed. His repeated use of the term "unprofessional" to qualify pre-Alukkasian practices in the retailing of gold in Dubai and parts of India through the conversation testifies to his understanding of them as situated within the institution of the bazaar, although he does not explicitly use the term bazaar. The bazaar, as I deploy it here and to qualify the milieu prior to the Alukkases is premised on Geertz's concept of it—a "distinctive system of social relationships" the specificities of which include poor, scarce and unevenly distributed information on pricing and quality of goods, the trader's monopoly over information as the basis of his profit and the success of business, the physical agglomeration of the trading houses within a quarter of the city and the heterogenous and non-standardized nature of the commodities of trade and signals an epoch that underscored Dubai as not yet within the fold of modernity.⁶⁸ What Alukka's intervention meant for Dubai's gold trade in the 1990s and for the global trade of the metal in the post-1990s can only be made sense of against this backdrop of a commercial past ascribed to it.

67 Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*, 89.

68 Clifford Geertz, *Peddlers and Princes: Social Change and Economic Modernization in Two Indonesian Towns* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 28; "Suq: The Bazaar Economy in Seffrou," in *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society: Three Essays in Cultural Analysis*, ed. Clifford Geertz, Hildred Geertz and Lawrence Rosen (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 214. Also see Rajat Kanta Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: the Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no.3 (1995): 449-554.

I came here, introduced a billing system and came up with what was called a gold price, making charges, stone charges etc. That helped me quite a bit. It was during that times that Chemmannur jewelry, Vijaya jewelry and the likes of them were started. I opened a shop in Dubai in 1987. They had only started but began following the billing and pricing systems I set up. I was the one who first introduced the concept of the uniform, both in Dubai and India. There were no uniforms before that. The salespeople wore different colored shirts then, plus in my shop nobody could have a mustache. That is part of Joy Alukkas' identity.

When I started with uniforms, some seemingly big gold businesses and shops ridiculed me, “why, are they cabbies?” I brought in a certain discipline within the entire business. The practice of setting up a 100 sq ft shop gave way to big shops. All the shops I started were big shops. Many people began to follow my example. A big shop in India, when we were still undivided, we started in Thrissur. People were taken aback, because they had not seen such a thing before and so they nicknamed it the gold supermarket. I brought about a change in gold business that way.

When I introduced uniforms my brothers in India were against it. Then I went to India and started a shop there in 2002. Now in all shops in Kerala and India you find men and women in uniforms. The practice of shop owners sitting at the cash counter does not exist anymore. Earlier, it was the owner of the shop who was the cashier. I started an office for my shop in India and got my eldest brother to inaugurate it. My brother kept telling others “look at the *Gulfkaran*, the *parishkaari*,⁶⁹ he is sitting in an office. The jewelry was where the owner sits and at the cash counter, receiving customers. But today in Kerala, I have showed others, my competitors how one can have multiple shops. Otherwise, it was a single shop, with the owner. In Kerala, South India, and to some extent even in India, I showed people how they can have multiple shops. I started a textiles shop, and followed it up with 4 or 5 shops. So even textile shops that talk about a 100 years of commercial history have only now begun to acquire the techniques and technology required for multiple businesses. That's a big change. That's a different history altogether.

The history in Dubai is different. Here, I paid attention to the interior of the shop, developed new designs, many people followed it, implemented new patterns in jewelry, came up with new brands. I conducted many experiments. All these have yielded results. After partition, I changed the name to *Joyalukkas*, I have managed to make it a household name. It was Dubai that helped me do all this, the growth I achieved here has been huge. Even though I do not have an MBA, I spotted the good things here, adapted and implemented them. That's an achievement.

The shift in commercial practices Alukka effected around gold in Dubai gave way to a larger transition that was both structural and perceptual—structural because these changing practices extricated gold from the bazaar economy and implanted it within a modern economic system of standardized commodity markets; perceptual because, gold was now a commodity entering and shaping the realm of consumption via new experiences and constituencies of the phenomenon. The modernization of retailing consisted of a series of steps, primary among which was the standardization and

⁶⁹ *Parishkari* is a word in Malayalam the literal meaning of which is reformer.

break up of prices. Alukka's efforts at standardizing the price of gold culminated in a uniform gold rate per gram of the metal across the UAE. The gold rate which was calibrated on a daily basis reflected in *Dirhams*, the *Emirati* currency, the international market price of gold as declared by the open market in London. The gold rate began to be displayed in jewelry shops for the benefit of the customers. The price of jewelry was obviously more than the standard market price of gold and included labour or making charges as it was called and other hidden costs. Labour charges were contingent on a number of factors including the design, wastage and the mode of manufacture of the ornament and varied from jeweler to jeweler. For instance, a piece of jewelry carved out and worked on by an artisan was often valued at a higher price than that cut by machines resulting in higher making charges for it. These began to be listed alongside the price of the metal thereby giving the customer the option to make purchases of the metal on the basis of price differentials in different stores and redefining him or her as a standalone entity rescued from the predatory instincts of pre-modern traders.



Figure 4.5. A salesperson at the Joyalukkas outlet in the Gold centre (photographed by the author, December 2011)

Redefining the customer also called for the transformation of the experience of buying which now happened in well managed and comfortable shops. Paul Manjila, the Area Manager of *Joyalukkas* for the Emirates emphasized the premium that their brand placed on service and communication which boosted customer confidence in the quality and purity of the gold that they offered as well as their sales practices and pricing. The informality involved in pricing and the casual offer of discounts in earlier times now gave way to other kinds of informality around the actual process of sale. Abin,⁷⁰ a 23 year old salesperson at one of the *Joyalukkas* stores in Gold Land, who was quite amused by my interest in his tactics at selling, quickly gave away the secrets. He said that it was well-dressed executives, mostly men, who could talk people, particularly older women into buying, drop a hint or two of higher prices charged in other stores and subsequently maneuver the husband's decision to buy from them and distract the children with jokes that constituted what is called service and communication in businesses like theirs.

Having captured a customer base in business, the next level was commercial campaigning around gold through advertisements and event sponsorships, and gearing it to become a part of Dubai's official brand image and urban identity. Cultural events and festivals sponsored by *Joyalukkas* and other jewellery groups included celebrity evenings and star nights in which popular actors were flown in from India to perform for the several expatriate communities living in the Arab Gulf.

⁷⁰ Abin is a pseudonym for the person.



Figure 4.6. The entrance leading to the Gold Souk (photographed by the author, December 2011)

What began as Indian, mostly Hindi and Malayali celebrity evenings in the late 1980s, is now a major urban convention with the city becoming a venue for all kinds of international events from cultural performances to award ceremonies and sporting events, some of which are staged as part of its larger festival and spectacle seasons, say the Dubai Shopping Festival, Summer Surprises⁷¹ etc. Partnering with the state and its ministerial departments, Alukka joined other retailers, wholesalers and bullion dealers to establish the Dubai Gold and Jewellery Group (DGJG) in 1996, the year that the Dubai Shopping festival (DSF) was launched for the first time. The state-private partnership in the marketing of gold and Dubai, increasingly becoming synonymous with each other, was institutionalized in the raffle draw organized as part of the 1996 DSF when 50 kilograms of gold worth 2.5 million dirhams were given away as prizes to winners on a daily basis. A report in the *Times of India*

⁷¹ Summer Surprises is an annual shopping event more or less like the DSF but conducted on a much smaller scale during the summer months of June and July. For more details see <http://www.summerisdubai.com/en/festival/festivals/dubai-summer-surprises.html> (accessed January 2, 2013).

published in 1998 on Dubai's status as the gold corridor of the world and the correlation between the metal and the city neatly sums it up for us:⁷²

Dubai's gold trade launched the slogan of "Dubai City of Gold" during the first shopping festival. Today that slogan has become a branding message for the city. The first sign that one encounters on entering Dubai city from the airport is: Welcome to Dubai City of Gold. Car stickers with the slogan are popular and advertisements for anything from real estate to shopping malls describe Dubai as the City of Gold.

The equation to gold is now being made not only from Dubai's affinity and historical ties with the precious metal but more metaphorically. Dubai offers the ultimate package in everything: Lifestyle, leisure and business environment. What began as a simple headline to attract people to buy more gold during the shopping festival is now a brand statement for a city.⁷³

Today nineteen years into the launch of the DSF, the practice of giving away gold as prizes continues and is a huge factor in pulling shoppers from all parts of the world. It has been estimated that "four million more shoppers find their way to the retail and jewellery shops of Dubai in every edition of the DSF" and is the most sold commodity during the festival.⁷⁴ Joyalukkas' strategy of marketing itself as a global brand by acquiring a stake in the urban project called Dubai and through the cultural dividends and symbolic gains accruing to the city has taken both Dubai and the group a long way in their trajectories as commercial entities in the 21st century.

Conclusion

Dubai's beginnings as an urban brand, the chapter illustrates, goes back to the Malayali migration of the 1970s when the city became associated in the popular imagination of the community among others in India, with gold, electronics, textiles and other consumer goods. The implications of these social imaginaries for the urban history of the city have included the development of a commercial economy specialized in particular kinds of commodities, sometimes legitimately transferred and otherwise smuggled to India. The transitions at a structural and perceptual level in the commercial domain of gold that we have seen in the chapter, I argue, stand as

72 "Dubai gearing up for the gala mall," in *The Times of India*, 19 October, 1995.

73 "The Gold Corridor," *The Times of India*, March 14, 1998.

74 Lily B. Libo-on, "Gold is the most sold commodity during DSF," *Khaleej Times*, January 30, 2014, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/todayevent/2014/January/todayevent_January. (accessed January 31, 2014).

metaphors for the transition of the city in and of Dubai. They were the fledgling signs of Dubai's mutation from a city predominantly defined by the incessant circulation of commodities, money and people to one in which these began to permeate in the form of establishments that looked to the city for commercial legitimacy as much as for brand identities.

Chapter Five

Contraband then, Counterfeit Now: Dubai and the Fake Arts of Globalization

The 1990s in Dubai was marked by a new wave of migration of Russians into the city following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of new post-socialist economies in Russia and parts of Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The Russian migration differed significantly from the earlier waves of commercial and labour migration of South Asians in that the vast majority of Russians were shopper-tourists who made short and frequent visits to the city in search exclusively of merchandise such as clothing, electronics, footwear and other consumer goods. These itinerant traders, better known by the Russian term *chelnoki*, were of the very same league of suitcase traders that frequented markets in Turkey, Poland, South Korea¹ around the same time and are referred to in official papers of international trade and financial institutions as shuttle traders.² This chapter examines the effects of the Russian shuttle trade of the 1990s on Dubai and the ways in which it fed into and impacted on the city's existing geographies of commerce in the post-imperial Indian Ocean. The key argument of the chapter is that it was these reinforced geographies of commerce that triggered off specific forms and processes of globalization in Dubai, primary among which was the culture of counterfeit and its spatially dispersed practices of production, retailing and consumption.

