

Genes and Djinn:
Identity and Anxiety in Southeast Arabia

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Declaration

' I, Aaron Lee Parkhurst, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.'

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the ways in which identity is constructed in the United Arab Emirates in the face of rapid development and immigration. The thesis draws upon ethnographic data collected over three years in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, among other Arabian Gulf communities, to explore how foreign knowledge systems, specifically genetic models of inheritance, are incorporated into indigenous bodies of knowledge to reshape the ways in which local people see themselves in the world. Long held Gulf Arab conceptions of the self and body in relation to nature, spirits and foreigners are challenged by the promises of globalization and modernity. This conflict creates both personal and social anxiety for many local people as they attempt to consolidate desert and Islamic tradition with the ambiguity of new urban and social landscapes, creating a metaphor between Gene and Djinn. This thesis follows this conflict ethnographically through the rapid construction of a new aristocratic class of citizens in the country, and the ways in which some of them imagine their downfall. As people move through the desert, the coast and the rapidly growing cities, their quest for an elusive notion of modernity ricochets into local systems of destiny, cosmology, agency, body practices, and kinship, and the languages one uses to articulate the ‘self’ and world are transformed.

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A note on names:

The names of all people, places, and organizations below the governmental and administrative level have been altered or omitted to protect the anonymity of those who participated in this ethnography.

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Chapter 1

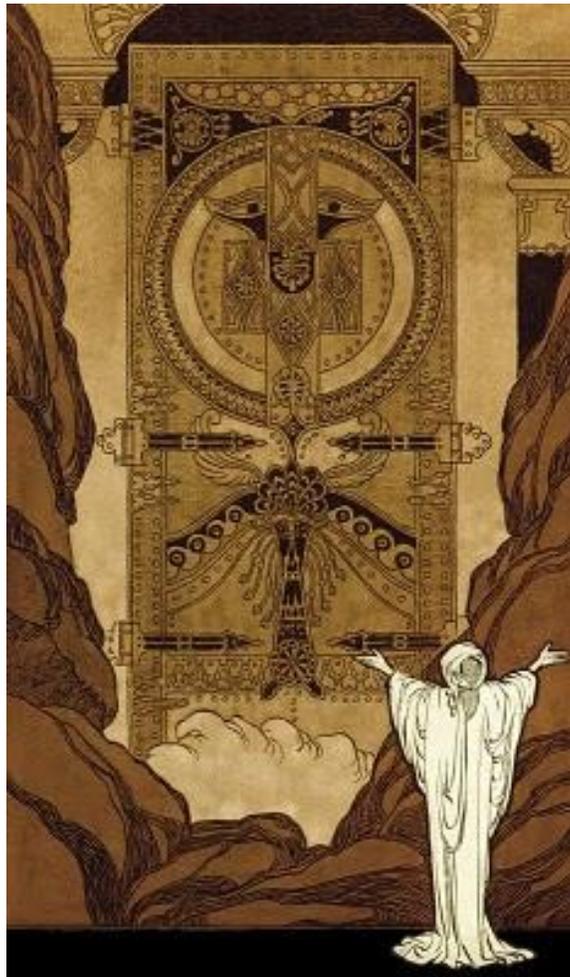
Thee and Me

There was a Door to which I found no Key:

There was a Veil past which I could not see:

Some little Talk awhile of ME and THEE

There seemed---and then no more of THEE and ME.¹



¹ Figure 1: Rubaiyat XXXII. Omar Khayyam. Artist: René Bull. Work: Illustrations for *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, 1913. Medium: Watercolor and pen and ink XXXII

Introduction

Al Dhiyafa on December 2nd

It only rains a few days every year in Dubai. My first year in the city I counted five days of rain. If there were more, I missed them, drizzling in the middle of the night, or seconds of precipitation across patches of the city, enough to leave stains of water droplets on pavement or smoothed-over sand, evaporating in seconds. Dubai's wonderful thoroughfares, the Sheikh Zayed, Al Dhiyafa and Jumeirah Roads are nonetheless lined with green landscaping: long carpets of grass, flowers, and date trees. It does not matter that it rains so seldom, the government waters the public lawns three or four times daily, without which the plants would die within hours, consumed by the oppressive sun. Emirati men say "Cities need to have some green, it is worth using the water". Many environmentalists disagree, but I admit that I found the landscaping to be a powerful aesthetic. In areas of the city where green is scarce, Al Qouz and its neighbourhoods to the south where migrant camps house South Asian labour, the unforgiving force of the desert re-enters the imagination. On Sheikh Zayed, desert flowers, grass and plants are shaped into long calligraphy and Arab mosaic patterns that separate service streets from a 14 lane highway. Al Dhiyafa, though, is particularly striking. The avenue is lined with small trees that are green for half of the year, but bloom bright red throughout the blistering summer months. Indian migrant workers sleep under the colourful canopies

around 2pm everyday during the summer. They call the tree Gulmohar, which etymologically refers to a peacock's feathers, and the Emiratis call it a flame tree. The migrants nap there for hours, sleeping on each other's laps. I assumed it was just because the trees provided the only shade and respite from the sun overhead. "Yes, that..." says a sleepy labourer "but also, when you are up so high all day it is good to be close to the Earth".

Many of the pedestrians who pass by the sleeping South Asian labourers under the Gulmohar on Al Dhiyafa are Filipino. They inhabit the side streets off the Satwa Roundabout, and refer to Al Dhiyafa as little Manila. They have their own supermarkets and clothing outlets, internet cafes and video game stores. Pork is expensive and relatively hard to sell and purchase in the Emirates, but Filipinos in Dubai always seem to be eating pork for lunch, sausages with boiled eggs and rice. Unlike the sleeping migrant workers who will be bussed back to labour camps in the evening, many Filipino migrants live off Al Dhiyafa, and can be found playing basketball and football in parks on the side streets until late in the evening, or crowding ice cream parlours and cafes late at night. A few hundred meters up from the roundabout, "little Manila" gives way to Lebanese and Syrian textile outlets. Mediterranean Arab expatriates sell carpets, curtains, and upholstery for furniture on either side of Al Dhiyafa. Their outlets are modest in appearance, but the quality of goods is considered high, and prices are not cheap. These Lebanese and Syrian businesses cater mostly to European expats, or wealthy Indian expats from Mumbai, and their businesses do well. A few hundred metres from the Lebanese upholstery district, Dhiyafa and Satwa suddenly become Persian. The campus

for the Iranian hospital in Dubai is here. It is one of Dubai's oldest, and best hospitals.² Across from the hospital is a Persian mosque. Its unique polished blue and green tiled exterior is a sharp and colourful contrast to the many brown and pink stucco Sunni mosques that are evenly distributed across the city.

One of Al Dhiyafa's striking aesthetics is its smell. The crowded mess of cultures provide a sense of olfactory heterogeneity. Persian and Indian restaurants, open door kebab parlours, Filipino fruit stands, and Asian noodle bars mix with cheap Pakistani eateries, Palestinian Shisha cafes, thick humidity, and the salty air of the Arabian Gulf, only a few hundred meters away. In contrast to the savoury odours, there is a slight stench of garbage and sewage. The buildings are old, but not old enough, I think, to warrant their state of disrepair, but I might have been unsympathetic to the corrosive power of sandy winds that batter the facades of the structures. Buildings from the 1980s look much older than they are, but the streets are clean, as are the foyers of each house, albeit dusted with the ever-present desert. Still, my informants know that sand is clean, often cleaner than water. Terms of Islamic purity dictate that when water is absent, one may perform ablutions with sand, wiping ones skin with the grainy earth and inhaling it through ones nostrils. The purity of the desert can absorb the urbanism infecting the body, and pristine nature can cleanse the filth of daily interactions from ones skin and lungs. Besides, the stench of the street is not from rubbish or dirt, at least, not from any

² In the mid 20th century, before there was common medical infrastructure in Dubai, Iranian medical shipments would come to Dubai to provide medicine, treatments, and surgeries. Sheikh Rashid Al Makhtoum donated the hospital land to the Iranian Red Crescent in 1970, and the hospital has thrived and developed since. It is still Iranian owned and governed, but caters indiscriminately to all nationalities.

rubbish that I can see. It is from sewage just under the ground. Long time residents tell me the city grew too fast for plans for proper sewage, and the smell of waste leaks from the pavement and sits in the thick humid air.

Day and night, the masses in Al Dhiyafa go about their business. The Keralite and Pakistani migrants sleep under the Gulmohar while Filipino migrants make their lunch and play sports. Syrian expatriates sell their curtains and Persian men walk to their house of God. British women turn off the Roundabout onto Al Wasl on the way to their villas, stopping for a bite to eat at a New Zealand café around the corner. I can see them from my flat's window every day, but I do not see any Emiratis, not on Al Dhiyafa. They drive the length of the avenue in white cars and sport utility vehicles perhaps, with windows tinted far beyond the legal limit.³ They are there, but I cannot see them.

Except for today. Today I can see them because they want to be seen. The tinted windows are rolled down, and they are jumping in and out of cars. Today I cannot smell the distinctive orange or rose shisha on Al Dhiyafa, nor can I smell illegal sausages, Chinese noodles, or cheap Pakistani curries. I cannot even smell the sewage seeping from just under the sidewalk. This afternoon there is only one scent overpowering all the others. It is the exhaust from a congested line of white automobiles.

³ The legal limit is 30 percent, but special permissions can be granted for more. Some Emirates do not allow rented vehicles to be tinted, and Dubai does not allow company vehicles to be tinted. However, drivers are usually only stopped if their vehicles blatantly exceed the legal limits.

When we study anthropological methods before we go into the field, we are often taught to search for a spectacle; something loud, or something colourful, to highlight and make vivid the otherness we wish to study. December 2nd in the Emirates is certainly a spectacle of sorts. In many ways, it avoids the flashiness of the country's events that are viewed by an international audience. The opening of the Atlantis hotel and the Palm Jumeirah peninsula saw one of the world's most lavish displays; 100,000 fireworks (the world's largest show) and a guest-list of political figures, plus Bollywood and Hollywood film stars. There was method in the extravagance. It was meant to be a display to show the world that Dubai was swimming in wealth while the economic giants of the West suffered economic turmoil. The opening of the Palm Jumeirah could stand as its own fascinating anthropological study. Many Emiratis with whom I spoke claimed the opening was proof that Dubai, with the ambition and will of its leaders, had easily overcome the financial woes of the globe. The expat community, however, referred to the display as the world's most expensive denial. It was the following week in which Dubai Holdings admitted to the media that it could not pay its \$59 Billion debt.⁴ In a similar vein, the opening of the Burj Dubai cum Khalifa unveiled the world's tallest building (representative of what?). I will come back to these in the final chapter. These spectacles are more ambitious, more famous, perhaps easier on the camera, and certainly more expensive than anything I ever witnessed on December 2nd, but for the anthropologist (I speak for myself) they are not nearly as interesting.

⁴ See Steve Rose's review of the opening in 'The Guardian' for a popular cynical perception of the event. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/nov/21/dubai-atlantis-palm>

Aside from some glitzy state affairs, speeches given by sheikhs, and fireworks set off along the coast above various landmarks, UAE's National day is not celebrated with any particular destination. It is celebrated through intrusion. At first observation, it seemed quite mundane, but I came to understand that the most remarkable phenomenon that occurs on Dec. 2 is that Emiratis rolled their windows down. The literal practice of driving in an automobile with an open window becomes figurative. Revellers crowd the streets in white automobiles, hanging their bodies outside their car doors, moving in the congested streets at the pace of oozing molasses. They have no particular destination. They shout at anyone nearby. "Welcome to Dubai!!! Get out of our way!". "Where are you guys heading?" I ask them, looking for the party. I could race them on foot. I walk faster than their cars can move down Dhiyafa even on a normal day. "We are going wherever the car is going. Everywhere it belongs to me!". Expats all over the city know to be finished with their business for the day and be home by 2pm. It is not the case that Dec. 2 is unfriendly. Quite the opposite is true. It is a matter of practicality, if one is caught on the road too long after midday, the only option is to abandon one's vehicle. The arterial passages that pump vitality through the cosmopolis come to cardiac urban arrest. All afternoon, evening, and night, revellers sit in their vehicles, pounding their car horns in celebration. The point is to make noise; to be heard, to own everything, to occupy as much space as possible. The day is a symbolic inversion. The Emirati national who abhors the public gaze, who values his privacy and secrecy, who has separated himself from the streets of his city, and who is a small minority in his own country, de-tints himself for 24 hours, and gets in the way.

This project is not about the UAE national day per se, but it partly concerns itself with why the day is unique. Why is it so strange... so symbolic to see an Emirati vehicle with its windows rolled down? At some points, this ethnography details local knowledge of science, technology, and medicine, at others it details the experience of religion, spirits, and the presence of cosmological agents. Further still, it explores perceptions of development and urbanity, and the intrusion of banal terms of 'globalization' and 'modernity' for which I believe we have insufficient vocabulary. It tells the story of a new aristocracy, and also its perceived descent. At its most successful, the ethnography is, I hope, all of these things at once. This first chapter introduces the thesis by outlining the construction of a new aristocracy in the Emirates and how their relationship with 'modernity' begins to cause personal and social conflict as well as personal anxiety. The second chapter shows how this conflict and anxiety is illustrated by spirits in local cosmology, demonstrating how Djinn, locally, articulate opposing desires and ambiguity through fire and sex. These ambiguous agents of the desert lead into a discussion on agency and local constructions of destiny. The third chapter attempts to break apart these constructs through a historical and modern examination of 'Islamic fatalism'. The fourth chapter demonstrates ethnographically how the language of fate and indigenous knowledge systems of illness and identity inform the dissemination of emergent scientific and medical systems in the Gulf, specifically genetic understanding, creating a metaphor between genes and Djinn. Informed in part by local genetic discourse, the fifth chapter returns to constructs of identity and anxiety through an examination of 'whiteness' in the Emirates. The chapter is divided into two parts: an ethnography of the kandura, or dishdash, worn by men, and a study of skin-whitening habits performed by women.

Both male and female relationships with whiteness become increasingly exaggerated in the Gulf as foreigners and foreign systems of knowledge challenge local constructions of race and identity. The final chapter weaves all of these cultural practices, languages, and movements together to discuss the challenges that local people face in shaping their identities in a rapidly moving society. Torn between the promises of modernity and the values of tradition, many people in the Emirates are beginning to question the ways in which they are able to ‘be’ in the world. The Anthropology concerns itself with the incorporation of Western philosophical imports into indigenous cosmologies and perceptions of the self, its consequences, failings and successes, and its effects on the social and cultural trajectories of the Arabian Gulf society. I found that there is irony as well, where intentions of the elite to foster well-being help develop new cultural pathologies. There exists a desert coast in which spirits of the waves and sand coexist with political and transnational otherness, and the legacies of Islamic ideology. They engage with each other, not like oil and water, but as stable incongruences. I extend here Michael Lambek’s (2003) musings that personal cosmology and the illness it can cause is inherently ironic. That is, the drive that is perceived by my informants to push one into ‘modernity’ can, in turn, produce stagnation, as we will see in later chapters. Fatalism, the Djinni, Expatriates, Diabetes, Skin Whitening, and a crumbling economy produce in the imagination its own anxious cultural rheumatism, and here, too, we must question agency, both personal and that of the desert.

The incongruences are not collapsible but remain semi-fixed in juxtaposed limbo, a sustainable borderland, perhaps, to borrow terminology from the post-modernists. “The

borderlands are just such a place of incommensurable contradictions. The term does not indicate a fixed topographical site between two other fixed locales (nations, societies, cultures), but an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject.” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, 10). How do people come to terms with the borderlands and construct a sustainable personhood? What happens when they succeed, and indeed what happens to those who fail? Many peoples of the Arabian Gulf find themselves now in an ironic social state of both incorporation and resistance, both of which leave scars, “For even people remaining in familiar and ancestral places find the nature of their relation to place ineluctably changed, and the illusion of a natural and essential connection between the place and the culture broken.” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, 10). In these terms, in a sense, this work also provokes reflection from a reversal of anxieties. Western nations are currently trying to come to their own terms with the spread of Islam. Issues that arise from the ideological clashes of specific secularisms and religious freedoms and identities make headlines. American and European governments find their own cultural paranoias. When we read debates on, say, the French construction of *Laïcité* and political debates on the wearing of headscarves by French state school children, we are able to reflect on the nature of a multicultural social body, citizenship, its ties to racism, and the defence of historical values.⁵ This ethnography in many ways is a geographic reversal of this reflexivity; an examination of multicultural anxiety within a globalizing conservative Muslim community in the Arabian Gulf.

⁵ See Joan Scott’s chapter on Secularism from her *The Politics of the Veil* (2007) for an excellent discussion on the hijab and *Laïcité*.

The line of polished white automobiles continue down Al Dhiyafa to the coast. Here, they turn along the coast to the southwest, and at the intersection of the desert and ocean is a flagpole bearing the standard of the UAE. Native Dubaiians claim it is the world's largest, though natives of Abu Dhabi contend that theirs is larger. It is breezy along the beach, but as the lines of white automobiles sludge past the flag, it hangs flaccid above the traffic. Perhaps it is too heavy to wave in the wind, though today it does not matter. The flag can be seen on everything, tied on the antennae of every vehicle and hanging as giant banners along skyscrapers. I have one hanging in my window as well. It is plain, consisting only of four blocks, the pan-Arab colours of Black, Red, White, and Green. Emiratis are taught that white stands for pacifism, red for courage and passion, green for fertility, and black for nature's greatest contribution to the development of the country, oil. Today, revellers celebrate by exploiting oil, revving their car engines for hours, blasting air conditioner with the windows open. "We run out of gas every year", a young man tells me, "but it is ok, we just leave the car and get it the next day".

A week later I walk down Dhiyafa back to Jumeirah open beach. The road is as congested as ever, but the car windows are all rolled up. I can see Indian and English faces behind the glass panes of large sport utility vehicles, Land Rovers and Lexus. I can tell when Emirati are driving as well because I *cannot* see their faces as they glide along the pavement behind black, opaque windows of Nissan Ultimas. They have images of their sheikhs, Mo and Khalifa, covering their rear view with *masha* 'Allah written in Arabic calligraphy underneath. There is a sticker for 'Al Futtain' motors on the back

bumper. Their black windows become much like abayas. They make hidden the private features of the body from the public gaze, but in turn warrant a new gaze. It both hides and highlights identity.

مواطن- Muatan – National – A Novel Aristocracy

A few months into my stay in Dubai, I started visiting a hospital in Abu Dhabi to conduct a pilot study on the stigmatization of mental illness. I had been invited to the hospital by the new Health Authority to discuss the role of using anthropology as an evidence base to support a project to push psychiatry into primary health care. The drive from Dubai to Abu Dhabi takes roughly an hour and a half along a flat, desert road that runs parallel to the coast. My partner and I picked up a cheap, used, 1998 Land Rover Discovery when we arrived in Dubai, and over time, I learned to drive in a much more aggressive manner than I was accustomed. My first few trips to Abu Dhabi, however, were hair raising. I still had not adapted to the aggressive, speed hungry style of driving that governs local roads. Speed limits on the road to Abu Dhabi are around 130 km/hr, but the limit is rarely obeyed. It is not uncommon for local drivers to speed past at an average of 170 or higher. It is a rite of passage for foreigners to be overrun and side-lined by drivers on the highways. It has also become a sort of running joke among the locals, and some of them take some small delight at newcomers' discomfort. I sat down with a local at the hospital whose job at the institution was unclear.

“Is this your first time in Abu Dhabi?”, he asked me.

“I have been once before but this is the first time coming by myself”, I replied.

He gave me a knowing grin. “How was the drive coming down here?”

Me: “Terrifying.”

Him: “Ha, yes, but you are still alive!”

I started to jokingly complain. “Do they always drive like that?”

He shrugged and looked amused “That is our culture!”

I joked back “I was nearly run off the highway, they act like they own the roads!”

“We do own the roads.” He replied.

I laughed, but noticed that he did not. He looked at me confused. “So what do you do here at the hospital?” I asked him.

He replied “I work here.”

Me: “What do you do while you work here?”

Him: “Eh?”

Me: “What type of job do you have?”

Him: “I am a Muatan, I work here. Here at the hospital.” I let the matter go. We were speaking in English as my Arabic was still rudimentary at best, and I assumed there was error in communication. This was the first time I had heard the title Muatan.

A few months later, after I completed the pilot study, I started analysing the data from a stigmatization questionnaire on perceptions of mental illness. The questionnaire was designed as an ethnographically minded study to attempt to compare qualitative and quantitative data on severe mental illness cross-culturally (Littlewood, Jadhav, and Ryder, 2007). The survey begins with a behavioural description of a young man with potential mental illness, though it does not mention any specific illness categories. The questionnaire then asks for basic demographic information, followed by a series of questions that explore the respondent’s social relationship with the man in the behavioural description. With the help of a professional translator, and then with the help of the Emirati directors of the hospital, I translated the questionnaire into Arabic. (See appendix A). I do not record names on the questionnaire, but I do ask for some personal data such as one’s age, nationality, religion, education, and profession. Some left this diagnostic category empty, others answered in full. Most of my respondents were Emirati as the study was conducted at a government pavilion. Under “Nationality”

(Jinsiya), respondents would write “Emirati”, but under “profession”, a large proportion scribbled in “Muatan”. My dictionary translates the term as “national”. Residents often confirm this, or tell me it means ‘a local’, or even ‘an Emirati’. At first, I was confused by the idea that one’s nationality could be Emirati, and one’s profession could then be a national, until I realized the term does not translate well into English. What I found was a unique category of individuals; a novel aristocracy; a large section of the local population whose social and professional identity are tied to the state and the benefits that the state endows. When the Muatan unroll their windows on Dec. 2nd, and when they place posters of the sheikhs on the back of their Nissans and Land Cruisers, they are not just being patriotic. They are performing their job. Few of the self-defined Muatan that I encountered held a job with any sort of title. Their job *was* being Emirati. By living in a state that provides arguably one of the world’s most benevolent welfare and social security systems for its citizens, the Muatan maintain their wealth and status by *being* Emirati.

The status is highly protected. There exist many political and bureaucratic hurdles to aristocratic muatan inheritance. There is a perception of citizenship in the Emirates that depends on deep-rooted personal autochthony. Citizenship itself cannot be acquired. It is intrinsic to a person. I have met residents plagued with identity crises as a result of this constructed citizenship. I listened to a male Indian resident born in the country, and whose parents were born in the country, panic because he was living illegally. At 18 years of age, men can no longer live on their parents’ visas. He went to the United States for university, and returned to Dubai to work in banking. His company

let him go in 2009, and without employment sponsorship, and no options for citizenship despite three generations of family living in Dubai, he faced deportation to Mumbai, a city he had never known. Muatan status is more complicated than citizenship however. Like citizenship, it must be inherited, but not all citizens can be muatan and receive the benefits of the state. The Muatan status is far more social than political. It must be recognized through behaviour, through a demonstrated love of the state and the sheikhs. It must also be protected socially, passed on from father to son, and not through the mother, thus limiting the range of socially acceptable familial unions and maintaining the exclusivity of the Muatan cultural category. There are state sanctioned bureaucratic institutions to enforce this tradition, and there are Emirati citizens who cannot call themselves Muatan.⁶ For this thesis, I propose that one considers the *muatan* identity as a form of Arabic aristocracy. Many political and social thinkers, from Aristotle and Plato to Hobbes and Nietzsche have commented on the definition and role of the Aristocracy. The construction of social class is, however, contextually specific, and while the ethnographic term *muatan*, as I have described it above, is most appropriate, for the sake of discussion, I often use the notion of aristocracy interchangeably. Not all will agree with the category. Edward Digby Baltzell (1964) in his ‘The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy & Caste in America’ defines aristocracy as:

- (1). A community of upper-class families whose members are born to positions of high prestige and assured dignity because their ancestors have been leaders (elite members) for one generation or more;
- (2). That these families are carriers of a set

⁶ See my discussion on the Kholasat Al Khaid (family book) in chapter 4.

of traditional values which command authority because they represent the aspirations of both the elite and the rest of the population; and (3). That this class continue to justify its authority a. by contributing its share of contemporary leaders and b. by continuing to assimilate, in each generation, the families of new member of the elite. (6)

Baltzell finds an aristocratic ideal in capitalist economy, an ideal that others can strive towards, and actually achieve. He might disagree with its use in Dubai, and instead categorize Dubai's Arabic aristocracy as 'caste'. Still, I find Baltzell's definition useful because it allows him to chart the downfall of American aristocracy (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) through social exclusion and retreat, a theme I will return to in chapter 6.

It is also important to note that there are hierarchies of 'rule' in the Emirates. The *muatan* aristocracy is a different cohort than the Sheikhs, those tribal leaders who govern the seven Emirates, and who rule the *muatan*. There are some citizens of the Emirates who easily define themselves as both sheikh and *muatan*, though this thesis maintains separate categories for clarity, especially as one of the primary roles of the Sheikhs is to maintain the status of the *muatan*. It is therefore not useful to specifically define aristocracy in the Gulf as relating to 'rule', by say wealth or by birth, as context creates constant conflict and questioning of hierarchy. Independent of ruling families, constructs of hierarchical authority become well defined among the aristocracy. During the nearly four years I lived in the Emirates, I spent some months helping to manage a set of cafes to help support my fieldwork. During the holy month of Ramadan, in the past, any

establishment that sold food was required by law to discontinue service during the fasting hours from sunrise to sunset. At about 24°N, Dubai lies just on the edge of the tropics, and so the sun rises and sets roughly the same time all year (about 6am to 630pm), and there is no daylight saving. Grocery stores were still opened, as food could be purchased, but not consumed in public. Following these laws essentially shut down any other business in food or catering for the month that was not normally open into the late parts of the evening. As Dubai developed, it became clear that it was not economically feasible to ask this of small businesses. Therefore, the law became more ambiguous. It was not that the law changed, it simply became more open to interpretation. Many businesses began to stay open, but plastered windows so that the public could not see in, or only served food in take-away containers, knowing that people would eat on the premises. Others tried to arrange a 'licence' that allowed them to stay open (with tinted windows). While some Emirati government workers insisted there was no such thing, business owners were still able to receive official permissions from members of the aristocratic groups, often independent from a specific government office. A phenomenon developed that some establishments that stayed open during Ramadan actually performed some of their best business during the holy month, as food choices in the city were more limited. The cafes that I worked for was one such business. They had permission from their Emirati sponsor to remain open, they closed all outdoor seating, darkened the windows, and turned off all background music.

There is no official body that monitors society during Ramadan. Police only investigate when complaints are made by locals. One afternoon, a wealthy Emirati

couple came to the café to purchase a number of slices of cake. They were upset to see that the café was full, with long queues, and noisy. They never spoke to any of the staff to complain, but the staff could see that the couple was irritated. They began making calls as they left the café. Through a series of communications, the government was notified, and police arrived an hour later. While the police were very polite, they insisted that no licence existed, and that the café had no right to be open. They fined the café five thousand dirhams (about a thousand pounds), and threatened to come back the following day, and if the café was still open, arrests might have to be made and certainly there would be much heavier fines. The owners of the café, themselves well connected in Dubai, called their sponsor and their own Emirati contacts. If the couple purchasing cake had known who sponsored the café, they might never had made any complaints. Within a half hour, the police returned to the owners to apologize for disturbing the operation of the restaurant. They rescinded the fines and apologized for the behaviour of the complaining couple, wished the owners a happy and prosperous Ramadan and then left. While it was one of the first times I had seen this process in action, it is well known that this is typical of how conflict and law is dealt with in Dubai. Many locals laugh about it. “That’s just how things work. They like to handle things quickly, and privately.” It also speaks to how hierarchical rule is constructed. An average Emirati family becomes regulator for anyone *not* Emirati. Their judgment on social policy was effectively law at their whim. Without their own contact, the owners of the café (English speaking expatriates) would have been forced to pay fines and close their business for a few weeks until Ramadan ended, or suffer consequences. Of course, the owners’ contacts, very prominent figures in Emirati aristocracy, quickly trumped both the original complaint and

even the police, who were shamed into apologizing. These processes only work for the *muatan* because of exclusionism. If everyone had access to this type of power, no-one, obviously, would have an upper hand in social authority. Issues of jurisdiction would be public and far more lucid. My informants hoard the processes of jurisdiction and authority and keep them hidden from public knowledge. The metropolis, however, often develops independent of these processes. Part of this is due to a hesitant *laissez-faire* attitude towards the designs and working of expatriate life and business. Part of this, I suspect, was also intentional on the part of Dubai's rulers who market the city as a 'playground' for entrepreneurship and creative capitalist enterprise relatively unencumbered by over-regulation. I often get the impression from officers in government offices that laws, in general, are left purposefully vague. Nonetheless, the ability for the city to form new relations of power is also partly, and ironically, due to the attempts of the aristocracy to protect their power through secrecy and exclusionism. In an effort to protect power, the local aristocracy has concealed the system of relations that must be brought forth to recertify the various positions of authority that are traditionally known. The larger the city becomes, the more many locals find that aristocratic relations not as stable as they once were, and far more invisible to the 90% of the population who are expatriate and migrant residents of the metropolis. The position in which my informants find themselves is an intense and immediate conflict of desire. This is a theme that I present throughout my thesis, in the behaviour of cosmological agents, in local projections and enhancements of the body and skin, in consanguineous kinship practices, in linguistic movement, and in so many other systems with which people must contend in order to make sense of their world and their day. That conflict is everywhere,

between Earth and steel, coastlines and skyscrapers, tradition or modernity. For some, the rapidity with which Dubai grows leaves little room to find oneself. It makes this conflict imminent.

There are, of course, many 'benefits' to be a citizen of the state. Among some benefits commonly said to be guaranteed by the government at the time of my residency in the country were free healthcare, both local and abroad. Emirati men can claim free land with which they can develop homes or business. Men are entitled to interest-free loans to build homes. All loans, according to local law, given to Muslims should be interest free, but this benefit guarantees fixed amounts: 750,000 dirhams to develop a new home, or up to 300,000 for home extensions. Housing is free in areas that the government is developing. New developments provide free homes between 2,600 and 4,500 square feet, depending on the size of the family. Emirati men are entitled to free education. This includes study at universities abroad, with extra stipends going towards private schools. The scholarships include tuition and large monthly stipends for prestigious private schools, and smaller stipends for attendance at an American State school. Men are entitled to about \$20,000 towards wedding costs. Some men claimed that Emirati men are entitled to vehicles, insisting it is a privilege of the state and a gift from their sheikhs. However, when confirming all other benefits, others insist the government does not provide cars for citizens. Unlike the other benefits listed, there is no official published policy for automobiles. Most employed Emirati men and women (about 80 per cent of employed nationals) work for the government and may receive vehicles through government positions. Under these employment conditions, it is often

difficult to pinpoint what is given as a benefit of work, and what is given as a benefit of simply being Emirati.^{7 8}

Methodology: Shifting Ontologies of the Anthropologist.

