

Spectacular Urbanization amidst Variegated Geographies of Globalization: Learning from Abu Dhabi's Trajectory through the Lives of South Asian Men

ROBINA MOHAMMAD and JAMES D. SIDAWAY

Abstract

The world city aspirations and spectacular urbanization of Gulf cities such as Abu Dhabi rest on the combination of petrodollars, connections and labour. Drawing on interviews with South Asian men working there, this article reports their lives and labour as a mirror to the development of Abu Dhabi. This requires and invites an investigation of spaces of social reproduction, raising broader theoretical and comparative issues about these in the context of Gulf cities and other sites of rapid urbanization and migration. Transnational categories and connections are thereby opened up in ways that have implications for the study of other cities.

Introduction

Consent and coercion in the most urbanized region in the world

Consider the following bold statements that appeared some years ago in an article setting out a research agenda on Gulf¹ cities:

The Gulf has become *the most urbanized region in the world*. Except for Saudi Arabia, all of the countries of the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates] have more than 90% of their population living in urban areas . . . The familiar topic of polarization in world cities, characterized by widening inequality, multi-ethnic cities with marked segregation by ethnic group, and social exclusion, takes on new

Our informants were generous with their time and information — for no material reward. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Annual Conference of the Urban Geography Research Group of the RGS—IBG held at the Centre for Urban Theory, Swansea University, in November 2009, whose organizers and audience we thank for their comments. Later presentations, at the AAG meeting in Seattle and AAG political geography/sexuality and space preconference in Tacoma in April 2011, afforded further opportunities for useful feedback. We also wish to thank three IJURR reviewers for their helpful and encouraging comments on earlier drafts. In addition, David Bassens and Matt Sparke read an earlier draft and also generously offered suggestions and pointed to relevant literatures. We are grateful to Fiona Frebarche for her copy-editing and assistance tracking down demographic data. We, however, remain responsible for the interpretations and any errors here.

The maps were drawn by the Cartographic Resources Unit at the University of Plymouth, UK.

1 We eschew adopting either Arabian or Persian adjectives when referring to the Gulf region/sea that lies in Southwest Asia between what are today called the Arabian Peninsula and Iran.

forms . . . *multiple layers of distinct divisions* between public and private sector . . . national and expatriate . . . male and female (Malecki and Ewers, 2007: 474, 477, emphasis added).

It is evident that Gulf cities offer productive and challenging questions about, and tracks through, what is signified by the urban today. Such questions partly arise from their showcase architecture and fast-track development. Many glossy books can be found picturing the astounding architecture that has appeared in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Manama, Doha and the other cities on the eastern edge of Arabia. Artificial islands (Jackson and della Dora, 2009), skyscrapers (Acuto, 2010), cultural centres (Ponzini, 2011), free trade zones (Keshavarzian, 2010), stadia and shopping malls are entangled with the projection of a global hypermodern image for these cities. But, as the above quote indicates, these places also demand scrutiny as social spaces, not least as cities inhabited by millions of relatively low-waged migrants who labour in them and constitute the numerical majority of their inhabitants. In considering these features of a key Gulf city, this article will consider some comparative and open historical lines of enquiry that suggest implications for cities elsewhere. These are pursued via a case study of migrant lives in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates.

Although frequently overshadowed in the international media by neighbouring Dubai, Abu Dhabi has similarly been (along with around a dozen other cities and city-states in the Gulf) a place of fast and spectacular urbanization over the past few decades. Indeed, the losses on speculative real estate in Dubai since 2008 have further consolidated Abu Dhabi's role as the UAE's capital city and banker of last resort (Bassens *et al.*, 2010). Thus, in the words of one chronicler of Abu Dhabi:

In command of nearly 8 percent of global oil reserves . . . over \$1 trillion in sovereign wealth funds . . . with innovative new economic sectors being established according to a thoughtful master plan, Abu Dhabi . . . will soon yield enormous influence across both developing and developed worlds. Moreover, with the hosting of Formula One's championship-decider in 2009 . . . the building of an entirely carbon neutral 'green city' in the desert, with satellite branches of the Guggenheim and Louvre museums, and with campuses of New York University, La Sorbonne, and other premier academies under construction, Abu Dhabi will soon be poised to eclipse even Dubai — its ubiquitous UAE partner — as a household name (Davidson, 2009: 1).

Abu Dhabi also mirrors other cities in the region in terms of a remarkable demographic profile. Since the influx of petrodollars and migrant workers in the 1970s, Gulf cities — from Kuwait, through Bahrain, Qatar and those of the United Arab Emirates (most prominently Dubai, but also Abu Dhabi, the focus of this article) and beyond to Muscat — have developed a distinctive demographic profile with a numerically small (indigenous) citizenry at the top of the social hierarchy. Beneath them is the foreign labour hierarchy, capped by a small number of highly paid professionals but largely comprising vast numbers of low-wage migrants. Although detailed breakdown of countries of origin is hard to come by, according to official sources (UAE Ministry of Economy, 2008), over 75% of Abu Dhabi's 1.6 million inhabitants are foreign workers, but less than 1% are in the highly paid professional segment. In fact, the majority (around 52% of the overall population) of Abu Dhabi's population are men from South Asia. They are supplemented by other migrants, notably women predominantly from Southeast Asia (especially Indonesia and the Philippines) forming 23% of the overall population. Though these women are vital (for the provision of retail services and domestic labour), and though commerce and services in these cities also require relatively small numbers of elite foreign professional employees, this article focuses on the lives and work of the majority: men originating from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Elsewhere in the Gulf, these have been described by Mohammed (2003: 21) as 'outcasts in a society that depends on' their labour. But, as we will note, there is also a considerable social difference within this category. Not all are proletarians, for their lives and labour embody a range of class positions, albeit in an overall subordinate position in the socio-spatial hierarchy of the city.

Other scholars have also explored Gulf cities through a focus on migrant lives, spectacular urbanisms and labour. A series of articles and books constitute an interdisciplinary field charting the lives of different categories of migrants in the Gulf and/or wider urban trajectories there (Longva, 1997; Khalaf and Alkobaisi, 1999; Shah, 2004; Pacione, 2005; Davis, 2006; Nagy, 2006; Kanna, 2007; Walsh, 2007; 2011; Elsheshtawy, 2008; 2010; Gardner, 2008; 2010; Kibria, 2008; Vora, 2008; Piolet, 2009; Coles and Walsh, 2010; Smith, 2010; Wilson, 2010; Gardner, 2011; Rahman, 2011; Buckley, forthcoming). Our account builds on these, but also seeks to reassess the wider comparative and theoretical significance of Gulf cities, with implications for the study of other sites and cities.

Migration to the Gulf differs significantly from South Asian flows to the West with regard to forms of governance, 'regimes of repression and control and configurations of dominance over the subjects moving between nations' (Gardner, 2008: 58). Unlike the 'outsiders' in the West, foreign labour in the Gulf forms a numerical majority. Anxieties about the loss of local culture and values have been expressed through calls for greater controls on length of stay and settlement. They underpin the established order, whereby ruling families oversee a durable authoritarianism, regulating societies in which citizens are in the minority (Herb, 2009; Chalcraft, 2010).

The migratory experience has been described as being produced through both the 'grounded and flighty, settled and flowing, the sticky and the smooth' (Jackson *et al.*, 2004: 8). Because of the impermanent nature of residence and that fact that families usually remain elsewhere, migrant lives are enacted and sometimes suspended between poles. This is underlined by the UAE government's decision to refer to migrants as 'temporary' workers. Migrants to the Gulf are unable to gain citizenship or permanent residence so they are 'precariously on short-term temporary contracts that can be revoked at any time for any reason' (Ali, 2010). The salaries of the majority of South Asian guest workers are usually too low to meet the requirements for their families to be permitted to join them (Malecki and Ewers, 2007). This is evident in the public spaces of Gulf cities.

The next section of the article introduces the urban socio-spatial structure of Abu Dhabi, drawing on other work on Gulf cities. Following Elsheshtawy (2008), we subsequently take a bottom-up approach to illuminate and investigate this structure in the case of Abu Dhabi. This draws on our informants and their modes and methods of interactions. Our methodological approach and selection of informants is described in the Appendix. Following a brief mapping of our research sites, the longest section of the article then narrates the life spaces of our informants in Abu Dhabi. These raise comparative and historical agendas about the forms of urbanization and transnationalism that have developed in the Gulf.

Gulf city spaces

Latterly promoting themselves as world cities — globally networked centres for trade, culture, finance and tourism — the fast-growing cities of the Gulf vividly embody dynamic socio-spatial change. Fuelled by petrodollars since the 1970s, Gulf cities have honed their role as spaces of accumulation, consumption and display, attracting workers from across the globe. Although there are variations between them in terms of the relative dominance of petrodollars, all have pursued a development path that requires and is expressed via fast urbanization (Hvidt, 2009; Ramos, 2010). It has been argued that they now represent a distinctive model of urban modernity and socio-spatial dynamics that differs both from the classical colonial city and from other 'Arab cities' (see Silver, 2010; Elsheshtawy, 2011), and can be differentiated from other postcolonial cities in Africa, Asia or elsewhere in the global South.