Counterfeiting involves a variety of practices, and degrees of imitation of a commodity, an established product or brand which over time may have come to

1 See Boris Rumer, ed., *Central Asia: The Challenges of Independence* (New Delhi: Aakar Books, 2003) and Marie-Laure Djelic and Sigrid Quack, ed., *Transnational Communities: Shaping Global Economic Governance* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

2 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Measuring the Non-Observed Economy: A Handbook* (Paris: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2002), 225.

represent an abstract notion of quality for the consumer and a certain monopoly of profits for the producer. It could be at the level of appropriation or adaptation of technology or worse, it could be the outright hijacking of the brand name. The brand name or its (brand's) surfeit as Constantine Nakassis refers to it carries “the immaterial excess of social meaning that emerges out of engagements with branded goods.”³ It is this excess of social and symbolic meanings of success and classy lifestyles that consumers buy into when they buy counterfeits of brands without having to pay the cost of brand names and meanings associated with such names.⁴ It is not unusual that we think of counterfeit commodities from the perspective of their production rather than from one of exchange or consumption, thus giving it a unidimensional meaning of outright illegality and therefore criminality.⁵ When we do take into account the latter two processes it is often as part of the itinerary of a transnational criminal network and not as a social contract between geographically dispersed populations motivated by economics, cultures of consumption, and the role of categories of commodities, counterfeited or otherwise, in the social lives of their communities.

This chapter views counterfeiting from the other side, acknowledges the agency and complicity of traders as well as consumers in bracing it and provides a contextualized understanding of the phenomenon as a set of concrete processes in and defined by Dubai in the 1990s, rather than look at it as sheer imitations of existing products and brand labels. It begins with a discussion of the method deployed to study practices and processes of counterfeiting, followed by narratives of retailers that catered to shuttle traders and others that sought cheap brands and counterfeits offered by Dubai

3 Constantine V. Nakassis, “Brands and Their Surfeits,” *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no.1 (2013): 111-126.

4 Yi-Chieh Jessica Lin, *Fake Stuff: China and the Rise of Counterfeit Goods* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3.

5 Willem Van Schendel and Itty Abraham warns us against the analytic dangers of subsuming all illegal transnational networks under the rubric of criminality. They espouse a more subtle view of illegality which moves away from the state as its point of reference. What the state considers illegitimate is illegal while what people involved in transnational networks consider illegitimate is illicit. It is far too simplistic to collapse the two categories since what may be considered illegal by states may be perfectly licit in the eyes of people who are involved in it. For details see Willem Van Schendel and Itty Abraham, ed., *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders and the Other Side of Globalization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 4-5.

during the times. Counterfeiting is also analyzed through the changing dynamics of migration and the processes of consumption inflected by class, ethnicity and cultural contexts as well as the politics of the market in Dubai. I have, owing to the complexity of the theme which revolves around two inter-referencing waves of migration and their associated practices of trade and consumption, resorted to a structure for the chapter quite different to that of the earlier chapters. Within this structure, issues overlap and fold into each other in ways that reflect and help articulate the connectedness of the processes in question.

Russian Shuttle Traders, Malayali Entrepreneurs and the Retail Boom in Dubai

Reports of international trade and financial institutions define shuttle traders as travelers who make repeated visits abroad and return with huge volumes of goods in their accompanied baggage intended primarily for resale in their home countries or elsewhere.⁶ Shuttle trade surfaced as a widespread phenomenon in the post-Soviet milieu, although nascent and scaled down forms of it existed even as early as the 1960s within the black markets of Soviet economies.⁷ Its having become rampant in the 1990s is often attributed to the structural transformation in Eastern Europe,⁸ the changing national economic and political contexts under globalization and its recipe of market-oriented growth both within the Communist Bloc and elsewhere.

The scale, pace, reach and nature of Russian shuttle trade in the post Soviet milieu has had repercussions for international trade in general and evoked considerable attention in academic and policy circles. International financial institutions and trade organizations have documented the significance of shuttle trade, its variant forms, besides trying to propose methods for measuring the volume of and incorporating data pertaining to such trade in the balance of payment accounts of countries engaged in it.⁹ Scholars have analyzed the factors that impelled its rapid growth and the

6 Statistics Department International Monetary Fund. *Shuttle Trade: Report to the IMF Committee on Balance of Payment Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: Statistics Department IMF, 1998).

7 Afsin Sahin, Yilmaz Akdi and Cemal Atakan, "An Investigation on the Shuttle Trade Dynamics of a Small Open Economy," *International Journal of Economic Sciences and Applied Research* 1, no.2 (2001): 1-12.

8 Sahin, Akdi and Atakan, "An Investigation on the Shuttle Trade Dynamics," 2.

9 Statistics Department IMF, *Shuttle Trade*, 13-20.

contexts of administrative and legal stalemate on the one hand and issues of border uncertainty and porosity on the other within which it flourished in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries as also the coalescence of the phenomenon and criminal activities.¹⁰ There have been studies like those undertaken by Deniz Yukseker and based on ethnographic research conducted among shuttle traders and shopkeepers in Istanbul and Moscow which formed the nuclei of the phenomenon, on the modes of operation of market exchange in these largely unregulated and informal practices of transnational trade and the gendered and often equally personal nature of these business relations.¹¹

Russian shuttle trade, as we are given to understand by critics who have studied the phenomenon in the light of the Soviet crisis, was short-lived and did not stretch beyond the closing years of the twentieth century. When I went to do my fieldwork in Dubai in 2011, Russians¹² had no conspicuous presence in the city's retail districts as they did in the 1990s when they were often found moving in groups of five or six men and women around streets in Deira,¹³ haggling with shopkeepers and carting bags of purchases made in the process. In a little over a decade they have dispersed or merged into a larger foreign contingent within the city comprising tourists, technocrats, investors and real estate agents, leaving behind little trace of their nascent entrepreneurial activity as suitcase traders. When in the city, their social relations were defined and limited by the nature of their business, the illegality implicit in its logistics and the networks that informed these, rendering it necessary for the researcher to begin any sort of an enquiry on the phenomenon within these networks.

The arguments made in the chapter are based on insights drawn from ethnographic

10 Yuliya Zabyelina, "Costs and Benefits of Informal Economy: Shuttle Trade and Crime at Cherkizovsky Market," in *Global Crime* 13, no.2 (2012): 95-108.

11 Deniz Yukseker, "Economy and Gender in the Urban Borderland: The Public Culture of Laleli, Istanbul," in *Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City*, ed. Alev Cinar and Thomas Bender (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 17-36.

12 Russians is the term commonly used in Dubai and other parts of the Arab Gulf to denote traders and citizens from the ex-Soviet republics. A Russian could, by this logic, be from Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan as much as he or she could be from Moscow.

13 Deira, the part of Dubai on the eastern side of the creek is the quarter of the city where one finds several retail markets for cheap consumer goods and electronics.

research conducted among groups of travel agents, hotel staff and retailers in Deira. Most of my informants, officially retailers but informally travel agents, real estate brokers and intermediaries in the money business were Muslims from Malabar. They were, in the years of the Russian boom, at the helm of the city's trade in electronics and personal consumer goods and. Their narratives are memories of their personal and collective experiences of the Russian suitcase trade in Dubai as well as accounts of their own lives and careers besides that of their compatriots as these were defined by and in relation to Dubai. A significant factor worth noting is that Dubai is at the centre of their narratives, the fulcrum around which life, community, livelihoods and personal skills and capacities revolve. Their investments in Dubai, financial, social and affective, mirror their commitment to a city which they and other migrants like them both helped create and sustain in many ways. The ethnographic accounts of men whose positioning as traders within the markets of Dubai coincided with the entry of the Russian chelnoki frame the thematics of the chapter and lay out the counterfeit economy argument. I have also drawn on the insights of two generations of consumers among Malayali men and women in Dubai and Kerala to offer a textured account of the counterfeit through personal experiences of consumption.

Ethnic Enclaves, Global Corridors: A Trader's Tale of Retailing in Dubai

Riyas Karoo moved to Dubai in 1994 at the peak of the Russian influx into the city, forsaking at the insistence of his father, the one opportunity he had to graduate as a bachelor in English Literature and undertake a teaching career in Kerala. When I met him for the interview, which was less than a year ago,¹⁴ he was the sales manager of a brand of consumer electronics called Nikura based at its wholesale outlet in Murshid Bazaar, Deira, and a very successful individual in his professional and personal life. I was referred to him by his brother Najeem and a couple of other traders from the brothers' village in Vadakara, Kerala, who I met on one of the many trips to the Al Sabkha and Naif localities in Deira. Best known among the lower middle and lower classes of resident consumers and traders for cheap retail consumer goods, these localities were once the heart of the city and the centre of the Russian

¹⁴ Interview on January 23, 2012, at *Al Shaab* in Deira, Dubai.

trade. Riyas was somebody many of them looked up to and hailed as the icon of success in a community operating within a limited range of capital and belonging to a class as theirs, the basis of both capital and class for them being Dubai itself. He was cited as the perfect example of what Dubai could bring an individual with their kind of a social background inflected along the co-ordinates of ethnicity and class, and reined in by the limitations imposed by the two.

It is interesting to note that despite many Dubai-based Malayalis having risen to prominence as global, regional and national icons of business, say for instance Joy Alukkas of the Joyalukkas Jewellery group, Yusuf Ali of the LuLu Group International etc., the Malayalis, generally speaking, believe that their mobility as an ethnic/linguistic group was limited vis-a-vis that of Europeans or Arabs or even north Indians for that matter. As for state and private employees they could only earn salaries much lower than that of Arabs or Europeans even if their managerial and technical skills far exceeded those of the latter. Glamorous jobs like crew on aircraft and cruises which fetched enormous salaries were ruled out because they did not have the right looks or the tastes required to impress a globally elite clientele. Traders like the informants that spoke to me often hailed from lower classes and backward regions in Kerala and could only be placed in businesses operating within a specific range of capital. They could make a lot of money in business, and some of them certainly did, particularly during the peak of the Russian shuttle trade but could not transcend the class that they formed a part of in Dubai.

Within the circumscribed range of mobility Riyaz in their view had made it to the top through sheer hard work, his ability to adapt to the changing circumstances and practices of business, his educational qualification and most importantly by following what they call *nervazhi*. *Nervazhi* is a compound word in Malayalam made of the components *ner* and *vazhi* meaning straight or right (in an ethical and moral sense) and way, path or trajectory respectively. It is deployed in contexts where the economic and social means or the trajectory as it may be, by which an individual has reached his/her goal is significant to accord legitimacy to his/her accomplishments and contemporary station in life. Literally translated as the right

path, I heard the term echo through descriptions that Malayalis across the class spectrum offered me of themselves as well as of others in both formal interviews and casual conversations as they attempted to make sense of class mobility in and through Dubai.

A host of differences is suggested by the prepositions 'in' and 'through' qualifying Dubai here. Whereas 'in Dubai' essentially meant living, working and trading in Dubai, the latter signified ways of making profits on the foreign exchange that flowed from Dubai or the larger Arab Gulf into Kerala or other parts of India. One of the methods was to cater to the remittance, investment and now residential needs of migrants in India even as they were based in Dubai for work or business. Hawala networks, finance companies, property development and real estate ventures (at the forefront of these are non-migrants) established in Kerala and now extending to other parts of India are classic examples of enterprises that have become via managing the remittances and investments of migrants, little business empires in their own right. The specific moral, social and political dimensions that accrue to *nervazhi* in present times have much to do with the dominant role that Dubai plays in the social lives of the Malayalis at large. The particular history of the city as the principal artery of the Hawala network and the managerial core of smuggling and other contemporary practices of illegality and the implication of several Malayalis in these—mostly traders and those that are part of the informal economy—have been factored in to accord the term its added metaphorical sense. *Nervazhi* in many ways also becomes a trope to delineate the city's own trajectory of growth and encompasses within its conceptual scope the illegitimate routes, unethical moves and illicit structures that have contributed to such exponential urban growth over a short span of time.