I confess to a lack of ambition when it comes to religion in my personal life. I am culturally Jewish, with an American Orthodox Jewish upbringing. Like most identities, this is a garment layered with many textures. Still, many years ago, I stopped being conscious of this identity in practice and in discourse. Over the course of the last fifteen years, I developed a theological position that I quite proudly own as Jewish atheism. If someone were to ask me my heritage, in Boston, London, Seattle or indeed in any of the cities in which I set up camp, I was always proud to claim to be Jewish, but I was never aware of *being* Jewish. My partner is not Jewish, and we do not practice religion in our home, neither do our peers with whom we associate on a daily basis. Jewishness became a reflexive diagnosis on my part, and perhaps on the part of people who knew me well, but it was not part of my waking knowledge. It was, perhaps, part of what Julia Kristeva defines as, “strangers to ourselves” (1991). It seemed ironic, at first, that I should only become aware of being a Jew whilst living in a Muslim country. I often claim to be a non-practicing Jew. However, this statement often leaves me wanting. To claim to be a

⁷ It is important to note that Dubai labour law, at the time of my residency, required travel allowances (read vehicles) from all employers in the public and private sector, respective of salary, though the law was not always enforced.

⁸ For a detailed discussion on employment statistics for nationals in the UAE and in the Gulf at large, see Dresch’s (2006) excellent chapter on ‘foreign matter’ in which the author focuses on the local reproductions of dependency on government salaries in a globalising market.

non-practicing Jew is, I think, insufficient in my case. I do not practice faith, but one cannot help but practice everything else. There are affect and speech patterns to consider, stereotypic attitudes towards both guilt and celebration, the influence of many generations of cultural legacy and habits, and indeed the amalgamation of behaviours that make any particular social identity unique. The fact was that no one ever seemed to care or even notice in my secular world, and so neither did I. When I arrived in Dubai, I was suddenly aware that this identity mattered, as much as I tried to ignore it. I wanted to be as empirical as possible, to study Islam and Dubai in unbiased qualitativity. In other words, I did not want to be the Jew in the desert, just the anthropologist, and I thought it would be easy. The problem was that I suddenly found that the people with whom I needed to interact cared very much who I was, and so I too became quite aware.

It was not the case that anti-Semitism was ever really pervasive or at least outwardly visible in my years in Arabia. It was something else. My identity would often hang in the air during a conversation or a meal, usually ignored in a type of deafening silence, or addressed in awkward attempts at forced reconciliation. Some people couldn't help but comment unprovoked of how they knew not to associate Judaism with Israel, others would make attempts at humour and joke that "oh we are supposed to punch each other now". This was usually followed with a statement of how silly that idea was. I often appreciated the effort. I was just the other side of the coin; I too found that it took surprising effort for me not to say something. Someone would find out I was Jewish, and I would suddenly think to comment, "do not worry, I'm not Israeli". The thought did sometimes escape my lips, and was greeted with an acknowledgement of understanding

by my interlocutor, but I admit it shamed me. I'm not Israeli, nor am I a practicing Jew by most standards, but what if I was? In either case, most locals did not really know who I was and what I thought about the world. Awkward banter could not really dispel any true tension; it could only dispel the tension of not having addressed a well-known conflict. The social anthropologist Ruth Mandel has spent many years in Germany studying Jewish and Muslim communities in Berlin. She has commented on her experiences of being an American Jew in Berlin.

“Thus I fell victim to something akin to what Germans call *unheimlich*, but even more so. *Unheimlichkeit* includes both defamiliarization with a place and a confrontation with the unknown, an uncanniness. For me it resonated as a sensation of historically immoral trespassing. Had it been a mere four decades earlier, this would have been a nonplace for me – in all probability I would have been banished, either to exile abroad or certain death closer to home.” (2008; 109).

This was it exactly, and in attempts to show me that Arabia could be my home, the fact that I received so many comments confirmed that it could never *really* be. Attempts by an individual to demonstrate how much they trusted me would often only confirm how much they did not. I recall a number of times while I was growing up in the South of the United States, my family would be at a gathering and someone would comment to the only African-American in the room “Oh I have a black neighbour! They are really nice!”, or to my parents “Oh I had a Jewish friend once, they were really

sweet”. Surely these attempts at post-racism must come across as tedious and embarrassing. We would have a decent laugh about it in private. Now, however, I found myself part of these terms of engagement, part of what Ruth Mandel referred to as “the anomalous situation of Jewishness in this relatively ‘Jew-free’ society” (2008, 110). I would usually only feel truly comfortable being Jewish with an informant who would flat out tell me “be careful who you tell. Most people won’t care, but even if you are not religious, some people are still quite closed-minded, they will just assume you work for Mosaad (Israeli secret services). Just be careful.” This is the type of dialogue I would have thought would make me paranoid, yet an honest observation of cultural tension proved to be a perfect way to dispel it.

The sentiments affected me most the first six months of my nearly four year stint in the Emirates. A few stories of overt anti-Semitism and a few offensive personal encounters put me on guard. Shortly after I arrived in Dubai, a Fulbright scholar from New York was arrested by the secret police, detained and questioned for 13 hours, and then deported. He was an American Muslim sociologist from a prestigious New York institution studying expat life in Dubai, but when he asked the agents who questioned him why they were detaining him they would only answer “I think it is the Jewish”. The researcher published it in his blogs and the story made international headlines.⁹ On two separate occasions, I removed myself from taxis as the drivers (both Pakistani) asked me where I was from, as is inevitable in a Dubai taxi. When I told them I was American,

⁹ See the Syed Ali’s narration of his ordeal in the Guardian’s “You must come with us”, Monday 12 November 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2007/nov/12/familyandrelationships.firstperson>
See also his weblog, <http://bklyn-in-dubai.livejournal.com/>

they began violent anti-American and anti-Semitic rants. One driver began a tirade that the then US president George Bush was a secret Jew and needed to be slaughtered along with all the other secret Jews who rule America. He became so enraged that he could not control his taxi. He stopped at an intersection in Al Quoz, and I left and walked the rest of the way to my destination. These brushes with overt anti-Semitism were few and far between, however, and I never really worried about my safety. Indeed, I've encountered more anti-Semitic symbols and gestures in the U.S. and Britain than I ever did in the Middle East. Still, I learned it was just easier to be mum about my religion and my upbringing, not because it embarrassed me or because I felt I was in real danger, but simply to avoid the awkwardness, the silent acknowledgements, and the tedious banter. I did my best to be an ambiguous anthropologist. This too was not without consequences.

I realize now that this position forced me into a pattern of alternating ontologies, sometimes intentional, though often unintentional. I admit to sometimes projecting myself dishonestly. I could not always be the Jew in the Arabian desert. When I first began talking to locals in Arabic, they often assumed I was Lebanese, and I was not always aware of this. I would explain that I was a researcher from London, but I have dark eyes, dark hair, and olive skin, and informants would usually construct their own ideas concerning my origins. This was sometimes a boon, and sometimes a hindrance. When informants thought I was Muslim, they would behave in ways that were appropriate when dealing with other Muslims, especially as they would not have yet ascertained my religiosity. This was important because it gave me insight into the sacred canopy and the heuristic processing that accompanies years of experience practicing the

Emirati and the Muslim public self. When they knew I was American, or if they thought I was British, unless I forced reflexivity back to the sacred canopy, a different identity would begin to break through their Islamic personas. While each individual would remain a product of their upbringing and environment, I did begin to recognize a shift in social motivations depending on my personal ontology. This is partly what helped me form an understanding of the boundaries of religious congruency that I will address in Chapter 3.

Despite the familiarity that some individuals would instantly show me when they thought I was Arab, I developed the position that it was better to be a non-Arab while researching the local selfhoods. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, during my first summer in the Emirates, I conducted a pilot study on the stigmatization of mental health in the UAE. The research was conducted at a large government hospital in Abu Dhabi. I conducted this project partly for my own research, but also as a way to start a large partnership between UCL and the local health authority. The local directors of the health authority believed it would be better to start a project rolling, elicit the trust of the Sheikhs, and then try and sort out proposals and red-tape. To this effect, they asked me to comment on the specific aspects of the hospital that I believed could hinder success for psychiatric initiatives in the state. My first comment was my first observation: there were no Arab doctors. Aside from the director of behavioural science, a thoracic surgeon cum psychiatrist, in nearly four years of exploring hospitals, I never did meet a Gulf Arab medical practitioner. My comment to the director of the health authority was a call for local Arab doctors. Few of the doctors I met in government hospitals even spoke any

Arabic. Surely one of the best ways to improve mental health outcomes among locals as well as decrease the stigmatization of mental illness was to have doctors present who truly understood what it meant to be Arab, and not just Arab, but Gulf Arab. I quickly learned that this was a naïve perception. Doctors at the government hospitals complained that Arabs would never open up, that they participate in medical resistance, and that they treat the medical institutions with apathy and even disdain. I visited a German mental health clinic in Dubai, and the owners had an opposite experience. They joked with me, “The Emiratis are some of our best patients... only not in Dubai. They are great in Germany”. The doctor who started the clinic owned a practice in Germany. After years of business from Emiratis who travelled to his clinic in Germany, he decided to start a clinic in Dubai. While his clinic did quite well in Dubai with Western expatriates and non-Gulf Arab residents, his Emirati patients still preferred to travel to Germany for treatment than visit his local clinic. He ended up going back to Germany and leaving his Dubai clinic in the care of his capable son and German staff. “The last thing Emiratis and Arabs want is an Arab doctor. That is a sure way to get them to never go to the hospital”. The resident psychotherapist at the clinic was a white American man, and was the first registered psychotherapist in the UAE. He explained that when he did see Arab patients, “I think it is a great comfort to them to think I don’t speak a word of Arabic”. “The fear”, he explained, “is that even if I tell them I am sworn to privacy, if I was Arab I would still tell someone something about them, to their cousin’s cousin, or to a friend who works at some office owned by their wife’s brother’s friend or something, and their private life would get leaked somehow.” This certainly seems part of it, though I suspect there are other reasons as well. There is perhaps a perception of the superiority of Western

medicine. There is also, as I have mentioned above, the heuristic response towards the Islamic sacred canopy when two Muslims meet each other. Regardless, it was clear that many locals, both men and women, would divulge nearly anything to a white German man, but would divulge nothing to an Arab man or woman. I found that if I wanted to get certain information from many informants, I had to make it clear that I was neither Arab nor Muslim.

My personal ontology in the region, then, became often nebulous. I could not be too public about my natural identity, an American, atheist Jew, and furthermore unmarried, but living with his partner, a social situation that is only ambiguously legal in Dubai, and punishable by prison and deportation only 10 miles away in Sharjah. Nor could I effectively remain native. Not only would it be dishonest, but it might get me nowhere ethnographically. I found a comfortable in-between place that required careful divulgence of information. I became, in my perception of myself, both good at explaining who I was not, and good at not explaining who I was. The emotional and psychological states that pervade the ever present ethnographic methodological paradox between cultures of participation and observation are discussed often by post-modernist anthropologists (see Davies and Spencer, 2010, for a collection of essays on the topic). Ghassan Hage gives the image of “a table tennis ball on the beach being drawn in and out of the waves, with the sandy beach representing the informants’ culture, and the water representing the cultural world of the anthropologist. The movement of the table tennis ball is unpredictable and chaotic, yet it is certain that sometimes it will go deeper into the sea and sometimes get closer to the sand. Sometimes it might even stay on the sand for

relatively long periods of time, only to be swept by the waves again” (Hage; 2010, p153). I confess that my fieldwork experience was not entirely like this. Where am I when I’m not in the water and not on the sand? It is worth saying here that, in a certain sense, defining specific ontologies, or perhaps states of becoming in the field, is a preposterous endeavour. Certainly some contrasting states of being are observably more polar than others, yet for an anthropologist, or anyone for that matter, to try and place and categorize their personal voice within the complexity of social interaction ignores both personal history and the influence of the present. The same can be said in observing the voices of my informants shifting between Arab, Islamist, Secularist, Asian, Family man, Womanizer, Party-goer, Homebody and etc., or myself, as an observer, to place definitive shifts in their own self projections in response to their perceptions of me. Each is observably different than the last, “but”, as Gilles Deleuze has commented on those who wish to place these voices, “since each of us, like anyone else, is already various people, it gets rather crowded” (Deleuze, 1995, 7), and if not crowded, than certainly lacking orderly continuity.

Still, I will abuse the notion of alternating selves, for myself and for my informants, as I find them useful at least for vectors of meaning. To this end, I propose an additional ontology. I spent significant time discussing Djinn with communities in the Emirates. It was not until a few nearly disastrous encounters (see discussion in Chapter 4), that I realized I could become one myself. Not literally of course, but effectively. Ambiguity has its own consequences, it is ironically its own definitive state, especially in a culture that has such a robust cosmological structure devoted to ambiguity, and so

highly values the concrete visibility of Cartesian Dualism. The last thing I thought of myself was that I could be dangerous, but without somewhere for locals to centre me, I could become just that. I thought my broken Arabic would make me harmless, I assumed it would take away my power, and provide hegemonic superiority for the people I was observing. Yet, on several occasions I was verbally attacked. “Why do you speak Arabic at all? If you aren’t Muslim or Arab why are you speaking it”? The thoughts were not just inquisitive, they were angry and protective. The ability to speak Arabic in what is becoming a Pan-South Asian, English based, and multicultural urban slosh is, as I have learned, protected by many Emirati people. This cultural linguistic protectionism is rife with consequences, as I will discuss in later chapters. The potential exists that rather than building trust with locals, speaking Arabic as an expat could lead to strong feelings of distrust and apprehension.

Categories and Conversions

I encountered the Emirati need for social labels often, and most aggressively whenever I dealt with red tape, applying for various licences, visas, and etc. I’m acutely aware that this is a universal phenomenon. I have come across plenty of relatively minor frustrations, for example, entering and exiting even Britain and the U.S. whenever I naively, or unintentionally flaunted my social or political ambiguity. Such systems thrive on labels, and do not appear to be able to function without them. Yet, these dependencies seem exacerbated in South East Arabia, and seem to extend more often outside the political arena and into the local imagination. One afternoon I found myself in a

government office filling out forms for a visa extension. The forms explicitly ask for your religion. There were eight choices: Christian, Muslim (Sunni or Shia), a few Hindu groups, and a few Buddhist groups. The boxes for Judaism, No religion, or “Other”, were conspicuously absent. I left the boxes blank. I handed my forms in to a middle-aged Emirati woman whose job required her to examine the forms before passing them off to a typing centre.

She looked me up and down and said “you didn’t put your religion”.

Religiously, I was happy to be nothing. Me: “Oh, I don’t really do anything”.

She looked confused. “I don’t really have a religion”, I told her.

Office Woman: “Oh, you are Christian”.

Me: “No, I’m not Christian, I’m not anything, but there wasn’t a choice for that”.

She looked over my form. Her English was not great, and she switched to Arabic.

“Shu Jinsiiyatak?” (Nationality?)

Me: “Ana Amriki, wa lakin sakanayt fi London”, I responded (I’m American, but I lived in London).

Office Woman: “ok, fine you are Christian, write that you are Christian.”

I was willing to be nothing, but I was *not* willing to write that I was a Christian. Politically I did not care; it was a question of personal dishonesty that left a sour taste on my tongue. Me: “Ana mu masihi, ma 3ndi diin.” (I’m not a Christian, I don’t have religion), I said as definitively as possible.

It was only one of many questions on a bureaucratic form, and I did not think it would be a big deal. She became alarmed and called over the Emirati intimidation officers that hover about government offices. They spoke with her in tense voices. They came across the counter and stood over me, I understood that their job was mostly to intimidate people, but it worked. “Who are you and what do you want?” The tone was not friendly. I realized I was suddenly in a dangerous situation.

I made two mistakes here. The first was not conforming to systematized categories, in this case state-sanctioned religious affiliation. Being Jewish is, I am promised, legal in Dubai, as is, say, being Shinto, but they are only legal de facto. Being atheist is ambiguously *illegal*, but the legality is moot. As evidenced by the officers at the home office, the category does not really exist. The way many Muatan can come to understanding the notion of an atheist, I have found, is to view him or her as just a ‘shameless’ Christian. I tried to make it clear I was *not* a ‘shameless’ Christian, and this made me dangerous. “*Iza ana baddi visa, Laazim yakun 3ndak diin?*” (If I want a visa I have to have religion?). The second big mistake was responding in Arabic. In this case, it was not received as an attempt by a foreigner to adapt to and respect a host nation. As

a non-Muslim American, my Arabic was intrusive at best, and more likely clandestine. I realized what I had to do; a trick that many expats have learned while travelling and making mistakes. I had to fall back to a banal expatriate category, an ignorant confused white American. It is embarrassing and self-depreciating, but fairly necessary. I dropped the Arabic, acted like I had no idea where I was or what I needed to do, explained that I wasn't even sure if I was in the right queue, and emphasized that I was American and couldn't figure out where I was supposed to go. It took five minutes of convincing, but it eventually worked. "Ok, no problem". They brought me to a desk at the typing centre that was part of the "woman only" section. This is where most confused Westerners end up. I skipped the hour-long queues that are present in the men's section, and a young Indian man took my forms, looked me up and down, and filled them out without speaking to me. I received my replacement visa without any other complications, and when my processed forms were handed back to me they read "Christian" typed in bold across the centre of the page.

Arabic Protectionism

Following the socio-cultural methodological institutions set forth by Franz Boas, we are often encouraged in our field to deconstruct personal boundaries in an effort to elucidate relativism. Critical observers will tell me government and red tape offices, regardless of where they sit on the globe, are no place for this type of behaviour. They are probably right. Still, the irony of being politically converted into Christianity by a government entity self-defined as Islamic, and therefore proselytizing, in philosophy if

not in practice, was not lost on me. In fact, I found there to be distinct lack of overt Islamic advertising by my informants. Even Imams and religious authorities seemed to avoid an aggressive stance on exporting Quranic ideology when I would speak to them in private. My first thought was that this followed a general ‘hands off’ approach to religion in welcoming Westerners. This is in sharp contrast to Abu Dhabi’s immediate neighbour to the West, which rigorously encourages Islamic conversion. A number of my British acquaintances who worked in engineering, development, and oil came back from business trips to Saudi and exclaimed “apparently I’m a Muslim now”. The statement concerns systematic forced conversion in Saudi. Mecca and Medina are specifically forbidden to non-Muslims, and so the government’s political response to the problem of importing all their labour and development teams from non-Muslim countries is to force mass conversion in the outskirts of the city. Buses and taxis ferrying migrant workers and Western expats into the cities park on the side of the road. Islamic authorities then quickly convert them all through a simple ritual, sometimes hundreds at a time.

The process is quick. Workers recite a statement of conviction that there is only one god and that Mohammed was his prophet. After repeating it three times, the workers are officially Muslim. Many, however, are unaware of what they are saying. The conversions are often practiced in cities other than Mecca and Medina as well. A Sri Lankan friend of mine was converted in this way. He was brought into Saudi to work in a McDonalds. He learned Arabic while he lived there, but was unaware he had been converted upon arrival. His employers began requiring him to go to mosque, and it was

there he learned that he had been converted. He now lives in Dubai and works at an expatriate run beach café.

“I learned to love Islam in Saudi, and I am a Muslim now for four years. They made me go to mosque in Riyadh but it was a good thing to do because we always had the weekend off, and now I am married, and now I don’t drink alcohol. Here we never have the weekend off, and I cannot go to mosque really, but I go sometimes, and [the locals] don’t want me there. I have to go to the Asian mosque I think, but it’s too far away, so I don’t go.”

One of my British acquaintances who travelled to Saudi on business was asked to go through this process. Being more aware of what Saudi officials were asking of him, he adamantly refused. “I told them they could do what they needed to and send me home if they wanted, but I wasn’t reciting anything, so I think they just pretended like I had.” The nature of Islam, purity, and Saudi’s holy cities is complex, and is not part of the discussion here. What I take from these stories is the notion that, in many cases, the appropriation of social categories is more important than any participation in these categories. It matters little if a visitor is even aware he has been converted, as long as he can be *said* to be Muslim, or in my case, it matters very little what I *actually* practise, as long as I could be said to be Christian on a piece of paper. Had I not looked at my forms typed by the Indian man, I’d never have even known I’d been ‘converted’ by the Emirati home office.

As for the irony of being labelled a Christian by a Muslim state, my Sri Lankan friend experienced something similar to what I experienced at the visa office, but his case is more complex. He felt as though he was treated as a Muslim, and not a Sri Lankan Buddhist in Saudi, and upon his arrival in Dubai, there was a sense that he was reconverted back into Buddhism. He became less a Muslim, Islamically integrated in a religious state, and became again a Sri Lankan, unwelcome in Islamic circles. His fluent Arabic was increasingly deteriorating because locals would not practice with him, and he found he was discouraged from going to Mosque, both by the company for whom he worked and by local Muslims. The greater irony was that he was not an ambiguous agent in need of a category as I was. He was a proud practicing Muslim. His Dubai visa papers listed him as a Hindu, a departure from both his native Buddhism and his adopted Islam, and he told me his immigration procedure was not pleasant.

My Emirati informants provided a contradiction on their thoughts on conversion. After many heated debates with my interlocutors, especially with ‘the three Mo’s’, they would conclude with the insistence that Islam is for everybody; that the Quran was written not just for Arabs and Muslims, but was a gift from Allah to all peoples. Yet, they often seemed disquieted when I told them I had read it. A friend told me, “This is because they are worried you are reading it in English, and you should be reading it in Arabic”. However, I am not convinced my informants were worried about language. Proselytizing always seemed to me to be focused on what ‘one’ should do, not what ‘I’ should do. The Mo’s would frequently tell me the Quran was for everyone, but if I asked them which copy I should read, they would quickly change the subject. They would

rebuke me for not worshipping God on Fridays, but if I offered to go to mosque it was met in silence. If I asked to join a Quranic study group, a typical dialogue would progress, “why are you wanting to do that?” “Well, I am interested in Islam and want to know more”. “Yes, that is good because Islam is for everyone”. “Is there somewhere I can go?” “You should go to Jumeirah mosque, maybe”. Jumeirah mosque is a tourist mosque on the beach. It is the only mosque open to non-Muslims, and it has visiting hours outside prayer time. As a result, it has become, and is advertised to be, a bit of a tourist attraction.

The representatives for Jumeirah mosque were always warm to me, but I know that they were paid to be. They did not actually work for the mosque, but rather for the ‘Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding’. I rarely received invitation or information outside what tourists were often given. If I enquired beyond the diagnostic information of what occurs in the mosque or how a national dresses themselves, I would be ignored. If I asked where I could study the Quran, they seemed not to know, “Why do you want to study these things anyway? Where are you from?” eventually telling me to maybe look up a madrassa. I received the most honest answer from an Emirati representative at the mosque, Ali. “These things are not really for English people. You can come and see, maybe, but I think they will not want you to. They are not teaching these things to people like you. But there are cultural understanding classes...” It was not ‘cultural understanding’ I was after, but rather ‘understanding culture’. Cultural understanding classes involved learning how to greet businessmen in Arabic, offer them coffee, and negotiate in English without seeming rude. If only understanding culture was

so simple. “Cultural understanding’ classes are quite expensive, short term lessons. British and American acquaintances who took the courses were excited about learning to say ‘good morning’, ‘thank you’, and ‘my secretary will set up an appointment’ in Arabic, but complained that there were never any discussions on how locals lived. It is likely their teachers did not know themselves. I was never able to find courses taught by Emirati locals, and teachers were almost invariably Lebanese. This extended to language classes, which I will come to later. My point here on incomplete proselytizing is the observance of a general trend of internal conflict. That is, in Dubai at least, most locals seemed to know that they should try to convert me; they just did not seem to really want to. They seemed to know I should go to a mosque; they just did not want me to come to theirs. They seemed to think that I should know the Qur’an; they just did not really want me to read it.

In the case of Islam specifically, I must acknowledge that my goal was never to ‘be’ labelled Muslim. I am, in this sense, a religious fraud. I wanted to know Islam as an outsider, and it seems reasonable that my informants could pick up on this. Only once was I called on my motivations. I complained to my first Arabic teacher (from Jordan), about the perceived exclusion from the Islamic world. “If you want to be Muslim”, she half scolded me, “you just be one. You submit to Allah. You don’t worry about all the other things. They will come.” This is partly my failure for wanting to first ‘know’ and then ‘do’. The ease at which some of my friends were ‘converted’ in Saudi acknowledges this. Still, while the possibility of questioning my authenticity certainly exists, it is incomplete. The exclusion of religious services extended far beyond me, and

beyond Muslim Sri Lankans, but to other Arabs as well. Palestinian and Syrian Arab men seemed specifically unwelcome at some Sunni mosques, though I was not able to follow through on their specific cases other than hearing their complaints. In my years in London, friendly Muslim groups have invited me to events and classes around the city. My first copy of the Quran was given to me years ago by a student Islamic group at University College London at an open day on campus. The contrast between this type of religious transparency and that performed by many Emirati nationals was profound.

In addition to a general sense of Islamic protectionism, I encountered a strong local protection of the Arabic language. I have already briefly discussed the problem for the Muatan of a non-Arab foreigner speaking Arabic in a government office. My attempts seemed to be perceived as clandestine. Within the general public, many of my interlocutors seemed torn on foreigners learning the local language. A primary reason is that language is often used as an instrument for secrecy. Some of the locals I know to be bilingual (English and Arabic) have admitted that it is useful for ownership of Arabic to be somewhat restricted. Many expats will be familiar with this problem. It is a common scenario that an expatriate will become involved in a motoring incident with a local. A-shortiiya (police) are quickly summoned as is the law. The police very rarely know any English, often defining themselves as Muatan, and are largely there to fill out paperwork. They have a long friendly conversation with the locals involved, and do not really engage with the expatriate. In one instance, an acquaintance of mine, a British housewife, fell into this scenario. She happened to know some Arabic. She explained “the police and the man spent 10 minutes talking about their families and how they might know each

other before even looking at me. When I interrupted in Arabic they were both furious. This man started shouting and making up stories about [the crash]. The police officer didn't even ask me if I was ok, he wanted to know why I spoke Arabic". The implication is that Arabic is a protected tool, an aristocratic commodity that should only benefit the elite. It is a joke among the European expat community that whenever you have a car accident (a rite of passage for anyone living in the country), you call your spouse and they ask two questions: "Are you ok?", and "was a local involved?" There are other elements of perceived social hierarchy involved here as well. Of course, there are many Arabic speakers living in the Emirates as migrants or expats from elsewhere in the middle-east, and they have the same joke, but in Arabic.

Supra-Arborescent inheritance

One epistemological approach that my informants have taken to engaging with cultural intrusion is to objectify, and perhaps even anthropomorphize an adopted concept of globalization. Globalization becomes a *thing*, a *thing* that can invade your space, your house, or your mind. It is not necessarily seen as evil, but certainly foreign, and can cause harm. In later chapters, I will explore the idea further, through association with Western science, expatriates, Djinn and spirits, genetics, disease, and even skin colour. All of these things have a certain magic to them, though I am hesitant to dwell into the supernatural realm. Roger Lohmann (2003) provides an excellent discussion on the appropriation of the supernatural in academic discourse. Lohmann cites Joseph Bosco and presents the idea of the "universal applicability of 'supernatural' because of the need

for an etic perspective, despite the fact that what is considered ‘natural’ varies cross-culturally” (page 119). An etic perspective becomes useful because it provides a home and a contrast for various imaginings of philosophical imports (or any material imports for that matter), whenever that *natural* becomes *unnatural*, gene into Djinn. However, the concept become limited when the inevitable statements are made by my informants that something ‘*supernatural*’ is acting natural ... naturally supernatural. Lohmann presents an interesting thought. “Generalizing, we can assume mountains, trees, fairies, or the causes of life and death also exercise volition. When we do this, we are engaging in supernaturalism” (pages 121-122). However, if something like, say, a gene for Diabetes, or a godless foreigner, is acting of its own agency, or an agency derived from nature, or enveloped into a personal cosmology, it is not so useful to call it supernatural despite its analogies to its imaginative cousins of smokeless fire. Before an ethnographic perspective, the clearest I can be at present with this debate is to say that my informants seem to know that with a Djinn, with a foreign intruder, and with genetics, something is happening naturally that everyone knows can happen but possibly should not be happening, not in a way that defies gravity, but defies structure. In any case, the supernatural analogies, if we are to use them, are not alone sufficient for me to think about globalization, at least, not in terms of what foreign imports are. Saying that they occupy as similar space as the supernatural is useful for emic comparison, but is it always a reality?

الذ كلمات غريب ب من غريب ي

(Strange words from the Westerner)

Of course, emic comparisons seem to elucidate social response. Simple changes in imagination have vastly different meanings. I once asked a friend of mine to give me an Arabic riddle, something simple that my poor Arabic could understand. He gave me the statement above, and contained in the script is a sort of Arabic joke. Arabic words tend to be highly structured, and almost all words have three letter roots. The root letters can be manipulated to form a body of meaning around the root. Very complex reference can be extrapolated or derived from very basic ideas. The result is that, for an Arabic speaker, seemingly unrelated words can exhibit a certain level of synonymy with each other. I have no deep insight into whether this cultural linguistic synonymy is a cause of language, or a casualty of language (I suspect a mixture of both). For the time being, I simply enjoy its existence. In the above example, the meaning comes from root Gh – R – B, which leads to a range of vocabulary. The phrase *الذ كلمات غريب ب من غريب ي* (Alkalimat **ghariiba** min **ghrabiya**), or ‘strange words from the westerner’ uses the root twice. The joke is that the word for “strange” is synonymous with the word for “westerner”. Furthermore, the word for “strange”, is also structural related to the word “absurd”. The phrase then easily implies that Westerners are not only inherently different, but are also ridiculous and filled with nonsense. My friend thought this was terrible funny.¹⁰ He spent some time explaining it to me, all the time pointing at me and laughing. It was

¹⁰ Also, he explained how Trafalgar Square is named from the same root. The cape of Trafalgar from Arabic *Taraf Al Gharb*. طرف – End or extremity of the ‘West’., which he also found terribly funny.

some time later that I understood the possible consequences of such an association. Surely it must be cliché for the anthropologist to comment that “my informants thought I was strange”, and for this I apologize. Still, the fact that the association of the Westerner with strangeness and ambiguity is not only socially imagined, but also deeply embedded in the structure of language warrants thought. In some discourse in the region, the playfulness of my friend’s pun is transformed into something more insidious. As I have mentioned previously, people that I engaged with peripherally sometimes found me too ambiguous, not fitting properly into their categories, which became dangerous. Here we find a local joke that associates the concept of the Westerner with a general sense of nonsense. The structure of the written word itself implies that the Westerner makes no sense, that he does not follow the known rules. The foreigner, not a particular individual, but the idea of the foreigner, is sometimes referred to in the Gulf as a type of Djinn literally, sometimes the Djinni of the West, and other times the Western Shaitan more malevolently (I will discuss the structure of the word Djinn later in Chapter 2). The former is amoral; the latter is immoral. The former comes with a warning, a label that says ‘proceed with caution’; the latter comes with scolding, a stop sign and a fragmentation. The line between ambivalence and aggression is blurry, but my informants are often quick to draw it. The contradiction is that ambivalent agents, beneficent agents, and malevolent agents often come hand in hand, or indeed are one and the same. How are my informants able to split them?