Thus Sulayman Khalaf (2006) seeks to model a 'Gulf city type' based on the articulation of an oil economy and globalization. In the style of prior urban models of Western cities (those associated with twentieth-century American cities spring to mind), this is rather abstracted from lived experiences. Nonetheless, it is useful as a

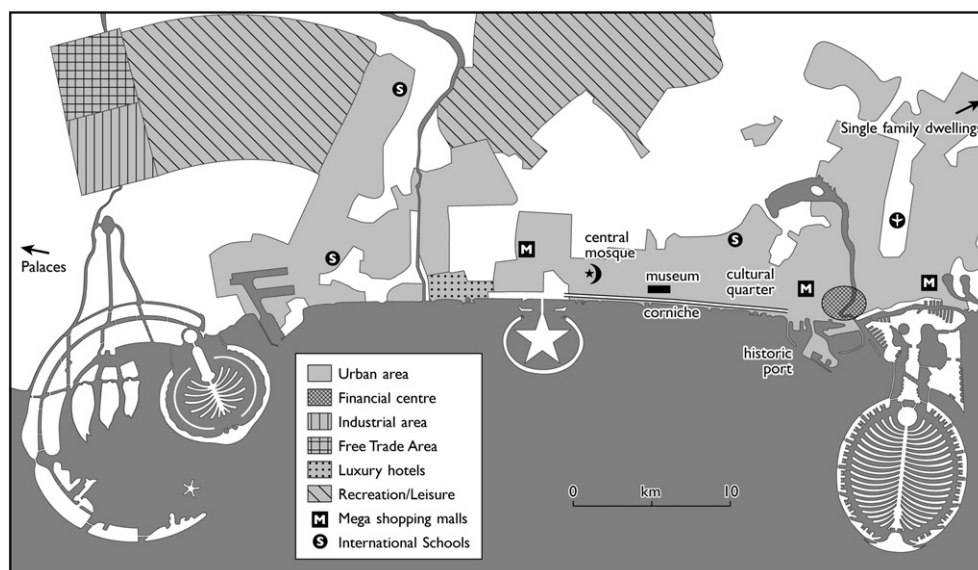


Figure 1 A model of the Gulf-type city

point of departure. His model combines coastal locations, exponential growth and the multi-ethnic migrant character. We have represented the basic morphology of this in Figure 1; variants of this urban form can be found along the Gulf coast from Kuwait to the United Arab Emirates. In all cases, it is evident that their socio-demographic structures and their sharply segmented labour markets (Willoughby, 2006) are expressed socio-spatially in their urban structure described by Malecki and Ewers (2007: 478) as a 'kaleidoscopic melange'. Central to this model are the segregated housing patterns distinguishing the residences of national citizens (where Southeast Asian domestic workers are usually employed) from the palaces and compounds of the elite, to the villas of the middle class and state housing for lower-income nationals. The latter is located in areas that were once peripheral but have subsequently been engulfed by the urban sprawl. The fragmentary nature of this sprawl has led Elsheshtawy (2008: 974) to describe Gulf cities like Dubai as a 'prime example of "splintering urbanism" ' in the mode of Los Angeles, promoting a high dependence on private transport fuelled by cheap petrol. This marks another distinction between car-owning nationals and the lower-waged migrants who are the main users of the cheap public transport system.

The residential patterns of migrants are also divided by labour market sector, class and ethnicity/nationality. There are the residential camps housing construction workers. The properties in the older areas that have been largely abandoned by the original local residents have been made into multi-occupancy dwellings for other South Asian migrants. Some of these areas are being gentrified in a state-led process as heritage areas. By contrast, foreign professionals occupy high-rise residential blocks and suburban villas.

The city is also serviced by glossy malls and upmarket hypermarkets offering air-conditioned comfort within which to consume for those with sufficient disposable incomes. The only non-professional migrants present in these spaces are those employed there. This highly segmented city is described as 'a stage of segregated multicultural lifeways and identities' (Khalaf, 2006: 259). The lower-middle and upper-working classes inhabit, live and consume in very different worlds, not only from nationals and foreign professional labour but also from each other, binding with co-ethnics within the same city (Willoughby, 2006).

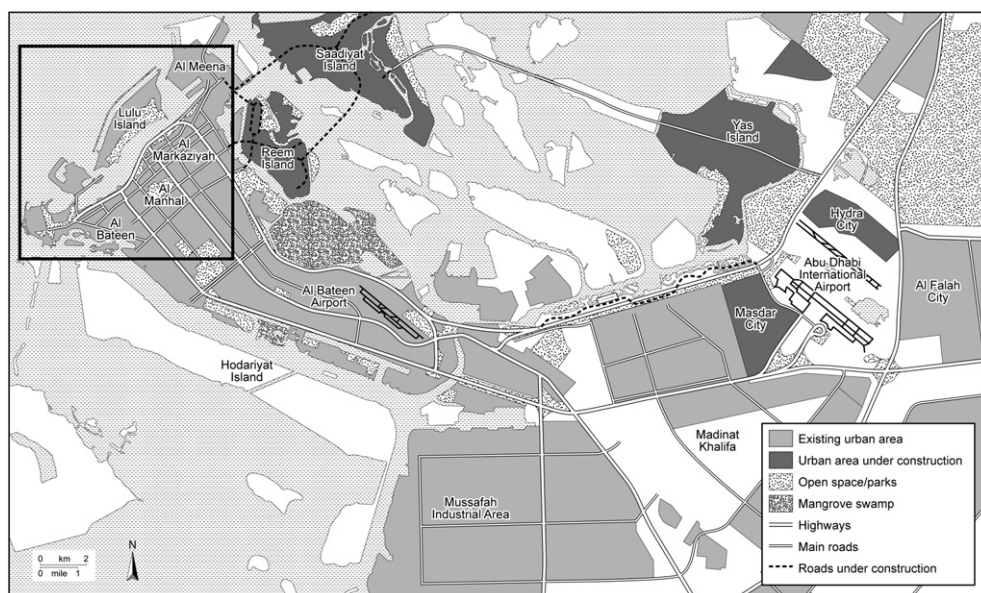


Figure 2 The Abu Dhabi study area

The lower-quality mid-rise buildings dating from the 1970s — the first petrodollar boom — are inhabited by lower-middle-class and upper-working-class migrants. These are the dwellings which constitute the predominant core of Gulf cities — and also form our focus here. Thus, in excavating life in Abu Dhabi, our concern is not with the spaces that make up the ‘front stage’ of the gulf spectacle but with the city’s mundane ‘back stage’, inhabited by those whose labour enables the spectacle and supports the lifestyles of the elite. In this shabby low-key setting, the transnational life-worlds of South Asian workers are negotiated. These configure the physical environment of the city but are configured by the political and socioeconomic framework which circumscribes their arrival and position within spatially stretched households where a (gendered) division of labour is conducted across the Arabian Sea. In turn these accounts inform and enable broader comparative reflections.

The research site within Abu Dhabi's urban landscape

The peninsula of Abu Dhabi is T-shaped. The oldest area, the downtown, runs along the T-bar with the port on the east side and the impressive Hotel Emirates Palace on the west (see Figures 2 and 3). Running east to west, the newly created Corniche Street traces the coastline with its artificial beaches and parks. The three main arteries running east to west that form the downtown area are Khalifa bin Zayed Street, Hamden Bin Mohamed Street (popularly known as Elektra Street) and Zayed the First Street. The unofficial boundary of the downtown area is Al Falah Street. Beyond this point, the high-rise blocks disappear and are replaced by low-density, low-rise, owner-occupied housing for local Emiratis. Both the arterial roads, and the small localities like Al Manhal that they frame, are dotted with small businesses. Some stores have been subdivided, so are only big enough to hold a salesperson and a single customer. Each of these residential localities is made up of medium-rise blocks, most of which date from the 1970s boom. All have a mosque at their core.