Despite its underlying notion of licitness as was manifested in their conversations there seemed to be no shared perspective among them on what constituted illicitness. While for some of them particularly the Hindus and Christians (most of them hailing from the south of Kerala), illicitness was synonymous with illegality, for the lower classes of Hindus and the Muslims (mostly shop assistants and retailers) of Malabar there was a marked difference between the two. This stark contrast in perceptions of

nervazhi or illicitness stemmed from a variety of factors including the national socialist apathy to trade in general exhibited by the first category, their understanding of legality shaped by the nationalist paradigms of foreign exchange and import restrictions frequently violated in activities of smuggling and their middle class sensibilities of ethics and culture. Added to these were the Muslims' historical and cultural traditions of trade, their social and ethical consciousness fashioned by these as against having evolved from the nationalist modern sensibilities of their counterparts and most significantly of all, their view of Dubai as a geographical continuum of a historically and socially entrenched commercial culture. *Nervazhi* then encompasses within it perceptions of geography and the trajectories of social mobility permitted by geographies that are legitimate and those that are not. In that sense Dubai itself is outside the moral and spatial realm of *nervazhi* or licitness, a point made by many of my Hindu upper caste informants and echoed by some of their Syrian Christian counterparts during several interviews I conducted in Kerala in 2011 and 2012. For them any money made and remitted from outside the borders of the state bore the imprint of illicitness despite the glitz and glamour entailed by the global nature of the enterprise in current times. Dubai as the very source of money was illicit by their logic since it was by all means outside the legitimate geography of the post-colonial Indian state challenging the latter's ideology and structural framework of socialism. For the Hindu and Christian residents in Dubai who were predominantly salaried employees, it was not Dubai, rather it was what one did there that had to be factored in when considering the nature and degree of illicitness. Working for the state ministries in the emirates scored high in terms of social acceptance, salary earners with multinational firms were on par, those employed with small scale private firms did not fare very well but it was the small scale retailers themselves and shuttlers that completed the picture of illicitness for them. For Riyas's social circle that comprised the latter groups illicitness was much more constricted in its scope and often times did not mean more than overt implication in activities listed under smuggling. Interestingly, smuggling itself was not illicit unless it was smuggling of some illicit commodity like drugs or arms.

Riyas did not seem to echo the sentiments of his compatriots on Dubai or their view of individual success as he spoke to me at length in my apartment about retail trade in the city and his existence as defined by the perpetually changing contours and dimensions of the latter. His account of the family's decision to have him sent to Dubai to take advantage of the opportunities to be found there (as was made out by his compatriots who had flown to Dubai to cash in on the new retail boom spurred by the Russians) and memories of a trader's life in the city over the past eighteen years betrayed a sense of unease that was at odds with the financial success and social mobility he had accomplished. He admitted he was happy to speak to somebody 'educated and sensitive,' 'an outsider to Dubai' or to quote him "share moments of retrospection" in which he assessed, often with disillusionment, his career and individuality as they were tied in irrevocable ways to Dubai. He felt he was among people who did not understand 'our middle-class sensibilities and aspirations' which I discerned was what instilled in him a feeling of talking at cross-purposes during the interview.

When he first came to Dubai to work in a readymade garments shop along with a couple of other young men, all of them brought in by a compatriot who owned the shop, he wasn't sure he would stay on for so long. His complete lack of interest in assisting customers with clothes landed him only two months later in yet another undertaking by a fellow compatriot except that the new store sold electronic goods.¹⁵ The switch, he remembers was never difficult, since what mattered was not whether he knew product specifications, brand quality or the mechanical aspects of the device, all of which I arrogantly assumed were what helped the customer reach a decision on whether or not, or better still, what to buy. The challenge was of a different kind altogether. He had to prove himself at selling, and selling in a hitherto unprecedented ways to a novel category of customers—the Russians.

It was at the electronics store, Riyas remembers, that he had his first serious encounter with the Russians, whom he had only read about in World History classes

¹⁵ This shop called Dimple Trading owned by a Malayali who was also a relative of his, shut down many years ago.

in high school and whose images for him were tainted by the local communists' myopic understanding of the Soviet socialist system back home. His attributing their initial ventures of purchasing everything they found even when they had not the least idea of the kind of goods available or their utility, as well as his added emphasis on their ignorance and lack of experience with the social, legal and informal dimensions of profit driven trade clearly show that he perceived post-Soviet Russian trade practices as marked by the rupture with socialism and its culture of restricted consumption, not unlike the stereotypical notions that Europeans themselves had of the Russians.¹⁶

Russians were in fact emerging out of a straitjacket, a straitjacket of controls and restrictions on their urges and efforts to shop, accumulate and consume. They were simply bringing in money, a lot of it and buying big time. They just bought whatever they could lay their hands on. Those who managed to do well despite their initial ignorance held on in business. Others simply lost the game. For instance, when buying heavy things, one has to be prepared to pay for excess baggage at the Dubai airport or wherever else. They didn't know that by the time they reached Russia, they would have incurred a lot of money on things bought, that is to say, apart from the purchasing cost. They wouldn't have a clue of that. Therefore, they would buy in bulk and go. We do not know how many of them would have made good of it. Some of them that had a sense of the way things were, did survive. They would buy from retailers then, and retailers did pretty well. I came during that phase of the retail boom. Had I come at least two years back, I could have had a greater knowledge of the Dubai market and I could have started a shop and that would have helped me be part of that retail boom triggered off by the entry of the Russians. But I did all that I was capable of for my employers.

Ignorance or lack of familiarity as it may be, was in the case of Russians more than ignorance of the logistics of business and the terms and conditions of international transfer of cargo. It loomed large at the level of language and therefore communication skills. Almost none of them could speak English just as none of the Indian traders could speak Russian or any of the Slavic languages. Ignorance was also ignorance of the nature of the market in Dubai and its peculiar rituals and terms of trade which traders like Riyas who came in to Dubai following the Russians were also not exempt from. In his own terms and revealing the ways in which he as a young and a novice of a trader tapped into the changing dynamics of such a market under a dominant Russian clientele,

¹⁶ Raymond Barrett, *Dubai Dreams: Inside the Kingdom of Bling* (Boston: Nicholas Brearley Publishing, 2010), 124.

It is not really easy, one has to learn to do business in the Dubai market. One needs good experience, familiarity I would say. For that one must be involved while based at a shop. One must be thoroughly involved in the process of the sale. If you are a wholesaler on the other hand, you must be well informed about and conscious of your competitors. One must also be involved in purchasing. Let's say a container or two of goods comes for us today (as wholesalers), we must not forget the fact that another team can or could have gotten the same stuff as us. In such a situation, would we get a market for the stuff quickly? All such things we ought to learn and learn soon. In that sense, we must always be alert in Dubai. In other places, wholesalers will receive orders from retailers who in turn may receive them from customers, say from Bahrain or Qatar, they will have an estimate of customers, although they will keep some extra quantity but there will only be some extra quantity. That is not the case in Dubai; it is a question of excess, in fact.

One of the key features of trading in Dubai in personal consumables, he observes, has been the predominance of haggling or bargaining as he calls it over other formal mechanisms of price determination and the lack consequently of a fixed price or even a price range for a particular kind of product or its multiple brands. No limits to prices quoted and charged meant no limits to profits made, turning shrewd hagglers of traders into rich businessmen in as short a span of time as a year or even less. The persistence of haggling as the principal mode of transacting business coupled with the lack of a common language was what ensured Riyas and many others like him a footing in Dubai's Russian shuttlers' dominated retail market, something that most of my interviewees of a similar profile as Riyas attested to for a fact. That they were young, a whole lot of them were in their teens to be precise, had far less inhibitions and were willing to take greater social and economic risks gave them an edge above their older compatriots in business who often hired them as shop assistants through familial, social and often religious networks that stretched right across the Arabian Sea from the creek to the coasts of Malabar. These young boys, now men in their late thirties and early forties, made their way up in business with some of them becoming business partners of their previous employers and even individual entrepreneurs in their own right after having plodded through difficult, often dysfunctional linguistic environments featuring such minimal expressions in English as "you take, I take," and negotiating hitherto unfamiliar cultural codes of communication that was seemingly anything but gendered.

Riyas presented me with a hypothetical case of haggling, not unlike a mathematics teacher in high school, a case he had come up with in the span of a minute sifting

through his many transactional encounters with customers to help a historian grasp the essentials of trade as it happened in Dubai.

For instance, a person asks, what is the price, and I say it is 50 dirhams,...and he says, 50! what are you saying? And then he would say you must give it to me for 40. Even then, that is, if I sell it at 40, I will have a profit of 20 dirhams, because my cost price would be not more than 20 dirhams. The thing is you must put on a sad face and say, I have no profit, that's going to be a loss for me. This is too low a price for me, give me something more. If you take it forward in this manner, the customer would feel, hmm, I got it for ten dirhams less; that is their satisfaction. For those like us, there's some reward for the time and effort we put in.

Yet another key feature of trade in the particular context of Dubai and as Najeem observes, is the customer whose attitude and mindset to the commodity, the retailer and the price governs the act of exchange. A customer, we must remember, is an ethnically, socially and culturally modulated individual besides being an economic entity. All these extra-economic co-ordinates that define him/her go into the fixing of price and the terms of exchange in Dubai even today, an attribute of the retail market that has had profound implications for Dubai's urbanity. The Russians were not the first customers that these retailers were interacting with and selling to, nor was haggling a novel practice in the retail markets of the city. There were the Arabs, the Emiratis, the Iranians, the Egyptians, Palestinians and the South Asians before the Russians. Nevertheless, they were all of a different social profile with a different set of needs and preferences to the Russians. The Emiratis as recipients on the one hand, of the welfare programs of the oil state and on the other, of *kafalat*¹⁷ from migrants were rapidly moving upward in terms of their economic and social standing in the 1970s and the 1980s in the emirates. The other ethnic categories, some of which were allowed to naturalize, were co-opted along with the Emiratis themselves to work in the public sector and share in the state's resources. Among the South Asian migrants a conspicuous segment came to stay on in Dubai with their wives and

17 The *kafala* is the system that GCC states use to organize and control the lives and movements of South Asian workers and traders in their respective territories. It links individual workers to a specific job and to a specific citizen who acts as his sponsor or *kafeel*. Although the law in the emirates does not stipulate that the *kafeel* is entitled to remuneration from the guest worker or trader he sponsors, cases abound where the former extract huge sums of money in exchange for the passport of the latter that they confiscate on arrival. There have also been instances of sponsors asking traders for payments to exercise their power granted them by virtue of their Emirati citizenship and have them initiate visa proceedings or fulfill other legal requirements for labour recruitment, transfer of trade licenses etc. For more details on the kafalat system, see Gardner, *City of Strangers*, 29.

children as part of the emirate's workforce (although they were numerically insignificant when compared to the legions of unskilled male workers who came to work on infrastructure projects leaving their families behind) and took home salaries that made for a comfortable living. As these retailers looked at these categories, they were conservative customers. They valued articles, especially electronic and electrical goods, for their use value and purchased them mostly for personal consumption while in Dubai or as gifts for family or friends back home. As citizens of broadly speaking, a producer society, they opted for articles that stood the test of time and lived up to the standards of performance their manufacturers promised.¹⁸ They were aware of product specifications which rated the highest on their priority list; the price, many traders reminded me, was only secondary. Haggling, insofar as retailers were concerned, was futile since they were trapped in a milieu where profit was not at a premium for consumers and in which there were far fewer customers and retailers than there are today. Besides, the manufacturers and importers, in view of consumer behavior typical of a producer society, catered to the consumption needs only of a select class of consumers who could afford and were willing to pay and not for a mass market.