In *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993), Michal Taussig begins by telling his readers that “In some way or another one can protect themselves from evil spirits by portraying them”

(12). If we accept that technologies, within the imagination, can and do often take on magical properties (Gell, 1998), as imports from an immoral world, technology seems to easily embody ambiguous moral categories in the Gulf. “Some people are thinking that these [television and radio] are immoral, but we know better. When we use them, we use them as Muslims.” Mo explained to me. Similarly, Emirati women have no problem wearing the latest European fashions, tight, form fitting fabric, but if they are in public, it is usually underneath their abayas. Perhaps technology is too easy. When we think of imports with their own inherent ethicalities, it becomes more complicated. Taussig shows how a culture can be both fearful and distanced of another, and yet still adopt and absorb the feared cultural into its own nature. He asks a great question... “How much of a copy does the copy have to be to have an effect on what it is a copy of?” (page 51). I might shift the emphasis of the question away from the copy and onto the template. From my informants’ point of view, this is their own knowledge of how the world is structured, their own cosmology. I will not argue that the copy is not magical, or that it doesn’t produce desire (I will discuss scapegoating and mimetic desire in later chapters), but I wonder if the local cosmology remains more robust. My fieldwork has shown me that the latter is made to fit into the former.

There have been many exchanges of ideas between East and West, from West to East, and from East to West. A practical example might be the use of numbers in Arabic:

٠ ١ ٢ ٣ ٤ ٥ ٦ ٧ ٨ ٩
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Figure 2: English and Arabic Numerals

The latter set will likely be the most familiar to English readers. These forms used in Western scripts are known as Arabic numerals in the West. They were adopted in Europe from Arab countries in the middle ages, and so referred to as Arabic. In truth, the numbers are suspected to have originated from Hindi by Persian and Arab scholars many centuries earlier. The reality entails a complex social trajectory of mathematical thinking from the holiness of numbers in the cults of Pythagoras, its teaching in the great Baghdad House of Wisdom, to the completeness theorems of Al Khwarizmi¹¹, to reigning international mathematical thinkers whose algorithms and programming filter back to the quietest villages of Musandam fjords. Even isolated fishing towns have a mobile phone or two among the population, Japanese technology functioning through binary mathematical language developed by German, British, and American computational thinkers made possible by the epistemology introduced to Europe as Al Khwarizmi's *Sifr* (zero). I found it strange how often this I heard this story cited to me in Dubai, albeit sans detail. English numerals were proudly owned as Arabic ones. Arabic numerals were often called Indian numerals in Arabic (RaKam Al Hind). My informants, and the media, often cite Islam's 'golden age' during Europe's intellectual darkness. I think they cite it often because they believe they are heading, or are currently in a new golden age.

¹¹ One of Al Khwarizmi's famous contributions to mathematics is developing and outlining algebraic methodology in his book of the same name *Al Jabr* (Arabic: Completion) short form of "The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing". From Al Khwarizmi's name we derive Algorithm.

Though road signs and registration plates now read both sets of numbers, there is a strong protectionist sentiment to keep Arabic numerals out of Arabic. The Arabic numbers are used as evidence to demonstrate that Western thinking is developed from and subservient to Arabic (and Islamic) principles, but they are refuted in public space as a form of attempted Western imperialism, recalling the protection of local language that I discuss previously in this chapter. Even with a perceived knowledge of gift and ownership, a simple system is absorbed into knowledge of superiority, and distanced to avoid perceived potential deference.

Taussig's analysis of Panamanian Cuna seems to imply an interiority in which dual modes of thinking become intertwined. In the case of, say, Genes and Djinn, there is a potential duality between Western designed empiricism and religion. The potential incongruences are, of course, not unique to the Gulf region. The debate on what cognitive domain the two combatants occupy is quite prevalent across the globe. I have not the room to outline this debate here, but will leave it as a question of head-space. Stephen Jay Gould has tackled this problem of headspace in what he calls "non-overlapping magisteria" (1997). His argument specifically concerns the clash (or rather, non-clash), between science and religion. They occupy, the National Academy of Sciences will tell us (1999), two completely different, non-warring lines of flight in human observation of the cosmos; two different realms of human experience. This is a nice political thought. Still, are there two different realms of human experience?

In order to tackle a similar epistemological quandary, Carolyn Nordstrom examines the problem of headspace in regions marked by war, violence, and often deadly political conflict. “Roles themselves”, she demonstrates, “– the positions any given person holds in society – are often complex and multifaceted: a state actor can also function as a non-state actor, a sock manufacturer, a black-marketeer. A state actor can simultaneously vote sanctions into law and then ignore them for profit or power. A businessperson can lament clandestine sales while profiting from them.” (2004; 94). This may be more on the mark. Many of my informants drank alcohol. I would meet them in bars at five star hotels. They would wear their dishdasha, full national dress, and drink Heineken, the usual beer of choice for middle aged Emirati men. They would, of course, be horrified should they be seen in public with alcohol, but a five star hotel bar is not public in this sense, it is safe. The only possible people that may see a man drinking Heineken at a bar for expatriates are other drinkers. If they are Emirati, they would be comrades in moral offense. I once had some drinks with a man who angrily scolded others for drinking while he himself was downing lager. It did not seem to be a case that he thought they “should do as I say, not as I do”, but rather he saw himself as a moral agent and transgressor simultaneously. When I pressed him on the irony, he was first offended, and then he shrugged. Then, a few minutes later, when we had moved on to a different topic, he suddenly brought it up again, interrupting me, “ok, but I always give to charity”. The end of my long discourse with him concludes with a general “It is fine if *I* drink”. This is possibly a quick attempt to rationalize two conflicting behaviours. What is lacking is a sense of moral affront. In admittedly very different contexts, I have gone drinking with a friend of mine who is Mormon, and another who was a Jordanian

Muslim. Both, in their own terms, claimed to believe that what they were doing was wrong, that they should know better, and that we all have vices. My Emirati drinkers, many of whom supported a ban on alcohol, were able to morally justify their beer.

I take Nordstom's point about the multifaceted nature of the political self in society as inherent. What happens when this is suddenly witnessed on a large social scale? Sheikh Mohammed, the ruler of Dubai, and its highest religious authority, also owns a monopoly on liquor sale and distribution in the Emirate. As a moral agent, my informants tell me, he can do this because he is able to keep alcohol from getting out of hand in Dubai by controlling its distribution. As a businessman (and one of the world's few billionaires), alcohol is a commodity that makes him money. The monopoly allows for high prices coupled with 30% tax (in a normally tax-free country). Islamically, alcohol is clearly *immoral*, yet making money, as Weber has famously argued, might be *quite moral*. Further still, politically, for the ruler of a city-state modelled on tolerance and a stated openness to multiculturalism, alcohol remains objectively *amoral*. There is more to be said on this, but I leave it now to say that these categories do not operate by reduction; they do not cancel each other out. In the same way, I do not think that giving charity always counteracts a moral transgression. Rather than undergoing a process of elimination, they must all exist at polar extremes simultaneously, and, when necessary, cross over to each other's planes.

Tracing ‘globalization’

How does an anthropologist or any observer of the world follow and define these lines of flight? Does the presence, for example, of alcohol in a system act independent of tradition, or, more broadly, does the introduction of any novel technologies and sciences into a new system take over and inform tradition, or do they arboresce independently of each other. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari provide a much more abstract way to thinking about these “crossings” in their *A Thousand Plateaus*. For them, there is no determinism, nor direct arborescence. There is simply a series of machinations operating in and around each other. “There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything significant. ... More generally, evolutionary schemas may be forced to abandon the old model of the tree and descent. Under certain conditions, a virus can connect to germ cells and transmit itself as the circular gene of a complex species, but not without bringing with it ‘genetic information’ from the first host. ... Evolutionary schemas will no longer follow models of arborescent descent going from the least to the most differentiated, but instead a rhizome operating immediately in the heterogeneous and jumping from one already differentiated line to another. Once again, there is *aparallel evolution*... (2004, pg 11).

I take their point about aparallel evolution, and it echoes in some ways Gould’s point in defining non-overlapping magisteria. Still, there are unsettling omissions in this perception. There is a problem, as I see it, of history in the form of a branching tree.

Technological determinism seems keen on the power of history limiting our freedom and true agency. Here, technology defines history. Technology is the root of a branching trunk of well-defined fractalled trajectories; it is what *begins* the historical pathways that rob us of our freedoms. The rhizomatic model tears apart the tree in favour of a Nietzschean type of freedom in the face of ahistoricity. For the former, technology is superior to history, and for the latter, history is irrelevant. Both approaches disregard technology or science as a social construction in itself. In the first instance, we have no freedom, and in the second, we have too much. I hope in my ethnography to show a middle ground. There are boundaries of agency in which technology can operate.

As a case study, one might consider the UAE international off-roading championship in Abu Dhabi. The event takes place in January during the warm and pleasant winter. The location is remote. It lies in centre of a vast plain of massive windswept dunes, south of Abu Dhabi's Liwa Oasis, near the UAE's Southern Border with Saudi Arabia, though in the Rub al Khali, borders become a bit ambiguous. There are no roads past the oasis, and there are no border crossings. It is the entrance to the world's largest sand desert. It is a four hour journey by highway to Liwa Oasis from Dubai, and then about an hour weaving through sand dunes to the location of the competition. The site is Al More3b (Tal Moreeb) (the terrifying, horrific, or the awesome, frightening hill), the largest sand dune in the UAE, and one of the largest sand dunes in the world. It is a kilometre and half long and 130 meters tall with a 50 degree slope. The competition is essentially an uphill drag race competition. Competitors from Qatar, the UAE, and Bahrain equip fairly standard SUV's with turbocharged engines, and

one by one, they race up the face of Tal More3b. There are three categories of racers referring to the size of the vehicles. The drag racing starts at sunset and proceeds until late at night. Before each run at the hill, an announcer names the team and the vehicle and its specs, and after the run, the time is announced and compared to other competitors. The racing is interrupted many times; to clear debris from around an explosive engine, or for the call to prayers. The night is conducted with a sense of office. The rules are strict, and organizers and sheikhs have special tents and boxed seats to oversee the races. The winners, however, seem to take each success with a grain of salt. The competition seems more a practice in bravado and showmanship than a record of racing times. The crowd favourite was a UAE national who overcharged his SUV. The vehicle was in the heavyweight category, and as it approached the top of Tal More3b, the engine exploded. The SUV launched itself into the air on the incline, completed a 360 degree flip mid-air, and landed on its wheels before catching fire. After the car flipped, the driver managed to launch himself out the window. He rolled 20 meters down the hill until standing up and bowing to thunderous applause.

It struck me how much the championship was about the observers. Of the thousands at the event only a handful were non-GCC citizens, and most were Emirati. If we take for granted an anthropomorphized globalization entity, the event can be seen as a chance to be Muatan openly, away from the globalized gaze. There is nothing multicultural about the event, a rarity in The UAE. Part of this is privacy. The remote location of the event ensures several things. The obvious is that it limits accessibility to those willing to venture out to the desert, but the location creates a type of community as

well. Perhaps because spectators are far out in the desert, and because the event takes place in the night, the majority of spectators camp in the desert over night. Large families set up massive tents along the bases of surrounding dunes. The competition ends at midnight with a fireworks display, but the noise of hundreds of engines and the smell of fuel persist throughout the night. Spectators bring their quad bikes and desert motorcycles, and they play games with the dunes until the sun rises. The engagement between sand and foreign technology is a new way to own and be masters of the desert. The site is of particular interest to the Muatan. Liwa Oasis is the ancestral home of the Bani Yas tribe, the Bedouin people whom the ruling families of Dubai and Abu Dhabi owe their heritage. The *Al Nahyan* family moved from the oasis at the end of the 18th century to Abu Dhabi and they still rule the UAE today. In the winter months, the oasis and its gateway dunes become a Muatan playground. Foreigners are very welcome, but unlike in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, foreigners are reminded openly that the land belongs to the locals. As we walked along the edge of the dunes from the site of the races, young local men would drive by at high speeds on desert motor bikes, punching our shoulders as they passed. They turned their heads after they zoomed by, and they shout “Marhaba!, Welcome to Liwa!”. As they spin clouds of dust with their various vehicles, they become very aggressive and very playful; two qualities that they suppress in the city.

A superficial observer can view the festival as a foreign import: drag racing with American and British sport utility vehicles. Emirati participants and spectators see it as a rich cultural tradition. For them, the fact that the tradition is quite young is arbitrary. These big, petrol guzzling machines are seen locally as ‘owned’ by Gulf culture, despite

there not being any influence on the machines' development. Some colonial observers lament the relatively new-found love and obsession with cars, especially in their engagements with the desert. William Thesiger recalls the Rub Al Khali without them:

“I went to Southern Arabia only just in time. Others will go there to study geology and archaeology, the birds and plants and animals, even to study the Arabs themselves, but they will move about in cars and will keep in touch with the outside world by wireless. They will bring back results far more interesting than mine, but they will never know the spirit of the land nor the greatness of the Arabs.” (Thesiger,2007 xiii).

I suspect that Thesiger has misjudged the fluid and dynamic nature of culture. I suggest that the technology is somewhat irrelevant. The cars become a symbol of the aristocracy and the Muatan. They represent the oil they consume, and the oil revenue that supports the Aristocracy. They also represent the purchasing and ownership of the abstract globalizing entity. Even more than that, the automobiles represent for locals a complete mastery of the desert, a showcase of mobility that was first introduced to the Bedouin in living memory, and which is conceived as the beginning of tribal unification (Thesiger, 2007, page 80) I argue that the off-roading is more than simply a cultural festival. It is something of a revitalization movement. It embodies the Bedouin trajectories of the Aristocracy and a strong sense of desert living. It is at its core anti-urban, but it demonstrates a perceived mastery of foreign space through a novel recreation of local space, developing that liminal, in-between social belonging that

readdresses the spirit of a community which Victor Turner called *existential communitas* (1973: pp. 193-4). The anxiety and privacy that characterize the deterritorialization of Adu Dhabi and Dubai become drenched for a moment under the desert moon, “Al Qamar”, and the sicknesses of the mundane, multicultural splatter are structurally addressed through playful engagement of the Bani Yas’ history and desert engagement. One of my informants, a Dubai Mo’, who rarely spent time with his family (either of his wives) in Dubai, proudly claimed, “I make my family go camping to the desert every month usually because it is the best thing to grow up right.... It is like a medicine”.

Aside from certain qualities that many revitalization movements seem to share,¹² I insist that these gatherings stand alone. They may exist *in the face* of urbanity, but they are not themselves copycats, nor foreign imports. There is a point with which I can agree with Deleuze’s post-structuralism here. He claims “mimicry is a very bad concept, since it relies on binary logic to describe phenomena of an entirely different nature... (2004, page 12). Though my informants might see them this way, I cannot say that a gene is a Djinn any more than I can say whitened skin is an expatriate face, or that fate is ambition or fate is the moon. I will discuss all these things in the following chapters. Yet, viewed as layered histories, these dualities are made irrelevant. They align within a larger cube of time and tradition that is its own thing. Like Ariel’s famous drowned man from Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, the sea does not become the body, nor the body the sea, but a new structure, a dead and alive being with dual independent histories that chimerically

¹² See Wallace (1956) for a classic characterizing of revitalization movements.

entwine without suffocating, both still growing in their own direction, enlarged into a beautiful grotesque: *something rich and strange*.

Chapter 2

Urban Djinn and the conflicts of modernity

Introduction

The tribal people of the Emirates now share their desert and their coast with visitors from around the world. However, before the discovery of oil, there were still traders, attracted by local pearls and spices, and there were many centuries of foreign military men, using the coast as strategic space in wars that many locals cared little about. The coast of Oman, only a few miles across the Hajar, is dotted with white-washed Portuguese Forts with old rusty cannons facing the sea, and a few facing the mountains. A hundred kilometres further South lays Muscat, one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world. There has been a port in Muscat for 5,000 years (Rice, 1994: 256), and for centuries, the city has welcomed visitors who came for frankincense on their way through the Arabia sea. Omani frankincense is still sold in the city's old *Mutrah Souk*. I have wandered several times through its old covered alleyways filled with Indian textiles and quality Omani traditional crafts, and cheap, often fake, merchandise in equal measure, awash in scents and ouds. Still, there were few who ventured far from the coast, even among the local tribesmen. There were quiet settlements along the sea, in the mountains, and in the desert, that, before oil brought highways through the sands and rock, escaped

the intrusion of others, Indian merchants, Persian traders, Portuguese colonials, and the British army. There were cities in the desert even Thesiger would not venture for fear of death. Still, many people of the Gulf, no matter how isolated, knew, as they do now, that they were not alone. There are plenty of other agents acting in their world, other agents with free will. These are the Djinn of the desert and sea who have their own desires despite the designs of man. They live in their own world, but they can act in ours, and as the society of the Gulf changes, so do the Djinn. As a fast changing world forces internal conflict upon the inhabitants of the desert who watch their world rapidly transform, so too does the world have an effect on the cosmological entities that local people know to exist. I approach the spirits who act in the world as external projections of conflict internal to the local self. The anxieties and desires of Gulf Arab men are mirrored and enacted by spirits in the community. Such is the case of the modern Djinn; once lords of the Rub al Khali, now mischievous and horny bipolar poltergeists. Through one lens, they are powerful and assertive, confident and selfish, through another lens, cowardly and depressed, perhaps filled with grief. They are born of smokeless fire, and this mystical composition conjures images of vigour and potency, but what is the outlet for their energies?

A Brief History of Djinn in Anthropology

The word Jinn means literally, concealed, or hidden, and is associated with both physical and metaphorical darkness as well as the inability to see, for example, Jinn Al-layl, or 'darkness of the night'. There are, according to many sources, many different

types of Djinn in the world: The Umaar (lit. Dwellers) who live in human houses; The Ifrit (pl. Afaarit), whom Westermarck has described as “the Aristocracy of the Jnun” (1926 I: 363), powerful Djinn associated with fire, and are usually malevolent, The Arwaah, general spirits who interact with people especially children (Khaleel ibn Ibraaheem Ameen, 2005, page 32), and Maarid (lit. rebellious). Other Djinn include lesser Shaytans and Ghuls, both of whom are malevolent. There is a wealth of stories of Djinn in Islamic and Eastern tradition, but the most salient in popular culture are probably the many Djinn whom are narrated to Shahryar by Scheherazade in her famous nightly practices of self-preservation. Many of these stories involve a spirit inhabiting a vessel through the great sorcery of King Solomon (Ar. Sulayman), son David, and king of the Jews, who is believed throughout the Arab world to be one of the most powerful and wise men who ever lived. In Arabic theology, and indeed, alluded throughout the Quran, Solomon was able to gain dominion over both the nations of men and the armies of Djinn.¹³ A great prophet of Allah, Solomon had power over the forces of nature, and he recruited the faithful masses of the spirit world, and enslaved the malevolent (see Quran Surat An-Naml 27: 17 and Surat Saba’ 34:14). A thousand years later, unsuspecting fisherman or unwary travellers unwittingly release the great Ifrits from their physical or spiritual imprisonments, and the spirits come, either cursing the name of Sulayman and threatening to destroy the world of men, or learning from their past errors and coming to terms with the greatness of Allah.¹⁴ In these stories, there is always a clear

¹³ Sulayman remains one of the more popular names in the Arabic Gulf. The name is given to bestow the gift of wisdom to a child. For reference to Sulayman and his armies of Djinn, see Quran: Surat 27: An-Naml.

¹⁴ For an ironic use of the name Sulayman with Djinn possession, see also Boddy, 1989 pp: 287, where she describes Sulayman as one is the Arab Sudanese *zar* that can possess

focus for the Djinn's (often two-faced) benevolence, or vengeance. Here also, the Djinn rarely commit their mischief in the psychological realm. Rather, they are very real incursions into the physical world.

The Djinn are mentioned throughout the Quran. In Surat Al-Hijr: 27, and in Surat Ar-Rahman: 15 they are said to be moulded from scorching fire (Sahih International) or smokeless fire (Muhsin Khan). They have their own chapter (Surat 72: Al Djinn) which narrates a story of a group of Djinn atop a hill who have just heard a recital of the Quran. The Djinn then reject the Christian accounts of Jesus, denouncing the idea of a son of God or a resurrection, and they then submit to Allah, admitting that among them are both the righteous and wicked. There is some teleological confusion among Arab communities, especially in Southern Arabia (excluding Yemen), concerning the mythological or theological purpose of the spirits. In the Gulf, religious scholars and authorities tend to insist on the reality of Djinn, but argue strongly against the possibility of there being a role for the Djinn in human experience. Still, in many communities, contrary to the official stance, religious scholars in the Gulf are willing to commit to Djinn as inhabiting the mind (possession) as Islamic, whereas the Djinn portrayed as poltergeists are more magical, though nearly all traditionalists claim to believe in both. The primary problem with the discrepancy lies in how to rid oneself of a Djinn. Submission to Allah, and other 'holistic', non physical approaches (exorcism through discussion, prayer) should be sufficient to cope with the former, while magic, which is strictly forbidden in Islam, is required for the latter. Regardless of Islamic law, Muslims

an individual. Here *Sulayman Ya Janna* is an adult unwed homosexual male, invoking paradoxically both masculine failures but also sexual pleasure in the afterlife.

seem to participate in both prayer and ‘sorcery’ in dealing with spirits, and have no problem rationalizing this into the holistic nature of Islam. This chapter is less worried with how to become rid of an annoying Djinn, and is more concerned with how and why they are able to act in the Arab world. Indeed, one may find that the city itself is more powerful than any Sorcerer.

During my stigmatization studies at Sheikh Khalifa medical centre, I had the unique opportunity to explore the behavioural sciences pavilion. I was given access to the staff and to the outpatient clinic, and I was able to speak with doctors and patients at the hospital. On one occasion I met a doctor on staff and asked him if he had some anecdotes concerning a Djinn in correspondence with his patients. I was investigating Djinn as a source of mental illness in the UAE and was looking for evidence that UAE nationals, and other Arabs in The Emirates, still held indigenous beliefs independent of Western medical practice. In chapter 1, I have discussed briefly the ways in which meaning and associations can be made manifest through the physical structure of a word. In the case of the linguistic structure of ‘Djinn’, the notion of ‘concealment’ leads to a cascade of vocabulary. The word for foetus, for example, is *janoon* (جنون), indicating a ‘concealed’ or ‘secret’ human, but also hinting that the sex of the child remains unknown, and so the foetus remains a mystery. In terms of human behaviour, Djinni and spirits have long been associated with mental illness in the Muslim and pre-Muslim Aramaic and Sanskrit traditions. The term for madness in Arabic, *Ajnoon* (أجنون) lit. hidden intellect, is itself a derivative of Jinn (concealed). A question can be posed as to the root of this association. Can one consider an explanatory model for abnormal

behaviour based on a belief in cosmological agents, or can we consider the Djinn as representations for human behaviour, or indeed, can abnormal behaviour and the presence of Djinn simply explain and inform each other?

In other parts of the Muslim world, Djinn possession is quite common, especially among women. Edvard Westermarck (1926), in his examination of ritual and belief in Morocco, begins the discussion on Djinn and the role they play in Islamic culture. Westermarck's work, now approaching 100 years, can be seen as heavily biased. While his analysis might be viewed as a product of the Edwardian age, with a focus on social Darwinism, he was perhaps the first to characterize Djinn possession therapies as both exorcism *and* appeasement, emphasizing the ambivalence and consequent appeasement of some spirits (1926. I: pp. 155, 156 and 518). Ioan Lewis has famously linked some Islamic possession cults to deprivation (Lewis 1966), specifically singling out women as a socially depressed group who use spirit possession as a form of articulation when other means are so socially limited (page 318). He concludes that the notion of deprivation might transcend these cults to work as a paradigm of Western psychology (pp: 325-326). Janice Boddy takes the notion further, and suggests that Djinn (*zar*) possessions in Sudan not only address the desires of deprived and otherwise voiceless women, but also, "works to strengthen and replenish her intellectual and emotional maturity", and it "opens the door to true adulthood..." (Boddy 1989, pp: 309). Among Arab communities, notably in North African nations, there have been multiple studies conducted on Djinn possession, spirit possession, and culture-bound syndromes. Crapanzano (1977) explores the names and pathologies of Moroccan *jnun* in his theories of therapy and healing rituals among the

Hamadsha.¹⁵ Similar to Boddy's analysis of *zar*, Crapanzano writes that through possession and healing, "(the Moroccan man) is provided thereby not only with a new social identity but also with a new set of values and a new cognitive orientation – that is, with a new outlook. This new "outlook" may furnish him with a set of symbols by which... he can articulate and give expression to those particular psychic tensions which were at least in part responsible for his illness." (1977, page 5). Overwhelmingly, Arabs have told me that the presence of Djinni is fundamental to Islam, but in the Emirates, there is a large discrepancy of opinion as to the role they play in this reality. Part of this confusion lies in what has become a very multicultural city. Migrant workers, especially those from South Asia, bring their own knowledge of the Djinni with them as they travel. The social roles and behaviours of these Djinn vary widely from one another (for example see Marsden 2011 and Khan 2006 for recent studies on the relationships between Djinn and humans in South Asia). However, social stratification that currently exists in the Emirates still strongly limits the influence that foreign spirit categories from South Asia, and specifically the Indian continent, have on modern interpretations of Djinn among Emiratis. In any case, there seems to be confusion at the hospital in Abu Dhabi, and I was trying to get to the root of the dilemma.

Djinn Possession, Illness Categories, and Culture Bound Syndromes

I had previously had several interviews with one of the directors of behavioural sciences. We discussed Anthropology and local perceptions of mental illness,

¹⁵ See specifically Crapanzano (1977) chapter 8: The Theory of Therapy

stigmatization of mental illness, and the stigmatization of treatments. We were discussing Anthropology's contribution to modern Psychology and the DSM IV and she had brought up that there exists even culture-bound syndromes. I told her I had some interest in them as well. Citing DSMIV – A culture bound syndrome is... (Littlewood and Lipsedge 1985). The idea of the culture bound syndrome has found an official home in Western Psychology with citations in the DSM-IV, though its relevancy as a psychiatric category has been called into serious question. It has been argued that all psychiatric condition is 'culture bound', negating the usefulness of designating any specific regional behaviours as specifically 'culture bound' (Littlewood 1996, Jadhav 1996). Others have pointed out possible universality for behaviours and rationalizations that have been designated as culture bound syndromes (Jadhav 2004, 2007). Within the broad range of predominantly Islamic communities, there exist a number of behavioural categories specific to a group of people that has been said to be culture bound. In Malaysia, Muslim men might suffer from a category that they call *amok*. Here, normally passive men suddenly take arms and commit violent acts in public until they are subdued or killed. Locals might claim that the individual was possessed by a spirit. Early functional explanations focused on *amok* as a way for individuals to commit suicide in a conservative Islamic culture that so strongly advocates the eternal damnation of those who take their own lives (Cooper 1934). Later studies focused on the performative aspects of *amok* and its perception as psychopathology, hinting to the underlying authorization of the violent behaviour by the local community (Carr and Tan 1976). Still, others suggest that one approach the behaviour not as 'culture bound', but as symptomatic of other conditions that get lost in the quest for relativity (Saint Martin

1999). Similarly in Southeast Asia, *Latah* is characterized as a type of startle behaviour that promotes suggestibility. It is argued that the condition is less of a syndrome and more of an acceptable, psychophysiological-based social role that actors might invoke to perform acts they would not otherwise be allowed to perform (Winzeler 1995, Simons 1980). As discussed earlier, *zar* possession has been conceived of in similar terms, with specific characteristics and rules for different Islamic communities (see again Lewis 1966, Boddy 1989, Kennedy 1967, and Natvig 1988). The presence of *zar* has been noted in Iran, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, and in many of the Arabic speaking countries of the Arabian Gulf, though I have never heard of any cases reported in the Emirates. In India, *Dhat* is a condition that mostly affects men. It is often characterized as a somatic syndrome that affects a man's sexual performance and fertility, locally described as semen loss, and is often accompanied with feelings of guilt (Wig 1960). Its cultural uniqueness has recently been questioned, however (Jadha, 2004, Sumathipala 2004). Grace Harris has provided ethnography on *Saka* possessions in Kenya, focusing on 'hysteria' and again invoking sentiments of deprivation and desire among women (1959). While *dhat* is found across the Indian sub-continent, and *saka* is found in the Horn of Africa, and neither are necessarily associated with Islamic groups, I mention them here because of the multicultural demographics of the Emirates. Well over half of Dubai's population is thought to be from India, for example, and it seemed reasonable that given the recent phenomenon of massive migrations of South-Asian populations, as well as an influx of Arab nationals and African migrants (including Sudanese and Somali workers and merchants, and especially Kenyan migrants working in the food industry) that some indigenous behavioural categories might have migrated to the country as well, taking new

shapes in the urban desert sprawl. Excited that it peaked my interest, the director of the hospital began explaining to me what they were, and I casually asked her if she had any experience with such a category of behaviour at her hospital. She gave me a confused look and told me ‘no of course not. We don’t have anything like that here’. I mentioned studies of Djinn possession in North Africa and asked if there were local analogues among Gulf communities. “No of course not” she reiterated, clearly more irritated. Based on previous conversations, I came to know when an issue was sensitive with certain high ranking locals, and knew better than to press the issue with her.