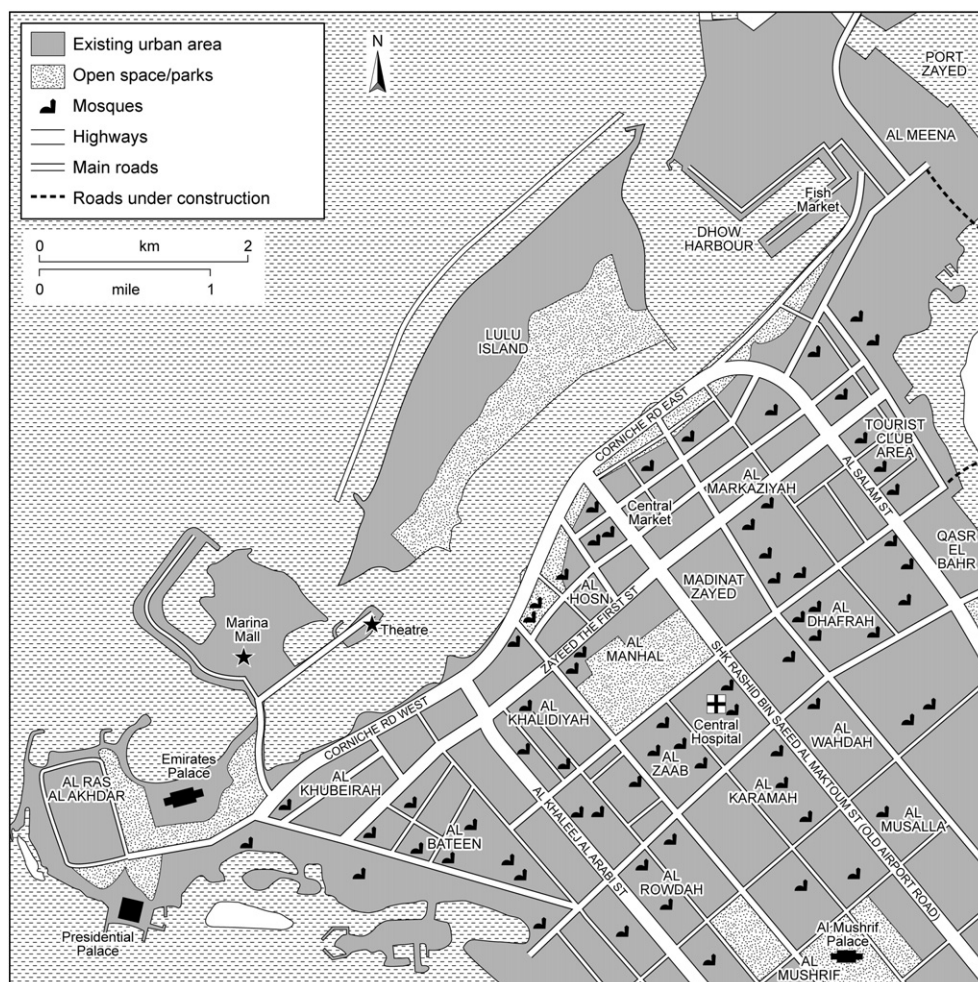


Figure 3 The Abu Dhabi study area (detail)

The streets are cluttered with cars, since few of the blocks have their own parking spaces. Each street is lined with numerous laundries and grocery stores, punctuated by the odd mobile phone shop, cyber café or shoe shop. Some streets may have a concentration of one type of product or services. In Al Manhal, for example, tucked away in a small street two blocks back from Zayed the First Street are a row of shops selling painting and decorating products. Opposite the mosque are several Punjabi carpentry stores, similar to those a few blocks away in Khalidiya. There is a concentration of restaurants and bakeries catering for Pakistanis and Indians, their frontages displaying menus in Malayalam, Urdu, Tamil, Arabic or English (see Figure 4). Seldom are any women to be seen eating here. Most of these spaces away from the malls and the main arterial roads are clearly not places where the presence of women is regarded as normal or expected. Judging from the businesses located on these streets (there are few retail outlets or services that would appear to cater for women's specific interests or needs), it seems that few women would have any reason to be here.

Around the corner is a concentration of garage-servicing businesses, all of which appear to operate out of tiny single-room premises invariably crammed with tools and products. None seems to have any garage facilities, so the cars are serviced on the streets,



Figure 4 Images of Abu Dhabi street scenes in the study area (photos by authors)

among the hordes of parked vehicles. Beyond, along the Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed al Makhtoum arterial road, the garage services disappear. The small shops here are all run by South Asians for the local South Asian market (fabrics, tailoring services and video and DVD rentals). The windows give an indication of the market for entertainment products in this city. They are covered with posters of Hollywood, Bollywood and other Indian regional cinemas.

Their commitment to maximizing opportunities for making money means that few non-professional workers can afford to squander precious time on watching movies. In the next sections, we explore workers' modes of arrival in the city which circumscribes their experiences of it. We also examine their negotiations of city spaces in their daily routines. Finally, we consider how informants' patterns of work, play, investment and consumption may also relate to the relative opportunities in their home regions.

***Dubai Chalo*² modes of arrival and means of accommodation**

In keeping with the experiences of other migrant communities across the globe, non-professional men usually find their way to Abu Dhabi through someone they know either directly or indirectly who acts as a sponsor to help them in arranging the purchase of a work and residence visa, something that is referred to as 'serial migration' (Banerjee, 1983). Less frequently, opportunities are found through formal means such as the press or recruitment agencies (Malecki and Ewers, 2007; Shah, 2008). The percentage of those using formal and informal means varies depending on the country of origin (Shah, 2008), with more Pakistanis using informal networks and Sri Lankans using recruitment agencies (perhaps aligning with rural–urban differences in the origins of migrants from these two countries). In the UAE (and other Gulf states), the labour market and foreign businesses are regulated through the *kafeel* (guarantor) system which maintains a tightly restricted labour market in which employees are in the highly vulnerable position of being tied to their employer, who frequently retains their passports. Residence visas are also tied to the sponsor (Ali, 2010). Our informants suggest that it is possible to transfer to another employer but this is a cumbersome process (this is also the case in Bahrain, as Gardner, 2008 notes). Similarly, for most of our self-employed informants the most accessible form of business set-up in terms of the required outlay is a joint venture undertaken with a local sponsor, who must by law retain the controlling share while remaining a sleeping partner. An annual fee is paid to the local sponsor for this service.³

Of our informants, only one — Rehan, a Kashmiri graduate who has been in Abu Dhabi for a year — was recruited through an advert in the situations vacant column of the

2 *Off to Dubai* — this is the title of a Pakistani movie from the 1970s when migration to the Gulf began to gather pace. It is not only a reference to migration to Dubai but is also used as a generic term for the Gulf region.

3 There are a number of ways that foreigners can start up a small business in Abu Dhabi. A foreigner can start a business in a free economic zone (which is spatially restricted but offers autonomy); or by establishing a limited liability company (the licence for this is very costly although it does offer complete autonomy); or through a local sponsor (by far the commonest scenario). There are two forms of sponsorship involvement: the first is superficial, where the foreigner negotiates an annual fee to be payable to a local sponsor in return for which he agrees to countersign any paperwork and authorize all the activities of the business — if labour is being imported then the local sponsor will be required to personally go to the labour department; the second form of sponsor involvement is by investment in the company and being a shareholder — the local sponsor must always retain the controlling share irrespective of contribution to the business. Licences obtained through sponsorship are cheaper even after paying the local sponsor, but autonomy is compromised. The wider sociology and politics of these forms of brokership in Abu Dhabi and the wider United Arab Emirates are described in the account by Hertog (2010) and returned to in the conclusions here. There have recently been limited moves in the UAE to ease some of the restrictive regulations of the labour market (El Feki, 2010), but the fundamental structures remain unchanged.

newspaper in his country of origin. In this instance, the employer was purchasing labour for his business, whereas in the case of all our other informants, they were buying the opportunity to make money in Abu Dhabi. This then shapes Rehan's experience of the city. Rehan's employer paid the AED 10,000 fee for his work visa, and the cost of his flight to Dubai for work experience before his onward travel to Abu Dhabi. Additionally Rehan's job comes with accommodation. This is particularly significant given that accommodation costs have escalated in recent years, leading to multi-occupancy of rooms. According to Mukhtar, a 41-year-old taxi driver from a small village called Channarma in Pakistan's Swat Valley who has been working in Abu Dhabi for 12 years, rents have risen sevenfold during this period: 'When I first arrived here the rent was AED 600 for a room, then it went to 1,200, then to 2,500 and now it is at least 4,000 a month'. A Kerala professional we spoke to informally (who stressed being a secular Hindu in this Muslim world) was recruited through formal means to manage a company supplying project management and specialist courses for technical skills to multinationals. He notes that his job:

unfortunately does not come with accommodation. This is very tough [because] landlords here require a whole year's deposit up front. That and the rent on a three-bedroom apartment . . . and it is not even your own.

Such high rents target the upper end of the market (professionals whose accommodation is a perk of their job), meaning that those at the bottom end of the labour market are squeezed. Thus, those on lower incomes responsible for their own accommodation (and preoccupied with minimizing costs in order to maximize earnings and remittances) respond by splitting the costs with other workers, renting a bed-space in a room shared with one or more workers (this was the case for all but one of our informants). The minimum number in a room was 6. It is not uncommon (although illegal) to find more than a dozen men sharing a two-bedroom apartment. Mr Iqbal (who is in his sixties), a Bangladeshi from Chittagong, works in a plumbers' merchants and shares a room that costs AED 3,000 per month with 10 others, thus paying only AED 300 per month. Even Rehan (whose accommodation is provided by his employer) must share a two-room, two-bath apartment with 8 of his co-workers. It is still very crowded, but this discomfort is eased somewhat by the facility of a second bathroom. Only one bachelor, 26-year-old Azhar from Lahore in Pakistan (who alone amongst our informants was actually born and raised in Abu Dhabi, living very well here until his father's former business collapsed), has made a decision not to share a room. There are also those informants who share a room (more conventionally) with wives or fiancés who are also working in Abu Dhabi, and then also those who share with other male kin and thus live as a quasi-family rather than as bed-spacers. Hence, the lives of South Asian men in Abu Dhabi (whether in employment, working in their extended family business or running their own small business) often revolve around the spaces of work, bed-spaces and the city spaces connecting these two. Those working in shops that close at 10pm may, after work, choose to hang out close to their workspace with their compatriots and/or grab food at the numerous small cheap diners run by South Asians for South Asian workers.