The Russian customers came in as traders with a clearly defined objective which was to buy as much quantity as possible of a wide range of goods at the cheapest prices. They did not care for product specifications, nor was longer shelf life a criterion that underlined their choice of products. Some of them picked the cheapest of the lot; others who brought in more cash picked two or three, sometimes even all the brands that they could spot at a retailer's. Whatever they bought, they bought in huge numbers, sometimes all the pieces stocked in a shop, sometimes quantities that these retailers had to procure from other retailers or wholesalers themselves. It is not surprising then that they formed the quintessential customer for those like Riyas and Najeem who readily admit that the Russians by the sheer scale of their numbers and

¹⁸ It needs to be pointed out here that in the case of the categories mentioned here excluding the South Asians, longer shelf life for a product also had to do with the South Asian maid who used them in the kitchen, laundry and the other spheres of the household. They were not finicky about the price or quality to the extent that South Asian consumers were since the blame for poor performance could always be laid on the maid. It was for the latter that the product had to last since it was one of the factors that decided the nature of treatment meted out to her by the family she worked for.

the range of goods they bought during their visits to Dubai over less than ten years changed the commercial, political and social landscape of the city beyond what had been done by migrants from South Asia for more than forty years.

Given that the Russians put price at a premium and bargained for the cheapest deals, it was important for businesses to procure and stock cheap brands of electronic goods and in large volumes. Coincidentally, this was a time when radical shifts in the global order of manufacturing and service industries—manifested in an immediate sense, in the rise to prominence of East Asia as the new site of industrial production—were beginning to pulse through the retail corridors and consumer landscapes of urban Dubai. Dubai began to augment, even displace previously stacked imports of Japanese and Western consumer electronic goods¹⁹ with those from the new export economies in the East. Although these goods had made their way into Dubai and other markets in the GCC region as early as the late 1980s, it was not until the advent of the Russians in 1993 that they began to take over these markets completely. It is imperative as we talk of consumer electronics and in the context of the 1990s that we have a sense of the phenomenal range and categories of products that were imported from East Asia into Dubai. These included such goods as home appliances, kitchen appliances, personal and travel gadgets, cameras, security devices, entertainment systems, car accessories etc., all of which were essentials on the shopping lists of the Russians that arrived in Dubai. The growth in world trade and the increased share of East Asia that analysts worked out for the decade were perspicuous insofar as the trader, the buyer and the layperson were concerned, in the profusion of a broad spectrum of products on display in shop windows in the city.

In the course of my interviews with migrant families of Malayalis in and across Deira—these interviews were part of an attempt at studying changing consumer practices to map the movements in Dubai's electronic retailing—I was given to

¹⁹ There is at this juncture a need to distinguish between the two especially in terms of their range of products available in the markets of Dubai. While the European or more particularly the German, Dutch and French brands like Braun, Philips and Moulinex marketed what broadly fell under kitchen appliances, the Japanese brands had the monopoly in television sets (Sony), refrigerators (Sanyo, Sony etc.) transistors, tape recorders, stereos, iron boxes (National Panasonic), washing machines, cameras (Fuji, Yashica) etc. The American brand GE was dominant only in air conditioning in the seventies and eighties.

understand how a battery of products much of which were redundant in the cultural scheme of their everyday existence started infiltrating the markets simply to cater to the Russians. The latter, they observed, had a relationship with these novel products which was unlike anything they had seen before, echoing Riyas' and the other traders' views of the Russians as reveling in the freedom of extravagance after years of political and economic repression by the communists. It was perhaps their way of catching up with the rest of the world, or the West as it were, the consumerist attitudes of which they only seemed to have popular myths about. Many women among the homemakers I had been introduced to remembered how they suddenly began to find mixer grinders the complex functions of which they were unaware of and could not manage, not because they were ignorant but as a result of the poor quality of spare parts used and the flawed nature of the assembly of these parts. From out of nowhere there were deep fryers, sandwich makers, personal massagers, sauna devices etc., designed for the average home, gadgets that hardly made a difference to their everyday life except in the figures on their electricity bills or the space in their kitchens. On asking them about the brands they were referring to they plainly admitted that while some of them had names that have disappeared from the market now, a majority of them were brands like National, Sharp, Panasonic and Aiwa that sold other more conventional kinds of products earlier. A majority of these women were displeased with even these brands themselves as contrary to their standards they compromised on quality and were ready for the trash in less than six months and a huge drain on their husbands' pockets.

The observations that these women made point to some of the important upheavals in the consumer electronics industry worldwide. Looked at from the singular frame of reference that retail Dubai afforded, the industry was perceptibly erratic and riddled with its own baggage of chaos and contradictions at least until the turn of the century. The first in the series of such contradictions was the alarming rise in the availability and distribution of fakes and the gradual setback in the popularity of premium brands, particularly Japanese brands in the city (and by extension in the GCC region).²⁰ The proliferation of the manufacture and distribution of fakes was broadly

²⁰ In the beginning were companies like Jumbo Trading and Cosmos ITL in Dubai. These were the

speaking, a direct outcome of multinational companies moving their production bases to parts of East Asia. A strategy espoused by Japanese corporations like Fujitsu, Hitachi, NEC (National Electronics Corporation) and Toshiba in the context of falling domestic demand for their products, it was oriented towards overseas export and realized through foreign direct investment in the low cost markets of the newly industrializing economies or NIEs in the 1970s and the ASEAN countries in the 1980s.²¹ Low cost markets that provided the cost advantage of one or more factors of production, say land, labour etc., helped these multinational firms manufacture at very low costs, goods that could be sold at much higher prices, given the social value of their brand names among retailers and consumers across the world, a trend that continued well into the 1980s and quite visibly in Dubai. Greater cost advantages and higher profit margins coupled with unparalleled brand values however came with their own sets of disadvantages. Some of these disadvantages included the ill effects of technology transfer²² and the rising potential for reproduction especially of low value-added products and household goods. Although technology transfer has been a vital aspect of foreign direct investment by multinationals in developing nations, it was the modes and practices of Japanese firms in the East Asian region that eventually resulted in product counterfeiting ventures in the latter. Blair and Freedman's study of East Asian Multinational firms points to how the Japanese apply the same methods of technical training as in Japan in the course of its transfer of production technologies to local subsidiaries in their new sites. The enhanced training procedure through individual participation and assistance in the process of production as well as unrestricted access to specialized information for its new recruits eventually gave way to counterfeiting at multiple levels. With rising demand for consumer electronics, increased access to communication and transport technologies and the booming of intra-industry trade in

sole distributors of electronic goods across the Middle East and functioned in the capacity both of retailers and wholesalers.

21 ASEAN is the acronym for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the members of which are Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. For details see Laura Diaconu, "The Multinational Companies and the Low-cost Markets of South-East Asia," *Journal of the Faculty of Economics*, University of Oradea1, no.1 (2009): 148-152.

22 For details see, Alex Blair and Craig Freedman, "Are Japanese Multinationals Different? Technology Transfer in the Asian Region" in *Regional Strategies in a Global Economy: Multinational Corporations in East Asia*, ed. Rene Haak and Dennis S. Tachiki (IUDICIUM Verlag, 2004): 157-178.

the nineties, local companies that were tied to these MNCs as production subsidiaries began to replicate international designs and models for overseas export, emerging with a competitive edge over the Japanese in low-end product sectors. This new culture of production was to have far-reaching effects on Dubai's markets, inflating and changing at a rapid pace, the social, spatial and political dimensions of its urbanity.

Brands in the Faking: Producers, Intermediaries and Importers

Until the nineties in Dubai the line that demarcated the wholesale and retail trades in consumer electronics was rather blurred. The buyer, whether retailer or end consumer went to the trading establishments²³ like Jumbo Electronics or Cosmos ITL for their purchases. The retailers were mostly licensed shop owners or shop assistants from the rest of the Emirates or other countries in the GCC for which Dubai was the singular point at which to source all kinds of merchandise. While some of these retailers had their own vans and trucks for ferrying their purchases from Dubai to their stores, small traders often drove their own private vehicles, hired the services of cabs or looked to other informal mechanisms of transportation for the purpose. The latter were often men who worked as chauffeurs and transport agents for other establishments or institutions and who availed the mechanisms of transportation offered by their employers to clandestinely carry moderate volumes of portable goods as iron boxes, stereo sets etc. Their purchases they then sold to buyers at small margins in the drawing rooms of their houses, or had them delivered at the consumer's house. Although small traders, these men operating in the interstices between the trading establishment and the end consumer, had their share of profit which interestingly rose or fell in tune with the haggling skills of the consumer. The advantage that these lay traders had was that they did not have to have pay import duties to the government unlike the trading establishments in Dubai. The incentive to trade, hence, was quite high even for a lay person based in the emirates and to a certain extent the other GCC states. An enterprising individual,

²³ Trading establishments in the commercial register of Dubai were licensed traders and authorized dealers for specific brands .

according to most of my informants, only had to tap into the structural orbits that connected these spaces to Dubai often with the help of ethnic social networks and groups as the Malayalis did.²⁴

Since trade was often embroiled in informal practices and consisted of haggling based rituals of exchange, the incentive to provide quality brands or original stuff to the consumer was often lacking among these lay traders. It is important to look at stories that traders have of consumer brands, particularly brands in electronics as much as it is vital to analyze popular perceptions of quality, price and the country of manufacture of these goods. The term 'original' even as it dominated the narratives of the traders and the women consumers lacked any semantic consistency at all. Neither could they define what it meant nor could they point out to a brand that they would consider as irrevocably original. Traders' narratives highlighted migrant preferences for different brands of the same product, say a television, which they believe are determined for the most part by their ethnicities, their countries of origin and the shared social semantics around the product and its brands, say for instance, Sony or National Panasonic. For the women who were end consumers, it was more often than not the brand they first had access to and used that constituted the original. Some of the traders were quite vocal about the cultural politics of brands and the labeling of new, lower priced and Asian made brands as counterfeit or 'duplicates.' Some of them told me how the hype around the original or the first-grade brand was generated simply to preserve production and price monopolies over a product by its manufacturers in the West and to devalue Asian products. Second grade products or those that come after the original, they remarked are often better than the originals, a case in point being Japanese brands which were often accused of replicating German technology. Whether it is the German or the Japanese brand that constitutes the original is a matter of serious concern when looked at from the perspective of Dubai based retailers and consumers as well as consumers that acquire their goods from Dubai through migrant friends or family. This ambivalence insofar as the original is concerned is linked to Dubai's import and re-export trajectories. In the case of small

²⁴ Also see, Filippo and Caroline Osella, "Muslim Entrepreneurs Between India and the Gulf," *ISIM Review* 19 (Spring 2007): 8-9.

kitchen appliances, like the food processor for instance, the German brands were deemed to be the original whereas the original for the television, the iron box, the stereo was always Japanese. The third grade or the one that comes after the second-grade is inevitably Asian or more precisely Chinese according to many of them and is priced at much lower rates than the original and the second-grade. One vital aspect that was factored in as brands were graded was the ethnicity of the consumer for whom it was produced and not his/her economic category or class per se.