The doctors and patients tell a different story, however. Every Western doctor I spoke to told me they encounter the Djinn problem quite frequently. The hospital employs almost exclusively Western doctors who are admittedly quite confused as to what their patients actually want from them. This was also one of the director's biggest laments in governing this hospital. It is very difficult to acquire Arab psychiatric doctors. She tells me they simply don’t yet exist. They employ Americans, British, Germans, and Swedes, imported directly from their home countries; none of whom really know any Arabic. Patients at the hospital very rarely speak for themselves. Older women come into the hospital in groups. Older men come in accompanied by a younger relative who does all the speaking. Young patients are accompanied by an older relative who does most of the speaking. The doctor has the arduous task of sorting out second hand information that is influenced by the opinions of the speaker, not necessarily that of the patient. What little Arabic staff there are seem to naturally sift through conversation and come to logical conclusions, but some Western doctors claim that the Arabic speaking

staff are often just as difficult to speak to as the patients. Arab staff know and are embedded in the terms of local social relations, and know the rules of offending. Western doctors have a harder time about it, especially when it comes to Djinn. According to some doctors, in the case of an older person (usually a male, an uncle) accompanying a younger patient, the older person speaking for a patient might insist that the individual has been plagued by a demon or Djinn. They tell me that the young patient doesn't have the agency to express themselves because their guardian will not let them alone. Alternatively, an older patient might believe they are plagued by a spirit, but their younger escort (often a son) doesn't believe in such things and doesn't immediately communicate their relative's true concern to the doctor. The older patient might not have the words to communicate with the doctor directly, or in the case of an older woman, might feel that it is inappropriate to tell the doctor.

Case Study: Sexual Assault by a Djinn

On this occasion I am able to witness, with a doctor, one of his more confusing cases involving Djinn. An Emirati man had travelled a fair distance to bring his 16-year-old niece to the hospital in Abu Dhabi. The niece, Reem, is pregnant. The uncle, speaking for the niece, wants the doctor to treat her, and he briefly explains her condition. The niece sits silently, draped in her black abaya. The doctor tells him, "I think you've come to the wrong building, this is the behavioural sciences pavilion", and the doctor starts giving him directions to the main hospital. "yes, yes, I know. You are a psychiatric doctor. We came to see you. I've already spoken to the people here before I

came.”. The doctor is puzzled. “you want me to treat her?” “Yes.” “for pregnancy” “Yes.”. The doctor assumes correctly that there is a miscommunication problem, and that some crucial information is not being passed in the conversation. He tries asking the niece questions, the uncle always answers for her. The doctor’s primary goal at the moment is attempting an understanding of why this pair are in a psychiatric ward. He talks with them for another ten minutes before he is allowed to directly speak to the niece. The uncle, when questioned about the pregnancy gets angry. They ‘know’ she is pregnant because the doctors already told them so, but they suspected long before, even before she became pregnant. The doctor asks about the father. The uncle gives an irritated look. The doctor asks if she is married. The uncle, getting more irritated, says of course not. The doctor asks how she became pregnant. “you know how she became pregnant” the uncle retorts. The doctor does. At this point the doctor is relieved. Counselling services for teens are something he *can* arrange. Behavioural problems with teenagers are one of the specialities at this hospital. The doctor can even help with domestic issues regarding the unwed teen pregnancy. The doctor knows not to talk openly about sex with the girl in front of a conservative Emirati. He tries to allude to it lightly in his discussions on counselling. Though missing all the specific details, he knows roughly how the girl became pregnant, and he assumes that the girl and the uncle would have some idea themselves. He apparently is mistaken about the uncle. Getting more frustrated the uncle shouts at the doctor, “no no no she is a virgin, of course she is a virgin.”

After time, it became clear to the doctor that the niece's family, or at least her uncle, believed she had become pregnant by Djinn. The Djinni has ruined her purity. I've since learned that this can happen in a number of ways. Wearing sexy lingerie has been cited to me most often. Young women should be dressed modestly when they sleep so as not to attract the desires of the Djinn, and many a scantily clad young woman has been found mysteriously pregnant in her bedroom. Sometimes a woman is naturally quite chaste in her clothing, but she has simply left the window open and therefore opened up her secrecy to the lustful Djinn. Also, travelling to the city, especially Dubai, and perhaps staying in a hotel can make a woman vulnerable to the Djinni's advances. I am told that many women have been found mysteriously pregnant a month or two after traveling to Dubai. The Dubai hotel room, through its lavishness, expense, and transience, becomes a highly sexualized place, naturally attracting the spirits, how are themselves inherently sexually charged. Another curious sexual crime of Djinn in the UAE, and at least in Oman, is that they often promote homosexual behaviour in both men and woman who claim to be ordinarily sexually mainstream. The belief that Djinns can cause homosexuality is not limited to Emiratis or Arabs, but is echoed within the Muslim Indian population here, and especially within the Pakistani community. It is not uncommon for doctors to hear "these thoughts are not my own", "these actions are not my own". I will discuss this further in a moment. As for the young girl in question, the pregnancy was caused for a different reason altogether. She allegedly became pregnant because the Djinn was bored out in the desert. When the doctor was finally able to speak to her, she claimed that there was nothing to do there like there is in Dubai, and so the Djinn became lustful.

The doctor's position is made even more awkward (and regrettably frustrating) because there is another moral question at stake. The 'older male relative declaring a young woman molested by Djinn' story is apparently not uncommon, and it is often suspected among staff that the sexual crimes are actually committed by the older male relative, or perhaps another family member. In this case, the doctor is angry because the story ends at the hospital, and he believes that it could be the uncle who made this girl pregnant. This type of abuse is becoming increasingly more common in the UAE, and the crimes are becoming more public. However, with most Emirati families in this situation, a great amount of pride and shame is at stake. It is very difficult to convince law enforcement to investigate these types of domestic issues even under overwhelming evidence. In fact, just reporting the crime can offend a family so much that the doctor could be arrested for suggesting it. The fact that the Djinn was 'bored', at least for the psychologist, might be in the uncle's favour; a subtle response, perhaps, explaining the girl's hidden behaviour, and vindicating the uncle. Furthermore, the presence of the Djinn is in the family's interest, independent of sexual abuse. It is illegal to have children out of wedlock in the Emirates, usually leading to jail time and deportation for any expatriate following the birth of the child. The law is just as harsh for locals: it seems to encourage families to handle these matters privately. Reported cases of rape in the Emirates seem strikingly rare, and while I do not have the space to discuss it fully here, the absence of sexual crimes reported might speak strongly on local gender relations as sexual assault on a woman might often be deemed her fault. We must also consider, of course, that it is possible that the young woman is articulating her relationships with other

men in her town. She may have slept with them of her own free will, and remains silent to protect herself, or prevent the violence that could occur between the households.

Rather than robbing her of agency, the Djinn might be a way for her to intimately control her surroundings and relationships in a sexualized domain in which she ordinarily would not have any power. The Djinn for her, and the Djinn for her uncle may be two entirely different constructs. However, without the ability to follow up on the patient, or for the anthropologist to visit the home, the father remains a mystery. In any case, the uncle was convinced of the Djinn, the family was panicked that there was a spirit plaguing their house, and the niece appears to be without much agency, at least in the clinic. She claims she is a good Muslim even in her sleep, and suggests that there is nothing else for the Djinn to do, trapped as he is, out in the middle of nowhere. The couple is eventually sent away as everyone seems in sound mind, and other than being pregnant (which is quite normal and healthy in theory), there is nothing physically wrong with the woman.

Case study: Djinn and runaway teens

There are many stories like this in the hospitals of the gulf. The three weeks before I left Dubai, a similar story was unfolding in the Emirates news, this time in neighbouring Saudi, in a town outside the big city (Alkharj outside Riyadh): a 16 year old girl, and another horny Djinn. The story had been updated in the popular media every few days with the latest developments. Emirates 24/7 news relates the story in an update.

“Saudi police backed by a civil defence aircraft and hundreds of town residents

have launched an extensive operation in search of a teenage girl whose father says she has been kidnapped by a jinn (genie). The 16-year-old Saudi girl disappeared from her house in the central town of Alkharj a month ago but was found later in Riyadh, Shams daily reported. She vanished again three days ago, triggering a massive search campaign by the police, civil defence and residents of the town, the paper said. “Her father believes she is possessed by a jinn, who threatened to take her to Riyadh last month and carried out his threat,” the daily said. “He says this jinn speaks out through her and told them that he would take her to Riyadh...and that is what happened as they later found her in Batiha neighbourhood in Riyadh...he then threatened that he would take her away and make her disappear forever...he said he would take her outside the country.”

Muslim authorities in Saudi claimed, during the scandal, that Djinn are not able to transport humans. The article published by Shams daily had quoted a local Imam, Sheikh Ahmed al Aseeri: “This story about a djinn taking the girl away cannot be believed because djinn are not able to carry humans or make them disappear... they can control minds but not bodies so this theory is not correct,”. The drama seemed to end two weeks later, when the girl was found again in the streets of Riyadh, wandering aimlessly. The story, while not publicly acknowledging overt sexual crime, echoes in the popular media what is happening in the hospital. The family had been keeping this girl locked in her room, and so a sexually charged Djinn, filled with wanderlust, whisks away the girl, possibly abused by her relatives, to the big city. Furthermore, with strict local laws that prohibit the movement of women, especially outside her family’s town, being possessed by a spirit has great benefit to a woman who wants to travel.

A Freudian observer might compare these Djinn to a child, albeit a spoiled one. He is selfish, and one cannot reason with him. He is impatient. His actions always have a sense of immediacy about them, and he wants instant gratification. When the Djinn cannot have his (or her) way, he throws a temper tantrum. The sexual response can be seen as punishment, or an assertion of authority. Alternatively (or perhaps in addition), the Djinn's ability to transport young women can be seen as a form of escapism, especially in light of the Djinn as a psychic projection of social and individual desire. Still, one might argue that these spirits are highly representative rather than say a transcendental phenomenological projection of the ego. Indeed, where do these spirits come from, the father/uncle, the woman, or the great mysterious sand dunes of Arabia? Perhaps the act of reporting such an incident, or the process of creating narrative for the hospital is actually synthesizing the influence of the imp. Is a pregnant Emirati teenager cause or casualty? Was the Djinn present before the woman became pregnant? According to her family, they suspected that she *could* have become pregnant, and in some ways, they seemed to know that it was coming. However, we do not really know because, in cases like this, we are always left with scanty historical narrative.

Djinn and Sex

Similarly, most cases that I encountered of a Djinni causing homosexual cravings, whether structural or phenomenological in mechanism, are after-the-fact in discourse.

Indeed, this is further evidenced in cases of homosexual behaviour by the fact that very rarely do people show any particular gestures of actually being possessed, even among the more traditional locals. I have met a number of men who maintain that there is external influence over their sexual behaviour, yet do not exhibit, and claim to have never exhibited any disassociation of the self. In addition, there is certain mysticism surrounding the Djinn as strong and overwhelmingly passionate entities with uncontrollable sexual urges. Certainly many Djinn love young women, but in local imagination they might also enjoy sex with men, as well as other acts that are stigmatized in the Arab human society, but are not particularly taboo in the society of Djinn. Perhaps the disassociation is more subtle. In many minds, because of their great energy (born of smokeless fire), a homosexual act performed by a Djinn is not really homosexual at all. It is, in fact, glorified masculinity; a demonstration of power and prowess. Dubai, for many Arab nationals, is perceived to be a liberal playground. The local psychotherapists tell me that many men (who do not have a relationship with a Djinn) come to the country and are unprepared for the freedoms that they encounter. They, themselves, treat patients frequently for alcohol and drug abuse, sexual frustrations and anxiety. They also see men consumed by guilt or shame over their sexual encounters. Obeyesekere, in his study of Sri Lankan spirit possession, focuses on these mental states in his analysis of demons and demon possession arguing that demons in most societies act as subjectifying cultural symbols that people can utilize in order to enact their most profound psychological problems (1981). The fiery symbolism of the spirit invokes a sexual heat that men claim take power over them. In reflection, they believe it is this energy that causes them to approach other men at a public beach or at a bar (an un-Islamic place for which they may

already harbour feelings of guilt). In this light, it matters very little whether or not there is any overt dissociative behaviour acted out by the victim. The feelings of heat, energy, and intense, sudden lust are perceived to be just as powerful. Furthermore, the Djinn causes a confusion of sexual terms of engagements. These men often seem confused as to the roles they play in sex. Rather than being the active agent during sex, they found themselves in a more passive role, adding to their feelings of shame or guilt. The roles that actors take on during sex warrants its own in depth discussion, though I do not have the space for it here. It is important to note, however, that (as in many parts of the world) men in Dubai might engage in sex with other men without the act threatening their perceptions of themselves as heterosexual, masculine bodies as long as they take an active role during sex.¹⁶ In Dubai, in any case, through an invocation of Djinni influence, men can be seen as disassociating themselves of both culpability on one level, and social stigma on another. As a result, this is a way to avoid a named category (gay or homosexual); a psychological mechanism in which a man can own a behavioural description (engaging in sex with men) and perhaps maintain his heterosexuality (at least in his own mind, if not others). A lazier (or perhaps simply convenient) interpretation links ubiquitous Islamic Fatalism to the behaviour of the Djinn as a sort of external ‘act of God’. The logic is that certain behaviours are rationalized as permissible, or at least non-punishable, because the victim has been robbed of his ability to control his sexual urges from some cosmological entity. This opens a discussion on scapegoating which I

¹⁶ There is a very large body of anthropological literature that tackles the construction of gender, sex, and sexuality. For an ethnography that tackles these constructs in South East Arabia specifically, see Unni Wikan’s study of the Omani *Haneeth* (1977) where effeminate men may own a local gender category that allows them to participate in the social domains of women, including passive sexual roles as male prostitutes.

will discuss further in chapter 4. For now I will simply claim that it may be useful to borrow Girard's notion of the scapegoat (1977) as a mechanism in which internal struggle is placed on an outside threat, a threat that that can be minimized by the community. This can make sense in Arabia (as it can anywhere) where the scapegoat can be such a powerful and pervasive protective mechanism against self-reflected culpability, a phenomena that is, perhaps, universal. Of course, Girard's scape-goat is a communal project. In the clinic, these men appear to be more alone in their anxiety. Can a scapegoat work if no-one is around to see it? Further inquiry into the lives of these men might uncover more insight. Indeed, it is difficult to tell what motivated these men to come to a clinic to talk about their sexual frustrations in the first place, considering that the clinic is such a highly stigmatized place to begin with. Finally, as has been written about spirit possession (not necessarily Djinn) in other parts of the world, perhaps homosexual Djinnns are simply deliverers of agency, sold to the superstitious and sexually curious/repressed individual. I prefer the former category to the later, because, at least in Dubai (Oman is a different case altogether), it is the human self who is engaging in sex, not the Djinn. Like the teenage rape victims, I suspect the Djinn arrive through discourse, or are made manifest through reflexivity. Indeed I met many of these men who have sex with men¹⁷ through a Western psychotherapy clinic in Dubai. Still, perhaps the Djinn in Dubai are articulating something more than individual whims. They promote sexual misconduct in the desert because it is too dull or perhaps too stifling and traditional, yet they cause sexual misconduct in the city because it is too liberal and mundane. Again, the stigmas and cultural categories placed on Djinn provide contextual

¹⁷ It is important to note that all of these men were married to women, and some had children.

reasoning, but there is a larger psychological framework to which it alludes. Let us observe their activity amongst the community.

Firestarters: Smokeless fire begets fire

In the UAE, the list of grievances against Djinn is not limited to sexual crimes. Shortly after arriving to Dubai, I was drawn to an article in the local newspaper about fire starters in the neighbouring Emirate of Fujairah. The story is as follows. A family in Fujairah (about an hour's drive from Dubai) are terrified for their lives because of a number of fires that have erupted at their home. The Family claims that Djinn are to blame. Nine fires have broken out in the home within the span of a week. The owner of the home, Abdullah Ali, insists that there has been no trouble in his home up until now. As well as starting fires, the Djinn have caused other mischief in the house. There have been electricity and water supply problems, and clothes have been flying about the home. The article continues,

“Abdullah's son Sulaiman told 7DAYS: ‘One day last week a fire started in a room in the house and we called the Fujairah Civil Defence who came and controlled the fire. As they were leaving they were shocked to see another fire break out in the same room. After extinguishing those fires, two more suddenly broke out in other rooms.’

‘There is no other reasonable explanation but the genies are doing this,’ Sulaiman, a colonel in the Civil Defence, said, adding that he did not believe that genies were responsible until he witnessed the strange events unfolding in the house for himself. ‘I saw with my own eyes my colleagues’ hoses becoming tangled up with each other to prevent the water coming out to extinguish the flames. It was so strange.’ This week, terrified by the series of strange events, the family had an exorcism performed inside the property. “Furniture and clothes began flying as the ceremony was taking place. The genies were not happy,” Sulaiman explained.

Sources at Fujairah Civil Defence say they can offer no explanation as to the cause of the fires. The case comes after a similar set of unexplained fires in a house in Ras Al Khaimah, reported in 7DAYS last August, that were also blamed by the residents on genies.

-7Days (Wed May 16, 2007)

This is apparently not uncommon in the Emirates, or in the Arabian gulf at large. (for example, see Emirates 24/7 (2010 and 2012) for similar case in Kuwait and Saudi). Mo says that Genies are certainly capable of such things, but by and large, when people think fires are started by Djinn, there is bound to be a human explanation, but he admits Djinn are not above being vindictive and have of course caused problems across the UAE. It turns out Djinn, perhaps because they are ‘born of fire’ themselves, are quite fond of fire-starting as a tool to express themselves. Perhaps, when they are able to

interact with the human world, they cannot help but start fires, such is their intensity. I am told that “This is their nature, if they are strong. [Fire] it is their essence. They maybe cannot help it, they are not like other things”. Within the city of Dubai, they are particularly active in a the Satwa neighbourhood. (see chapter 1) The neighbourhood is on the poorer end of Dubai neighbourhoods and is a bit of an enclave. It lies between the upscale villas of Jumeirah along the beach to the North, and the towering skyscrapers of Sheikh Zayed Road at its South. The neighbourhood is also one of the oldest in Dubai and is crumbling and crowded. Workers residing in Satwa often live six to a bedroom, and it is not uncommon for a fire to break out in an over-crowded villa. The residents are divided into older Emirati families who have grown up in Satwa, in the south and west borders, Filipino communities in the East, and low wage Indian, Arab, and Pakistani workers throughout the rest. There are a number of high streets that run through the area that are always bustling with pedestrian traffic and South Asian merchants. The neighbourhood is also one of the most superstitious in the city. My flat on Sheikh Zayed Road is only a few minutes walk from Satwa, and I have walked through the neighbourhood in search of Djinn.

What I have found is that the complexities, anxieties, and disappointments of the Djinn are as complex as their victims. The first group of men I was able to speak to about Djinn fires were Pakistani. They were three men crowded at a table in front of a small grocer on a residential road off Satwa Street. They were there for the same reason I was there; curiosity over a recent fire across the street. We sat and watched people come

by to examine the ruined villa complex. After a brief chat about where they were from (obligatory in Dubai), I asked them:

Me: “What happened here?”.

Them: “Another fire maybe.”

Me: “Maybe?”

Them: “All the time fires like this now happening . . .”

I asked who they thought was causing them.

Them: “no-one even living in this building”, one answered, “no-one caused them. These fires they are just starting.”

Me: “What do you mean”

Them: “My cousin’s house was set on fire and no-one was cooking. They were all in the room and it just went on fire.”

Me: “Do you think spirits of some kind could be causing these fires.”

Them: “Everyone knows it is spirits.”

Me: “Are they Muslim spirits?”

Them: “This country is Muslim country, everyone is Muslim”

The man speaking to me began to get angry, but not with me.

He spoke: “It is because... look at these places. They need to have roofs. These ones don't have roofs, that's why they are doing it like this one”

Me: “The Djinn?”

Them: “Yes these ones maybe doing that”.

Me: “Because they don't have roofs?”

Them: “Some have roofs but everything is breaking and they don't like things that always breaking.”

Them: “Yeah, especially if it is raining everything is breaking and too much water. And the landlord doesn't do anything, and so everyone is angry.”

Me: “The spirits?”

Them: “Yeah, like this one (pointing to the rubble)”

It is true what the workers were saying concerning the state of the structures. Many of the homes do have crumbling walls, and leaky ceilings. It does not rain often in Dubai, but when it does, a bird’s eye view of Satwa reveals rooftops painted blue from tarps laid out over decaying roofs in an attempt to prevent a domestic deluge. Without any drainage systems, the brief yet torrential rains cause deep flooding through the neighbourhood. The electricity goes out quickly in the summer months from poor, aging wiring. Sand has reclaimed most of the alleyways. Is this what the Djinn are upset about? The buildings are falling apart anyway. Fed up with the state of things, perhaps the spirits are taking revenge. I was able to confirm from a number of Satwa residents that the Djinn were angry, but they are not just angry that their neighbourhood is falling apart. They are also jealous. Mahmoud is a Pakistani electrician and plumber for a construction company contracted by Bin Drei enterprises, and he is a resident of Satwa. He makes 2,800 dirhams a months (around 500 pounds sterling), which is quite high for his nationality and position, and he hopes to get a special licence so he can open his own business eventually. He is a young, skilled tradesman with experience in constructing tall towers. I invited him for coffee at my flat a few times. He does not believe in Djinn and he explained why there are so many fires in Satwa.

“Basically the landlords will do nothing. They will not fix or repair anything. The electricity is always a problem and most people are living there 6 or 8 people in a room, the landlord doesn’t care what happens to them. So if there is a problem, [the residents] are fixing it on their own. I am always going to my friends to fix these problems, my friends are always calling me to come fix this or that, but this is my job. If you are not experienced it causes fires. Sometimes you think you fixed it and then months later something catches fire because it was not done properly, but these places have so many problems”

He laughed when I asked him about the spirits and the roofs and the walls. “What they mean is that the spirits are upset that the buildings are falling down and they are poor. Some of the people think the spirits are angry because of these skyscrapers and all the rich houses nearby when they are so poor, so they set fires to things.

Me: “So the spirits are jealous?”

Mahmoud: “Ha, yes. Very Jealous I think”

Me: “And you think its mostly just DIY wiring and aging infrastructure rather than jealous Djinns”

Mahmoud: “Ha, Same-same.” Answered Mahmoud. “What difference does it make?”

Mahmoud's claims have a certain logic too it. Many fires start, ironically, when it rains. With unskilled DIY electrical fixes exposed to nature because of decaying roofs and walls, it seems reasonable that the sporadic winter showers might lead to localized fires. It is at this time as well that the crumbling infrastructure becomes most highlighted. Moist air mixed with sandy winds break down weak ceilings. Blue tarps cover the holes but often collapse after being weighed down with mud. The roads and houses flood from even small amounts of rain as proper drainage has never been developed in the neighbourhood. I knew closely some Sri Lankan workers who lived in the area whose room (there were 6 living in the room) would flood at least once a year. "We call and make complaints, but they are always telling us sorry but the landlord is on vacation, but it makes you wide awake in the morning". It is here where the Djinn look out from the holes in their ceilings and see that their view of the ocean, only a few blocks away, is blocked by the expensive villas of Jumeirah, and the desert is blocked by the towers on Sheikh Zayed, and they begin to set things in fire in frustration. Here, perhaps, the Djinn begin to resemble the Ethiopian *Zar*, in at least the act of coveting, if not in possession practice. Indeed, here it is a more a *place* that is possessed, and less a *person*.¹⁸

Djinn as articulations of desire

¹⁸ See again Lewis 1966 pp 312 for a discussion on *Zar* and covetous Djinn

I wanted to explore the belief in jealous Djinn. A Satwa laundry woman from Sudan told me that a Djinni had set her friend's kitchen on fire because her stove was no longer working. She knows this is why the Djinn committed the act because it was the stove that caught fire, and now the landlord has to replace the whole kitchen. A Satwa Yemeni barber named (Mohammud) Housam has lived in the area for 30 years. He explained that Djinn caused holes in the ground in an attempt to swallow the houses because they were embarrassed at the appearance. He knows it was Djinn because one of the offending holes in the sand under a room in a villa was covered in the spirit's footprints. Alternatively, a Jordanian man, only half joking, informed me the reason there were so many fires is because there weren't any women in the neighbourhood. "That's what happens when you let so many bachelors try and cook their own dinner." Many residents of Satwa, like in many areas of Dubai, cannot make any official complaints against their landlord or their living conditions because they are living in the villas illegally, even while their residencies may be valid. It is against the law in Dubai for bachelors to share bedrooms, even though this breach of housing violation is widespread in Dubai. In the case of low income workers, this type of living is all that can be afforded, with sometimes 6-8 people sharing a room. Dubai police and housing authorities tend to look the other way, though they do occasionally raid apartments and villas when there are complaints from concerned neighbours. Perhaps the Djinn are not necessarily jealous at all, but are the articulation of frustrations concerning over-crowding and marginalization, or the inability for one to control his or her living conditions, the inability to afford a wife, or to bring ones wife or family to Dubai from a home town or country.

In any case, it certainly seems that there are energies in the community that feel betrayed by the success that engulfs them on all 4 borders. Workers without air conditioning are living, quite literally (depending on the position of the sun), in the shadows of some of the worlds newest and largest, and expensive skyscrapers. Only a parallel service road separates glitzy Sheikh Zayed Road from the Satwa sand pits. Satwa is then separated from the ocean by expensive villas owned and lived in by Dubai's 'elite'. Even the East end of the neighbourhood on the lovely palm lined Al Dhiyafa Street, though inhabited by a large Filipino community whose wages and living conditions are only marginally better than the average Satwa resident, appears high end and off limits. Some residents have lived in their homes in Satwa nearly 40 years, and while everything developed around them, the sustainability of the neighbourhood was ignored. Djinn or not, there is resentment in the walls of the homes.

It is important here to discuss one final perception of Djinn in Satwa. A year and a half after I moved to Dubai, plans were announced by the government to gentrify Satwa. Rather than improve the existing infrastructure, the government's plan is to destroy the entire neighbourhood, and gentrify the area from scratch under the name "Jumeirah Garden City". Landowners were told that they would have to evacuate, though there was resistance from some of the tribal men who had lived or owned property in Satwa for many decades. Bulldozers began showing up unannounced in the middle of the night. Arrangements were often made between the government and landlords, but not communicated to the residents. My Sri Lankan friends who lived in

the area went to work at their café one afternoon, and after a long shift, they went home to their house to find that it no longer existed. Their story became a common one. Square, smooth patches of dirt slowly started appearing in place of three story houses. Fires started breaking out more steadily among the houses that remained. From my bedroom window two blocks from the South end of Satwa, I could see them light up the neighbourhood regularly. Some residents claimed that the Djinn were lashing out at the destruction of their home. Others claimed that Djinn were acting malevolently in accordance with the desires of greedy landlords. Still again, some claimed that the landlords burned their own property down, though the reasons speculated did not muse on insurance claims or politics. Rather, they felt the fires were simply spiteful acts against the poor committed by the landlords. Feelings of resentment to the landlords created stronger discourse than was spoken of Djinn. I asked Mahmoud again what he thought of the spirits and the landlords, and again he commented “Same, same”.

Mahmoud was joking, and admits that he does not believe the fires to be caused intentionally by any entity. However, others are more coy with their thoughts. It was often difficult to pinpoint what individuals were afraid of. “*They* are doing it, these things, destroying the homes.” “Who are *they*?” I asked. “*They* are the ones doing it.” “Are they spirits or people do you think?” “Yes, they are like this”. Of course, it is possible that mentioning a source by name might be thought to invite further attacks. As Westermarck has commented in Morocco, “to pronounce their name would be to summon them” (1926. I: 263). However, the pending plans for Jumeirah Garden City complicate the confusion. Many people who are quick to discredit spirits claimed that the government was somehow in charge of burning down the houses of residents who did

not leave on their own. In any case, it became clear that the question of *who* was starting the fires was not as important as the anxiety and frustration that the fires expressed.



Figure 3: Locals crowd a Satwa mosque on Friday during midday prayers. The mosque becomes full quickly, and orderly lines of men form along its sides, facing just south of west, towards Mecca. To the South, blue tarps characterize the rooftops of homes, while empty lots begin appearing amidst the crowded buildings.

Outside the boundaries of Satwa, there are construction sites and skeletal frames of buildings and high rises across the sand and along the beach. There are resentful Djinn here as well. They too are armed with fire, but they are not jealous; they are full of lament. When I first arrived in Dubai in February 2007, the city was undergoing investigations over construction fires in the Marina. The problems with construction had made international news with many reports showing Dubai and the UAE in a negative light. The government was taking steps to prevent more fires. Accidents that were normally kept quiet became public news stories. Arabian Business reported that in 2007, there were 249 construction accidents in Dubai, stating “Acting Director of Buildings Department in Dubai Municipality, Fawzi Mohammed Al Shehi, told the paper: ”The civic body inspectors come across at least 12 safety violations each day’.” (Sambidge, 2008). I do not know how this value compares to other cities, but it is enough that workers in Dubai are concerned. Rumours are spread through worker camps on what has occurred every week. Most accidents were not caused by fire. Scaffolding and floor boards might suddenly collapse, or railings might give way, sending workers plummeting to the ground. Some places are more dangerous than others. Mahmoud enjoyed working with Bin Drei’s tall tower, but one of the reasons he wants to start his own company is because he is worried that his next project will not be as pleasant an experience. “There are no standards in Dubai, some places are better to work for than others. This tower was always safe and everyone is always safe but the contract is over in six months, and then I don’t know where they will send me . . . to another tower maybe that my company [his current employer] goes to, and then it will be ok, but if I get another contract it might not be like this tower and I don’t really want to go. Its not a safe place to work and workers

are treated really bad. Accidents are happening every day because the workers are not trained and nobody is watching. A lot depends on who you work with.” Mahmoud did not think much of the fires. He shrugged his shoulders. “yeah, they happen sometimes”.