Many do not have access to a kitchen facility. This may either be the result of a clause in the rental contract which only permits married couples use of the kitchen facilities (as in Azhar's case), or a conscious decision not to pay the additional costs for kitchen facilities in order to keep costs down. Some informants also tell us that they lack cooking skills and so see little point in paying for a kitchen. Others, like Dilshad (a taxi driver in his forties who has been in the city for 11 years), eat out because their roommates all work different shifts and there is no point in cooking for one. Then there are those who initially sought to save money by taking accommodation without access to kitchen facilities and eating out on the assumption it would be cheaper, before realizing that quality food comes at a price and that cheap mediocre-quality food is unhealthy. Salim, a Pakistani carpenter from Toba Tek Singh in Punjab who runs a small business with his brother and nephew, points out how:

here it is not like our country where restaurant food is expensive compared with cooking it at home. As you might have seen here eating out is cheaper. If we have time then we cook our own otherwise we eat out . . . but it is harmful. This food is not good quality. It is only cheap because they do not use the freshest ingredients.

Those like Salim who have purchased access to a kitchen can negotiate a sharing of the responsibilities for shopping and cooking with their roommates. Mukhtar explains how he lives with:

6 or 7 men who are fully earning and one who is unemployed, like my brother's son will be when he arrives shortly. For sure he will be out of work on arrival. I will also tell him that I can pick everything up from the shop and those that can't pay for their own food and rent will cook the curry [for everyone's meal].

It is these connections that are drawn on by migrant workers to establish themselves and their businesses. Without such connections, Abu Dhabi can be a bewildering environment. This is not only a foreign environment in terms of cultural norms, but also as an encounter with urban modernity and numerous strictly enforced laws and regulations that must be negotiated in order to obtain the required permits and licences before any money can be earned.

Elsheshtawy (2008) notes with respect to Dubai how bed-spaces are advertised clearly stating the nationality being sought, so that Tamils do not find themselves sharing with Bengalis and so on. Thus, whether their arrival in the city is via close kin, friends or more distant contacts, migrant workers seek out and cling (both physically and emotionally) to those who are familiar at whatever scale may be available (i.e. whether these are people from their village, from a nearby town, district or country). In Mukhtar's terms 'all acquaintances and relatives live together'; these are the people who will help with accommodation and the information necessary to get established and start earning.

The diversity of the city can be seen as a positive; middle-class Rehan was attracted to Abu Dhabi in pursuit of money and:

to go and see what types of persons are there. In UAE you can find what you [might] call 'every person', of each colour, from every religion, from every country.

It is this diversity which in 60-year-old taxi-driver Khan's eyes makes this a great environment for learning: 'the best school'. It was here amongst his compatriots, not back home in Pakistan, that Pashto-speaking Khan learned to speak Urdu. But for many of those here to make money, diversity is something to be resisted. This is typified by Mr Iqbal, whose shop is very close to a tandoor bakery run by Pathans whose families originated from Ghazni in Afghanistan but are themselves from Quetta in Pakistan. When we suggested to Mr Iqbal that this proximity must mean that he enjoys freshly baked breads, he balks at our suggestion, responding that 'Pathans have problems, different culture and different food'.

Spaces/times of work

The organization of paid work for non-professionals in Abu Dhabi (i.e. the working week and year) reflects the nature of Abu Dhabi as primarily a place of work for so many. Those who are employed will get one day off a week (usually this is Friday, the Muslim 'sabbath'). Those who manage their own or work in a family business can be on duty up to 12 hours a day from the day they arrive in the city to the day they leave. Both employed and self-employed migrants (with a few exceptions) informed us that every 12 or 18 months they take between 1 and 6 months unpaid leave to return home in order to reconnect and maintain relationships with spouse and/or family. For those in

employment this was at the end of their contract period, when they are legally required to leave the UAE and are prohibited from taking on a new contract for 6 months (although this clause is being changed). Those who are self-employed tend to follow a similar pattern, either leaving their business in the care of a relative or closing it for a visit home. Exceptionally amongst our informants, Azhar shares responsibility for a small business with his father, so they alternate every 6 months between Lahore and Abu Dhabi. Another informant, 19-year-old Akram, has taken over his father's business. His father retired in 2008 after 25 years of working 11–18 month stints in Abu Dhabi. Akram stressed that he does not need to hurry back to Pakistan. He aims to spend most of the next 5 years in the city before returning home to his village in Pakistan to marry, after which he expects to settle into the more usual pattern of 12–18 months in Abu Dhabi and 1–3 months away.

For the majority of migrants, the months at home are a time of consumption and leisure. In Abu Dhabi, meanwhile, most work intensively. Akram, for example, will work every single day from 10am to 2pm and from 4pm to 10pm, taking an extra half an hour break once a week to attend Friday prayers. Many businesses in which several family members work together (such as carpentry shops or the precious stone merchants in Khalidiya) as well as those employing additional labour (such as tandoor bakers and printing supply shops), together with those stores located in malls which tend to remain open throughout mall hours, do not close for lunch at all. Grocery shops (which are numerous and as such have fierce competition) open for the longest hours, often from 7am to 1am, often with only a couple of workers sharing the shift. Akram's daily routine is relatively leisurely when compared to that of other young men, particularly those who are working in the grocery stores of extended kin or driving taxis. At 9:30am, Akram leaves his bed-space in a room he shares with six men (all much older than him, acquaintances of his father from the Dera Ismail Khan region). On his way to his shop he will pick up some tea to drink on the job. Most of his day is spent in his tiny shop that measures 1.5 metres by 2.5 metres. Fully stocked, it can barely hold a single customer. Working alone, Akram breaks for lunch at a nearby diner, after which he walks back to his bed-space. Unused to air-conditioning, Akram finds it difficult to sleep at night in this shared environment (which is maintained according to collective rather than individual desires and comforts). He returns to his bed-space in the afternoon when his roommates are out, so that he can have this space to himself and switch off the air-conditioning whilst he catches up on sleep.

In her work on professional British expatriates in Dubai, Walsh (2006) notes how, for many of these, relocating to Dubai enables lifestyles of individualism, high incomes and decadence. This contrasts with the South Asian migrants, who narrated to us their burden of familial responsibilities that translates into a singular focus on moneymaking and remittances. When asked about leisure activities the majority of informants claim that there is no time for leisure because they are either running their own businesses, being super-exploited by extended family for their labour, or on a basic salary plus commission so they must work hard to maximize earnings. Thus, in Mukhtar's terms:

Because there is a lot of work I leave for work after [*Fajr*] prayer [time for the dawn prayer is 4am in June]. During the day, after reading the [*Zohar*] prayer [at noon] I eat lunch and then I start work again. Now I am about to go for [*Asar*] prayer [it is 5pm]. After prayer I will go out again. I will finish at 11pm or midnight when I will go and eat the evening meal.

Even those who are employed and work set hours and those who manage businesses that close at 10pm have to think about food and rest before the grind of another day; thus leisure must be deferred until Friday (the 'sabbath'), *Eid* (the Muslim festival occurring twice a year) or return visits home.

When they did talk about leisure time in Abu Dhabi, our informants usually mentioned spending time accessing the internet using a personal or shared computer and watching television. In a small shared space, this has to be in consultation with others. There tends

to be an age hierarchy. Informants like Akram (who shares with acquaintances of his father) have little or no voice to express their preferences regarding the environment around the bed-space. He tells us that one of his roommates is a religious type who disapproves of television, so he seeks to avoid being around him by spending minimal time in the room. Thus, the discomfort of living in such close proximity with relative strangers ensures a greater amount of time is spent in work or in city spaces. Although living close to the Corniche, Akram only rarely goes for a stroll along the seafront. More often he joins late-evening gatherings of other South Asian men on to the streets of the city near to residences or work places.

Thus, for the majority of our informants, the lack of access to a private, enclosed, secluded and domestic home space in the city structures their lives. Their lives are lived publicly, at work and (for those who are Muslims) in mosques that are never far away (there are numerous mosques serving every locality). Whatever their family status in countries of origin, in Abu Dhabi they lead lives the lives of an enforced, dislocated bachelorhood, as part of an all-male community of compatriots connecting in public sites of work, worship and leisure.

Public spaces of the city become temporarily transformed into little Pakistan/India/Bangladesh/Sri Lanka either after work, on Fridays or public holidays (for those who are employed), with impromptu all-male gatherings in squares, pavements and green spaces in various parts of the city: in the poorer parts of Khalidiya (on the south side of Zayed the First Street, as well as the north side where there are newer office blocks and upmarket coffee shops like Starbucks) and particularly around Madinat Zayed and the mosque by the gold souk. As Elsheshtawy (2008) has demonstrated in the case of Dubai, such sites are fleetingly transformed into places of connection and bonding with compatriots. For the poorest of labourers who have limited access to communications technologies, these sites are important in connecting with kin in the homeland through compatriots who are leaving or just returning.