Consumers in Dubai and elsewhere and before the Russians had entered the scene were more than familiar with individual brands and their respective standards of performance, so brand names could not be circumvented quite easily, a fact that was well known even to newly emerging manufacturers in East Asia. Consequently the production intermediaries tied to Japanese multinational corporations in East Asia among others who functioned more along informal lines, began to launch their own counterfeiting operations.²⁵ Some of these operations acquired their supplies from production overruns or access to factory seconds taking advantage of the same infrastructure as the licensed producers. There were others that made use of the same decentralized approach to counterfeiting as licensed producers, procuring and assembling components in the very space of their homes and with friends and family as workers. Many of those that created components that go into the assembly of the final product may not have been aware of their being part of an illegal activity or network. Insofar as they were concerned they were only responding to new orders for products in an intricately linked open market.

Dubai constituted, besides the entry point for markets in the GCC, a substantive market for counterfeit goods as the region at large lacked a comprehensive set of laws and regulations that could ensure the protection of intellectual property rights.²⁶ The greatest benefits accrued to Dubai since in the nineties the UAE did not even have a trademark law unlike the rest of the GCC states within which the customs

25 United Nations Office on Drug and Crime. *The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment* (United Nations Publication, 2010): 179-180.

26 Office of the United States Trade Representative. *National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers 1992*. (DIANE Publishing, 2003):105-107.

formalities among member states were minimal.²⁷ It is difficult to state with any precision the means by which these trademark infringed products found their way into Dubai—in other words, whether they were sourced as such at throwaway prices by distributors/importers who then passed them off as original stuff to traders and end consumers in Dubai, or whether these importers themselves were tricked into the game by intermediaries who in concert with the manufacturers made a profit out of procuring supplies of cheaply produced fakes at the wholesale price of the brand. While both these practices can certainly not be ruled out, of equal importance for the direction that Dubai's growth took was the emergence of a new category of importers. The new importers on account of Dubai facilitating their direct links to counterfeit manufacturers in East Asia and China have kept the global trade in counterfeit going and at profits worth billions of dollars.

While representatives of huge trading establishments refused to comment on their complicity in the deal shifting the blame on to exporters they sourced their stuff from in these countries, small time retailers explained at length how it could not have been otherwise since the volume of branded supplies these big names could procure lagged way behind customer demand in Dubai especially with the Russians. It was only natural then that they tried to bridge the gap between demand and supply by tapping into alternative sources and networks of manufacture and export in the East Asian countries. The gradually rising numbers of importers that could launch supplies at reduced costs, regardless of whether the latter was counterfeit or original came as a threat to these authorized dealers of brands in the initial days when the numbers of conservative customers were dwindling in comparison with newer segments that were either unaware of or turned a blind eye to quality. A vast majority of the new customer segment, particularly the Russians, never directly approached the trading establishments. They preferred to shop at retail units in the streets of Deira. It was mostly these retail units run by Malayalis that offered them business, but the possibility that they could always switch to newly emerging importers and gain supplies at a bargain loomed large. An individual or two associated with the big trading establishments and insisting on condition of

²⁷ Office of the United States Trade representative, *National Trade Estimate*, 106.

anonymity bluntly told me how their new Malayali competitors/importers who had no qualms about floating illicit merchandise provided the business fetched them quick money, were to be held accountable for corrupting the conscientious businessman and the commercial integrity of Dubai at large.

Traders like Riyas and Najeem also made a case for the rising trade in counterfeit merchandise against such developments as the widening of the customer base, the alteration of customer profiles in terms of class, ethnicity and social mindsets, the investment by low profile brands in service and repair and the onslaught of capitalist and market values on everyday life. Riyas in particular emphasized the changing social circumstances and attitudes in Kerala or more particularly Malabar over two or more decades of its history of migration to the Gulf as contributing in many ways to the city's trade in fakes. On the surface much of it seems as if it were tied to the newer class dimensions of migration, with lower class groups of men rushing to Dubai and the Emirates at large to capitalize on the commercial boom of the 1990s and partaking of the social norms set by their earlier counterparts. Nevertheless that even the classes the premium brands targeted switched to lower grade products if not fakes altogether in the context of lack of commitments shown by brands to maintenance and repair can only be suggestive of the part that the latter themselves played perhaps inadvertently in the rise of fakes.

When I came here, the trend was such that these trading establishments that you are talking about would only sell National iron boxes, Sony television sets etc. These were the only brands available in electronics then. The problem with these brands was that an ordinary chap would have had to spend more than half of his income on just any one of these articles if at all he were to buy them. If he bought a watch in addition to these, I mean TV and iron box, he would for sure incur a debt. No wonder then that the ordinary folk unlike the earlier generation of mostly well-to-do migrants stopped thinking of the long term use of a particular electronic device. The only sentiment governing them was 'I also need everything.' They would be on a budget but they would still need everything that others could afford to have. They would have to gift everybody something or the other when they returned home, say a watch. Gulf returnees were always in the habit of giving gifts, but in the earlier days they would only gift the elders in the family. For instance, our relatives in the Gulf always gave my elder brother and sister something, but there was never anything for us. Today you cannot not give everybody something. Even the smallest fellow in the house would have his mind set on some gadget which you had to carry from the Gulf.²⁸

²⁸ For excerpts of the interview see Appendix 1.

'Dubai-logic': Markets, Politics and the Popular Fiction of Growth

Shafeeq hails from Triprayar, a place about 22 kilometers south of Thrissur and famous for its Sree Rama temple, one of the few dedicated to the worship of Lord Rama in Kerala. A forty year old gentleman, he is the youngest of nine children in a family that is largely scattered around Thrissur, Dubai and parts of the GCC. On the move for generations as religious teachers and traders in and around the eastern Indian Ocean, the family eventually settled in Dubai as its ultimate destination in the latter half of the twentieth century. Shafeeq's father along with his twin brother were perhaps the first of the first generation Malayalis to have reached Dubai and long before the place had shown any sign of a future for itself. Shafeeq remembers how his father and his travels in Persia and Ceylon had become some sort of a legend in the immediate vicinity of his house in Triprayar so that much of what he knew of his father were stories recounted by his neighbors rather than personal accounts of the man himself. Leaving in the year 1967 on a launch that came to the shores of Chavakkad, little did the two men know that their descendants as much as the descendants of their neighbors and friends all of whom they had brought over to Dubai would make it their home for years to come.²⁹ The most they could have expected of the voyage was that it would lead to a brief sojourn not unlike the one they had in Ceylon where Shafeeq's father was a religious teacher and his brother a plantation worker. That it turned out to be more of a project of economic promise and social mobility can only be understood against the very trajectory of the city's transformation, the testimony to such a project being the roping in of different generations and members at different phases in the city's growth.³⁰

Shafeeq arrived in Dubai in 1993, the last among the four brothers to migrate to

29 Chavakkad is a coastal village in Thrissur and one from which many illegal migrants travelled to Dubai in launches in the 1970s.

30 Shafeeq's father and uncle had a tailoring shop, to begin with, in the Deira Souk. His uncle then ran a textiles shop in the vicinity of the first one. The quarter that housed these shops was then called the Iranian market. These shops exist even now and is run by one of his cousins. In fact most of his cousins continue to run the shops they inherited from their father or uncles. Some of them have textile shops, others perfume stores across the length and breadth of the Emirates. His brothers-in-law (sisters' husbands) too have stores in the Naif souk.

Dubai. He began his apprenticeship as a trader in a shoe store in the Naif Souk immediately on arrival and as his father had planned well in advance. What struck me as interesting as he spoke about his days of training for a career in trade was that he was not taken into any of the many businesses his brothers, brothers-in-law and cousins owned in Dubai and the other Emirates. When I queried him on why that never happened striving hard to conceal my ideas of migrant family business acquired in the course of my interactions with the Bhatias and the Sindhis, he offered me the explanation that the scale and scope of their businesses was not such that there was room to accommodate many players, although there was no money lacking in the game. Besides, it was impossible for the larger majority of Malayalis to run family partnerships in business, given the peculiar social and financial dynamics of the institution of the family. Each unto his own was the larger philosophy guiding the community at large. It was no different in business either. The family set him up in a store, equipped him with the right connections, provided him accommodation, but left him on his own to come to terms with the market, grab the right opportunity and raise capital that would see him through his own business. After two years of apprenticeship at the shoe store, Shafeeq could put together everything that was needed to start a business of his own. He leased a shop at the corner of Naif Road and began to sell consumer goods, mostly plastics, toys, sports goods and beach umbrellas to the Russians. He identifies himself, though, as an importer rather than as a retailer, sourcing for his clients on their trips to Dubai goods from China and other East Asian countries which he then shipped to ports in Eastern Europe in containers. Had he not been duped into a deal by a long-term Ukrainian client who fled without paying he would have continued to remain a successful businessman with a transnational base and perhaps a brand name to his credit.

I met Shafeeq in person only in December 2012 at Thrissur³¹ where I had gone to interview a couple of early Gulf migrants, although I had known him for close to a year through acquaintances in Kerala. He now forms part of a group of six young men from different districts in Kerala who recently embarked on an import business in China. They take turns to go to China where they source leather goods, digital

³¹ The interview was conducted at Thrissur Towers on the 18th of December, 2012.

equipment, electrical and plumbing materials and bathroom fittings for markets in Saudi Arabia and other states in the GCC region. China seems like a new beginning for Shafeeq after his business in Dubai collapsed in 2005 that left him with no option but to return to Thrissur with very little money. His narrative breaks the monotony of and strikes at the centre of the argument, naive as it is, that trade flourished in Dubai because of the liberal policies of the government which he questions relentlessly. A longer history of engagement with the city and its administrative domains facilitated by the movement of two generations, besides his own experience of state apathy as a victim of fraudulence may have been instrumental in extending him an outlook that set him apart from most of my interlocutors. He foregrounds private commerce, the varying shades of illegality implicit in its practices and the political dynamics of the state and its administrative logic skirting these as fundamental to the burgeoning growth of the city. In his view and what I choose to call the *Dubai-logic*,

Dubai became Dubai through others, through extracting from others. The market was the organizing principle of its growth, it was only through the market that this logic of extraction could be worked out. Where Dubai stood to gain, players in the market, never mind their ethnicity, migrant status or the nature of their business, did pretty well.

Nothing could have been illegal in the emirate, not even counterfeiting, by the extension of the Dubai-logic. Before the Russians, counterfeiting in Dubai was neither an exigency nor a lucrative business, hence it was practically non-existent. This is, however, not to say that there were no counterfeit products in the market. The emphasis here is on the preposition 'in' qualifying Dubai as the site of counterfeiting, an aspect that needs to be examined in the light of the changing contours of the Russian trade and the subsequent expansion of import businesses in the city.

In the initial days, they would come to the shoe shop, look at the designs and styles, buy everything up, every piece that the shop stocked. They only knew Russian. They brought money, every pie they had, converted into dollars, and spend it all in Dubai. Thanks to such behavior, all the retailers in the area, extending from Naif all the way up to Murshid Bazaar made it big. It was only later that Murshid Bazaar became devoted exclusively to wholesale trade. The traders in the Iranian market retreated inside, moved inwards to settle down at Murshid Bazaar, at its farthest end, eh! it is not even Murshid Bazaar, it is much further inside, I mean the wholesale market, if you go from the gold souk, you will perhaps reach there, but no, an ordinary person, he could have lived in Dubai for years, but will never reach there. It was there that the wholesalers catering to the Russians

established themselves. That is what we call the new Iranian market.