Other workers are not so stoic. Many are afraid to even discuss it, fearing repercussions from their employers, or perhaps the topic makes them nervous. Workers at the Nikko Towers on Sheikh Zayed Rd in Dubai tell me 250 accidents a year is a bit understated. “Maybe that many just in this tower alone . . . too much work, and working too hard . . . always there are problems”. Along the Western banks of the Creek in Bur Dubai, workers gather in groups in the grassy shades during their afternoon breaks in order to escape the sun, eat lunch, and perhaps take a nap before going back to work. Imran, who is sitting here in the park is Pakistani and does not want to go back to work. He believes an accident is going to happen soon. He attends Islamic study on Fridays and sometimes in the evenings. His Mullah has told him that these accidents occur because there are spirits who are upset about the loss of Islamic values. Everyone is at risk. Imran is careful to pray, even while he is at work, but he knows some of his co-workers do not pray, and so accidents can happen on a construction site. Housam, the barber, explained that it is not the case that the spirits are upset that people do not pray, but more that someone has destroyed their home. “If they are causing accidents with a building, they probably are angry that it is being built. Maybe it is better that they don’t build so many buildings. That’s why they are causing these fires, too many buildings, there is no other explanation”

The three Mo's do not like to talk about Djinn. "We believe in them and they are everywhere, but they are not people's concern.", and this echoes what Ms. Razem has taught me about Djinn in the region. The Mo's, however, admit to agreeing with Housam, though they will not admit to Djinn, or direct actions from spirits. "Yes, sometimes these things [accidents, fires] can happen because it's not always good to build more towers. We don't need any more towers. Our strength comes from the desert, we are desert people. It is good not to forget that we are desert people" . . . "The land wants to be desert" "Is this what can cause fires?" "Yes, sometimes this can be true, sometimes it can". The Mo's perhaps take, then, a sort of phenomenological view of the fires. The accidents become a projection of the desires of the land, with the Djinn (or spirits) acting as agent for the "wilting" landscape. As Razem has explained, the implication is that the Djinn are upset about the loss of their desert: the pristine, undeveloped, un-westernized gulf waters and sand. These spirits lash out in the form of a fire in a tall tower, or an unexplained collapse in a ladder or scaffolding. "We have seen it happen" says Imran, "pieces of metal that move all by themselves . . . there is a great sadness".

The Djinn are confused

Though they speak with authority and absolute confidence on almost any matter, the Mo's actual position on the fire-starting menaces remains frustratingly nebulous. As for the fire-starters in Fujeirah, the Mo's do not seem to have a consolidated opinion. During one meeting, "these villas are too big maybe for Fujeirah." "These places are

good places to go to be closer to God. They have been there a long time maybe and it is too easy to forget how true Allah is.” “It is very sad these things yes, but also Allah watches you if he has reason to watch you, so who knows why they say these Al Djinni are there, if they are there, maybe these people need to go back to Allah, that’s what I would tell them, that is why we have the word of God, because sometimes old people like me forget.” The logical interpretation of this is that the is the homeowners’ fault (not the Djinn’s) for straying from Allah, or perhaps his children or other family members are straying from Allah, causing this plague on their home, or perhaps their villas are too ostentatious, and after 25 years they are spoiled and need to learn the lesson of modesty (the preferred lesson to be learned in Arabic discourse). Here, the fire-starter is not a direct punishment from Allah, but it is imagined that Allah’s protection has been lifted, and so the spirits are then able to do as they please. Yet, on a separate day, they seem to have forgotten all about Allah. “These people it is very sad, they should move to Dubai anyway. Why are they out all the way [in Fujairah].” “nothing to do out there, even the camels they don’t go over there” “I would not move out there, [half joking] these things they probably will happen to me to, God forbid.” On this day as well, the homeowner is again at fault, though not because he has strayed from Allah, but because he would stay out in the desert ‘sahra’, which, when used in this context (especially since Fujairah is on the beach and surrounded by mountains, and not really in the desert at all) is slightly derogatory, akin to what American cosmopolitan observers might label ‘redneck’ in the U.S.. In one imagination, the poor men are plagued by poltergeists because they are not traditional enough, in another, they are attacked because they are not modern enough, and in both cases, the Mo’s seem absolutely convinced of their rhetoric.

In pointing out the discrepancy to these Emirati, one risks great offence, as I find ubiquitously true in the Gulf, yet, when I have ventured there, after the offence (and the resulting denial), there is a psychic retreat among the Mo's, an almost slight self-loathing, or perhaps a depressed confusion. The Djinn are confused because their victims and story-tellers are confused, or if not confused, than doubtful. When I first discuss these fire-starters with them, they are wearing sandals, sitting back in their chairs, legs open, and drinking strong black filter coffee, speaking in Arabic. They are in Arabic *mode*. A week later when I bring it up again, they are still in national dress (Dishdash and Guthra), but are wearing black leather European dress shoes, sitting tightly cross legged, sipping cappuccinos, and speaking in English, though there are only 3 Emirati men in the group. I try to ask if the fire victims should stay in their homes and read the Quran or if they should move to Dubai and have more fun. Mo 1 says "both", Mo 2 just becomes irritated with me and does not respond, Mo 3 says "I don't like these cappuccinos, why are we always ordering them", he calls a Sri Lankan waiter over, asks to return the nearly empty cappuccino and demands a filter coffee with an extra pot of hot water on the side.

As discussed, the sentiments on Djinn in Satwa, Fujeirah, and in construction sites in Abu Dhabi and Dubai can be read as desire machines, products of deprivations, but to what aim? Do the spirits, or those who are plagued by spirits, want more, or do they want less? Do they want spirituality or urbanity, wealth or modesty? Do they want sexual liberty, or a marriage and family that society has prescribed to them? It is clear to the ethnographer that they paradoxically want it all. I suggest that the desires only appear

contradictory, or even hypocritical in any specific context, because that is how they are often articulated. In truth, the conglomeration of wants is, I suggest, its own category of anxious desire. I borrow here Spinoza's concept of vacillation from his *Ethics, Part III: On the origin and nature of emotions* (1677).

If we conceive that a thing, which is wont to affect us painfully, has any point of resemblance to another thing which is wont to affect us with an equally strong emotion of pleasure, we shall hate the first-named thing, and at the same time we shall love it.

This disposition of mind, which arises from two contrary emotions, is called vacillation; it stands to the emotions in the same relation as doubt does to the imagination; vacillation and doubt do not differ one from the other, except as greater differs from less. ...one and the same object may be the cause of many and conflicting emotions.

-Prop. 17

In organic chemistry at school, we would often have to draw out organic compounds. Benzene, for example, is a fundamental organic molecule with a formula of C_6H_6 . Six carbon atoms for a ring, and each hydrogen atom attaches to a carbon atom, and each carbon atom necessitates four molecular bonds. If one is to draw out the molecule on paper, showing these bonds, there are two possible variations, or isomers. (See figure A).

However, these isomers can only ever really exist on paper. To understand how benzene works, it is a mistake to conceive of the molecule with bonds in place. Instead, chemists and biologists have come to depict the molecule as it functions in reality, with less defined bonds between carbons (See figure B).

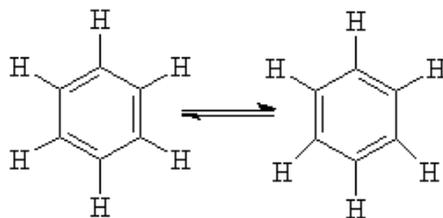


Figure 4: Isomers of Benzene

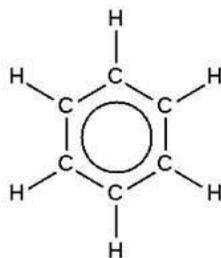


Figure 5: Benzene with resonating double bonds

This is how we might model conflicting desires among the Djinn. If we are to take a snapshot of a conversation, an articulation of a desire, or a specific phenomenon, the photo gives us miniature truths, but I suspect that desire and anxiety do not work this way. Snapshots of two different anxieties are a lie. On paper they look as isomers, at one time a desire for something new, and at another time, a desire for something old, but

in reality, I suspect they exist as a single, more stable entity. Ghassan Hage has mused on vacillation in his thoughts on the role of the anthropologist. “Basically, vacillation occurs because we do not always know what we want and we often want contradictory things. Using Bourdieu’s notion of *illusio*, we can say that vacillation is when there are many incompatible things giving meaning to our lives and we find ourselves pursuing them despite their incompatibility. What is important, though, is that vacillation is not just a movement between various states of being; rather, it is a state of being in itself. (Hage 2010, page 152). A pendulum oscillates: it moves back and forth, two different states, but the Djinn vacillate: they are both back and forth. Like a flame sputtering on the tip of a candle, this speaks of the nervous energy that they embody. They are almost chaotic; they can be many things at once.

Conclusion

What, then, is the fate of the Djinn? I admit that I envision the Djinn, Ifrit, Arwaah, or Maarid, at least in the United Arab Emirates, as the psychic projections of social desire, perhaps by philosophy of which Merleau-Ponty has famously outlined in *Phenomenology of Perception*, “... there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself” (Merleau-Ponty 2002, page XII). In some cases this may take the form of deprivation violence, if not overt deprivation ‘possession’. The Djinn might commit sexual assault on a young woman who craves a life in the city, or it might promote same sex intimacy among men who admit to problems in their marriage. The fire-starters might also be the voice of jealousy, upsetting homes and families where

infrastructure is crumbling in the face of rapid development on all sides. However, the Djinn are also paradoxically nostalgic. Their desires are torn between the old and the new, and more than that, their value system places emphasis on skyscrapers on the one hand, and empty desert on the other. Like Hage suggests, I do not think they move between one desire and another, but want all these things simultaneously. It is its own unique state of desire. Their violence on the streets, and their hidden voices in the clinics are, I suggest, the articulation of the vacillating bodies that move through the streets of Dubai, a city that Emirati men vacillate in themselves. The both own the city, and are owned by the city. The both own production of the city, but do not produce themselves. A last interpretation, then, is that of an anxiety of production. Taussig (1980) has written of devil belief and sacrificial rites as an anxiety in Marxist terms.

The fetishism that is found in the economics of pre-capitalist societies arises from the sense of organic unity between persons and their products, and this stands in stark contrast to the fetishism of commodities in capitalist societies, which results from the split between persons and the things that they produce and exchange.

The result of this split is the subordination of men to the things they produce, which appear to be independent and self-empowered.

Thus, the devil-beliefs that concern us in this book can be interpreted as the indigenous reaction to the supplanting of this traditional fetishism by the new. As understood within the old use-value system, the devil is the mediator of the clash between these two very different systems of production and exchange. (Taussig 1980, page 37)

We might reconsider Devil beliefs in Dubai, poltergeists who cause accidents in towers, or fires in villas, as the energy produced through the transition of value systems, the transition from being of the land, to owning the land but being isolated from it.

Regardless of where fires come from, the simultaneous guilt that is expressed over the loss of traditional value systems and the feelings of entitlement that are expressed on individual wealth might support this claim. It certainly seems the dualist notion of the Djinn as 'other' has somehow been lost in a Shamal, and has conceptually attached itself as an extension of the self. As for mechanism, I believe, and the evidence suggests to me, that the Djinn have lost their inherency. On pathological terms, their existence and influence has become an 'immunological response', as David Napier might say; a newly constructed metaphor to help rewrite the Arab-self's terms of engagement with the world (Napier 2000).

On a final note, one cannot help but think, in this sense, that these Ifrit born fires and these Arwaah sexual offenses are the Djinni's death throws. Accounts abound in desert stories of Djinni trapped in bottles by the great power of Solomon. Though they are either tricked by humans and controlled, or submitted to Islam and became penitent, they always knew who they were, even in slavery. The armies of Ifrits are said to still be in fear of Solomon, and so they stay hidden in the Rub al Khali, but with Solomon at least, they know what to avoid, they are never broken. Ironically, it is modest anxieties, no great and clever sorcery, that causes their impotency. The genies stick around then,

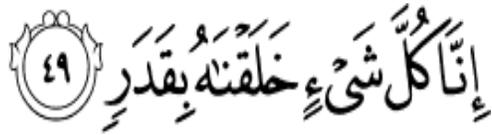
hovering in the back of the imagination of the locals, filled with a fire that only rarely burns.

And so, there seems to be a contradiction of negative energies. The Djinn in the Gulf do not appear to know what they want. They are upset at the loss of their clean and open deserts, and are angry at development on their once pure desert. However, they are at the same time upset because locals are not developing enough. They are jealous when their neighbours have shiny new skyscrapers and expensive villas while they themselves are stuck with old desert homes. They set fires to the poor when their homes become too old, and they set fires to the rich when they try to build something new. This dichotomy makes sense to me. I understand the Djinn's plight as a metaphor for the region, and for the Muatan specifically. The society is torn between a desire for wealth and technology, for globalization and metropolitanism and urbanity, and a fear over the loss of tradition, of the loss of Arabic language and Islamic ideals, and perhaps above all, the loss of purity and cleanliness, if we are even to separate any of these categories from each other. This social double consciousness has beautifully manifested itself in the actions of the Djinn, who in the Emirati desert are at the same time stealing purity, and punishing the traditionalists. The City seems to make them crazy. Otherwise pure, they become lustful and cause clean men to become homosexual, or they rape chaste women in their hotel rooms perhaps as punishment for their urbanity, or perhaps the city itself has corrupted them. Yet the desert makes them stir – crazy, ennui transformed into intense restlessness. They get bored in the sand and become lustful, wishing to go into the city. The very fact that the city exists causes an intense frustration. Like their human analogues, the Djinn

are afraid of being left behind, yet are afraid of moving forward. They are, however, able to do what peaceful members of society cannot. Occasionally they can lash out, and true to their form, their preferred outlet is fire.

Chapter 3

Deconstructing Islamic Fatalism



“Indeed, all things We created with predestination.”

-Quran: Surat Al Qamar: 54:49

A Bag full of Money

I am at a café with Mo who has sent his Filipina mistress to get him coffee. He tells Westerners that she is his wife, but she is not one of his wives, at least, she claims they are not married. Mo does not come with her to the café on the weekends because on Fridays (Al-Juma3h)¹⁹ he is with one of his legal wives. Every weekday morning is the same. Mo wants a filter coffee (cafetière) with extra hot water on the side: “Why should I pay for two coffees”, he (probably justifiably) asks, “and these filters are small anyway and the coffee is still fine, they only want you to pay more”. Usually I am on the receiving end of these rants, but he has asked for a second cup and means for me to sit

¹⁹Friday, Yawm Al Juma3h, is the Islamic day of rest, and begins the weekend in Dubai. The work week is Sunday to Thursday, with weekends on Friday and Saturday. The majority of the Arab world holds weekends on Thursday and Friday, and Dubai did as well until the 1st of September 2006, when they official and controversially shifted to Friday and Saturday to better match international markets.

down with him. Since he is buying, I will not fight with him. He pulls a stack of bills out of his purse like bag, and hands a 1,000 dirham note (at the time, about 200 pounds) to his mistress, and tells her “filter coffee with extra hot water and an extra cup”. He, along with many other British expats and Emiratis, always pays for everything in 1,000 dirham notes. “That’s all the banks give me” Emiratis tend to say, somewhat truthfully. “That’s all the ATMs will give me”, British men complain, usually truthfully. “That’s all my husband gives me”, say British and Emirati women, very truthfully. The practice is infuriating to merchants and anyone else accepting cash. Most tills only hold a few thousand dirhams of change in assorted notes, and it isn’t a viable business options to hold massive amounts of cash on site. It is never convenient to constantly be finding change for an 8 dirham coffee paid for with a 1,000 dirham note. Mo and his cohorts do not care. “That’s all the banks give you”.

The value of the note no longer grabs my attention. When I first began working in Dubai I used to argue vehemently with costumers at my café, especially British women, who I felt should know better (and with whom I knew I could vent with their full comprehension). “How many times back in England did you go to a restaurant and pay for a coffee with a 200 pound note and then demand change [never], and yet you do it here every single bloody morning”. “Well that’s all my husband gives me”. After a few months of these interchanges I suppose I grew numb to the money that gets thrown around. Indeed, most of my morning coffee and pastry costumers were regulars. When I gave them each 980 dirhams change in the morning, I learned to accept that the following morning I’d have to do it again. That change would be spent daily. Mo is not an

exception to this type of spending, but while most expats will pull a single large bill out of a wallet, Mo grabs his from a stack of large bills, One of several stacks that he keeps with him in a bag on his shoulder resembling a long handled purse, or perhaps more like a pouch.

I suspect, like most of the older urban Emirati, that he and his peers are wealthy men by most standards in Dubai. They carry large sums of cash with them as a habit, avoiding ATMs, and instead withdrawing directly with a person at an Islamic bank, with a local teller with whom they can sit down and have coffee when they do their banking. However, Mo and his friends (Mo2 and Mo3), have been carrying more cash than normal as of late. Mo feigns humbleness when I hint at asking the value, but should I have to guess, a few stacks of thousand notes and 500 dirham notes easily comes to fifty thousand dirhams or so (about 8,000 pounds), that they carry with them at all times. “Its good to have cash”, he tells me, “because sometimes things here are expensive now, and then you don’t have to go to the bank when you go shopping in the evening”. However, Mo’s stacks of cash have grown larger recently. He has ranted to me before that he does not trust the banks with too much money, preferring cash and gold and various material investments, but this is different. The country is in economic turmoil, and though Mo is duty bound to be patriotic and claim that the economy is as healthy as ever, he is a clever man and knows differently. Mo is hoarding cash, not just on his person, but in deposit boxes and in his home, because he does not trust banks. He tells me he is taking the necessary steps to protect his family and his money. I do not know if he is making the right decision, the point is that Mo takes action that he has rationalized is in his self

interest, and in the interests of those who depend on him financially, and in the interest of the lifestyle with which they have grown accustomed.

Later, Mo and his friends are talking about Western media and how they are attacking Dubai unjustifiably. There have been some international issues regarding the finally public inability of Dubai to pay off its debts, as well as stories discussing the massive flight of expats who have lost jobs. The three Mos echo the recent media announcement from Sheikh Mohammed, that all these reports are just the malevolent underpinnings of an international witch-hunt against Dubai. “Aren’t you worried”, I ask them, “that the economy is in trouble though. Isn’t it better not to ignore it?”.

Mo 1: “It’s not ignoring it, but money comes and goes. If something should happen it is Allah’s will.”

Mo 2: “People should not worry so much”

Mo 1: “It is good maybe because maybe there is too much money and people worry to much about money and should be more relaxed.”

Mo 2; “Allah, he doesn’t care about money”

Mo 3: “This is the will of Allah because people forget about Islam when they have too much money”

The three of them continue in this vein for some time. Mo reminds me the Qur’an is not just for Muslims but is for everyone and that Allah knows what he is doing in the world. Their rhetoric is so strong and so lengthy, that I am quickly left with the impression that

their stacks of notes meant nothing to them, that Allah gave it to them in wisdom, and could just take it in wisdom. But, then, why go to such lengths to protect it? They each carry enough money on their person to purchase a new car in cash because they do not trust the banks, yet seem to be ambivalent towards the loss of fortune. They seem, at times, to spend wantonly, showing each other new gold watches, or talking about a new car, or sending their wives to Paris, and there seems, between them, to be some unspoken justification for their spending. Then again, they are often highly critical of the opulence pervading the lifestyles of the elite of Dubai, rationalizing the financial woes of the city as punishment, a direct result of Allah's disappointment.

In telling this anecdote, I wish to show an inherent contradiction in the region's discourse, a contradiction expressed in almost all aspects of Arabic life, from cultural practice and personal choice, to linguistic rhetoric and common colloquialisms: that between disowning one's agency in determining the future, and alternatively going to great lengths to shape one's own destiny. Such is the dilemma of 'fatalism', an epistemological category classically and culturally owned in the historical and modern Arab world, and yet, perhaps not always owned in practice, or indeed, perhaps not practiced at all. I had intended, when I began my fieldwork, to discuss 'Islamic fatalism' in light of changing perceptions of the self in the region, as a motivation of behaviour, or a rationalization of the world. I had taken the concept for granted, that it was prevalent, ubiquitous, and of course, real. It was discussed so often in literature as an inherent component to the Arab psyche, and more importantly, explained as crucial to Islamic life by Muslim religious scholars, average Muslims on the street, and especially converts to

Islam. When I arrived in Arabia, the classical proofs were evident, the devotion to Allah, the perceived acceptance of the natural order of events, and especially the fatalistic language, the communicative habits of those devout who know that the commitments and projections of destiny referenced in discourse and conversation are governed by the ethereal ‘will’ and sacrosanct intelligence, and yet, despite the widespread participation of those cultural traits so referenced, there was a falsehood in the meaning behind the words, the countless references to God, the inevitability of the trajectories of time. What is fatalism, historical and modern, and what is fatalism Islamically? Does it exist, and if so, in what contexts? This chapter examines the notions of free will and determinism in Southern Arabia as both truth and falsehood, evident in discourse and context, and yet contradicted in action, and it argues against the uniqueness of the Fatalistic spirit. It also aims to demonstrate that Fatalistic rhetoric is used as an instrument to apply meaning to the mundane, a religious tool to bridge the conflict between thought and action. Furthermore, it explores the epistemology of time and tradition, the trajectories of the past through present within the gulf mind. I argue that fatalistic categories in South Arabia are less indicative of determinism, but are perhaps reflective of the confluence of historical and future discourse that *is* unique to Arabian social essence and individual psyche.

The Bayesian failure

There is a classic logic puzzle I have always enjoyed. My father, who is a mathematician of sorts, explained it to me as a child, and I accepted its truth, but I didn’t

truly understand how it worked until I studied Bayesian analysis in genetic counselling during my undergraduate studies. The puzzle has many forms, but at its simplest, and as I tell it, it is as follows. A Christian slave is ordered to fight starving lions at Nero's Roman Coliseum. He is told, as he enters the arena, that he has a chance for salvation. There are three closed gates before him. Behind two of the gates are lions, deprived of food as to give them blood lust, i.e. certain death. Behind one gate is a clear exit, and the slave's freedom. All three doors appear to be identical, and there is no way of knowing which doors leads to lions, and which door leads to safety. Nero instructs the slave to choose a door, and the slave chooses the first gate. Before the slave opens the gate, Nero stops him, smiles sadistically, and then gives the slave some information. "You chose the first door, I will tell you with honesty that there is a lion behind the *third* door. Now you have a choice, you may stay with the first door, or you may switch to the second." What is the best course of action for the slave? Should he stay with his original choice of the first door, should he switch to the second door, or does it not matter in the least?

The usual difficulty in coming to terms with the puzzle is the inability to measure the statistical risk of opening a door. Before hearing Nero's tip concerning the third door, there was clearly a $1/3$ chance of survival. Nero then rules out door three. Listeners than rationalize correctly that there are two doors left, one leads to death, one leads to a new life. However, most incorrectly rationalize that there is then a 50:50 chance in choosing either door. The answer to the logic puzzle is as follows. The clever slave considers his options, takes a deep breath and switches to the second door, knowing that he has a much better chance of survival. Why this is true is a convention of statistics that falls under the

domain of Bayesian analysis. The philosophical basis concerning the logic is how pieces of observable information within a system alter probability, or in this case, to be more precise, how they do not. There is still a $1/3$ chance of survival behind door one, and now that we know where one of the lions waits, there is a $2/3$ chance of survival behind door two. I have told this riddle countless times since hearing it as child. Every time, the listener decides that it doesn't matter if the slave switches doors, or they answer correctly, that the slave *should* change doors.

One lazy afternoon, while I was working at one of the cafés, I sat down to coffee with a group of young Emirati men. They all worked for an engineering company at a large site office and were between 25-30 years old. The project on which these men worked, essentially a waterfront city within a city that was to accompany a another 'palm island' project called Palm Jebel Ali, was secretly on hold due to Dubai's economic woes. They had very little work to do. One can wonder if they ever actually had work to do. Indeed, I asked them what they did at work and none of them could actually tell me. "I do statistics, but no I *did* statistics maybe I should say", jokes Ali, referring to the fact that there is no foreseeable work in the near future. I am always asking about Emirati employment in the public sector (non-government sector). True to stereotype, none of these men applied for their jobs. The government had simply handed them the positions as part of a state sponsored effort to force Emirati inclusion into the public workforce. Regardless, after asking Ali about his work, I ask him my logic puzzle. All the men at the table agree. The slave should stay with the door he originally chose. I tell them the answer.

“No”, they tell me, “the slave should stay. I think he should stay with his decision”.

I try to explain the logic, but they interrupt me, “your fate is decided by Allah, it doesn’t matter which door you choose really, Allah decides if you will live or die.”

I try again to explain, “ok, but there is a one third chance...”.

Ali: “Eh, those things they don’t matter, you shouldn’t worry to much about those things.”.

Me: “Ok, but Ali, you are a statistician, surely...”

Ali “Yes yes ok maybe statistically who knows, but those don’t matter really. Not really.”. We were not understanding each other.

Me: “Ok, but why should he stay with the first door, does it matter if he moves to the second?”

Ali: “No, but he should stay because that is the door he chose, and [Allah] will help him maybe”.

A voice from across the table comments, “And yes, he should pray first before choosing a door, and then he should stay with that door.” At this point I’ve clearly lost control of the puzzle.

Me: “No, no, no, no, there isn’t time to pray, and the slave is Christian, not Muslim, Nero is impatient, God isn’t watching this time, the lions are hungry, everyone is watching, the crowd is impatient, and he should switch to door number two because...”

I’m interrupted, “There is always time to pray, I think, if he can wait and think about choosing a door than he has time I think to trust Allah”.

Me: “No! Nero hates praying, he’s sadistic, he fiddled while Rome burned, and he tells the slave that if he prays than he gets the lions!”

“Ok”, says the table “but see it’s all this person’s [Nero’s] fault so what can he do? There is nothing he can do”

Me: “Yes there is! He can switch to door number 2! That’s something he can do!”. They think I’m funny. My riddle has failed. I cannot argue. The nature of my failure is obvious to me. I saw only two pathways of reason; two different ways to perceive probability. I failed to see a third in which probability is irrelevant.

My failures open a discussion on a stereotype long attributed to Islamic culture; that of the fatalist individual. However, when predetermination is such an important concept in the branches of Judeo-Christian theological tradition, and indeed across the world in the gambit of religious and metaphysical complexities, what is specific about it in an Islamic context that makes it stand out? There are attributes to the stereotype that are evident in my friends' attitudes towards Nero. Specifically, the notion of defeatism has long been attached to Islamic fatalism as an indication of its uniqueness within the context of multicultural determinism, that ability to accept one's fate, for good or for worse, without action or agency, except for perhaps prayer, which is itself described by Muslims as a submission (from *Muslim*, one who submits to God), rather than a proactive sentiment. There is, of course, a paradox in this. If one is to believe that prayer is directly involved in affecting the future, or that God answers prayers, then the act of expressing desire through discourse with a deity cannot be entirely defeatist, and might be viewed as a very reasonable act of personal agency. We will come to this later. I am first interested in defining and deconstructing a long held stereotype. It may also be said that it is not my intention to pursue the notion of predestination, or its validity or falsehood, as universal truth. That is an ontological question at least as old as recorded philosophy, best left now perhaps to priests, rabbis or molecular physicists. The teleological arguments of Plato's *Timaeus*, Aristotle's *The Interpretations*, and Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, do provide, at some level, a framework in which to examine reason, yet the understanding of causality in nature, through divine will or through quantum mechanics, of the inherent truth of Predestination or fatalism, is somewhat irrelevant anthropologically. What is important is how it is understood to be

manifest in action, affect, and agency. Ethnography aims to show us those structures and rules of the universe that are written and spoken and understood to be true, and then it will show how they must be broken.

It is useless to pursue the World...

Pierre Bourdieu has pursued the notion of Islamic fatalism in his fieldwork among the Kabalye. I will borrow the words of a popular song he relates from his experience in Algeria.

It is useless to pursue the world,

No one will ever overtake it.

You who are hurried,

Stay and accept your censure,

Daily bread comes from God,

It's not for you to concern yourself.

That which is strange to you,

Let it not worry you...

(Bourdieu 1963, pg. 58)

Here, the classic ideals of fatalism and submission to Allah are poetically presented in popular culture. Part of the problem in analysing a historical view of Islamic

Fatalism is that the concept is often taken for granted by observers of Islam, and observers of Arabs specifically, as inherent to Muslim thinking. Of Algeria, Bourdieu tells us “Nothing is more foreign ... than the attempt to secure a hold over the future, and nothing more strange to it than the idea of an immense and open future as a broad field of innumerable possibilities which man is able to explore and dominate.” (Bourdieu 1963, page 56). Similarly, Patai relates, “As far as the Arab personality is concerned, there can be no doubt that the same belief in predestination or fate... exerts considerable formative influence... it engenders an attitude of passivity and of disinclination to undertake efforts to change or improve things. It especially discourages long range efforts which require advance planning, because any such activity might come dangerously close to rebelling against Allah, and his will as manifested in the existing order of things.” (Patai 2002, page 163).²⁰ Rebecca West, too, romanticizes its sentiments in the *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1948) as her informants in the then Yugoslavia weave the concept of destiny seemingly into every aspect of their lives.

The sentiment is manifest in speech patterns. In Dubai, and I have found this true everywhere in the Middle East, any statement concerning the future is given the addendum *In Shallah*, if it’s God’s will. This speech trend is a widespread and traditional one. The British Egyptologist Edward Lane commented on these habits two centuries

²⁰ Raphael Patai’s *The Arab Mind*, which I quote here and in several other places within this thesis, is a particularly controversial work, indiscriminantly essentializing all Arab populations into one national character. The book was published in 1978, but was republished in 2002 and is used as a primary resource for American military education. Patai’s work is useful at least to show a traditional Western academic perspective, which is how I borrow him here. I dare not spend the time to critique all of Patai’s arguments within this thesis, but see Brian Whitiker’s (2004) “‘The Arab Mind’ makes a better doorstep than serious reading.” for a review.

ago (Lane 1838, pages 200, 207, 278-81), as did 14th century Arab writers (Maqrizi, Ibn Battuta) some six centuries ago, Any statement of fortune or health is similarly given the fatalistic response, *Al Hamdu L'illa*, Praise be to God. Farewells are closed with *Allah Yisalmik*, God give you peace. For an Islamic basis for these habits, one need only to peruse the Quran. From Surat Yunis, 107-109:

وَإِنْ يَمَسُّكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ وَإِنْ يُرِدْكَ
بِخَيْرٍ فَلَا رَادَّ لِفَضْلِهِ يُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ
الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٠٧﴾

And if Allah should touch you with adversity, there is no remover of it except Him; and if He intends for you good, then there is no repeller of His bounty. He causes it to reach whom He wills of His servants. And He is the Forgiving, the Merciful:

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنِ اهْتَدَى
فَلِنَفْسِهِ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ
بِوَكِيلٍ ﴿١٠٨﴾

Say, "O mankind, the truth has come to you from your Lord, so whoever is guided is only guided for [the benefit of] his soul, and whoever goes astray only goes astray [in violation] against it. And I am not over you a manager."