Asim has been in Abu Dhabi for 11 months. This young man tells us how he has left behind the home his father built for the family, with satellite television, the latest movies and a life of leisure hanging out with friends in the teahouses of Dera Ismail Khan. He claims that he has no friends in this city; as for entertainment, 'I have not even seen the face of a TV'. Yet he is very proud to be here, assuming his father's role of supporting the family economically. For him it is a rite of passage. Enduring the hardship of life in Abu Dhabi will prove that he has passed from boyhood into adulthood and make him a worthy match in marriage.

Others, like 26-year-old Sultan from Kerala, feel that being in Abu Dhabi will generate better opportunities in the long term, but are less enthusiastic about what they have experienced since arrival. Sultan decided not to pursue a university course in India, coming instead to this city to work in his retired uncle's grocery store. He finds that his day in Abu Dhabi begins at 7am and does not end until nearly midnight. He has no lunch breaks (grabbing some food on the job) and is only permitted 30 minutes for Friday prayers, for a monthly salary of AED 1,200 (US \$300). His only leisure is watching a bit of television after his evening meal. Although he likes Malayalam movies, he never rents DVDs as he has no time to watch them. His accommodation is provided by his uncle. This is a room that he shares with four other employees also working for his uncle. He remarks that the lack of space here, especially when compared to the spaciousness of his home in rural Kerala, is particularly tough to adapt to.

Migrant subjective experiences are framed by their expectations. If Sultan is less than enthusiastic about his work life, then Farhan (aged 27) and Azhar are both very sombre. On the surface it seems that they both have very easy lives compared to many others working here, yet their expectations are quite different. Both are from two of the biggest cities of the Indian subcontinent. Farhan is from New Delhi, while Azhar's family is from Lahore. Both are only sons, who according to South Asian gendered norms must support their fathers in shouldering the economic responsibilities of the family. Azhar remarks how in Pakistan, being an only son is regarded as a privileged position, but living in Abu

Dhabi is physically and emotionally tough. Farhan (who comes from a family of precious stone merchants) has followed his father in to the *khandani pesha* (the family business). He lives and works here with his father and uncle, with one day off every week (when he enjoys going to the cinema and watching DVDs). He tells us, however, that he is profoundly unhappy: 'It is not so easy here. My heart is not here and the rent is also constantly increasing'. He is homesick and at the same time the amount of money made here is being eroded by the high cost of living which makes the hardship more difficult to endure. For him, time spent in this city, away from his wife (he got married last year), is time when his life goes on hold. He feels stuck. It is not possible to move forwards with life and relationships in this long-term temporary form of suspended existence. His nightmare, however, is ending; their business is not doing well, so a decision has been made to sell up and return to India.

Unlike Farhan who misses home, Azhar does not miss Lahore, but his former life in Abu Dhabi, where (uniquely amongst our informants) he grew up. His father arrived in this city at the age of 17, holding down several jobs in the early years and eventually establishing a very successful retail electrical goods business with his nine brothers. Unusually amongst our informants, his whole family were resident in the city when Azhar was growing up, and he and his siblings had a privileged international education. All this ended when the business ran into difficulties a decade ago. As this was a very emotional issue for Azhar, we did not probe too deeply into the precise details. We understood that it was partly related to management issues that were exacerbated by differences between the brothers.

The family lost everything and had to return to Lahore, which had become insecure on account of the conflict between the Taliban and the Pakistani state. Azhar was in his late teens at that time. He was searching for a direction for himself, only to find his family destabilized and directionless.

Azhar began a degree course in computing at Manhattan College in New York, but failed to complete it and then stayed for a while with relatives in London to explore his options. He argues that, despite growing up in Abu Dhabi, he now experiences discrimination. Azhar feels that local employers favour Indians, while other Pakistanis (unlike Indians, he claims) only favour kin and not their fellow nationals. Although he grew up in Abu Dhabi, he has no sense of being an insider or belonging there, but he also feels little connection with other migrants. After a fruitless search for direction in the West, Azhar reluctantly rejoined his father in Abu Dhabi in a new business venture started from scratch with a little cash and much goodwill from acquaintances. Their business is as yet unable to support a family here in Abu Dhabi so the rest of the family, like the families of the vast majority of non-professionals, must remain in Lahore. Taking up this opportunity means the family is fragmented. Azhar and his father alternate their time in the city, so they each do a 6-month stint here and 6 months in Lahore. This means that they see very little of each other. This existence weighs heavily on Azhar. He is conscious that his friends from school have returned to their homelands and moved on with their lives. They are in professional jobs, married and having children while he feels trapped in Abu Dhabi, condemned to bachelorhood by this long-term temporary situation and his duties as an only son. Like Farhan, Azhar feels that his personal life has been put on hold because of his work. Even his sisters, now in Lahore, have had the freedom of completing postgraduate degrees and engaging in paid work prior to marriage. We listen quietly as he narrates his story. He reflects on why he is talking about all this — 'where is this coming from?' — as he is normally so controlled. His state of mind is expressed in the statement '*jism chall raha hain magar rooh ne sath chodh diya hai*' (the body is still going but the soul has departed). Every so often he has to stop as his eyes begin to well up with tears which must not be allowed to fall and undermine his masculinity.

Azhar's intensive routine is now the same as that of most other South Asian non-professional workers. He works from 8:30am to 11pm, taking an hour for lunch. Like other small businesses, he only closes on Friday mornings for prayer. Thus, his whole

day is spent behind the counter of their shop. As with the majority of our informants, he stops to eat at one of the many nearby diners catering for men like him before returning to his room to sleep. Unlike other workers we spoke to, his restricted daily routine has less to do with making money than with a general alienation and disinterest in life, promoted by this existence which he was not raised to expect. In opening the new business, the main concern was that they opened in the right location. Location is key for the success of any business in Abu Dhabi, where areas are associated with particular goods and services: 'This place [on Elektra Street] was like heaven for us, in terms of location. This is heaven'. Like most non-professional workers in the core of the downtown, Azhar must live further out where accommodation is more affordable. Thus, he relies on the subsidized public bus service to get from his room in Khalidiya on the west side to the shop on the east side (otherwise a 40-minute walk away).

Mobility and movement in Abu Dhabi

A cheap and efficient network of buses operates in the city. A single journey anywhere in the city costs a mere one dirham (around 30 US cents). City buses tend to be packed with South Asian males and the occasional white male. The seats at the front are reserved for women, mostly used by Indonesian, Filipina, Indian, white and very occasionally Emirati women and children (usually with a Southeast Asian maid). We did not see a single Emirati adult male on the buses that we travelled on during our time in Abu Dhabi. It is also notable that notices for bed-spaces found across the downtown area are most often pasted to bus stops and lamp posts. The high percentage of foreign workers utilizing the system makes these prime spots for advertising bed-spaces.

The majority of our informants prefer, where possible, to live within walking distance of work. Those who are forced by lack of resources to live further out can, according to our respondents, spend anything up to an hour a day commuting into work in the heavy traffic. Few own (or even have access to) a vehicle, thus avoiding the problem of inadequate parking facilities — which leave the residential areas jam-packed with parked vehicles.

Aside from those who drive taxis, only two informants — Suraj who graduated from university in New Delhi (and manages his own print and stationery supplies business which he started up 6 years ago) and Saif who is a chauffeur for a multinational hotel chain — own a car. In stark contrast to the majority of non-professional South Asians, Saif and Suraj do not experience Abu Dhabi solely as a place of work, with family, leisure and consumption predominantly elsewhere. Stylish middle-class Saif (who has worked as a fashion model in his hometown of Dhaka) refuses to hang out in the city's Bangladeshi gathering spots, preferring instead Marina or Abu Dhabi mall. Some weekends he will visit friends or head to nearby Dubai. While Pakistani Azhar bemoans his lack of personal life in Abu Dhabi, having set his sights on unapproachable local women, Saif met his Indonesian fiancée in this city and has just moved out of a shared room in preparation for his imminent nuptials. The couple will live and work together in Abu Dhabi. Saif's family are open-minded enough to permit their sons to marry outside of their ethnic group (indeed one of his brothers, who recently moved to London, met and married his Filipina wife in Abu Dhabi). Thus, in contrast to Farhan and Azhar, Saif does not feel trapped here. He has continued to move through life as he would have done in his home town. He is currently planning his future and hopes to follow his brother's example by finding work in London. Suraj is the only South Asian worker amongst our informants who claimed to be 'settled' in Abu Dhabi. Sixteen years ago Suraj was able to secure a job working as a public relations officer for the royal family, travelling around the world with his employers. His salary was AED 7,000, in addition to which he enjoyed rent-free family housing, a car and free fuel. Six years ago his employers helped him set up his own photocopying and printing business, enabling

a lifestyle way beyond that of the itinerant majority from South Asia. He has his family with him here in Abu Dhabi. His wife is a special-needs assistant in a local school and their only daughter (who was educated at an international school) is currently completing an MBA. Unlike many of his lower-income compatriots, Suraj lives and works here. Yet, in common with so many others, he remits money (investing in a home in Kerala, currently managed by his brother). In all these cases, labour in Abu Dhabi and the resultant remittances prop up homeland economies, supporting consumption patterns in South Asia that would be not be otherwise possible. Such mixtures of coercion, consent, hegemony, opportunity and limits are echoed in the other accounts already cited in this article, as well as in those from elsewhere in the Middle East (Chalcraft, 2009). The size, influence and impacts of Gulf cities — and the ways that they articulate and connect with much wider urban and non-urban geographies — are giving them a heightened influence in the early twenty-first century. The broader comparative and theoretical issues that this raises form the main focus of our conclusions.