The traders in Naif Road used to go up to the new Iranian market to procure goods for the Russians in the early days. The Russians didn't know how to get there. One group would come and place an order saying we want these many shoes with us. As retailers, we would ring up wholesalers in the Iranian market, they were mostly Sindhis and Iranians, and ask for the order to be delivered at our shops. We would then deliver the cartons at the hotels where the Russians stayed. The hotels had their own storage facilities, warehouses, but because there were so many groups staying at the same time, the warehouses overflowed to parking lots and lobbies, even corridors leading up to the rooms, all of which were stacked to the roof with cartons of varying dimensions. These purchases they sent off as freight via air.³²

The growth and expansion of Russian business in and via Dubai (as perceptible in the shifts outlined in the narrative) also brought in a diverse range of opportunities for retailers whose businesses were built on the foundations largely of informal and social relations they established with the Russians within the threshold of their culture, religion, class and gender. Like Shafeeq, many became importers of raw, unbranded goods concurrently as they were in the retail trade of cheap branded and unbranded goods, all imported from China. One only needs to take a stroll in the evening on the Naif Road, moving through its many labyrinthine streets towards the Al Sabkha bus station to check out some of these stores selling watches, toys, plastics, leather goods, travel and sports goods and readymades staffed and owned by men from just about two or three villages in Malabar and frequented now by hordes of customers from everywhere in the world.

To speak of imports, nevertheless, as if they could be subsumed under a single category is not helpful in explaining how Dubai fit into the cracks of a globalization triggered off by shuttlers, importers and retailers trading in the city. It is necessary to discriminate between imports and the ways in which imported goods pitched at varying scales of illegality were sold within the city in order to unsettle the notion of a liberal, protective government. Nothing seemed wrong for a trader in Naif road or anywhere else to sell cheap watches or mobiles with Chinese names inscribed on them or for a customer to purchase them in truckloads. It was likewise for the gobs of cheap blankets, slicers, plastic containers, toys, steam inhalers, chopping boards, cloth hangers etc., that had no revered brand names to their credit. The retailer

32 For excerpts of the interview see Appendix 2.

rented a shop with the help of a sponsor who nominally and for all legal purposes was his business associate, imported the afore-mentioned variety of goods either on his own or in conjunction with other retailers and sold them at his own free will within the premises of his shop or office if he had any.³³ The terms of ownership for the retail business in question was some sort of a partnership of two or more of these foreigners in conjunction with an Emirati sponsor since sole proprietorship in trading was earmarked exclusively for UAE and GCC nationals.³⁴ This legal framework for retailing in fact was more or less what determined economic progress and social mobility for the retailers from Malabar. It is easy, now that there is some familiarity with a legal landscape the retailers in Dubai needed to navigate, to sympathize with Riyas for whom a retailer's ability to pool capital, enter into a partnership with another retailer of a similar background and run what could be called a business of his own translated into a successful career and a better social profile within the community. The retailer(s) paid no commercial taxes on the returns,³⁵ the government being hardly interested in his line of business or the nature and legal dimensions of his merchandise and the sponsor anything but accountable for the

33 The procedure prescribed for setting up a business was far from complicated and roughly in the sequential order outlined here. The retailer, once he had selected the potential site, and the specific legal form of his establishment defined by the UAE Company Law No.8 of 1984, Article 5, was required to find a local partner (UAE national) in whom was vested 51 percent of the ownership of the business. For details see, "Corporate Compliance (As per UAE Company Law No 8 of 1984)" published by Horwath Mak. [http://www.horwathmak.com/pdfs/UAE%20COMPANY%20LAW%20NO%208%20OF%201984\(2\).pdf](http://www.horwathmak.com/pdfs/UAE%20COMPANY%20LAW%20NO%208%20OF%201984(2).pdf), (accessed on May 15, 2012). Also see *How to set up a Business in Dubai*, published by the Economic Research Department of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2009. http://www.dubaichamber.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/How_to_start_business.pdf, (accessed on May 15, 2012). As for licensing and registration, the business owners had to list the type of business activities included within each license subject to a maximum of ten activities per license and come up with a name under which the establishment was to be registered. The relevant documents had to be submitted to the municipality in the earliest times since it was the body authorized to issue trade licenses then. Later the onus of issuing trade licenses shifted to the Ministry of Economy and Commerce and then eventually to the Department of Economic Development which was as recently as 2005.

34 For details and exceptions to the rule, see "Starting a Business in Dubai: A Practical Guide", *Dubai Business Advisor*, Vol 1, No.4 (2009). Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry. http://www.dubaichamber.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Dubai_Business_Advisor-No.4.pdf, (accessed on May 15, 2012).

35 In Dubai as in the rest of the Emirates, only oil, gas and petrochemical companies and branch offices of foreign banks are practically required to pay tax. This is despite the Dubai Income Ordinance of 1969 and the Income tax Decree (amended in 1970) stipulating that trading enterprises with returns of more than a million dirhams are to be subjected to taxation. For details see *Taxation in the United Arab Emirates* published by Galadari and Associates. http://www.galadarilaw.com/uploads/brochures/172113_Tax.pdf, (accessed on May 15, 2012).

partners or the mode of working of the business itself. With a trading license issued by any license issuing authority in the country he could import almost anything from anywhere (if the exporting country had no objections or if the importer could circumvent legal objections via political or extra-political methods) with minimal interference on the part of the customs.³⁶

The irony of the game in which someone could call a business his own when there were always more than two people involved was quite a glaring one until some of my informants explained, rather demonstrated the informal arrangements between the foreign partners and the token nature of the 51 percent of Emirati ownership. Since there were no restrictions on the number of shops a retailer could have stakes in, a vast majority of them entered into partnerships with the same individuals over more than one venture. Some of them were brothers, some cousins or brothers-in-law and yet others neighbors and friends who split the joint ventures between them in a manner that ensured each individual had the sole responsibility over the management and finances of a single shop as much as he shared ownership with the others in multiple firms. Kareem and his older brother Altaf have five shops between them in Al Sabkha and Murshid Bazaar. Three of these in Murshid Bazaar are 'owned' by Kareem and two in Al Sabka by Altaf as the brothers (whom I had separate conversations with) claimed. The unequal division was justified by Kareem being able to pool in the greater share of capital having come to Dubai earlier than Altaf.

Importers, the more daring ones, have taken advantage of the state of affairs underlying the establishment of a business in Dubai and exploited loopholes in commercial law to spin off a highly lucrative business in counterfeit goods, or more precisely the knockoffs of premium brands like Gucci, Prada, Cartier, Rolex etc. These fakes, precisely because of the lax verification procedures at the port,³⁷

36 For details on customs clearance procedures, see *Dubai Customs Customer Guide Edition 2*, http://www.dubaicustoms.gov.ae/en/Publications/Publications/Customer_Guide_EnV2.pdf, (accessed on May 15, 2012).

37 Note that there were no institutional mechanisms to deal with violation of intellectual property rights or instances of trademark infringement before 1992 in Dubai or the other emirates when Federal Law No. 37 on trademarks, otherwise known as trademark law came into being through the royal decree of the President of the UAE. Go to the official portal of the Abu Dhabi government, http://www.abudhabi.ae/egovPoolPortal_WAR/appmanager/ADeGP/Citizen?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=p_citizen_homepage_hiddenav&lang=en&did=14912, (accessed on May 15,

encountered hardly any difficulty in entering the city or leaving the port to its destination in Eastern Europe or even such ports as Amsterdam, the gateway to Western Europe.³⁸ In the city, these were mostly sold by vendors bustling in street corners, young boys from remote parts of India, several of whom I encountered in the course of my fieldwork in and around the Gold souk and Meena Bazaar in Bur Dubai.³⁹ Counterfeit products made their way to markets in Europe via Dubai's free trade zone in Jebel Ali where they were slapped with the name, logo and other visual markers of the original brand.⁴⁰ In fact many of my informants told me about how some of their acquaintances and friends particularly those that hailed from Kasargod in Kerala⁴¹ were specialists in the art of faking brand logos and fabricating package labels of raw stuff and were doing very well in Dubai on these fronts. They also told me how Kasargod in Kerala was Dubai's back-office providing all kinds of counterfeit services including fake passports, marriage certificates and other personal documents of national identity for those migrants that wanted to pursue quick, illicit pathways to wealth and success in the Gulf, thus earning for itself the epithet

*Kasargod embassy.*⁴²

2012). Even with the law coming into effect there were hardly any reports of cases relating to trademark infringement in newspapers and other public media. The Dubai government's first formal efforts insofar as law enforcement on the trademark front was concerned were made in as late as 2005 when an Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) unit was established at the Dubai Customs and programs to create awareness on the violation of intellectual property rights were launched. For details see, Dubai Customs We are IPR Edition 3 (2010),

http://www.dubaicustoms.gov.ae/en/Publications/Publications/We_Are_IPR_ENG.pdf, (accessed on May 15, 2012).

38 United Nations Office on drug and Crime, *The Globalization of Crime*.

39 For more details, see chapter 3 of the thesis.

40 United Nations, *The Globalization of Crime*,

41 Kasaragod is the northernmost district of Kerala and home to many of the state's coir and hand loom industries. It was an important centre of trade and specialized in the export of rice and coir during medieval times. In the 1980s however, it emerged as one of the subsidiary ports overseeing smuggling operations of gold and currency brought in from the Arabian Gulf.

42 The term Kasargod Embassy interchangeably used with 'Kasargod Republic' and 'The Indian Embassy of Kasargod,' drew much attention in the popular press in India and the Gulf following the crash of an Air India Express flight at Mangalore (which is the nearest airport to Kasargod) on May 22nd, 2010 when 52 passengers from the district were killed. At least ten of them were traveling on fake passports issued by the racket. A particularly interesting case of identity theft that brought to light the modus operandi of the racket, its methods of issuing fake passports and the charges at which such passports were available, was that of Shanavas Mammed Koya whose passport number and address appeared on the passport of the dead Abdul Samad. For more details, see M.G.

Radhakrishnan, "Kerala: Republic of Kasargod," *India Today*, June 11, 2010,

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/kerala-republic-of-kasargod/1/101181.html> (accessed May 5, 2012)

and Suryatapa Bhattacharya, "Inside the trade in forged Passports," in *The National*, September 4, 2010, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/inside-the-trade-in-forged-passports> (accessed May

Shafeeq showed me on his cell phone the scanned versions of old Malayalam newspaper clippings of at least half a dozen young men arrested for their involvement in organized crimes of an economic nature. There were two among the seven that he was convinced were part of a knockoff racket dominant in the late 1990s and the early years of the 21st century in Dubai. They were Gucci specialists, says Shafeeq, although there was no way to get them to admit it. Shafeeq knew of their business, particularly in the line of jeans, through a Ukrainian client of his who bought their supplies in Dubai and had them shipped to Ukraine every three months or so. Manufactured in Malaysia and branded in Dubai as Levis, Gucci etc., they were in huge demand in Ukrainian markets, partly because of the remarkably high quality of the fabric and the stitch and the relatively lower price attached to the two. Interestingly, they were never arrested for their involvement in the knockoff racket which was spearheaded by some reputed business magnate in Dubai. They were in the news for defaults on payments they owed to a chain of supermarkets in Dubai—these supermarkets are owned by a Malayali group—and were arrested by the police in Kerala.