وَاتَّبِعْ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيْكَ وَأَصْبِرْ حَتَّىٰ يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الْحَاكِمِينَ ﴿١٠٩﴾

And follow what is revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and be patient until Allah will judge. And He is the best of judges. (Qur'an, Yunis, 10:107-9) -Sahih International Translation

It is in this concept of judging that Arabic takes its common term for ‘predestination’, قضاء ل قدر (*QaDa al Qadar*), lit. “Judge of judges” (trans. Divine destiny). Charles Doughty, the great Arabist of the late 19th century, lamented the tradition among the Bedouin. In his failed attempts to offer medicine to their sick children, he wrote, “This is the supine nature of Arabs, that negligence of themselves, and expectation of heaven to do all for them, which they take for a pious acquiescence, in the true faith: this fond humour passed into their religion we have named the *fatalism* of the Mohammedans” (Doughty 1888, page 155). So too does Edward Lane’s orientalism speak of the Egyptian fatalist attitude as a structure of being (1838, pages 3, 611). T.E. Lawrence tells us that the tradition evolved from the desert. “It was easily felt as an influence, and those who went into the desert long enough to forget its open spaces and its emptiness were inevitably thrust upon God as the only refuge and rhythm of being.” (Lawrence 1922, page 24). The effect being that the Arab man “could not conceive anything which was or was not God, Who alone was great; yet there was a homeliness, an everyday-ness of this climatic Arab God, who was their eating and their fighting and their lusting, the commonest of their thoughts, their familiar resource and companion, in a way impossible to those whose God is so wistfully veiled from them by despair of their carnal unworthiness of Him and by the decorum of formal worship.” (Lawrence 1922, page 23). Lawrence’s argument is almost phenomenological in its nature, that the experience of the landscape, shapes perceptions by society and affects epistemology (Tilley 1994). These musings suggest that the lived aesthetic intimacies that the Bedouin people shared with

the desert, the perceived vastness of the rolling dunes or the barren rock, the sound of the wind, the tactile sensation of the oppressive sun helped form a sociality governed by fate mirrored in the rhythms of nature.

The themes of fate and destiny show themselves within Arabian folktale and legends. Scheherazade's tales in *1001 Nights* are rampant with destiny. Within the texts, destiny wraps itself in layers of narrative. The structural topography of the stories are only brought to balance at the end of each tale through destiny. Robert Irwin, a British historian and a scholar of the *Arabian Nights*, comments on the theme: "Every tale in *The Thousand and One Nights* begins with an 'appearance of destiny' which manifests itself through an anomaly, and one anomaly always generates another. So a chain of anomalies is set up. And the more logical, tightly knit, essential this chain is, the more beautiful the tale. The end of every tale ... consists of a 'disappearance' of destiny, which sinks back to the somnolence of daily life ... The protagonist of the stories is in fact destiny itself." (Irwin 2003, page 200). The rhetoric used in folk tales mirrors that in high speech. In formal context, it is common to follow good news with a notion that "heaven has blessed you", or that "Allah looks favorably". This is a classical way for Arabic to discuss fortuity, making ones chances for good or bad happenstance outside the calculations of statistical algorithms. Mathematical models then become irrelevant.²¹

²¹ The nullification of chance has been dealt with throughout ages of recorded philosophy. Aristotle sums up the argument simply enough in what has become the problem of future contingents:

Prayer, history, Retroactivity, and Schrödinger

I was struck with a thought while watching images of ‘faithful Christians’ in the media, on CNN and in Gulf News, during my years in Dubai. A series of mining ‘accidents’, or disasters if you will, had occurred across the world, in the US, in Chile, and in New Zealand. The first two events ended in happiness, with the Chilean miners being rescued to international applause after two months trapped underground. The events in New Zealand, however, sadly ended in tragedy, and the miners were never recovered. When news broke out of each respective event, there was no knowledge of the fate of the miners. They were either dead or still alive. It suddenly struck me as odd, while watching media coverage of the Chilean disaster, that the country was in prayer. It was not odd that the masses hoped, in their exaltations and vocal desires to their God, to affect the future; rather, I found it thought provoking that they prayed considering the past. Or perhaps, I simply did not understand. The Chilean miners had not yet been

“But if it was always true to say that a thing is or will be, it is not possible that it should not be or not be about to be, and when a thing cannot not come to be, it is impossible that it should not come to be, and when it is impossible that it should not come to be, it must come to be. All, then, that is about to be must of necessity take place. It results from this that nothing is uncertain or fortuitous, for if it were fortuitous it would not be necessary.” (From *De Interpretatione*, Section 9, e7r – e7v).

discovered to be alive. They had either died or had not died, and to pray for their safety would be asking their God to go back in time and rectify a mistake. Does their God make mistakes? When the miners were discovered under the earth, scared and hungry, but nonetheless quite alive, did those who prayed that they be alive feel justified in their devotion? I watched again, one month after the Chilean miners had been rescued, as the friends and family of the New Zealand miners prayed that their loved ones had survived, but this time they had not. Did they tell themselves that the miners had already died before they prayed? What could they have done? Or were they disappointed that their retroactive prayers were answered in vain? Can God answer retroactive prayers? I have posed this question in different forms in my time among Arabs in Dubai, and what I found may provide insight into notions of fatalism and temporal perception in the region.

In traditional Judaism, this type of praying is discouraged. The Jewish logic argues that one cannot change the past: to attempt to do so is to attempt to argue God's divine will. In a catastrophe, one can pray to Hashem (God), recognizing him as the orchestrator of a heavenly plan, but one should not ask, or make enquiries of a known or unknown past. The British Philosopher Michael Dummett has given considerable thought to the fatalist 'bringing about the past', noting that 'There is indeed asymmetry in respect of past and future in the way in which we describe events when we are considering them as standing in causal relations to one another: but I am maintaining that this reflects an objective asymmetry in nature' (Dummett 1964, page 338). Dummett also brings a Catholic perspective to the debate, attempting to refute the Orthodox Jewish prohibition on retroactive prayer. His argument, however, requires the belief that history

is in the mind. The linearity of time seems an inherent universal principle to Dummett, while the concept of history is perhaps not. The American historian Carl Becker (1955) attempts to show in parallel that there is “fact”, and there is history, but they are not, and cannot, completely be one and the same. His reason does not lie in falsehood, but in the completion of an idea. According to Becker, a historical fact is a “pale reflection, an impalpable image of the actual” because it is only representative of a great many truisms. (page 331). These truisms are ignored when talking about the historical fact, because when we speak of history, we are interested in the symbol, a generalization of all the actual truisms. These symbols have many strings attached to them, and these strings provide meaning, and so, according to Becker, the more small and precise a statement is, the more true it is, yet at the same time, the historian wants nothing to do with it, because it tells us nothing. Becker needs these strings attached because historical facts are worthless without them.. I view Becker’s argument as a historian’s philosophical parallel to inherent conceptual dilemmas in empirical physics, namely, Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, in which the precise knowledges of either position or momentum of particular observable entities are inversely related (Heisenberg 1927).

Can the extrapolation be made into observable history, and the precision of historical fact? Can one still rationalize the use of retroactive prayer without disrupting the theological implications of divine ‘will’? If one can, while time may be linear for the fatalist, history is not. It exists only within the psyche. History is a collection of images and ideas that compose a historical fact, and as Becker says, these images “exist in [the historian’s] mind, or in somebody’s mind, or they exist nowhere” (page 331). Indeed, the

argument can now be made that this epistemology of history allows for retroactive prayer, specifically if the fact is in the historian's mind, not our own. Roland Barthes discusses this problem of the discourse of history. He agrees that history brings time forward, and that any particular quantum of time lies in the words of the historian, but this historian is just "an empty subject of the speech act" (Barthes; 131). It may be, as Barthes seems to indicate, that the historian can never hope to *truly* piece together time: not with language, not with discourse. The historian becomes a referent, and it disrupts time in a very profound way. "In other words, in "objective" history, the "real" is never anything but an unformulated signified, sheltered behind the apparent omnipotence of the referent" (Barthes, page 139). Therefore, ". . . historical discourse does not follow the real, it merely signifies it . . . History is henceforth not so much the real as the intelligible" (page 140).

Like Dummett, then, I understand certain aspects of retroactive prayer as legitimate. If history is truly so vague, as Becker suggests, making negligible the linearity of temporal procession, and being 'true', or manifest, only within its narration, than retroactive prayer can be seen as a request to God, not for what was real, but as Roland Barthes suggests, only the 'intelligible'. A retroactive Christian response is not, perhaps, an attempt to change the past, but rather an intelligent reaction to an unintelligible circumstance. The scenario, or a variation of the scenario I present to listeners is as follows: A commuter train has six passenger cars. There is a terrible accident in which the train becomes derailed and one of the cars is destroyed, sadly killing everyone on board. All passengers in the other five passenger cars escape

unharmful. Someone close to you was travelling on this train. You find out about the accident while watching the news, two hours after the event occurred. Investigations have yet to publish a list of casualties and survivors. Would you ask God for the safety of your loved one? Would you pray to ask that so and so would have not been on the car that was destroyed? What is your reasoning? Following our logic from before, the Christian response seems to be that one could pray, not to change the past, but because the past is still unintelligible. It has not yet effectively happened. One is reminded of Schrödinger's famous thought experiment involving the nebulous realities caused by different forms of observation, or to be more precise, the lack of observation. "One can even set up quite ridiculous cases. A cat is penned up in a steel chamber, along with the following device ... in a Geiger-counter there is a tiny bit of radioactive substance, so small that perhaps in the course of the hour, one of the atoms decays, but also, with equal probability, perhaps none; if it happens, the counter-tube discharges, and through a relay releases a hammer that shatters a small flask of hydrocyanic acid. If one has left this entire system to itself for an hour, one would say that the cat still lives if meanwhile no atom has decayed. The psi-function of the entire system would express this by having in it the living and dead cat..." (Schrödinger 1935). The Christian response is much like Schrödinger's farcical cat. It becomes a question of semantics, but the semantics are important, because it elicits a response. The loved one aboard the train is not stuck in Cartesian categories, the individual is *not* either alive or dead, rather the individual becomes half alive *and* dead, or, if I wished to be more precise to my example, perhaps a sixth dead, and five sixths alive. The outcome, while mathematically viable, is philosophically absurd, but nevertheless allows for certain Christian observers to commit

to retroactive praying without accusing God of making a mistake. Additionally, as some have told me, “one should pray because, while we cannot change the past, only God knows his true plan. Since we don’t know what happened, we can send our prayers to Jesus, as he is always listening.” These prayers can effectively send their desires backwards in time, and remain predeterminists.

The Arab response, as per my experience, agrees that it is appropriate, should one wish, to pray retroactively, but I was at first torn with the logic of their claim. I presented my case to a number of people, most times out of context, as a thought experiment while we chatted about religion. One woman, however, had just finished telling me that her husband had just had surgery. She had been at the mosque, praying that the surgery went smoothly. “You mean”, I asked, “that he recover smoothly”. “No”, she responded, confused, “I ask that his surgery is to have gone well”. I did not want to press her on the issue, as I did not want to seem to trivialize her concern, but I later asked my friends about her response.

Me: “Can she have changed the outcome of the surgery?”

A: “No, you can’t change the past, all of it is Allah’s plan.”

Me: “Why then did she try through prayer?”. I expected a response typical of Schrödinger’s cat, the argument ender, the cyclical argument, that one cannot change the past, all is determined, but the blurriness of history creates indeterminacy.

A: “Ah, I see what you mean, yes in this way we can change the past.”

Me: “huh?”

A: “Our prayers, Allah will receive them.”

Me: “I don’t understand, but if the event already happened...”

A: “But Allah knew that we would pray.”

Me: “I don’t understand. Allah, makes decisions based on what you may or may not do at some other time?”

A: “Time doesn’t mean anything to Allah.”

Me: “So if you pray for something now, you can change the past?”

A: “No, you can’t change the past, her husband is either alive or dead, but Allah can hear your prayers in the future.”.

It suddenly dawned on me that certain aspects of ‘Islamic fatalism’ were a bit more temporally concrete and less like Schrödinger’s trans-dimensional hypothetical

feline. For some who adhere to such categories, there appears to be nothing nebulous about the state of the passenger victim. “There is a difference”, Schrödinger tells us, “between a shaky or out-of-focus photograph and a snapshot of clouds and fog banks.” (Schrödinger 1935). The passenger victim, or the husband in the hospital, is not both alive *and* dead. Rather, it’s the linearity of time that becomes blurred. One can effectively influence the past because Allah has knowledge of your personal future events. The philosophy is mirrored in the Qur’an:

وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ فَعَلُوهُ فِي الْزُبُرِ ﴿٥٢﴾

And everything [mankind] did is in written records.

وَكُلُّ صَغِيرٍ وَكَبِيرٍ مُسْتَقَرٌّ ﴿٥٣﴾

And every small and great [thing that a man or woman does] is inscribed [in advance in Allah’s written record].

(Al Qamar: 54:52-53)

Maurice Bloch has commented on similar perceptions of the Islamic Sadeh, descendants of the prophet in Northern Yemen. “They are both in history and out of it... to them, therefore, the particular events of history are external” (Bloch 1998, page 74). Bloch’s context here concerns the inherent religious authority of specific lineage, yet the ideology remains consistent; that of the nebulous ahistoricity in the perceptions of belief within Yemen. Bloch reminds us that the Sadeh, like God, exist beyond history. In this context, retroactive praying makes a good deal of sense. When an entity, for a specific

individual, becomes external to temporal linearity, why, then, should that linearity bear any relevance to the events that transpire under the context of that entity? Note, however, a certain irony in retroactive praying; that in a time of indeterminacy, the concept of defeatism associated with classical notions of Islamic fatalism does not appear to be present. The devotee believes he or she plays an active role in determining the fate of the individual. It is only after definitive knowledge of the outcome, for better or for worse, that one consigns themselves verbally to the rationalization that all was according to God's plan. The same might be said of a wealthy man, like Mo, who in principle protects his money, but becomes a fatalist while thinking about losing his fortune. Like his homologues in local folk tales, for him, perhaps "Fate, or destiny, under God, is the poor man's omnipotent ombudsman." (Irwin 2003, page 197).

Fatalism and Economy

Max Weber has famously given an account of Calvinism, and its notions of Predestination, as impetus for the formation of modern Capitalism. His argument was that according to the Calvinist ethic, one could not truly ever know who would be saved or condemned in the world to come, and so, God's desire was that the individual, through fervour and work ethic, should act as if he or she was already chosen by divine will. In this way, the successes or failures of a powerful work ethic, for both personal and familial gain as well as those charitable services for the good of the community and for church, while not the means for eternal paradise, were indications of heavenly favour.

(Weber 1930). Calvinists could then embody Capitalist philosophy. This way of thinking eventually (and ironically) morphed into the relative atheism exemplified by massive Western financial institutions that exist in areas such as Wall Street in New York City. Some strong proponents of this way of thinking have articulated their economic goals as a new form of morality, implementing a philosophy of laissez faire capitalism as part of an ethical body now known as objectivism (Rand 1957).

Dubai opened its stock market on October 25th, 2005. The Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) is a sort of city within a city. Sheikh Mohamed has his offices atop the famous twin Emirates towers on its North end, and in the centre is a towering tabled monolith 15 stories high, the DIFC Gate building, akin in shape to the trilithons of Stonehenge. Emiratis are immensely proud of their stock market, and of DIFC. The trading floor is a bizarre mix of older Emirati men dressed in Kanduras with Black dress shoes and Rolex watches and German and British white men in their thirties with shaved heads and pressed business suits. I only began to visit after the economic downturn. The British men were visibly distressed, when I saw them in DIFC, and when I talked to them at the café. The Emirati men did not seem phased in the slightest by any of the shiny electronic boards, or the symbols, numbers, or arrows flashing across them from right to left from which people who know about money and stocks can translate and derive meaning. As far as I could tell, the Emirati men were present simply to 'hang out', sitting in large leather seats eating dates and drinking coffee. "That is not entirely true", a British banker told me, "there are young Emirati men working there, not many, but when they do they wear a suit." Still, outside DIFC, there are Arab businessmen everywhere.

If there is one Arab stereotype that Dubai visibly claims more than any other, it is that of the Arab Capitalist. The opening of Dubai's free ports and zones have been conducted with the sole purpose of maintaining laissez faire opportunities free from overt government and social scrutiny. Its ports were notoriously used for free trade in gold, especially into India, where gold imports are highly restricted, a practice I've heard termed "legalized smuggling". The laissez faire attitude has proven successful, and Jebel Ali port is now one of the largest, most successful harbours in the world.

The push for the world to view Emiratis as heralds of capitalism is echoed by their leaders. Sheikh Mohammed addressed the American Public in the Wall Street Journal after George Bush Jr. visited the country near the end of his presidency. He tells us, "I learned my capitalism in the bazaars and boardwalks of Dubai. And perhaps the fundamental question that I learned to always ask was: How can we serve as agents of positive change? That's why I prefer to call Dubai 'Catalyst Inc.'" (Al Maktoum 2008). The Sheikh addressed the Emirate on the 38th UAE National Day in December of 2009, and his speech was broadcast to the community. In his address he lectured his compatriots, telling them that "Ambition remains the ally of our plans and big goals will remain our objectives. The nobility of our nation and welfare of the citizens will remain the compass that guides us and orientates our work. We will not rest until our people are assured of their comfort and have all the essentials to guarantee the dignified life that they deserve. ...But, the highest degree of love is self-giving. You are generous people. So gather your thoughts, light up your minds, roll up your sleeves, work hard and take the initiative. Always look forward, and believe that God will not allow good work to go

without reward.” (Al Makhtoum, 2009). This is a far cry from Bourdieu’s Algerian peasant song that chants to those who are hurried to accept their censure, to sit and relax, that daily bread comes from Allah, and that one shouldn’t concern themselves with its pursuits. Or that “The over eager peasant moves ahead of the collective rhythms which assign each act its particular moment in the space of a day, the year, or human life; his race with time threatens to drag the whole group into the escalation of diabolic ambition, *thahraymith*, and thus to turn circular time into linear time, simple reproduction into indefinite accumulation.” (Bourdieu, 1977, 162). It is more in tune to the popular Arabic saying “Ta’mal li-dunyatika ka’annaka la’ishu abada; wa ta’mal li-khiratika ka’annaka tamutu ghada.” (Patai, 2002, 155): “Labour for this world of yours as if you were to live forever; and labour for the other world of yours as if you were to die tomorrow”, akin to the English saying "God helps those who help themselves". This creates quite a contradiction with traditional ethnography on fatalism. Ambition, the Sheikh tells us, is now God’s will, and time is of the essence. How would Bourdieu’s Algerian countrymen respond to the notion that God’s divine will is for the individual to push forward their own will, their own plans, into society?

One response might be that the countrymen would lament. Indeed, many mid-afternoon coffee breaks with Emirati men end with a lament and a retrospection of the past as ‘not so rushed’. One hears daily that “People were not so much in a hurry before” and “life was easier and no one was worried”. The sentiment is even echoed among white British expats who have lived in Dubai for many years. Has fatalism, then, been transformed, reflecting the integration of Weber’s ‘Western’, semi-forceful Protestant

ethic into indigenous Emirati understandings of fate? Or has the context in which fatalism can be used transformed, while understandings of fatalism remain the same? I argue in favour of the latter.

Religious Incongruency

I hoped to have shown that fatalism as a cognitive category is owned and adapted as form of perception by Gulf Arab peoples. I also hope to have shown how visitors to the Arab world were so easily persuaded that defeatism and fatalism were inherent to the Arab's understanding of the world. They were able to come to these conclusions because the evidence is so rampant in discourse, and yet I wonder to what degree it was evident in practice. For example, In what context did Charles Daughy's informant refuse medical treatment? Was the child in desperate need of immediate treatment, or was there simply a conversation about the potential need for treatment? As I was not present at the beginning of the 20th century, I cannot say, nor can I say that Doughty, Thesiger, and Lawrence, to name a few, were wrong in their assessments of what is now read as historical Islamic fatalism. I would suggest, however, that their, and others' assessments of the 'fatalism of the Mohameddans' is, as Edward Said (1978) has argued, marked by the essentialism and orientalism popular in Western perceptions of the Middle East at the turn of the 19th century.²² .Yet, in the case of certain types of medical discourse, a topic that I will explore further in later chapters, such sentiments can and certainly do exist

²² Some scholars of imperialism and the Middle East make compelling arguments that Orientalism, as Said has defined it, remains a highly dominant methodology in Western engagement with the Middle East today (See Little 2009).

today. I have apprenticed in open heart surgery in U.S. hospitals and have listened to Jehovah's Witnesses forbid blood transfusions for their family members. It is a practice they say is akin to cannibalism and abhorred by their God, but the health outcome sans infusion is said to be determined by their God. Similarly, adherents of the Christian Scientist movement in the U.S. try to avoid hospitals altogether, placing their health outcomes in the hands of fate as ordained by God. I can only say that Islamic fatalism does not appear to be as practiced as much as it is said to be practiced by those who live in the Arabian Gulf.

This opens a discussion long plaguing the anthropology of religion, that on the discrepancy between what members of a cultural group say they believe and what they actually practice. As is often the case, the two are not always compatible. So how did years of British exploration come to such strong conclusions on the behaviour of indigenous Arabs? Mark Chaves from Duke University has termed this practice the 'religious congruency fallacy'. The fallacy,

“leads us to search for causal effects we should not be searching for, it leads us to make claims about religious causality we should not make, and it leads us to posit epicycles to save the religious congruence assumption from evidence that contradicts it ... It's tell-tale sign in qualitative work is when beliefs or attitudes that a researcher hears in the field are treated as stable dispositions presumed to be equally salient across situations, when people's accounts of how their actions are

rooted in their beliefs and values are treated as causal explanations of those actions” (Chaves 2010, page 6).

This phenomenon is neither novel, nor controversial in Anthropology. Evans-Pritchard was one of the first to argue that social researchers seldom truly ‘know’ the motivations of those groups of ‘otherness’ in which they inundate themselves, and that the habit of ascribing ‘belief’ to the causality of behaviour practices is itself often egocentric (Evans-Pritchard, 1965). Chaves notes that religious congruency is not unachievable, only that it is rare. It takes cognitive and social effort to achieve this congruency, and he outlines some scenarios in which this rarity occurs. One is through deference to authority, i.e., following direct orders from a priest, imam, rabbi, and etc. Another is through a ‘sacred canopy’, in which behaviour is governed by a contextual framework of close social influences and authorities, i.e., friends and family. A third is through heuristic processing in which behaviour becomes embedded through experience. (7) It is the failure of these processes that I suspect may be responsible for hasty analysis of the Arab fatalistic phenotype.

One problem, especially in the case of heuristic processing, is that the rules of society, and of religion, can be repeated and learned in a contextual setting, a mosque or a church for example, or recited daily in the Quran or the Bible, but never become embedded in behaviour because they have never really been practiced. For example, to illustrate this point, John Darley and Daniel Batson, researchers from Princeton University, studied the ‘Good Samaritan’ behaviour of seminary students in transit to

give a lecture on the Good Samaritan (Darley and Batson, 1973). Clergy were either asked to give a talk on ministry in alternative professions, or they were read the passages of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10: 29-37, and then asked to give a talk on the Samaritan. Some participants were told they were in a hurry. The talks were conducted in an adjacent building and a participant actor portraying a distressed individual in need of medical attention was placed along the path. The 'religiosity' of the individual made no difference to whether the individual offered help, neither did the subject of the talk. The only recorded factor that seemed to influence whether a clergyman would be a "Good Samaritan" on the way to a talk on the "Good Samaritan" was how late the individual was running. Nearly two-thirds of the participants helped if there was spare time, but only one tenth stopped if they were rushed. "Thinking about the Good Samaritan did not increase helping behaviour, but being in a hurry decreased it ... Our seminarians in a hurry noticed the victim in that in the post-experiment interview almost all mentioned him as, on reflection, possibly in need of help. But it seems that they often had not worked this out when they were near the victim." (Darley and Batson 1973, page 107). The point I emphasize with this example is that reading and thinking about a cultural rule did not elicit a mirrored behaviour because the context conflicted with a scenario in which an individual had much more experience, in this case, that of being tardy.

This gives some insight into what some writers of fatalism are perhaps doing wrong. The problem is methodological. They are asking the wrong questions. For example, one modern sociological study that questions the reality of Islamic fatalism

collects survey data from a range of Islamic nations, concluding that Islamists more strongly ‘believe’ that destiny is controlled through cosmological forces than do their non-Muslim counterparts, and that Arabs in Western nations may feel they have less personal agency in governing their lives because of Urbanization and Modernization (Acevedo, 2005). In this case, the sociological surveys provide the context for the participant to become intimately reflexive about their fatalism, forcing the cognitive effort that Chaves (2010) warns about. Fate, as an object, can be viewed as especially intangible, leading itself to be viewed only through coerced reflexivity. Walter Benjamin has written, “like character, fate too can be apprehended only through sign, not in itself. For even if this or the character trait, this or that link of fate, is directly in view, these concepts nevertheless signify a relationship – one that is never accessible except through signs, because it is situated above the immediately visible level” (Benjamin, 1919 (1996), pg. 201) The fault is sometimes not lost in ethnography, in which discourse with cultural actors often presumes cultural categories that the actor is then obliged to perform. The resulting behaviour, or discourse, then becomes an artefact rather than an insight. I fell into this trap often when I asked someone, “What would you do if...?” Depending on the context of the questions I realized I could elicit the response of my choosing. As many of my own studies were conducted at hospitals, I could follow up on Doughty’s dilemma with a sick child. I could ask about the importance of health care in a Quranic context and I could easily get a fatalistic response, especially when I allowed participants to think about the future. The irony that I was in a hospital was not lost on me. Informants who would exclaim that Allah would provide help and admit that seeing a doctor was irrelevant in the eyes of destiny would tell me this while seated in an out-patient clinic,

often seeking medical treatment for a trivial cold or sore joint, or more dramatically, seeking plastic surgery, a nose job, or a breast enlargement.

I admit to many problems in asking patients these types of questions. The most salient is that the subject of illness, body enhancement, mental illness, and indeed hospitals in general are still highly taboo among some Arab groups. In the stigmatization of mental illness questionnaire I conducted in Abu Dhabi, one of the more perplexing results was not from a question on the perception of mental illness, but rather part of the diagnostic data. I asked participants if they, or any member of their family are currently seeing a doctor, or had ever been to the doctor for any mental illness. Of the 83 questionnaires I collected in Arabic, nearly everyone answered no, despite filling out the survey while seated in the mental hospital. In other words, there exists a strong possibility of dishonesty when speaking with either unhealthy individuals or with their relatives due to stigma, or perhaps related sentiments of shame, both personal and familial, that exist independently of concepts of cosmological causations. However, stigmatization is not enough to explain medical dishonesty in Emirati hospitals. While asking fatalistic questions and forcing Quranic reflexivity on patients in a hospital sometimes produces fatalistic responses, changing context of questions and settings can encourage the opposite results. In talking with men at the mosque, asking fatalistic questions without encouraging active reflexivity of fatalistic concepts could easily produce non-fatalistic responses. A main problem, then, is that it became apparent to me, that in many cases, fatalistic discourse was given to me for my benefit, not as a system of knowledge prevalent in cultural practice, but as a system of knowledge that is *meant* to

represent Emiratis and Arabs in general. As I have discussed earlier in the chapter, ‘Islamic fatalism’ is a known and discussed cultural trait, and to borrow the language of Foucault, the visibility of the adherence to a *known* cultural norm in Gulf society outweighs the importance of its verifiability. The concept of fatalism, then, becomes protected and reinforced through discourse, while at the same time, often unpractised.

As for speech patterns, those colloquialisms that invoke divine provenances in mundane conversation, the *inshallahs* and *Al hamdu l’laahs*, I argue that the connection between their usage in peer groups and the beliefs of those collectives is purely speculative. Again, the conjecture assumes that God is so fully embedded in conscious cognition that the speaker cannot help but indicate fatalistic signifiers. I have, however, argued that significant context is required to make this connection possible, and as the context is rarely present in common conversation, I am forced to suspect that these fatalistic colloquialisms are not indicative of any real fatalism at all. Rather, I see their usage as Arabic signifiers, more shibbolethic than religious. Indeed, I have met many Muslims in Malaysia, Indonesia, India, and London, and they do not use these terms, or if they do, it is sparingly and in a religious context. The habit appears to be Arabian custom, a local interpretation of ‘hopefully’, or ‘I’m well, thank you’. When a secular American, for example, is startled and knee-jerks a common expletive “Dear God!” or “Sweet Jesus!” or perhaps is in the throws of ecstasy, and shouts “Oh my God”, do we assume religious congruency between exclamatory remarks and an inherent belief system? Do we assume an inherent analysis of theology when one hears an unexpected loud noise, or when one orgasms? We cannot. My father, for example, an Orthodox

Jew, angrily shouts “Jesus!” if a car should cut him off on the expressway. Rather than expressing a latent devotion to another religion’s creed, it is more likely his speech reflexes are a product of growing up in Syracuse, New York. Similarly, I was entertained to hear a Muslim man from Southeast Asia exclaim “Oh my Buddha!” when I showed him a picture of my friend attacked by leaches. Its Arabic counterpart might be “Ya Allah” (my God!), or in some places “Bismillah!” (In the name of God!). I might add that, while most Western expats use *Inshallah* terminology ironically, I noticed that the Sri Lankan and Filipino waiting and kitchen staff quickly picked up the terminology, first, perhaps, while dealing with costumers, and then among each other. It became for them *Dubai* speak, and most of these individuals had very little knowledge of Islam. In this case, its usage becomes idiomatic phrasing, local to a specific region, with understood implications independent of any religious connotation.