Conclusions: Abu Dhabi's variegated geographies of globalization

In this article we have drawn on discussions with informants in order to illustrate South Asian life, space and labour in Abu Dhabi. More work is needed to explore how the kinds of mundane micro-geographies charted here relate to the wider dynamics of Gulf cities, and with macro-geographies of capital and community connections. In his account of Gulf cities as distinct modes of the urban, Khalaf (2006) notes that, whilst they may appear more diverse than Cairo, Bombay, New York or Tokyo, Gulf cities evidence a socio-spatial-ethnic splintering on a scale that exceeds such places. The presence of very poorly paid construction workers, housed in compounds kept well away from the sites of luxury and consumption that they are building, has become something of a theme in the international media coverage of these cities. Yet, as this article documents — and as is evident in the other studies that we have cited — the middle-ranking strata of South Asian migrants evidence a range of socio-spatial strategies that profoundly shape central areas of Gulf cities like Abu Dhabi. They may remain relatively subordinate in the overall social structure, but their roles and numbers shape the social life of the city. This goes beyond the apartheid-like lives of the construction workers housed in compounds on the margins of the city, to a range of inner-city spaces such as those we have charted here. The comparative and historical resonances of the lives and spaces that our article represents invite further reflection.

In the first place, it is evident that echoes of the Gulf's petrodollar-fuelled urbanization exist elsewhere: from Caracas in the 1970s to Port Harcourt in the 1980s, Malabo in the 2000s, or the gold rush 'frontier towns' of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century in California or the Witwatersrand. Nonetheless, the combination of migration, oil, control and showcase that is found in places like Abu Dhabi is distinctive. In other words it resembles neighbouring Gulf cities more than anywhere else, and a credible claim can be made that these form a genre of urban modernity.

Secondly, the allure and impact of Gulf cities extend in all directions, not least into the South Asian recruiting grounds of the men whose lives and moves inform our article. We cannot do them full justice here, although some of the contradictions and struggles do come through, via their words and our interactions with the spaces where these were recorded. They bear witness to what an earlier strain of urban theory described as 'the extended reproduction of labour power' (Cohen, 1987) and elaborated by many others since (e.g. McKay, 2007; Yeoh, 2009; Martin, 2010), whereby the emotional, social and economic costs of bearing, rearing, educating and nurturing labour are borne by social realms removed from the immediate space of work. Latterly the language of diaspora (Cohen, 2008) and transnational urbanism (Smith, 2001) has featured some of the same trends. But the case of Gulf cities (and the avatars of modernity that they have come to represent) also provokes other thoughts.

Gulf cities are now amongst those spaces — alongside the megacities of Africa and the Americas and especially the cities of East Asia — that increasingly define the experience and meaning of urban modernity. For much of the twentieth century, this was a narrative centred on Western cities, from London, Berlin or Paris to Chicago and Los Angeles. Notwithstanding recent setbacks, occasioned by defaults and speculative excess (Bloch, 2010), the rulers of Dubai, for example, present the Emirates as the centre of a world increasingly weighted towards Asia. Such 'boosterism' aside, these shifts accompany calls in urban studies, geography and history to decentre the traditional Western (and megacity) focus that posited the rest of the world as peripheral to (or an accessory of) Western-led capitalist urban development (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009; Bunnell and Maringanti, 2010). In this respect, however, it is worth recalling that transnational connections and presences in Gulf cities such as Abu Dhabi are not new. It is not their spatial extent, but their numerical scale, that is more novel.

Histories of the Gulf point to the long-established presence of complex mercantile and geopolitical links connecting it with India, Persia and beyond, into which the Portuguese and later the Dutch, Ottoman and British empires were drawn (Onley, 2004; 2007a; 2007b; 2009; Onley and Khalaf, 2006; Potter, 2009; Tambe and Fisher-Tiné, 2009). Indeed, we might reasonably extend Ritu Birla's (2009: 10) landmark study of the historical roots of India's market society into the Gulf, in which she notes how:

ties of kinship and idioms of caste fuelled the colonial economy via vast networks of credit, wholesale and retail trade, and the financing of commodity production. In this way, South Asian history has been at the vanguard of alternative histories of capitalism that demand attention to embedded forms of exchange and exploitation within modernizing economies and social texts.

This requires moving beyond commodity and merchant networks into variegated subaltern historical geographies of globalization that do not take the West as the only (or indeed principal) point of reference (Chakrabarty, 2007; Markovits, 2007). Recalling moreover that the Gulf was long administered from India, and was for even longer economically centred on the Indian Ocean, the links that our informants embody and negotiate track across long histories and complex geographies. Whilst they bear more historical and comparative work, the snapshots of urban transnational lives in this article exemplify emerging and increasingly influential 'global cities' from the ground up/below (Varsanyi, 2000; Benton-Short *et al.*, 2005), and the value of studying global cities through cutting across specialisms that usually classify particular localities as South Asian or Middle Eastern (van Schendel, 2002; McFarlane, 2010). Whilst the issue cropped up amongst our selected interviewees in Abu Dhabi, the proportion of migrants to Gulf cities who follow well-established transnational tracks is unclear. However, our article has indicated the value of deeper attention to such issues. Indeed, the article with which we began here argued that: 'In the Gulf, the flow of labour and its manifestation in local labour markets serve as the key global city process, unlike elsewhere where transnational corporations (TNCs) are more central' (Malecki and Ewers, 2007: 468). A key article and subsequent book on migrant spaces in Dubai stressed their transience (Elsheshtawy, 2008; 2010).

Whilst more needs to be done to specify such interactions, our article points to the value of examining how transience interacts with historically determined urban spaces, sites and processes. A wider historical and geographical canvas also opens when such interactions are charted. Some years ago, Anthony King (1990; 1991) called for more attention to be paid to the colonial origins and antecedents of late-twentieth-century world cities. Since then, calls for comparative and bottom-up urban research have proliferated. Blending such postcolonial and historical lenses broadens the agendas. For example, historians of the Gulf such as Onley (2007a: 37) document ways that '[b]efore oil, the Gulf shajdoms looked towards Persia and the Indian Ocean'. Thus, Hvidt (2009: 401) points out how:

the current development effort in Dubai must be viewed as a continuation of events that took place in the early twentieth century, when the Al Maktoum ruler provided significant incentives to the Persia-based merchant class to persuade them to relocate to Dubai.

Drawing on a historical study further south in the Arabian Peninsula, Willis (2009: 35) provocatively argues that 'it is perhaps time to liberate Arabia's . . . history from the area studies paradigm and the postwar concept of the Middle East', advocating instead the spatial domain of the Indian Ocean:

not merely a body of water but an overlapping network of institutions, governing practices, discourses, and ideologies . . . [that require historians of Arabia to] look beyond the peninsula that carries its name . . . [to] interrogate more closely not only the region's place in the political and economic structures of Britain's Indian empire, but also Arabia's inevitable entanglement in the language of cultural difference . . . that was integral to the maintenance of cultural empire and whose effects still haunt the postcolonial present.

The lives, connections and aspirations of our informants similarly require us to look afresh at and beyond the city-state they inhabit. Nor can they end with the South Asian spaces that are the places of origin of our informants. Other migrant communities in the Gulf, such as women from Southeast Asia (and more recently from Ethiopia), bear their own sets of connections, raising other conceptual agendas and requiring other maps (e.g. Silvey, 2004; Stanley, 2005; Fernandez, 2010). In turn each articulate wider networks, which require careful attention to movement, class and cosmopolitanism (Werbner, 1999). Other vital links — notably between the Gulf and contemporary Iran or Iraq — are disguised in contemporary economic statistics from the Gulf states.⁴

Gulf cities are now more prominent than at any moment in modern times as nodes on the global map of urban flows and connections. Hence, further examination of the circulation of contemporary Gulf cities as urban prototypes for elsewhere (Barthel, 2010), along with more sustained scrutiny of their functions in top-down accounts of global networks of finance, architectural and producer services (such as Wall, 2010), will be rewarding. Notwithstanding recent scholarship paving the way, the challenge of blending that with vantage points embodying capital and labour circulation and attendant modes of street-level socio-spatial interaction remains substantially unmet. In an important project on intermediaries, migrants and the sociology of 'Gulf rentier systems', Steffen Hertog (2010: 315) calls this 'finer-grained conceptual work'. Such work holds considerable promise, for much may be gained in opening up the temporal and geographical horizons and resolutions of global city research. This could require a move beyond the vogue for comparative studies of urbanism towards what, in a related context, Mongha (2007: 411) terms 'analytical approaches that travel the globe, not in search of comparison, but to trace genealogies of co-production'.