Raymond Barrett in *Dubai Dreams* alludes briefly to an episode with a Mumbaiker whose catchphrase of 'good copy, genuine fake,' so invited him towards the site of the sale in an apartment building far removed from the crowd in the street and hidden in an alley that he followed the lad to what Barrett describes as “an Aladdin's cave of fake designer bags, watches, belts, wallets and briefcases.”⁴³ While for Barrett, Dubai's street culture of fakes in everything from designer bags to women may have seemed exotic, for the importer and the vendors, it was a venture that was risky beyond any other they could think of and needed a structural hierarchy not so much to distribute risk or have the secrets of the trade guarded as to protect the identity of the informer. A well-meaning official at the Indian Consulate in Dubai⁴⁴ warned me on the need to keep out of the sight of such outfits when I briefed him on an occasion

5, 2012).

43 Barrett, *Dubai Dreams*, 26.

44 The interview with the official was conducted in December 2011. I do not wish to disclose the identity of the official for I fear as much as he does that his diplomatic future in the GCC region or elsewhere for that matter could be jeopardized if a publication were to evolve out of the work and his comments on the illegal side of business in Dubai figured in it.

or two on my encounters with a couple of gangs and my interest in their modus operandi. Although at a loss to explain the nature of the risk that these outfits could incur on account of my interest in them, he was quite clear about what would befall me in the event of my continuing to pursue them and the helplessness of the Consulate should something fatal happen to me. My media friends were quick to indicate the transnational underpinnings of the business, the involvement of many reputed businessmen based in the city migrant and otherwise, and the global division of labour crucial to the management of its shadowy practices within the territorial confines of Dubai. A point they repeatedly referred to was the involvement of Nigerian men in the outfit as henchmen and the possibility of my having been led to one of them with no prospects of return by the boys from Kasargod who were the only public faces of the trade in Dubai. However, what risk entailed in such business for its higher echelons is a question that can be addressed only if one has a better understanding of the law as it underpins commercial behavior and streamlines illicit economic activity within the ambit of a financial economy in the emirate.⁴⁵

The emirate of Dubai has its own judicial authority with the requisite institutional infrastructure and resources in the form of independent courts and judges besides a body of legal codes, federal, local and Sharia, formulated to address a range of issues that punctuate social, commercial, religious, civil and migrant life in the country as a whole and the emirate in particular. Despite the presence of a modern institutional setting within which judicial proceedings take place, when it comes to regulatory frameworks to rein in commercial malpractices, be it smuggling, counterfeiting and other larger and more organized forms of economic crime, and law enforcement to combat them Dubai has been observed to be quite lax, even to the point seemingly of indifference. An instance worth considering is the Primark case reported in the early half of 2012 in the national dailies in the Emirates. An excerpt of the article “Primark copier could face legal bind” that appeared on April 26, 2012 in The

45 For details on Dubai's legal system, see Andrew Tarbuck and Chris Lester, *Dubai's Legal System: Creating a Legal and Regulatory Framework for a Modern Society*, Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2009. For Dubai's system of courts, court procedures, local laws and details of prosecution offices, go to the official website of the Dubai government, <http://www.dubai.ae/en/Lists/Articles/DispForm.aspx?ID=85&category=Citizens..>, (accessed on May 15, 2012). Note the nature of the sources listed.

National is added here.

The owners of a Dubai firm allegedly faking Primark, a well-known European chain of clothing stores could face federal fines of Dh 10,000 (US\$ 2, 722) and up to a year in jail, if found guilty of trademark violations, lawyers said yesterday. The local Primark, a company registered with Dubai Economic Development, opened a new clothing store in Bur Dubai this week purporting to be the huge European retailer. But the clothier based in Britain said on Monday that it did not have any stores in the UAE. Lawyers say the local company is treading a dangerous legal tightrope even if Primark from the United Kingdom does not have a registered trademark licence in the Middle East.

Note the irony in the stance of the Dubai Department of Economic Development which stated openly that it was not willing to take action against the company behind the store using the name Primark in the emirate. It justified its stand on the ground that it was liable to initiate action only when the trademark is registered with the UAE Ministry of Economy.⁴⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the dynamics of the Russian shuttle trade of the 1990s and the ways in which Dubai's commercial geographies and urban spaces were redefined through its presence and practices of imports, retailing, counterfeiting and consumption. It has engaged with the latter as spatially dispersed processes stemming from shifts in the geographies and cultures of production as well as those of consumption, all of which were influenced by a Dubai globalizing and being globalized via these. The terms brand and counterfeit, as illustrated by the paper, encompass a whole range of meanings and practices and elude any kind of a definition. Their multiple meanings as well as their cultural semantics are explored from within the canvas of Dubai's social histories of migration, trade and consumption and the logic of its retail markets. The role of the state and its legal regimes in facilitating the city's specific culture of counterfeit has also been addressed. It thus brings to the fore the contexts of power and politics informing what Chad Haines calls Dubai's "presencing project,"⁴⁷ and its (Dubai's) visibility as

46 For details go to <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/industry-insights/retail/primark-copier-could-face-legal-bind>, (accessed on May 15, 2012).

47 Chad Haines, "Cracks in the Facade: Landscapes of Hope and Desire in Dubai," *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, ed. Ananya Roy and Aiwa Ong (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2011), 163.

a brand promoting particular forms of commodity cultures and aspirational lifestyles elsewhere in the world.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

This work has evolved from a critique of the global city perspective on Dubai that highlights the city's rapid and superlative forms of spatial development in the 21st century, while ignoring the social and historical processes constitutive of such development. In unpacking the politics underlying a view of the city as a new space created by the logic of 21st century capital, I have both attempted to revive notions of the past in Dubai and give it (the past) a global dimension. The complementary aspect of the exercise has been writing Dubai back into the history of global capital, an attempt that has certainly not been and as we have seen in the introductory chapter, without precedent in the academia. Clearly, what makes this work different is its attention to processes, alliances and struggles that defy the territorial logic of standard political geography or nation-states as it were, and yet find legitimacy and meaning in Dubai. As against a catalogue of the city's half-a-century long infrastructural development projects and global growth strategies of the Maktoums drawn up by other scholars, I highlight these processes, alliances and struggles as having created distinctive trajectories and intricate patterns of globalization not just for Dubai but for other spaces as well. It is in this and not in any comprehensive or teleological sense of the 'global city,' I contend, that Dubai becomes and continues to remain significant for Urban Studies and for studies in Global History.

Entrenched in practices primarily of trade, the dissertation traces these processes, alliances and struggles to historical times and locates them in notions of space that correspond to diverse social imaginaries of the city of Dubai rather than to the manufactured realities of nation-states and their border regimes. The historical and social space referred to here and that the dissertation takes for its geographical, political and epistemic frame of reference in the study of Dubai is the Indian Ocean. To be more precise, it is the Indian Ocean traversed, mapped and articulated in its political, social and financial contours by Indian mercantile capital for over half a

century that is central to my argument on the making of Dubai's specific forms and practices of an urbanity that has ever since the city's beginnings in the 19th century been global in scope and scale.

The dissertation has traced the beginnings of Indian mercantile capital in Dubai to the pearl economy of the Persian Gulf in the 19th century. It has also considered the ways in which it was instrumental to incorporating Dubai within the imperial port regime of the British and defining the local contours of its politics as a mercantile city-state. It argues for Dubai's global relationality in history and in contemporary times as tied to the political project of a dual constituency in which power is shared between a tribal dynasty of rulers and a mercantile constituency, and the commercial consensus connecting the two. This mercantile constituency comprises multiple ethnicities, groups and classes of merchants, traders and entrepreneurs that evolve and establish themselves in concert with the changing dynamics of global capital as well as the historical developments that punctuate it. Many of these ethnic and social groups have been written out of the discourses of the city in Dubai, or have been reduced to a structural constituency of capital as the labour force vis-a-vis other nationalities or ethnic groups like Filipinos, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis or Indonesians. In other words, they do not figure as anything more than temporary labour migrants constantly subjected to exploitation and abuse by local sponsors or their compatriot intermediaries in the business of labour recruitment. By mapping the historical trajectory of mercantile capital in the Indian Ocean and the ethnic and social relations that have characterized it over the latter half of the 20th century, I not only narrate a different story of Dubai's migration, that is to say of merchant groups, but also expand the scope of labour migration to include practices and processes of trade as immanent to it. In doing so, I recount personal stories essentially of physical and social mobility, thereby re-inscribing individuals and communities of Indians as agents of urban and transnational histories in Dubai with narrative voices in such capacity.

The two mercantile communities of the Thattai Bhatias and the Malayalis that lend meaning to “geographies of commerce,” the conceptual category defining the work, I

have chosen for particular reasons. While both of these derive their legitimacy as merchants, traders and entrepreneurs from within the structures and practices of Indian Ocean commerce, their histories as trading communities in Dubai are radically different and so are their locations within the city's social hierarchy. The Bhatias' connections with Dubai go back to the 19th century when they came in as pearl financiers and merchants. Following the Partition of India in 1947 and the loss of Thatta in the province of Sind to Pakistan, they relocated to Bombay and Dubai and established these as the two nodal points of a powerful geography of trade consolidated through the flow of gold, currency, consumer goods and people. They were pioneers and trendsetters that created newer possibilities of commerce for communities that followed them into Dubai from Sind, say the Sonis who not much later specialized in the re-export trade in gold. The Malayalis, however, are an eclectic ethnic and linguistic group of Hindus, Christians and Muslims with diverse histories of migration and forming a composite segment of the migrant population in not just Dubai, but the rest of the Emirates and the larger Persian Gulf as well. They have, ever since migration started on a large scale in the 1970s, been placed in multiple occupational and socio-economic categories as labourers, guest workers, tourists, entrepreneurs, businessmen and consumers and have played key roles in shaping the territorial and global commercial geographies of Dubai. They have been, both as individuals who migrated before migration became an established practice in the Persian Gulf, and as a group constituting the dominant majority of migrants at the core of oil economies in the region, vital to bringing together and preserving multiple threads of histories in Dubai. At the confluence of an earlier history of Indian Ocean mobilities and of more recent waves of an international regime of labour migration, they have woven together these multiple threads, each with its own temporal and spatial logic, in layers and entanglements carving out a transnational economy in Dubai on the one hand and a clearly segregated urban society of *Emiratis* and outsiders on the other. Today, there are any number of billionaires among Malayalis in the world, particularly among those based in Dubai and to a certain extent, other parts of the Persian Gulf. Not only have they been at the helm of a liberalizing economy in India, mostly visible in the jewellery, real estate and consumer retailing

sectors, but are also increasingly remodeling their businesses in concert with the changing contours of global capital and labour to become household names and brands on the global stage.

The dissertation, in linking Dubai's trajectory of urbanity with the pathways and processes of mobility, both physical and social, of the Bhatias and the Malayalis has sought to work with and foreground analytic categories evolving from and commensurate with practices and imaginaries of movement, rather than rope in concepts informed by territoriality as a given. To this effect, it has sought to analyze in particular the ways in which Dubai has constituted the lifeworlds of these communities and in turn to render the city meaningful through their interpretations of themselves and others as communities of migrants, traders, labourers, consumers and smugglers. "Geographies of commerce" which is the key conceptual foundation in the study reflects the diverse and the constantly fluctuating contours of capital and commodities as they define the realms of their economic, social and political activity across the larger expanse of the Indian Ocean. While Indian Ocean helps foreground the historicity of social spaces and mobilities that lie at the heart of economic activity, both legal and illegal in contemporary Dubai, "Geographies of commerce" points to the immediate spatial and political co-ordinates of the social interactions afforded by such mobilities. It is thus deployed in the dissertation as a category that encompasses concepts, meanings, prejudices, politics and perceptions of the moral, the legal and the illegal produced in the act, process, and experience of specific practices of movement and the forms of social mobility afforded by it (movement).