So, is there such a thing as ‘Islamic Fatalism’? Well, sure, why not, in so far as there is such a thing as ‘fatalism’ in general, which anyone can exhibit, through its not a particularly useful term. My informants are certain that everything they do is Islamic. The question is a red herring. If they are sometimes capitalist, they are Islamic capitalists, if they are sometimes fatalists, than they are Islamic fatalists. As Martin Southward teaches, “One can never infer a man’s beliefs from his behaviour alone: for any course of behaviour is consistent with more than one possible set of beliefs.” (1978, page 366). I suggest the inverse is just as true. Calling a behavioural category ‘Islamic’ does not seem to provide religious causation. What it *does* provide is a language, a socially recognized discourse to engage and understand behaviour, regardless of what

that behaviour is. Louis Dumont (1970), has argued that individual distinctions of the culturally Platonic self are spontaneously adapted by the actors in a society to maintain social identity. My own ethnographic research on Islamic fatalism leads me to think that this view is too simplistic. Yes, the actors within a system seem to me to be able to act out the categorical behaviours owned by the troop, but often only through contextual influence, and often only when it does not interfere with contradictory heuristics. The point is useful outside of Islam, and leads to me to ask what other cultural categories do we take for granted, not because they are created and reinforced by an imperialist or colonial force, but because they are proudly owned by a particular group. I cannot count the times that, while growing up, I have heard my Jewish peers discuss “Jewish guilt”, both in jest and in earnest. I think also of “Japanese honour”, or “German efficiency”, or to stick with the fatalist theme, “Turkish Kismet”, or Russian “Avos”.²³ The list could be quite extensive. I believe in the utility of these cultural traits as possible analytical tools for contextually appropriate retrospection of behaviour, and yet I find them particularly dangerous as a prescriptive enterprise. It also forces me to question the importance, or the influence, of modernity and globalization as instruments of inherent cultural change, and the true prevalence of historical categories. We read accounts of Arthurian tales and the legends of Charlemagne and envision the ideals of chivalry inhabiting the mind of the medieval self above all other traits. We can then easily anticipate the behaviour of a

²³ Wierzbicka (1992) provides a discussion on the articulations of *avos* in Russian. It has its own culturally specific qualifiers. “Basically”, she claims, “it is an attitude which treats life as unpredictable: ‘it is not worth making plans and trying to carry them out; one cannot organise one’s life rationally because one cannot control life; the best one can do is to count on luck’” (435). While the behavioural enactments of Russian *avos* and, say, Islamic fatalism might appear identical in practice, the symbolic foci seem to be opposites. *Avos*, here, seems to rely on notions of lack of ‘control’ (*sud’ba*) and inherent chaos, as opposed to divine organization and ultimate preordained order to life.

knight of the Round Table as we scour Bulfinch's mythology. Would it have worked outside Camelot? I borrow one more quote from the ruler of Dubai: "I always ask: How can I help? What can I do for people? How can I improve people's lives? That's part of my value system. It's too late for me to change that system, but it isn't too early for me to say to the world that the Dubai narrative is all about changing people's lives for the better through smart capitalism, willpower and positive energy." (2008). As I've mentioned in previous chapters, Sheikh Mo is not just the political leader of Dubai, he is also the religious authority of a theocratic state. There are some that might observe the rhetoric of 'willpower' as contentious to cosmological authority. Does willpower and positive energy create an ontology that supersedes divinity? Or, must we assume that the religious authority of the Emirate has become an Islamic Calvinist?

I hope to have argued that answering yes to either question is largely presumptuous. Post-structuralist anthropologists and Social Darwinists have provided an explanatory model for the locomotion of cultural representations through history. Using epidemiological metaphor, it is argued that the replications of cultural categories within a system are a falsehood, and must be seen as transformations caused through changes of cultural traits that arise from individual biased transmissions that bridge the microcosm and the macrocosm (Sperber, 1975, Gould, 1998)²⁴. If we are to assume that there are indeed bite-sized pieces of Islamic culture, modern behaviours that clash with traditional notions of cultural traits can be viewed not as imperialistic imports, but as Islamic

²⁴ This is an excellent edited volume of essays from Stephen J Gould called 'Leonardo's Mountain of Clams and the Diet of Worm'. The essays are taken from his column in National History Magazine and involve a very diverse range of topics, but they all speak to bridging the microcosm and macrocosm through social peculiarity.

tradition through historical trajectory. It eliminates the problems of modern anachronism, and Sheikh Mo remains a strict Muslim. But in eliminating anachronism, this idea still presumes a solid notion of historical and modern ‘belief’. Alternatively, Bourdieu has argued among the Islamic Algerian peasants that “the passage from the traditionalist attitude to the predictive one cannot be effected in bits and pieces, but must assume the form of an abrupt and total transformation” (Bourdieu, 1963). It is a reasonable thought, but, if we are to hold this argument as a form of social logic, I insist that we do not examine this process as a one way street. The predictive and the traditionalist exist simultaneously, shifting epistemologically through contextual desires and perceptions, or rather, as I suggest in chapter 1, they oscillate between the two.

Genetic Determinism

My research has shown me that one of the most important contextual mechanisms for instigating fatalistic practice in the region (and I might add, to a degree I find this true anywhere I travel on the globe) is through thinking about the far future vs. the present or immediate future. One social domain in which this becomes prevalent is through perceptions of well-being and agency within medical intervention. In the following chapter I will discuss the role of fatalistic tangibility and language in local knowledges of Diabetes and Genetics, among other health and body practices, and I will discuss how genes are incorporated into indigenous cosmology. Here, I simply wish to propose the idea that the language and rhetoric that informs a discourse on fate in the Emirates might easily be applied to emerging body knowledges imported from the West, specifically the

concept of genes. In Western science, the deterministic potential of genes within the popular imagination have led to the development of a very complex debate, that of a genetic determinism for behaviour. The debate is a thesis in itself, and I do not have the space to have a full discussion on its specificities. What I am interested in for this thesis is how a body of knowledge weaves through social systems. What does it mean, in any social system, to say that 'x' determines 'y'? Genetic determinism, proceeds from the same baggage as 'Islamic fatalism. Richard Dawkins has commented on the lexical issue.

“The validity of the determinist point of view and, separately, its bearing on an individual's moral responsibility for his actions, has been debated by philosophers and theologians past, and no doubt will be for centuries to come... The only point I wish to make is that, whatever view one takes on the question of determinism, the insertion of the word 'genetic' is not going to make any difference. If you are a full-blooded determinist you will believe that all your actions are predetermined by physical causes in the past, and you may or may not also believe that you therefore cannot be held responsible for your sexual infidelities. But, be that as it may, what difference can it possibly make whether some of those physical causes are genetic? Why are genetic determinants thought to be any more ineluctable, or blame-absolving, than 'environmental' ones? (1999. pages 10-11)

For Dawkins, confusion lies in the construction of what it means for a gene to determine something. For many philosophers, the question is teleological, and answers causation;

for biologists, Dawkins suggests that the question is statistical, and is a source of miscommunication (ibid). Dawkins is clear on his position that “I recognize that philosophically speaking determinism is a difficult issue, which philosophers have been talking about for centuries. My point was that genetics has nothing to contribute to that philosophical argument.” (Stangroom, 2005, 43). I think I agree, and as I have argued, the same can be said about Islam. Genetics, like Islam, in discussing fatalism, is not really a causal phenomenon. The qualifier ‘Islamic’ or ‘genetic’ tells me what language we are speaking, each with their own symbols and contexts that can be invoked in the imagination. I spent a few years working in behavioural neurogenetics laboratories in Boston, and the discourse of genetic determinism was rampant. I will discuss this further in the next chapter, but I want to suggest, in this discussion on fatalism, that regardless of the intentions behind a word such as ‘determine’, or ‘destiny’, that users be aware of their audience.

A word like ‘determine’ cannot be written off as semantic. It ripples through the seas of language that people utilize as a repertoire to see them through the day. This might be especially true within a medical setting, where thinking about one’s future and about one’s personal agency, is intimately tied to well-being. Some research has been conducted on the fatalistic response to genetic dissemination in the West. One study has found that genetic descriptions of hypercholestaemia in neonatal screenings here in Britain leads to fatalist thought, and general defeatism among the parents of affected children. However, behavioural descriptions of the same condition lead to thoughts of serendipity, and a general feeling that parents can shape their children’s’ health (Senior et

al. 1999). Philip Kitcher (2000) echoes this warning and blames the Western science profession: “Genetic determinism persists not because of some subtle error in conventional ideas about the general character of biological causation but because biologists who are studying complicated traits in complex organisms are prone to misapply correct general views.” (page 397). Kitcher suggests this is often an intentional act on the part of investigators as they attempt to demonstrate relevancy in light of great academic pressure. Other research suggests that ‘determinism’ is, as Dawkins suggests, a scientific language of statistics, but that the stats themselves proceed from false assumptions, that biology differs by race , or more specifically, the biology differs by race as collected in American census categories, and that scientists plan and conduct their work under this assumption (Fullwiley 2007). One implication is that geneticists still wantonly operate under the same formulas for ‘national character’ that we have accused the Orientalists of perpetrating, and that we have long attempted to weed out of social science. Here, the semantics of science become highly specific. Not only is fate understood to dwell in genes, but embedded within the language of genetics is the assumption of race. In constructing well-being, race , then, itself becomes a pathology, and it becomes interwoven with destiny.

John Avise, in his monograph on the *Genetic Gods* (2002), extends genetic determinism to the structural realm of cosmology, attempting to ask and answer questions that are, for most people, religious. The link between genes and gods can be, Avise argues, a rather rapid one. I cannot argue with that. It is often visible in my field sites, as I will come too later. In the least, can we say that, if genes conjure up their own

cosmology within the imagination, than it is reasonable to suggest that an already present and strong cosmology might inform genetics? In the Arabian Gulf, genetics have found an audience with which it was unfamiliar. The intentions behind its language are especially vulnerable. The men and women of the Emirates may not always participate in fatalistic behaviour any more or less than anyone else, but what they do have is a very robust and complex language of their own with which they can engage fate. Genetic dissemination was bound, in some way, to be reworked under these powerful Arabic articulations.

Fate and Fortune

Finally, what makes the language of fate so powerful in the Gulf is that these articulations flow through so many categories of emotion? It has been argued that another impetus for belief practice may be misfortune in general, returning to the notion of the ‘poor man’s omnipotent ombudsman’. Again, Walter Benjamin has pondered the relationship between the visibility of fate in misfortune versus happiness. “Is happiness, as misfortune doubtless is, an intrinsic category of fate? Happiness is, rather, what releases the fortunate man from the embroilment of the fates and from the net of his own fate.” (Benjamin 2003, page 203). However, I have found that this sentiment is not always appropriate among indigenous populations of the Arabian Gulf. Happiness and fortune are often spoken of as Allah’s will in the same vein as misfortune. When faced with contextual reflexivity of their successes and wealth, Emirati men often feign innocence to personal achievement, instead choosing to acknowledge God for the profits

of hard work or good health. In my experiences with Emirati aristocrats, Egyptian businessmen, and even Syrian and Lebanese salesmen, success in business and the financial rewards that accompany a successful Gulf company are so often modestly attributed to Allah that I must question misfortune, as opposed to *good* fortune, as a category of fate within Arab thinking. The perception of fate in the Gulf as manifested in both good and for ill in peoples life-time experiences mirrors, to some extent, that of the Tallensi of West Africa of whom Mayer Fortes has shown to distinguish between various parcels of destiny (Fortes, 1959). The Tallensi cultural adaptations to the presence of fate differ strongly to what I have seen in the gulf. They have developed rituals to expel the destiny of misfortune while retaining the destinies that lead to well-being. Furthermore, the powers that govern the complexities of life, including destiny, fall under the jurisdiction of the ancestors. Within Gulf Sunni Islam, these jurisdictions are governed by Allah, Qada Al Qadar. Still, as Fortes writes, “The essential point is that Destiny is conceived of as accruing and adhering to the individual from the outside, as it were, like his shadow... and yet Destiny is chosen by the individual though it must be awaited to manifest itself” (Fortes 1987, page 149). Again, this theme is mirrored in Islamic folklore where protagonists so often stumble upon wealth haphazardly. Characters or human actors do not push these plots forward. Narrative requires that direction simply fall into their laps. The desert, the sea, and the palaces of sultans are filled with nothing but danger, serendipitous encounters, and a Deus ex Machina, and in the end, the heroes suddenly find themselves wealthy. It is worth considering that the attitude helps separate the Western Calvinist models of prosperity from, for example, the state speeches made by Dubai’s leaders. Sheikh Mo might push violently for individual and communal ambition,

he speaks to his nation about what needs to be done, and how to do it. Fatalism is why it works.

The problem in analysing this behaviour is that meaning in Gulf society can be everywhere and anywhere, and that meaning, within conversation, seems to supersede causation. This mentality is not a novel observation. It was one of the foundations of Stoic philosophy, developed into the concept of *sympatheia* by Posidonius, and pushed forward by Marcus Aurelius the philosopher king, as a doctrine of the Roman empire. The principles of *sympatheia* maintain the inherent binding of all cosmic appearances. Stoical Logic is fate, a universal reason (*logos*) that is un-malleable. Individual will becomes a response to the order in nature or happenstance. “*A cucumber is bitter. Throw it away. There are briars in the road. Turn aside from them. This is enough. Do not add, "And why were such things made in the world?"*” (Marcus Aurelius, VIII. 50, trans. George Long). This is one of its greatest strengths in Islamic perception; one need not necessary ask “why?”. Fatalism makes the mundane holy. It has that potential to fetishize everything into a divine exhalation of itself. So, in debating religious congruency, I lastly wish to add that I have found that the contextual impetus for belief practice behaviour may be more prevalent in conservative Islamic societies, largely because the sacred canopy intrusively shades the social landscape. Symbols, through reflexive mechanism, become more bountiful for providence. James Frazer, in the *Golden Bough*, uses the concept of sympathy magic frequently to explain the cognitive merger between *person* and *thing*.

“Dwellers by the sea cannot fail to be impressed by the sight of its ceaseless ebb and flow, and are apt, on the principles of that rude philosophy of sympathy and resemblance which here engages our attention to trace a subtle relation, a secret harmony, between its tides and the life of man, of animals, and of plants. In the following tide they see not merely a symbol, but a cause of exuberance, of prosperity and of life, while in the ebbing tide they discern a real agent as well as a melancholy emblem of failure, of weakness, and of death (Frazer 1922, page 24).

In addition, the calls to prayer echo “Come to your faith” across the city early morning until late at night. The consanguineous kinship practices combined with the relatively condensed and protected communities of the Emiratis still prohibit the visibility of the perceived social periphery in ways that do not exist in systems with larger social heterogeneity. This in turn allows for the possibility of certain cultural symbols to promote belief practice discourse through context. I suggest that labelling a cohort of people as fatalists is directionless. However, much like abstract images of genetics in a Western hospital, when my informants engage with certain contextual symbols, these symbols then allow for a critical reflexion on behaviour, and encourage fatalistic choices in accordance with the knowledge system in which these symbols are embedded. In light with Frazer’s tides, I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of one of these Islamic symbols that offer a glimpse of the Gulf’s sacred canopy perhaps more than any other. That symbol is the moon.

The Moon on the Mosque

I have visited mosques across the world, from Moorish places of worship in Spain and Tunisia, to those in isolated Saharan Berber camps, to those hidden on the banks of jungle rivers in the Borneo Rainforest. Some are built with mud, tiles, or bricks, or grand constructions of gold and white plaster, others of rudimentary bamboo. Atop them all, as is my experience, is *Al Qamar*, the moon, the adopted symbol of Islam. It is perched upon the towering minarets, or given a prominence on the hemispherical domes of the world's famous Islamic holy sites, a sphere or crescent that has come to complement the onion shaped architectural conventions adapted from Moghul tradition and spread across Arabia (Asher 1992). The world's Muslim community seems undecided on how it came to reside above Allah's houses. Plaques in Istanbul's Sultan Ahmet district tell me it was an ancient symbol of the city, used by Byzantium's rulers long before Muhammad travelled Arabia. It claims the Ottoman Turks spread the moon across Islam. "Nonsense", says Rahman, a representative at the Jumeirah mosque in Dubai. "It is true it is not an Islamic symbol really, it is not what people think... that we would worship the moon. No, Allah forbid this. No, Al Qamar, it belongs to everybody. But maybe more than other peoples, we Arabs really do love the moon" I tell him that the crescent moon is featured prominently on at least 11 flags of Muslim nations, from Turkey to Pakistan, Algeria to Malaysia. He points to the top of the dome lit up deep rose by fading dusk, "that is for their politics I think, but this one is not a crescent." I look closer and see that he is right. Each dome and tower has a whole, silvery moon at the top, each with its center missing, so that it appears to be a vertical halo. "Still the moon?" "Yes, still the

moon. It reminds us that Allah is always watching, that his plan is great.” “How so? Why does it remind you of Allah?” I ask him. “The moon is beautiful to us, one of Allah’s perfect creation. That is how we measure time. Christian peoples they follow the sun, but Arabs, we are watching the moon always. In that way we know, whatever happens to us, that it was Allah’s will.” I think I understand how my friend sees fate as he gazes at the moon.

The moon on the mosque is not just a symbol of Islam, it does not simply represent Allah. Indeed, while a healthy reminder is permitted, a symbol representing or synonymous with Allah would be blasphemy for a religious Sunni. It is not just the moon in the sky. It is Al Qamar al Qadar; the moon - the judge. It is not fatalism at all. It is a reminder that the human body is always acting, always scheming, always planning, but that Allah is always judging. For the Gulf self, and I dare to broaden to the Arab self, the moon is the judge by proxy; a physical depiction of cosmological hierarchy presented through nature. The Arab *knows* that he cannot change the cycle of the moon any more than he can truly change from whom he was born, and how he will die, yet the watchful moon is not fatalism or defeatism really, or at least, not as I see it. It is temporality itself that the moon truly represents. It is psychologically symbolic. As the phases of the heavenly body wax and wane behind the starlit minaret, the lunar effigy mocks time itself. As Bourdieu has told us of the Kabalye, “Submission to nature is inseparable from submission to the passage of time scanned in the rhythms of nature” (Bourdieu, 1963, pg. 57). The month may change in the sky, and for the individual, but for Allah, and in God’s house, time is irrelevant. This association between fate, temporality, and the moon

is echoed cross culturally and throughout history. Goliard clergy have saliently, and famously, rendered such symbolism in the early 13th century poetry of the Carmina Burana.

*O Fortuna
Velut Luna
Statu variabilis
Semper Crecis
Aut decrecis
Vita Detestabilis*

*(Oh Fate
Like the Moon
Changing your state
Always waxing
And Waning
The detestible life)*

The poetic Latin romanticizes what the Arab already knows. The inherent cyclical patterns in nature demonstrate the inevitable rises and declines of the lives of those who can view them; *always* waxing and waning in the course of human condition. It is, again, the *Sympatheia* of the Stoics, in which meaning is everywhere and the mundane becomes holy, or to further extrapolate, Spinoza's theories of ubiquitous unification (Spinoza). Here is one symbol, perhaps, that provides a constant context in which belief and action can reach congruency, hovering in the perpetually cloudless skies of the Rub al Khali and the Arabian shores. The indigenous tribes of the Arabian sands perceive this more than any other, and I am reminded again of my friend's sentiment "maybe more than other peoples, we Arabs really do love the moon". It is fitting that the chapter in the Quran most easily outlying the language and rhetoric of fatalism, and quoted in this chapter, is Al Qamar, *the moon*. Rahman holds his thumb up to the

minaret, arm stretched out in front of him, blocking the image of the silver halo from his line of sight. He then proceeds to do the same with the nearly full moon, large and red, low on the horizon. “You see, they are the same these ones” Not quite, but close enough. He circles the moon around his hand in a cupping motion. Rahman, is in his mid forties, but his delight in playing with the glowing satellite and its shadows is almost childlike. It is a reminder that Bedouin cosmologies are not entirely engulfed by the concrete urbanity of Dubai. It is rush hour, and I prepare to leave my friend. “Stay for some coffee”, he half orders me. “I can’t I’m afraid, I need to go try and chase down a taxi. Its rush hour and if I don’t start now I won’t be home for another hour.” Rahman continues staring at the moon, “You should relax, when you need a taxi one will come by.” I joke with him, “for you it probably would, but I have to chase mine down, the moon doesn’t send me taxis”. He gives me an odd look, and I bid him Sabah Al Khair. “See you soon”, I say, and he smiles, nods, and mutters quietly, “Inshallah”.

Chapter 4

Genes as Djinn

With Earth's first Clay They did the last Man's knead,

And then of the Last Harvest sow'd the Seed:

Yea, the first Morning of Creation wrote

*What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.*²⁵

Sleepwalking and Semantics: an introduction to genetic dissemination.

Doctor: A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once
the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of
watching!

Doctor: You see, her eyes are open.

Gentlewoman: Ay, but their sense is shut.

(Macbeth: Act V, Scene I, lines 9-11, 24-25)

In the winter following my return to London from the Emirates, I had the

²⁵ Artist: René Bull. Work: Illustrations for *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, 1913.
Medium: Watercolor and pen and ink

opportunity to meet a man who calls himself the world's first cyborg. Kevin Warwick is chair of cybernetics at Reading University, and is a pioneer in developing novel intimacies between the human body and technology. His experiments often involve merging animal, including human, nervous systems with machinery. Though I find his research fascinating, the specifics of his scientific contributions are not important here. I mention him not because of what he creates, but *how* his creations are presented, and how they are understood by his various audiences.

I first heard him speak at a large public lecture at the British Museum, hosted by my department in partnership with the Biocentre, an ethical think-tank sponsored by the House of Lords. We then moved to a more private setting for a café scientifique on campus. I found Professor Warwick to be a charming and charismatic speaker. The way in which he engages his audience reminds me of the industrial age scientific performances I've seen and read about in popular culture; akin to the Tesla era showmanship and stage magic that was used for public engagement a century ago. The audience at the British museum seemed equally taken with him. They gasped at the right moments, and cheered when the demonstrations of scientific sorcery queued them to do so. It makes a two-hour lecture playful. It is also quite dangerous. The adroit individual builds upon two constructs when he or she creates a technological emergence. The first is an actual product: a physical entity or instrument, or perhaps an idea or a methodology that functions as an instrument; something reproducible and maybe marketable. The second is a metaphor; a concrete way for the users in a system to make sense of the technology, to apply it to their cosmologies, and to generally incorporate it into the social structures that represent the way users know the world to work. A problem, as I see it,

with Western empiricism and the dissemination of science to the public, is that the developers, owners, and users of Western science are acutely aware of the former product, and all too often, completely ignorant of the second. Langsdon Winner partly refers to this trend when he poetically refers to scientific public engagement as ‘technological somnambulism’ (Winner, 2004, p.104). The image is that of a vast network of societal sleepwalking, interacting but not engaging, like Lady Macbeth on her nightly sojourns while she washes her hands, eyes are open, but senses are shut. He writes:

“From this point of view, the important question about technology becomes, As we “make things work,” what kind of *world* are we making? This suggests that we pay attention not only to the making of physical instruments and processes, although that certainly remains important, but also to the production of psychological, social, and political conditions as a part of any significant technical change. Are we going to design and build circumstances that enlarge possibilities for growth in human freedom, sociability, intelligence, creativity, and self-government? Or are we headed in an altogether different direction?” (Winner, 2004, pg. 112).

Winner muses in his title that technology is a form of life, but forms of life also inform technology. The circular exchange between science, and biomedicine specifically, is self replicating.

Science has a way of moving in unanticipated ways. Why then is it always

presented as a prescriptive enterprise? In 1998, Kevin Warwick designed communicative implants for human beings. At the time, he had vehemently said in public interviews that in 10 years time, everyone will need these implants. He spoke to us at the café scientifique about the divide between humans and cyborgs, or as he refers to them, ‘posthumans’, “...the world will be at war. Society right now is like an elastic band. You are going to have to choose your side because it’s about to split and there’s no going back...”. What seems to have happened instead is that Warwick’s implants are currently used as aristocratic playthings: as advanced barcodes for upscale New York celebrity night clubs. Perhaps, considering some of Warwick’s alternative claims, this is a serendipitous evolution.²⁶ My interests in local debates on the bioethics of therapy vs. enhancement do not concern the actual instruments. I view them as amoral, ambiguous entities. The metaphors we construct to export these instruments into society, however, are far more interesting. As I’ve said, we so often take for granted how they are formed, if not by creators, than by users. How does biomedical knowledge come to be understood and integrated into various microcosms, and as we export Western designed biomedical empiricism across the globe, how is it absorbed cross culturally? As I have argued in the previous chapter concerning perceptions of Schrodinger’s ambiguity, semantics are not something to be ignored. Semantics matter because semantics produce a social response. My simple anthropological point is that whenever a foreign or novel knowledge system is introduced into any social body, the complexities of the local epistemologies provide consequences for these systems, and so too they have transformative effects on these systems. Historical shadows, cultural legacies, and semantics matter. To ignore them is

²⁶ see Kevin Warwick’s “*Cyborg Morals, cyborg values, cyborg ethics*”. *Ethics and Information Technology* 5: 131-137, 2003

to sleepwalk, to suddenly find that our science is unrecognizable from our intentions.²⁷

This chapter explores indigenous perceptions of genetics and genetic susceptibility for disease in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. I aim to paint a small picture to show that biomedical truths are contingent on a great many things, and they are often far removed from the socially prescriptive entities we presume them to be. Indeed, they often take on social lives of their own.

Genes and their Agency

Arjun Appadurai has collected a body of thought focused on the idea that ‘things’ have social lives (1986). Through externalizing the life of ‘things’ that people ascribe value, Appadurai tries to come to an understanding of how value itself is constructed. Within medical anthropology, Susan Reynolds Whyte, Sjaak van der Geest, and Anita Hardon have reworked this basic model to demonstrate the social lives of medicines (2002), stating that, anthropologically speaking, one might focus on the social uses and consequences of *materia medica* rather than its biological mechanisms and the etic body of categories that many ascribe to medicine (page 3), and that “they embody anthropological ideas about the power things have over people, and about the power relations between people mediated through objects, about symbolization, about medicalization, and about the process of globalization” (page 163). Kopytoff has taken the notion of human biographies, and has suggested that “... we can profitably ask the same range and kinds of cultural questions to arrive at biographies of things.” (1986, page

²⁷ I have made this claim similarly in a short opinion piece for BioNews (Parkhurst, 2011).

66). In the tradition of W. H. R. Rivers (1910), he argues that the anthropologist might come to understand the often complex rules of kinship and inheritance as they are embodied by a particular object. “In doing the biography of a thing, one would ask questions similar to those one asks about people: What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its ‘status’ and in the period and culture and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things?” (66-67). I extend the idea of the social lives of things, and medicines, and suggest that genes, too, have social lives, and they, too, have biographies. Indeed, under a specific system of logic, the basic tenet of the gene as a unit of inheritance suggests that genes not only have biographies, but that they *are* biographies. In 1869, Friedrich Miescher discovered the presence of a weak acid in white blood cells. The acid that he isolated was later determined to be the nucleic acids that compose DNA and RNA. In a sense, what he discovered was chemically acidic ancestry, and this idea has ricocheted. Companies now market DNA ancestry kits, where one can discover their genetic heritage for a price. The same principles are now applied in the ever growing medical industry of genetic counseling, where chemical tests are utilized not only to inform your ancestry, but to inform your future generations.

The perception of the gene as a unit of biography leads easily to the possibility of constructing race, nationality, and citizenship from genetic makeup. Relative historical homogeneity allows for the regional reproduction and sustainability of genotypic specificity to the degree that genetic testing can often accurately demonstrate geographic geneology. Many geneticists with whom I have worked perceive this knowledge to more

narrowly pin down a modern definition of kinship. However, the idea of kinship is often far more fluid than that, changing shape and dimension respective of the cultural containers in which it is placed. Kinship formations have long been a preoccupation of anthropologists, informing the functionalism of Radcliff-Brown (1922), Malinowski (1922), and the early works of Bateson (1936) (among many others) as stable relational institutions. Structuralist approaches to kinship analysis focused on biologically driven incest taboo and ‘marriage’ ritual as driving the formation of alliances and exchanges (Lévi-Strauss, 1949; Kuper, 1988), though the concept of taboo as evidence for structures of cognition would eventually be called into question (Wagner, 1972). Later anthropologists began to critique concrete definable kinship categories, some questioning the use of kinship as a viable category at all (Schneider, 1984), and focusing instead on indigenous constructions of ‘relatedness’ (Carsten, 1995, 2000). At the same time that social anthropologists were moving away from universal kinship analysis, geneticists and Darwinian analysts were developing their own kinship theories informed by gene acquisition and transference, social evolution, adaptation, and natural selection (see Hamilton, 1964, 1965, and Wilson, 1975, among a gigantic field of study). While sociobiological theories have been widely critiqued since their formulation (see Gould 1978, Lewontin 1976 and Sahlins 1976), the deterministic potential of genes within the imagination remains a powerful influence (Griffith, 2001; Strohman 2001).

This influence has inspired anthropologists to re-examine identity, kinship, and relatedness through a genetic lens. If one takes Bruno Latour’s now famous quip that “we have never been modern” (1993) as a suggestion that the divide between nature and

nature in Western scientific discourse has always proceeded from false assumptions, one might then proceed to examine the intricate interconnectedness between biology, society, and the environment through the terms of engagements set forth by both social sciences and molecular biology. The complexities that arise as people reshape identity from an understanding of biology quickly betray the sociobiological framings of the self. Paul Rabinow has been instrumental in establishing a new scientific pluralism with his notion of ‘biosociality’ (1992, 1996) where biology ceases to be a basis for society, and rather, “nature will be modelled on culture understood as practice” (1996, 411). Anthropologists have utilized the concept as a theory with which to approach a rephrasing of identity and the ‘body in society’ in the face of the new sciences (Gibbon, 2007; Gibbon and Novas, 2008; Konrad, 2005; Finkler, 2000; Rose and Novas, 2005, Wexler, 1996). However, Rabinow himself warned of the limitations of the concept:

“The initial use of the term ‘biosociality’ was a heuristic one. And its utility was confirmed: referents were produced, practices invented, connections made, assemblages assembled, apparatuses put into motion. By the turn of the new century, however, some of the limits of the concept could now be seen with more clarity. The identification of such limitations is most welcome as biosociality was intended as a concept and not as an epochal designation meant to characterize an age of an era, that is to say that by definition the term did not have the same analytic power everywhere.” (Rabinow, 2008, page 191).

As anthropologists explored biosocial potentials in non-western societies, some found that many domains of society that were instrumental in informing illness categories failed to fall under biosociality in ethnographic terms (Bharadwaj and Glasner, 2009, Das and Addlakha, 2001). As Western scientific and medical categories become widespread in new regions of the globe, some anthropologists now argue for an ethnographic approach that seeks foundational mechanisms and motivations for the complex ways people navigate and reorganize themselves vis à vis emerging illness and body categories (Macdonald, 2012; Beaudevin, 2013). This ethnography suggests something similar. I aim to show that genetic dissemination in the Gulf has helped reinforce a type of biological citizenship, and individual and group identities can be reframed in terms of the new sciences, yet indigenous knowledge system are just as robust. Identity can be informed by biology, but it is often not on biology's terms. Local systems of cosmology, kinship, and fate, to name but a few, all have their own language in which biology must be maneuvered.