Robina Mohammad (robina.mohammad@strath.ac.uk), School of Applied Social Sciences, University of Strathclyde, Graham Hills Building, 50 Richmond Street, Glasgow G1 1XN, UK and **James D. Sidaway** (geojds@nus.edu.sg), Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, Kent Ridge, Singapore 117570.

4 This constitutes a promising and rich research agenda, although one beyond the scope of this article. For historical pointers, see Onley (2004), Onley and Khalaf (2006) and, on contemporary links between the UAE and Iraq's war economy, see Moore (2009). On migration patterns connecting the eastern and western shores of the Gulf littoral, see Najmabadi (2010). Whilst geopolitics continues to preclude the kind of visions set out by Parsa and Keivani (2002) for moving beyond blueprints or further aspirations for the Islamic Republic of Iran's own free-trade zone at Kish on the northeastern littoral of the Gulf, the complex network of intra-Gulf geoeconomic, trade and cultural influences is evident even to casual observers. It merits more research.

References

- Acuto, M. (2010) High-rise Dubai urban entrepreneurialism and the technology of symbolic power. *Cities* 27.4, 272–84.
- Ali, S. (2010) Permanent impermanence. *Contexts* [WWW document]. URL <http://contexts.org/articles/spring-2010/permanent-impermanence/> (accessed 9 January 2011).
- Banerjee, B. (1983) Social networks in the migration process: empirical evidence on chain migration in India. *The Journal of Developing Areas* 17, 185–96.
- Barthel, P.A. (2010) Arab mega-projects: between the Dubai effect, global crisis, social mobilization and a sustainable shift. *Built Environment* 36.2, 133–45.
- Bassens, D., B. Derudder and F. Witlox (2010) Guest editorial. The making and breaking of Dubai: the end of a city-state? *Political Geography* 29.6, 299–301.
- Benton-Short, L., M.D. Price and S. Friedman (2005) Globalization from below: the ranking of global immigrant cities. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29.4, 945–59.
- Birla, R. (2009) *Stages of capital: law, culture and market governance in late colonial India*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC and London.
- Bloch, R. (2010) Dubai's long goodbye. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34.4, 943–51.
- Buckley, M. (forthcoming) From Kerala to Dubai and back again: construction migrants and the global economic crisis. *Geoforum* doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.09.001.
- Bunnell, T. and A. Maringanti (2010) Practising urban and regional research beyond metrocentricity. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34.2, 415–20.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2007) *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial theory and historical difference*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Chalcraft, J. (2009) *The invisible cage: Syrian migrant workers in Lebanon*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.
- Chalcraft, J. (2010) Monarchy, migration and hegemony in the Arabian peninsula. Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, Working Paper No. 12, LSE [WWW document]. URL [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/32556/1/Monarchy%2C_migration_and_hegemony_\(working_paper\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/32556/1/Monarchy%2C_migration_and_hegemony_(working_paper).pdf) (accessed 22 May 2011).
- Cohen, R. (1987) *The new helots: migrants in the international division of labour*. Gower, London.
- Cohen, R. (2008) (ed.) *Global diasporas: an introduction*. Second edition, Routledge, Abingdon and New York.
- Coles, A. and K. Walsh (2010) From 'tracial state' to 'postcolonial' city. The imaginative geographies of British expatriates in Dubai. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36.8, 1317–33.
- Datta, K., C. McIlwaine, J. Herbert, Y. Evans, J. May and J. Wills (2009) Men on the move: narratives of migration and work among low-paid migrant men in London. *Social and Cultural Geography* 10.8, 853–73.
- Davidson, C.M. (2009) *Abu Dhabi: oil and beyond*. Hurst, London.
- Davis, M. (2006) Fear and money in Dubai. *New Left Review* 41 (September–October), 47–68.
- Elshehtawy, Y. (2008) Transitory sites: mapping Dubai's 'forgotten' urban spaces. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32.4, 968–88.
- Elshehtawy, Y. (2010) *Dubai: behind an urban spectacle*. Routledge, Abingdon and New York.
- Elshehtawy, Y. (ed.) (2011) *The evolving Arab city: tradition, modernity and urban development*. Routledge, Abingdon and New York.
- El Feki, A. (2010) UAE lifts strict sponsorship regulations on foreign workers. *Ahram Online* 20 December [WWW document]. URL <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/15/2245/Business/Region/UAE-lifts-strict-sponsorship-regulations-on-foreign.aspx> (accessed 9 January 2011).
- Fernandez, B. (2010) Cheap and disposable? The impact of the global economic crisis on the migration of Ethiopian women domestic workers to the Gulf. *Gender and Development* 18.2, 249–62.
- Gardner, A.M. (2008) Strategic transnationalism: the Indian diasporic elite in contemporary Bahrain. *City and Society* 20.1, 54–78.

- Gardner, A.M. (2010) *City of strangers: Gulf migration and the Indian community in Bahrain*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Gardner, A.M. (2011) Gulf migration and the family. *Journal of Arabian Studies* 1.1, 3–25.
- Herb, M. (2009) A nation of bureaucrats: political participation and economic diversification in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41.3, 375–95.
- Hertog, S. (2010) Lean and mean: the new breed of state-owned enterprises in the Gulf monarchies. In S.F. Seznec and M. Kirk (eds.), *Industrialization in the Gulf: a socioeconomic revolution*, Routledge, London.
- Hvidt, M. (2009) The Dubai model: an outline of key development-process elements in Dubai. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41.3, 397–418.
- Jackson, M. and V. della Dora (2009) 'Dreams so big only the sea can hold them': man-made islands as anxious spaces, cultural icons, and travelling visions. *Environment and Planning A* 41.9, 2086–104.
- Jackson, P., P. Crang and C. Dwyer (eds.) (2004) *Transnational spaces*. Routledge, London.
- Kanna, A. (2007) Dubai in a jagged world. *Middle East Report* 243 [WWW document]. URL <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer243/kanna.html> (accessed 5 January 2011).
- Keshavarzian, A. (2010) Geopolitics and the genealogy of free trade zones in the Persian Gulf. *Geopolitics* 15.2, 263–89.
- Khalaf, S. (2006) The evolution of the Gulf city type, oil and globalization. In J.W. Fox, N. Mourtada-Sabbah and M. Al-Mutawa (eds.), *Globalization and the Gulf*, Routledge, Abingdon and New York.
- Khalaf, S. and S. Alkobaisi (1999) 'Migrants' strategies of coping and patterns of accommodation in the oil-rich Gulf societies: evidence from the UAE. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26.2, 271–98.
- Kibria, N. (2008) Muslim encounters in the global economy: identity developments of labor migrants from Bangladesh to the Middle East. *Ethnicities* 8.4, 539–56.
- King, A. (1990) *Urbanism, colonialism and the world economy: cultural and spatial foundations of the world urban system*. Routledge, London and New York.
- King, A. (1991) *Global cities: postimperialism and the internationalization of London*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Longva, A.N. (1997) *Walls built on sand: migration and exclusion in Kuwait*. Westview Press, Boulder.
- Malecki, E.J. and M.C. Ewers (2007) Labor migration to world cities: with a research agenda for the Arab Gulf. *Progress in Human Geography* 31.4, 467–84.
- Markovits, C. (2007) Structure and agency in the world of Asian commerce during the era of European colonial domination (c. 1750–1950). *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50.2, 106–23.
- Martin, N. (2010) The crisis of social reproduction among migrant workers: interrogating the role of migrant civil society. *Antipode* 42.1, 127–51.
- McFarlane, C. (2010) The comparative city: knowledge, learning, urbanism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34.4, 725–42.
- McKay, D. (2007) 'Sending dollars shows feeling' — emotions and economies in Filipino migration. *Mobilities* 2.2, 175–94.
- Mohammed, N.S.A. (2003) *Population and development of the Arab Gulf states: the case of Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait*. Aldershot, Ashgate.
- Mongha, R.V. (2007) Historicizing state sovereignty: inequality and the form of equivalence. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49.2, 384–411.
- Moore, P.W. (2009) Making big money on Iraq. *Middle East Report* 252 [WWW document]. URL <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer252/moore.html> (accessed 5 January 2011).
- Najmabadi, S.R. (2010) Cross-border networks: labour migration from Iran to the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf. *Anthropology of the Middle East* 5.1, 18–33.
- Nagy, S. (2006) Making room for migrants, making sense of difference: spatial and ideological expressions of social diversity in urban Qatar. *Urban Studies* 43.1, 119–37.
- Onley, J. (2004) Britain's native agents in Arabia and Persia in the nineteenth century. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24.1, 129–37.