The term "geographies of commerce" was coined, to a large extent, to capture the alternate history of capital, trade and migration in an international system in which all three were monopolized and regulated by nation-states as the only legitimate economic players. Thus many of the practices that are rendered legible in this study on Dubai and that actually constitute the city's global geographies of commerce are construed as illegal in the dominant vocabularies of nation-states the world over. Some such activities that have been dealt with at length in Chapters Three, Four and Five are smuggling and counterfeiting. However, that these are activities that both

define and disrupt social, economic, political and legal spaces across the globe, fragmenting and incessantly re-organizing them at different historical junctures is a key point the dissertation makes. The part played by commodities like gold, textiles and consumer electronics and the cultural, social and territorial politics implicit in their transactions are also made out as central to the institutions of smuggling and counterfeiting. A significant feature of “geographies of commerce,” is its existence as a conduit for the exchange of and investment in cultural meanings and social politics around specific commodities transforming them as in the case of Dubai to global practices. The ways in which these geographies become sources for and routes to the discursive and spatial production of Dubai as a global city, as well as the creation of global brands discussed in some detail have helped situate the concept as central to imagining Dubai as a global city.

This dissertation on Dubai with its distinctive spatial approach to the city and its global past provides new theoretical insights and hints at new methodological possibilities for the study of other cities in contemporary times. “Geographies of commerce” in particular opens up new ways of thinking about and through space in its incessantly fluctuating contours and as contingent on historical and political aspects in multiple yet mutually inclusive contexts. We are talking of tools that help us map and render meaningful practices, processes and structures that lie on the margins of both academic and popular thinking and yet have remained vital to debates on global phenomena and structures, including nationalism, globalization etc. I am here referring to illegal flows, the social, political and spatial strategies of mobility vis-a-vis territoriality and more importantly the ways in which the legal and the illegal, the licit and the illicit, and mobility and territoriality co-habit as interrelated congruent forces at multiple scales. A study of contemporary global cities, I propose, cannot overlook these aspects of interconnectedness and inter-referencing as essential co-ordinates of urbanity in the 21st century.

Much of what is rendered in the work in terms of methodology speaks to important debates in Global History. Scholars arguing for the need to globalize historiography while developing “new globally encompassing understandings of the past that remain

sensitive to local particularities,” basically underscore the potential of such moves to challenge western perspectives of history resting on the notion of convergence and the proven universalism of global forms and structures everywhere.¹ Intellectual history has worked out many of these propositions in deconstructing Europe and in mapping and foregrounding epistemological and philosophical alliances and resemblances between spaces physically disconnected while unveiling the disjunctures and ruptures among different categories of actors in seemingly homogenous and unified spaces.² This dissertation and what it offers in terms of methods takes these insights into the realm of social and urban history in ways that highlight the global city as a ground reality punctuated by tensions and contradictions as much as a discourse and a construct hinged on perceptions of homogeneity and singularity.

1 Dominic Sachsenmaier, “Global history and critiques of western perspectives,” *Comparative Education* 42, no. 3 (2006): 452.

2 For details see Kris Manjapra, “Transnational Approaches to Global History: A View from the Study of German-Indian Entanglement,” *German History* 32, no. 2 (2014): 274-293.

Appendix 1

Excerpts from Riyas Karoo's interview, January 2012

When I came here, the trend was such that these trading establishments that you are talking about would only sell National iron boxes, Sony television sets etc. These were the only brands available in electronics then. The problem with these brands was that an ordinary chap would have had to spend more than half of his income on just any one of these articles if at all he were to buy them. If he bought a watch in addition to these, I mean TV and iron box, he would for sure incur a debt. No wonder then that the ordinary folk unlike the earlier generation of mostly well-to-do migrants stopped thinking of the long term use of a particular electronic device. The only sentiment governing them was 'I also need everything.' They would be on a budget but they would still need everything that others could afford to have. They would have to gift everybody something or the other when they returned home, say a watch. Gulf returnees were always in the habit of giving gifts, but in the earlier days they would only gift the elders in the family. For instance, our relatives in the Gulf always gave my elder brother and sister something, but there was never anything for us. Today you cannot not give everybody something. Even the smallest fellow in the house would have his mind set on some gadget which you had to carry from the Gulf. Some sort of a feeling of equality plus something for everybody had to translate into the figures of an ordinary guy's budget. Could he afford to gift a brand like National then? Could he be concerned with quality the way others who belonged to a different class were?

The peculiarity of second grade brands like Geepas, Sanford etc., is that they offer a warranty. If you bought a Panasonic set (tape recorder) in those days, a first grade brand, and there's some damage to it, you will not be able to find a service centre in Dubai despite the warranty offered by the brand. Even if there is, an ordinary guy will never be able to take it there. One service centre of Moulinex which I know and most people do not, is Nakeel centre. I am not sure if it still exists. I once bought a branded mixer-grinder and when it needed repair, a jar had gone off, I couldn't find a place. And when I did, the cost of the jar was equivalent to that of the entire unit. The jar actually costs more than the entire unit of a second or third grade brand. The issue of service and repair was a big drawback of the first grade stuff in Dubai.

It is quality that first grade brands offer, not warranty really. To claim service on their limited warranties is a huge task in itself. They would ask you if the damage was caused due to your negligence, for instance if the article fell off your hands, fell into water etc. For instance, if you buy a camera, there's always a possibility of it dropping it accidentally, now when you give it to the service centre, since they are experts at diagnosing the damage, they would instantly be able to sense your part in causing the damage. They would then quote the price of repair as 200 or 300 dirhams. You would lose interest in the camera at that very moment. Consequently people started looking for things that will give you a warranty, the consolation is that one can use it at least for a year. Hence, the whole situation was beginning to be

oriented towards producing cameras and other such goods for a year, or as much as the components would last. Remember it was at a time when customers were disillusioned with limited warranty products that fakes began to enter the market. When customers started bargaining for good prices, it became a different story altogether; the seller, if he were to make any profit out of it, he had to sell the premium brand iron box for 95 or 100 dirhams. Customers would bargain and force the seller to sell it to them at 90. After all that the seller does to prevent such a disaster, he would still be able to sell it only at 95, meaning he only gets a profit of 5 dirhams. That someone somewhere beginning to launch fakes of the National iron box was a blessing for the retailer who was fed up of customers that haggled who they realized couldn't be reformed. The fake or the copy was almost the same as the original iron box. The only option left was to reform themselves (for the sake of profits, for the sake of their sustenance), or adapt themselves to the situation. They knew what there were doing was not right (selling fakes by passing them off as original stuff), but it was a buyer's market and they had to act accordingly. Because someone launched the fake, people started buying it. So even when the selling price was 90, and the price after haggling was 85, the retailer would be fine, he could make a profit easily of 55 or 65 dirhams on the iron box. Thus the profit margin increased for the retailer. Those who bought this fake stuff and were trapped began to believe that everything they bought in Dubai was fake. They didn't want National Panasonic any longer. A huge majority of the people began to feel that they were not ever going to get the original brand; that they are never going to get it in the Dubai market at least. This was detrimental for Dubai's image so the government began to enforce strict regulations, they began to monitor the flow of these goods at ports etc. It was in such a situation that second grade brands with a year's warranty, reasonable quality and a decent brand image began to carve a niche for themselves. I can say for sure Nikai, I have sold quite a few iron boxes myself of Nikai. Once customers started buying them, they became a bit more confident of the quality, it certainly was not the best, but at least you didn't have to be duped into buying a fake National product.

Appendix 2

Excerpts from Shafeeq's interview, December 2012

In the initial days, they would come to the shoe shop, look at the designs and styles, buy everything up, every piece that the shop stocked. They only knew Russian. They brought money, every pie they had, converted into dollars, and spend it all in Dubai. Thanks to such behavior, all the retailers in the area, extending from Naif all the way up to Murshid Bazaar made it big. It was only later that Murshid Bazaar became devoted exclusively to wholesale trade. The traders in the Iranian market retreated inside, moved inwards to settle down at Murshid Bazaar, at its farthest end, eh! it is not even Murshid Bazaar, it is much further inside, I mean the wholesale market, if you go from the gold souk, you will perhaps reach there, but no, an ordinary person, he could have lived in Dubai for years, but will never reach there. It was there that the wholesalers catering to the Russians established themselves. That is what we call the new Iranian market.

The traders in Naif Road used to go up to the new Iranian market to procure goods for the Russians in the early days. The Russians didn't know how to get there. One group would come and place an order saying we want these many shoes with us. As retailers, we would ring up wholesalers in the Iranian market, they were mostly Sindhis and Iranians, and ask for the order to be delivered at our shops. We would then deliver the cartons at the hotels where the Russians stayed. The hotels had their own storage facilities, warehouses, but because there were so many groups staying at the same time, the warehouses overflowed to parking lots and lobbies, even corridors leading up to the rooms, all of which were stacked to the roof with cartons of varying dimensions. These purchases they sent off as freight via air.

The Russians knew nothing, not even to say hello in English. We were then all young men, dynamic and energetic, most of us unmarried. These Russians were all fair and good-looking men and women. The likes of me would go up to them in their hotels, sit with them in the lobby, ask them in English about their whereabouts, why they were doing this in Dubai, we even communicated through gestures. With frequent interaction, I began to learn to speak Russian, many other Malayalis already did. I now know Russian quite well, I can even read some Russian. I did learn the language, I should say, in less than two years.

It was the Russians who connected Dubai with China, although that was an inadvertent act. They gave China an entry into Dubai's markets through innumerable products, half of them literally useless for the average individual. I am not yet talking television sets or DVD players but cheap consumables. Having been a trader myself, I can say with the greatest confidence that Chinese production received a boost and in such a minuscule span of time only because of Dubai.

In Dubai, the Arabs and others used to buy quality stuff. When the Russians came, they wanted real low cost goods. We used to, for instance, sell containers of beach

umbrellas to the Russians. Where did these come from? Obviously China. Could you have imagined that in the Dubai you lived? A container of some 2,300 pieces of beach umbrella? We used to give them a bill for 2300 pieces on order and had the order delivered to them by evening or in the morning the next day at the latest. When they started buying container loads, and this they did from different traders simultaneously, they started hiring warehouses on short-term leases. It was to these warehouses, not in hotels, remember, that we delivered the consignment. Soon, even retailers began to have their own warehouses, we had one for instance at *Al Aweer*. From these warehouses, we (retailers) would load the consignments on to containers in their presence. When their business in their home countries began to stabilize and expand, they would just come to us and tell us, see we need a thousand pieces of this particular item, or ten thousand pieces of another item, we want it in December. We would then take the order, issue them bills for the purchase, take an advance payment, mostly ten or twenty percent of the total amount and book directly with the production units and factories in China. When the goods arrived in containers from China, we would break the seal of the Chinese company, put our own dealer names or brand names and then direct the shipment to Russia or wherever they wanted it. This was nine times out of ten done in the presence of the Russian customer himself or herself, you know there were quite a few women customers as well. And all this was done at the Jebel Ali port.

I started a shop two years later in Murshid Bazaar, fully convinced of the trend and the bright side it had for my career. I had a large customer base. There were many traders like me in those days. I know of somebody called Moosa, he started offices in Poland and Russia, hmm, hear he is doing well even now. What Moosa did was only a response to a particular development, in fact. The Russians started getting wiser. They began to learn English, their children began to learn German. They now have high standards of cultural excellence. Moscow, no wonder is the most expensive city.

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