- Onley, J. (2007a) *The Arabian frontier of the British Raj: merchants, rulers and the British in the nineteenth century Gulf*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Onley, J. (2007b) Transnational merchants in the nineteenth and twentieth century Gulf. In A. Alsharakh (ed.), *The Gulf family: modernity and kinship policies*, Sagi Books, London.
- Onley, J. (2009) The Raj reconsidered: British India's informal empire and spheres of influence in Asia and Africa. *Asian Affairs* 40.1, 44–62.
- Onley, J. and S. Khalaf (2006) Shaikhly authority in the pre-oil Gulf: an historical–anthropological study. *History and Anthropology* 17.3, 189–208.
- Pacione, M. (2005) City profile: Dubai. *Cities* 22.3, 255–65.
- Parsa, A. and R. Keivani (2002) The Hormuz corridor: building a cross-border region between Iran and the UAE. In S. Sassen (ed.), *Global networks, linked cities*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Piolet, V. (2009) Les émirats et royaumes arabes: les travailleurs migrants au pays des free zones. *Hérodote Revue de Géographie et de Géopolitique* 133.2, 136–51.
- Ponzini, D. (2011) Large scale development projects and star architecture in the absence of democratic politics: the case of Abu Dhabi, UAE. *Cities* 28.3, 251–9.
- Potter, L.G. (ed.) (2009) *The Persian Gulf in history*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Rahman, M.D.M. (2011) Bangladeshi migrant workers in the UAE: gender-differentiated patterns of migration experiences. *Middle Eastern Studies* 47.2, 395–411.
- Ramos, S.J. (2010) *Dubai amplified. The engineering of a port geography*. Ashgate, Farnham.
- Robinson, J. (2006) *Ordinary cities: beyond modernity and development*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Roy, A. (2009) The 21st century metropolis: new geographies of theory. *Regional Studies* 43.6, 819–30.
- Shah, N.M. (2004) Gender and labour migration to the Gulf countries. *Feminist Review* 77, 183–85.
- Shah, N.M. (2008) Recent labor immigration policies in the oil-rich gulf: how effective are they likely to be? ILO Asian Regional Programme on Governance of Labor Migration, Working Paper No. 3, ILO, Bangkok [WWW document]. URL <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/intl/52> (accessed 18 December 2009).
- Silver, H. (2010) Divided cities in the Middle East. *City and Community* 9.4, 345–57.
- Silvey, R. (2004) Transnational domestication: state power and Indonesian migrant women in Saudi Arabia. *Political Geography* 23.3, 245–64.
- Smith, B. (2010) Scared by, of, in, and for Dubai. *Social and Cultural Geography* 11.3, 263–83.
- Smith, M.P. (2001) *Transnational urbanism: locating globalization*. Blackwell, Oxford and Malden, MA.
- Stanley, B. (2005) Middle East city networks and the 'new urbanism'. *Cities* 22.3, 189–99.
- Tambe, A. and H. Fisher-Tiné (eds.) (2009) *The limits of British colonial control in South Asia: spaces of disorder in the Indian Ocean region*. Routledge, Abingdon.
- UAE Ministry of Economy (2008) Statistical abstract 2008 [WWW document]. URL <http://www.economy.ae/English/EconomicAndStatisticReports/StatisticReports/StatisticAbstract/Pages/sa2008.aspx> (accessed 14 January 2011).
- van Schendel, W. (2002) Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: jumping scale in Southeast Asia. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20.6, 647–68.
- Varsanyi, M.W. (2000) Global cities from the bottom up: a response to Peter Taylor. *Political Geography* 19.3, 3–38.
- Vora, N. (2008) Producing diasporas and globalization: Indian middle-class migrants in Dubai. *Anthropological Quarterly* 81.2, 377–406.
- Wall, R. (2010) Gulfworld: corporate profiles and networks of Gulf cities. *GaWC Research Bulletin* [WWW document]. URL <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/rb/rb347.html> (accessed 20 January 2011).
- Walsh, K. (2006) 'Dad says I'm tied to a shooting star!' Grounding (research on) British expatriate belonging. *Area* 38.3, 268–78.
- Walsh, K. (2007) 'It got very debauched, very Dubai!' Heterosexual intimacy amongst single British expatriates. *Social and Cultural Geography* 8.4, 507–33.
- Walsh, K. (2011) Migrant masculinities and domestic space: British home-making practices in Dubai. *Transactions of the*

- Institute of British Geographers* 36.4, 516–29.
- Werbner, P. (1999) Global pathways. Working class cosmopolitans and the creation of transnational ethnic worlds. *Social Anthropology* 7.1, 17–35.
- Willis, J.M. (2009) Making Yemen Indian: rewriting the boundaries of imperial Arabia. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41.1, 23–38.
- Willoughby, J. (2006) Ambivalent anxieties of the South Asian–Gulf Arab labor exchange. *Revista de Economía Mundial* 14, 31–56.
- Wilson, M. (2010) Vertical landscaping, a big regionalism for Dubai. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34.4, 925–40.
- Yeoh, B.S.A. (2009) Making sense of ‘Asian’ families in the age of migration. *Asian Population Studies* 5.1, 1–3.

Appendix on methodology

Our study draws on 21 in-depth semi-structured interviews with migrant workers from across South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) ranging in age from 19 to their early 60s.⁵ All the informants are male, and all work in the oldest parts of the city (between the Zayed Port on the west side and the Al Khubeirah area on the east). We selected them through our contacts and conversations whilst staying in Al Khubeirah during November 2008 and again in May/June 2009. Our daily negotiations of this space afforded many opportunities for informal interactions and conversations (both of us are native English speakers, and one of us is also fluent in Urdu and Punjabi and has a good working knowledge of Hindi; with this combination of languages there were plenty of people to speak to). From these, we arranged more formal interviews, which (together with observations) form the basis of this article. In the tracks of other work on migrant lives and work (such as that cited in the main text of the article and Datta *et al.*, 2009) our focus was on their everyday lives and use of the city.

With the exception of three individuals — a chauffeur for a multinational hotel, a driver for a car rental company and a salesman in a chainstore selling Kashmiri handicrafts — the informants are all employed in or run (with local partners) small businesses. In addition to basic information regarding age, marital status, place of origin and length of time spent in Abu Dhabi, our questions covered details of how they had heard about the opportunities here, the processes and the costs involved in gaining a work visa in the Gulf, the processes by which they obtained employment prior to or after arrival, and the city spaces in which they live and work during their time here. Those that ran a business were asked if they had been involved in its formation and the factors that made them decide to set up a business, what the processes were for setting up a business here, how they selected the location, what the start-up costs were, what their typical work hours are, what days (if any) per week they have free, where they spend their leisure time, how often and for how long they return home and how the business is managed while they are away, and finally if their family has ever visited them in Abu Dhabi. The interviews were conducted in the languages that the informants were most comfortable with. With those from Kohat and Quetta in Pakistan as well as those from Punjab (many of whom were not familiar with English), we communicated in Urdu; for a Sri Lankan worker who was familiar with Hindi and English, the interview was conducted in a mixture of the two. Only 4 interviews — with individuals from Kashmir, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka — were conducted wholly in English.

Wherever possible, interviews were recorded, often in the back of a taxi or a shop (carpentry store, precious stones retailer, handicraft store and launderette). The taxi offers a quiet environment for conversation. Similarly, the carpentry store is a space in which a lone trader sits, whiling away the hours waiting for the phone to ring and is happy to talk. This also lends itself to the recording of a conversation. Busy shops with

5 Many of those interviewed used an official date of birth for their documents, but were unsure of their exact date of birth and hence age.

a steady stream of customers (e.g. a grocery, printer, photocopy shop or tandoor bakery) were too noisy for recording, and the need for the interviewee to constantly attend to customers resulted in repeated interruptions. In these cases the interviews were documented as they were being conducted. Immediately after each interview a detailed account was written up, including information about the environment, the general atmosphere and body language of the respondents.

Our approach in seeking interviews stressed that they were for a 'university study'. This worked very well with those respondents who were educated and understood what a university was. Amongst others, some were hesitant because they were concerned about revealing something that could cause problems for them with the authorities. Among our Pakistani interviewees were many from troubled regions of their homeland who were simply fearful of politics (understandable given that military operations against the Taliban were in full swing in Pakistan at the time). We had to spend time reassuring such informants about the purpose of the study and our independence. Among the Pakistanis, it was unsurprising that Punjabis (as the dominant ethnic group in Pakistan) were the most open, hospitable and confident in talking about their lives. Those who agreed to be interviewed were assured that they were under no obligation to answer any question that they were unhappy with. All respondents were assured of complete confidentiality. In keeping with this, all respondents (and where relevant the businesses they work in) have been given pseudonyms. We have woven the interviews into narratives around arrival and accommodation, and working times and spaces, and in turn draw on these to enable broader comparative reflections.

Résumé

Les aspirations à devenir ville mondiale et la spectaculaire urbanisation des grandes villes du Golfe, comme Abou Dhabi, s'appuient sur les atouts combinés que sont les pétrodollars, les capacités de connexion et la main-d'œuvre. À partir d'entretiens auprès de travailleurs venus d'Asie du Sud, cet article relate leur vie et leur travail en les rapprochant du développement d'Abou Dhabi. Cette démarche exige et suggère une étude des espaces de reproduction sociale, soulevant à leur propos des problèmes théoriques et comparatifs plus vastes, dans le cadre des villes du Golfe ou d'autres lieux d'urbanisation et de migration accélérées. Il en résulte des connexions et des catégories transnationales dont l'étude d'autres villes doit tenir compte.