Case study: Genetic Schizophrenia

I was first introduced to ways in which genetic knowledge is constructed in Dubai from my initial studies on the stigmatization of mental illness. As discussed before, participants were given a behavioural description of anti-social, and perhaps psychotic, illness. There are three questions in the survey that could potentially lead to reflections of illness as inheritance. The first question was “Is the cause of this sort of illness something passed down in the family?” Another was “should the doctors tell him not to have any children in case he passes the illness on to them?”. The last was “Is his illness

something he might have brought on himself?” Respondents were fairly split in their response to the first question, roughly half of them answering yes, and half of them answering no with a slight trend to the latter. On the question of children, respondents were more decisive towards the negative, with only a quarter of respondents responding in the affirmative. Similarly, about a third of the respondents answered positively to the last question. The questions themselves do not tell me much about perceptions of inheritance. Indeed, I was not, at first, entirely sure how Emiratis even understood the questions, or rather, I was not sure to what degree their understandings of the question were congruent with my own. The questions are particularly open to interpretation, and the Arabic copies cannot perfectly translate into English. Still, they provided some contradictions that proved worth exploring. The main contradiction was that the answers for any one question did not always match the answer to another. Respondents might tell me that a certain illness could be passed down to a child, but that it could not have come from parents, others might say the origins of an illness came from one’s parents, but could not be passed down to a child. Some respondents might answer that one is not responsible for an illness because his illness is genetic, and proceed to deny that illness could be passed down from a parent. The data indicates that there may be confusion in the meaning of genetics, but it does not tell me much about it.

Of course, this is problematic from a Western perspective that is based on an association between genes and inheritance and a fairly robust model of gene acquisition. Not all Emiratis I spoke with seemed to share this association, and it took time for me to realize this. I spoke with patients, and even some hospital staff, about a behavioural description of a mentally ill, or socially disobedient individual. The description was part

of the stigmatization of mental illness study (see again appendix A), and while I was very careful not to mention any medical categories myself, many respondents named the behaviour as schizophrenia. There was an opportunity in the study to answer if this sort of illness was something that could be passed down in the family. Of 89 responses in Arabic, 34 answered negatively, and 45 answered positively, that is, the majority of respondents agreed that the illness described in the survey could, in some way, be sourced from parents. It is unclear, however, what this means ethnographically. For example, respondents may, in equal measure, locate inheritability of mental disorders inside and outside of genetics. It is also not at first clear whether certain behavioural conditions are thought to be present at conception or are thought to develop later in life. It seems apparent that there are strong local ideas of inheritability of illness. What composes these ideas, however, are less apparent. I will present some case studies that delve into the ways in which local Emirati's discuss and manage certain conditions and traits to tease out indigenous ideas more directly.

Case Study: Inside the Nutrition Clinic

Sahra is an Australian Muslim woman, and she is a professional dietician and nutritionist for a clinic in Health Care City (HCC). Her family is Lebanese, though she had grown up in Australia and moved to Dubai a few years ago. Her position in the clinic provides insights into Emirati diet habits that I find fascinating. She complains to me that “Many of our Arab patients come because they are told to. They are obese and diabetic. They are told that if they cannot control their obesity than they will die. I often feel like I am speaking to myself. I will have an hour consultation with someone about

their diets, their daily habits, family history, etc., and they hardly answer. They won't speak a word for an hour and then at the end of our clinic they will tell me they want a gastric bypass surgery. They all want gastric bypass surgeries....." Sahra starts laughing in frustration, "...even people who aren't that overweight, they want gastric bypass surgeries. At some point, all these nationals somehow decided that their problems all stemmed from actually having stomachs. They get very angry when you try to discourage them from having an operation. They tell you that you are a bad doctor or that you shouldn't be allowed to work here. I've never seen people get so angry when you tell them they don't have to have surgery."

Sahra recently left her position at another private clinic. The official reason was that the clinic had no money, so they needed to let some staff go. Sahra volunteered. "I hated it there and I hated my boss. We couldn't be honest with anybody. The locals figured out that diabetes could be a genetic condition. Everyone thought they knew more than me, and I wasn't allowed to correct them. Someone would call my boss and he never defended us. They would call him and tell him "we told this woman that our problems are genetic and she doesn't know anything, what are you going to do about it". He was an Indian doctor and he would just sit there and apologize. A few patients demanded that we be fired or they would have the medical license revoked because they didn't like what I told them. I mean, most of my clients are really lovely people, even if they don't listen to me, most of them do listen to me, but I never knew who I was going to offend and who I wasn't. My boss pulled me into his office one day and told me just to tell certain types of patients that their problems were genetic and then work from there. I mean, it isn't right. He basically told me not to tell locals they need exercise and

healthy food. I am a nutritionist. That is the entire purpose of my job. These are all private clinics. You have to pay to come see us. If you aren't interested in seeing a dietician, why would you come pay lots of money to come argue with me? In the end I was so fed up I just left. My boss told us basically to tell people what they want to hear or get deported.”

Case Study: Genetic phenotype and body Alterations

Sahra's laments intrigued me. Before I arrived in Dubai, I was unaware of such a strong positive response to the influence of genetic susceptibility for disease, but the more I spoke with locals about illness, the more it became clear that there was an expanding understanding of genetics as profoundly influential in determining health among the indigenous population. Furthermore, there was a relative eagerness among the locals to discuss genetics. I found it rare, however, to hear the western concept of genetics being discussed in terms of appearance, demeanour, strength or any traits other than illness. That is not to say that there is not a strong knowledge system of heredity among Gulf Arab nationals. On the contrary, most people I spoke seemed to have quite solid convictions of how parents passed down traits to their children. For example, men from the middle generation (around their mid forties) often explained to me that boys inherit the traits of their fathers from their father's seed, and women's beauty comes from her mother. On one occasion I had tea with Fatima, an administrator for health care city. She was Emirati, the daughter of a sheikh, and she had gone to school in the United States for her undergraduate studies in what I understood to be international relations. She was an incredibly friendly woman, and always eager to discuss the development of

Dubai health services. Like most Emirati who speak English fluently, her accent was American. I had recently got married and she was over-joyed with the possibility that I might have children soon. When she found out how recently I had been married, the first thing she told me was “I am so excited for your children! They are going to inherit your eyes!” “Mine?”, I asked. “Why not my wife’s?” “They are too pretty, your eyes, your children will have to have them, they will have their mother’s skin and they will have your eyes. Its so exciting!”. Skin colour is a sensitive issue among modern Emirati families. The perception that skin colour is inherited from the mother is important because skin colour is one of the most important elements of dowry that a bride-to-be can contribute to a family. General facial features such as silky black hair and nose structure are also said to be inherited strictly from the mother. I argue that these particular perceptions of hereditary mechanisms, while somewhat Mendelian in nature, are a break from Darwinist evolutionary models and are, rather, a return to a sort of Lamarckism, where the building blocks of future generations are determined pro rata to the physical effects of the lived experience of the parents. The repercussions for this cultural viewpoint are manifest in social practice, where women are encouraged to “fix” physical flaws before becoming married or having children so that their children do not absorb undesirable physical features from the unaltered parent. Such alterations include nose surgeries and skin whitening, among other cosmetic changes. The social motivation is that if woman can lighten her skin before having children, her children will then have lighter skin naturally, ignoring the possibility of such traits as embedded in genes. I will discuss this much further in the following chapter. What is important here is the discrepancy between inherited traits and genetics. On this particular occasion, I was

meeting with Fatima to discuss the over abundance of cosmetic surgery practices at Health Care City, and the steps being taken to encourage diversity among the clinics and real estate of the city. Plastic surgery has become important for Emirati women specifically because her facial features and skin are thought to pass on to her children. “These places do such good business here because it has become so important to be beautiful, or we would never find husbands! It is a big problem here. Lots of men are making their girlfriends and fiancées have surgery because it is so important to the family.”

The sentiment is echoed on the street. Younger Emirati men with whom I was able to become close have admitted strongly encouraging their girlfriends and wives to have surgery, especially nose jobs and breast enlargements. When I pushed for a reason for it, one engineer joked over coffee one afternoon “the face is good for the kids, the breasts, they are for me”. I confess that, despite my best efforts, one of my original failings as an ethnographer while talking about traits with locals was assuming a Western understanding of biological inheritance. It was an easy mistake for me to make. I had worked in molecular biology and cell laboratories for a number of years, creating strains of various organisms, mostly fruit flies and mice, in order to study the influence of genetics on behavioural traits such as circadian rhythms and sexual activity. I had spent countless hours manipulating the genetics of *Drosophila*, attaching marker traits (bizarre eye shapes, wing patterns, etc.) to behavioural genes that are far more difficult to see phenotypically (for example, under a behavioural screen). These genes would then have to remain stable. Predictive ratios of traits and robust inheritance patterns are especially important in alterations of sexual behaviour because the science itself limits

reproductivity among organisms. For example, in the laboratory, we would often create strains of flies in which many of the male insects would only have sex with other males. Some gene mutations would encourage behaviour in which male flies would form ‘trains’ of sexual activity where groups of the male insects would attempt to have sex with each other in long seemingly orgiastic lines. When creating sustainable lines of these genes, it was crucial to ‘know’ precise Mendelian patterns of dominant and recessive traits, to ‘know’ the rates of genetic recombination that interferes with Mendelian inheritance, and to ‘know’ clearly how many males and females we could expect with and without genetic abnormalities. Outside the laboratory and into the realm of humans, of course, we should know that robust indigenous knowledges of inheritance exist quite independently from Western knowledges of Mendelian and Darwinian models of modern evolutionary synthesis. Namely, the influence that parents have over their child’s traits are often not perceived to be egalitarian. Many men have explained to me that most traits come from the father, and that some are simply picked up from the mother, absorbed from her whilst in utero. This logic maintains that the father is the seed, and that children are able to absorb features from their mother, who carries them, but that mothers do not contribute to an inherent template. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what can be absorbed from the mother as there are often conflicting opinions. The idea that a man essentially contains the human template in his semen is akin to Western debates on preformation that pervaded recorded philosophy for at least two millennium (Pythagoras, Aristotle, Descartes, Galileo: see Gould, 1974). Preformation sciences that evolved from Greek philosophical tradition envisioned an already fully developed, but miniature, human being within semen. European thinkers of the 17th century searched for the miniature

human in sperm while though new microscope technologies.²⁸ The homunculus was thought to be inserted into the woman's womb where it could feed and expand, and perhaps absorb traits of the mother through menstrual blood or the placenta. "For Leeuwenhoek, his microscopic observation of testes and his on-going observations of his own semen confirmed his belief that mammalian ovaries were useless ornaments, and that the sole function of the female sex was to receive and nourish the man's seed where the future human was preformed in its entirety." (Friedman 2001, page 79).

Heredity, Conception, and Preformative Science in the Gulf

Some of my informants spoke of the belief that their semen contained a whole individual. For those who claimed to have ever thought about it, there were mixed opinions on how gender is determined. A few men explained to me that a man always makes a man, and that a woman turns him into a woman in the womb. Some informants told me that the child is genderless and that there are ways to help it become a boy or girl in utero, though I was not able to explore how this works culturally. One informant claimed to always know the sex of a child when he ejaculated from the strength of his orgasm. He explained "sometimes it's really good and powerful, so I know it would be a boy, and sometimes not as powerful and I knew it would make a girl." Though it rejects

²⁸ See Nicolaas Hartsoeker's (1694) *Essai de dioptrique* and Antoni Leeuwenhoek's (1677) letters to *Philosophical Transactions*. Reprinted and translated in S. Hoole (1800) ed. *The Select Works of A. van Leeuwenhoek (1798–1807)*. Hill (1985) has pointed out that neither scientists claimed to have seen the miniature human, though both advocated its existence. However, both scientists wrote and drew their observations of other preformed organisms.

the concept of a physical homunculus, western fertility science also teaches that sperm is engendered, where the sex of a child is completely determined by the man. A male sperm can only contain an X or a Y chromosome. The processes by which this happens is termed spermatogenesis and currently understood to be random in its selection of sex chromosomes (per Grey's Anatomy).²⁹ However, within the context of many individuals' Islamic ideology, this concept of randomness is not compatible with Allah's will. I am told that the Sunni position on engenderment is derived from Hadiths that explain that engenderment of a foetus is performed from an agent of Allah, and happens *after* conception. Nevertheless, there are indigenous perceptions of fertility that maintain a said belief in preformative engenderment mechanisms independent of published Islamic ideology. I have not discovered a specific term for a human within a sperm cell akin to homunculus, though the preformative understandings of traits and gender may be built into Islamic terminology for semen; naTfah classically, and Mani colloquially. See Qur'an Surat 86.

²⁹ Some recent studies concerning in-vivo sex-determination suggest, however, that genetic engenderment might not be as random as traditionally thought in Western science. For a lengthy discussion on both nature and nurture in sex-determination, Jena Pincott's (2011) *Do Chocolate Lovers Have Sweeter Babies?: The Surprising Science of Pregnancy*, specifically Chapter 2: Skinny chicks, bossy broads, and a basketball in the belly.

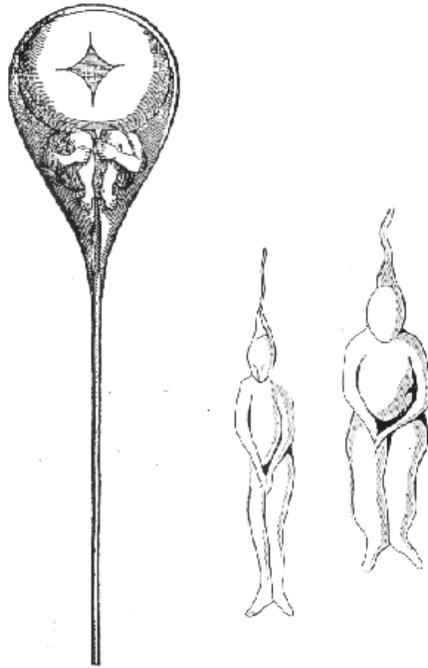


Figure 6 : Hartsoeker's drawings of 'homunculi', or 'little humans' inside sperm. (1694, 230)

Preformation theorists who developed their ideas within Christian tradition found support in the concept of a homunculus through religious evidence (Leuwenhoek, Hartsoeker, Malpighi, Swammerdam). A fully developed human within a man seemed to be evidenced by Christian doctrine. Namely, that Adam gave birth to woman, and all mankind. Furthermore, the idea became popular that within each homunculus was the seed of another homunculus; a hierarchy which proceeded exponentially smaller. The French 17th century preformatist Nicolas Malebranche examined the seeds of plants and the eggs of animals, and claimed to see clearly the fully formed generation to come, and

he extrapolated his argument to humans: “We ought to accept, in addition, that the body of every man and beast born till the end of time was perhaps produced at the creation of the world” (Malebranche, pg 27). This idea is congruent with the concept of original sin, in which Adam’s sin in the garden of Eden would have been physically present in every human being that would ever be. My Islamic informants did not like this idea. While there seemed to be a sense of Islamic spermism, this is confined to adulthood. A cascading infinitum of homunculi assumes that each ‘small man’ contains a proportionately smaller one. My informants were clear that “Only a man can do this thing (as opposed to a child), maybe when they are 13.”, and in any case, life is an exhalation of Allah. Still, in a deterministic context, the presence, or a lack of presence, of an ‘Islamic homunculi’ seems semantic. While an Emirati or Omani man cannot make semen until they reach puberty, they tell me that Allah has already determined whom their generations will be. Some middle aged men have told me about the strengths of their grandchildren, though they have yet to have any. It is quite common among most young Arab families, not just Emirati families, but those from across the Middle East, to practice teknonymy; that is, they name themselves after their first son, or more liberally, their first daughter. Many do this when they become married, long before they have children. Women name themselves, “Um Ahmed” or “Um Habeeb”, depending on the name they choose for the child they have yet to conceive. Would be fathers name themselves Abu “X” in a similar fashion. The name is then used by their friends and family. Traditionally, the name is always that of the potential first born son, however, modern Arabic parents are naming themselves after their first daughter, should they conceive a daughter instead of a son. They then change their name once they conceive a

male child. The naming pattern is, in a sense, a reversal of kinship inheritance perception, and allows the parents of a child to be defined by their procreation, even before a child is conceived. It gives further insight into perceptions of heredity among traditional Gulf Arabs who can inherit certain traits from their children. The renaming practice is often performed many years before a couple has children. Expatriated Arabs in Dubai with wives and families in Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria may only see their wives once a year while they are on vacation. I met two young men who were car mechanics from Syria who were saving money to fly their wives to Dubai so that they could start their family. Both of them had been married for three years and were called after their first son, who did not yet exist. As the price of goods and housing continued to climb in Dubai, they both were becoming disillusioned with the city, and said that if they could not bring their wives over in the next year, they would simply go back home to fulfil their names. There is, within discussions on conceiving children, a strong presence of destiny, in which the products of copulation are already envisioned and present within the kinship structure. This is, perhaps, an elucidation of the concept of a cultural homunculus; that the offspring of the human male is perceptively present within the adult male. My friends are acutely aware that they have names that they have not yet fully realized, and that it is their moral destiny to do so.

Here, destiny is often embodied as Allah and his cohort of angels within discourse. Um “X” and Abu “Y”, while not yet parents, and indeed not yet living within the same city, claim to be waiting for the time that Allah will grant them their child, or the social circumstances that allow them to have a child, i.e. money and/or proximity to their

partners. Some sexual habits among locals, and religious allowances of sexual practices, provide some evidence that agency of conception is left primarily to Allah's will. Before I begin that discussion, a point about Emirati habits must be made. Patai has written on the 'realm of sex' and its taboos, "The Arab attitude to sex has one additional aspect that must be touched upon. This is the extreme matter-of-factness with which sexual desires and functions are referred to or even discussed in great detail and with gusto, especially in either all-male or all-female company. This phenomenon has always been perplexing to the Western observer, who is at a loss to reconcile it with the extreme modesty and bashfulness that characterizes Arab sexual contact." (Patai, p. 145). I must admit to a misconception of repression of sexuality among local South Arabian peoples, when I first arrived in the region. I can attest to the fact that the rules of engagement for sexual activity are very different for Emiratis than for the urban Westerner, and can, in some contexts, be seen as quite stringent in comparison. I have found that discourse on sexual activity and sexuality, however, when conducted in contextually appropriate public and private settings, is in many ways far less conservative among local Arabs than in my experiences in the West. Many sexual habits, as long as they fall under contextually acceptable rules of engagement, are also conducted far more publically, and under less scrutiny than in many Western settings. Emirati men are very open with their sexual habits, what they enjoy with their partners, how they achieve sexual pleasure and gratification, and how they view others' sexuality, as long as certain women are not present. Women, I am told, will discuss sex and sexuality openly with each other as well, as long as men are not present. On more than one occasion, a British friend or colleague of mine has returned from a long day at work complaining that she had to listen to many

hours of dialogue on the shapes of her colleagues' husbands' penises and the ways in which they achieve climax. My own informants are always eager to discuss sex; the things their wives and girlfriends do to them, and the things they do with their mistresses. Many of them, especially younger men, visit prostitutes regularly, though this is not usually discussed as seedy behaviour. On the contrary, I have been given the impression that it is a moral alternative to masturbation. Self-gratification is said to be strictly forbidden according to Sunni Islam. Some men joked openly about it and admitted that probably everyone does it. Others insisted that they did not like masturbating, and so they often visit massage parlours that are scattered abundantly around the city. They expressed the belief that sexual gratification for pay with a partner is not just permissible, but moral, and often implied that sexual gratification at a massage parlour was excluded in haram activities as the staff were Filipino, and thus outside the possibility of marriage. Furthermore, the sexual relationship was one-sided; my informants said they would never penetrate these women. Their trips to the message parlour were so often spoken nonchalantly as part of a daily agenda that I stopped questioning the practice as a perceived immoral act, despite the fact that prostitution is strictly illegal in Dubai. I must interject here that the term prostitution is problematic as the word carries moral connotation. My acquaintances who visit massage parlours are clear that it is not prostitution even though they pay for sexual services. Some men often expressed pity for Western men who masturbate. My friend Mohammed, who does not visit parlours, but does have a Filipino mistress in addition to his two wives tells me "It is because they are more repressed in the West I think and cannot always be real men." The implication, which is repeated often in my discussions with locals, is that masturbation is considered a

weak practice, indicative of sexual repression. They tell me that Arab men and women are far more sexually liberated than their Western counterparts, and less inhibited. There is a contradiction here, as there are also spoken perceptions of Western sexuality as being 'without shame'. It was been explained to me that without the Quran to guide them, Westerners have no shame in who they will sleep with and when. It has even been explained to me that eating pork has the physiological effect of lowering one's shame, and this has led to European habits of sexuality. Still, this perception of Western sexuality is not one of liberalized sex but rather of aberrant acts and taboo relationships. It is also important to note that those Emiratis who admitted to frequenting parlours because they did not want to masturbate would not admit to prostitution, even though they were paying for sexual services. It was explained to me on several occasions that "it is not prostitution, no, because I am not sleeping with these people, I would never see a prostitute. This one is like a massage and they are legal".

The point to make here, is that while masturbation is strictly forbidden, sexual gratification for non-reproductive purposes is not. Among married couples, sex outside procreation is strongly encouraged. Anal sex is Haram, but egalitarian oral sex is said to be a more desirable alternative to procreative vaginal sex. Mutual masturbation to orgasm is also permissible between couples, and fetishes are often pandered to and discussed openly, even in religious context, and with frequent invocation of Allah. This is a stark contrast to some traditional Judeo-Christian traditions that limit all sexual activity to procreation only. Orthodox Jewish sexuality that was taught to me in high-school involved strict customs of 'Snias' or 'protection', that extended to married couples.

Rabbis would teach that sex should only ever be conducted to have a child, all other sexual activity is ‘spilling your seed’; a sin against the gifts that God has given you. The more religious parents of my peers all slept in separate beds. By contrast “A large strong bed”, explained the Mo’s at my café “is sometimes the most important thing you have in your house because you do not know where sex will go, and you have to satisfy your wife”. A king sized bed is a staple of an Emirati home. Sex is said to be something with which a couple can experiment. The sacred nature of semen, then, is constructed differently than in, say, Jewish tradition, or as taught by Monty Python in “The Meaning of Life” as a Catholic parody. When I asked my friends if semen is wasted in oral sex, or any other practice that ends in non-coital climax, they explained, “you do not know when you will have a child, that is a gift from Allah”, and “Sex is gift from Allah that man and a woman are supposed to do, you do not always have to have a child every time, can you imagine that? I would have 10,000 children.” So, while offspring are known to originate from semen, spermism in the context of marital sex can become secondary to Islamic cultural cosmology which does not necessitate the same religious protection of semen that exists in some other Judeo-Christian trajectories.

Within Islamic mysticism, there are even cases of life originating outside sex. Djinn are said to be capable of impregnating women through metaphysical intercourse, where semen is not present, and where a woman’s virginity may even, though unlikely, stay intact (see again chapter 2, section on Djinn and pregnancy). There is also discourse on abiogenesis within the history of Islamic alchemical manipulation of nature, and the endowment of artificial life. Take, for example, the famous polymathic Jabir Ibn Hayyan,

and the curious practice of Takwin. Among his many other pursuits, Jabir (known as Geber in the West) wrote in *the Book of Stones* methods for creating artificial life of plants and animals, including human beings.³⁰ Jabir's methods follow Greek philosophical trajectories on the formulae for the homunculus, and his works were developed upon for many centuries of Islamic science (Haq, 1994.) Jabir and his many followers still strongly attributed all their successes directly to Allah reiterating that the creative power of endowing life, while possible in a laboratory setting, required, at its fundamental level, the exhalation of God. In this way, Islamic medieval science was able to, on an alchemical level, disassociate patterns of inheritance and foetal development from sex and semen. The discrepancy of practice was that of efficiency not kinship. The protection of semen due to kinship repercussions is similarly less restrictive in Gulf Arab societies than in, say, Judaism. Jewish men are forbidden to reproduce with non-Jewish women, whereas Sunni Muslim men are permitted to mate with any religious women of either Christian, Muslim, or Jewish faith, though Sunni women are permitted only Muslim husbands. I argue that this is again partly due to the regional perception that the male contains the essence of a human being within his semen, while women only contribute superficially to a foetus.

³⁰ For a lengthy discussion on Jabir's artificial life forms, and some of his other scientific musings, see Robert Geraci's (2012) *Apocalyptic AI*. "The creation of artificial life was, for Jabir, the highest act of human kind, the ultimate manner of imitating the divine creator of the universe, though such imitation could never equal the creative powers of God, Jabir's method was quitesentially Islamic: it relies upon the Qur'anic theme of balance in the universe and 'celebrates and builds upon the central concept of Islam' that is, God's unity (Iqbal, 2002, 27)." (20). See also Haq 1994.

Cultural Inheritance

There is evidence for this perception within kinship practice, where both tribal and familial membership is inherited strictly through the father in Islamic society, compared to say, Judaism, where religious and tribal membership is maternal. The clash of belief practice has sparked political debate in Israel, as well as broader social debate in anthropology, specifically in terms of biosociality as brought forward by Paul Rabinow (1996) in which identity and social knowledge are transformed by genetic knowledge. Michal Nahman, for example, has shown how differing cultural knowledge of inheritance between Israel and Palestine has *synecdochic ricochets* between the body, the IVF clinic and the state, and has consequences in both political and religious arenas (2008, pages 117-133). The terms of engagement within kinship practices becomes blurred with the introduction of fertility treatments such as IVF and ova donation. Whereas the practices are permitted in both Jewish and Islamic law where genetics are secondary to gestation in the former or paternal bond in the latter, political and social entities in the region are forbidding the exchange of donation between different religions. Michal Nahman's fieldwork shows that Israeli women are voluntarily rejecting ova from Palestinian women while the government of Israel has fielded legislation to make the practice strictly illegal between Jew and Muslim. Under the laws, Jewish women may only receive donations from other Jewish women (Nahman 2006). The point is to delineate a biosocial border that defines kinship, identity, and citizenship not through genetics and Mendelian models of inheritability, but through synecdochic structures linked by specific social constructs.

Case Study: *The Kholasat al Qaid* (family book)

My research has shown that similar boundaries of kinship exist biosocially within South-East Arabia where identity is passed down through the father; where Muatan status is inherited paternally. To this effect there exists a special document called Kholasat al Qaid, or a family book. Though a passport will confirm Emirati citizenship, it is claimed that ‘real’ Emiratis must have this document.). The family book has become synonymous with an Emirati ID card, especially after 2008 when legislation ruled that one must have the family book, and not a passport, to gain an ID card. The document is what provides access to Emirati employment schemes, social services, and welfare services such as university, and property ownership. Furthermore, the family book is now required for a passport in every Emirate except Dubai. Children of Emirati men have the Kholasat al Qaid regardless of whom they marry. Though it is rare for Emirati women to marry outside of the country, there are some who do, and their children are given Emirati passports, but not the Kholasat al Qaid. During my years in the Emirates, articles in the news occasionally exposed the problems of women and children who were citizens without citizenship (Al Qassemi, 2010; Al Jandaly, 2008). I spoke with two of the three Mo’s with whom I often discuss Emirati identity matters about their Kholasat Al Qaid. “Do you have this book?” I asked them ascertaining its existence. They reacted in an almost irritated, affronted manner. “Why are you asking me these things, of course I would have this one and these things for my wife and children”. Mo 2 puts his right hand open faced on his breast as he talks about it. “We have like this one because we are

proud of who we are, and it is important to always know where you come from.” “But what is the difference between being born here and having a passport and having this one (the family book).” I asked. “Americans (he points at me), don’t do like this because history and family are not as important in America and families do not care for each other like Arab people.” This begins a ten minute lecture on the importance of family and why Islam is all about family and Americans have lost all their values. Mo has been to America and often tells me why Americans are very good people but they do not have enough values. Satisfied with their lecture, they begin to talk about other things. “Wait”, I interrupt them, “why can’t Emirati women have this thing?”. “All of us are having these things, and my wife she has like this one, its is for the family.”. Mo has two official wives, and I regret not asking him if both wives have his family book. “But what if she is not married?”, I asked. “yes of course she has these ones, and if she is not married she is still with her family probably.” “ok”, I asked, “but what if she marries someone who is not Emirati?” “Yes, all the time they are giving them these things”, Mo responds, becoming frustrated with me. I argue back “but they (the government, her family) are not giving her these things.” I tell him about all the stories in the news. “Ok” he says “but no they should not give those things to her children if they are not Emirati”. “But she is a local and her children are born here...” Mo interrupts me, “they should maybe be giving it to her kids then. I think they should be giving it to her kids but maybe they do it because they do not know who is the father, if he has his own nationality.” The unspoken assumption is that a child born to a Syrian father and an Emirati mother in the Emirates is Syrian, not Emirati. In Dubai, these children can officially renounce their father’s nationality and obtain an Emirati passport, but they cannot be Muatan, they cannot be

locals. They are free to travel, but they are said to be without a country.

The Arab Genome

I hope to have demonstrated that genes and genetics are perceived as agents of causation for many illnesses and medical conditions among many gulf locals. Genes are thought to be inherent to an individual; untreatable and invisible. The phenomenon that I wish to bring to light is that while many Muatan have readily accepted Arab genetics as a deterrent to their well-being, rates of consanguineous marriages, and the propagation of these genes, are still steadily increasing. While there exists a robust local knowledge of the mechanisms of inheritance and kinship in Southern Arabia, genes as biological entities are not part of, and not associated with this inheritance and kinship. Genes are widely known as identity markers independent of kinship. They are widely known to be carriers of disease, but are not often understood to contain the essence of, or the benign traits of a person. Consider the example of hair colour vs. diabetes. I found myself in another debate with two of my interlocutors concerning which traits come from a mother and which from the father. While we the three of us were each skipping our respective jobs for the afternoon, myself from managing the café, and my two interlocutors from their ambiguous positions at an engineering company, we had a discussion on what makes a woman beautiful, a popular discussion with most groups of local men. “A woman’s hair comes from her mother, and that is why they are keeping it like this [silky, and pitch black].” “What about diabetes”, I asked, “is this something that comes from the

mother or from the father?” “No, this one is genetic I think.” I continued, “Sure, but do you get it from your mother’s side of the family, or does it come from your father’s side of the family?”. “No, these ones, these diseases they are genetic.” “Fine, but where does it come from?”, I persisted. “No, yaani, they do not come from anywhere. I am trying to tell you that. They are not coming from anywhere.” “But if they are genetic, they are inherited from someone!”, I said. “Yes”, he tells me, “but no it does not come from anywhere, yaani, this is why it means it is genetic” “Well, what does genetic mean?” “It means that you have genes... that it is because you are Arab or maybe like these people”, he points to some Filipinos. “[The Filipinos] are genetic?”, I asked. The two men at the table could see that I was confused. “Don’t you know that Arabs have these genes and that British people have these genes and all these peoples have these genes.”, one of them yells at me. “He means different genes”, his colleague explains. “Yes, yaani, different genes all these people.”, he clarifies. “Yes, I understand that, but where do these genes come from?” “but they are not coming from anywhere is what I am telling you. They are because they are these people... “. His friend interrupts, “We are Arab so we have some of these ones [genes].” “Is being Arab genetic than?”, I asked. “Yes, of course, and like you are coming here from England.” “Is being English genetic?” “yes that is what we are trying to tell you.” “Ok, so is being Emirati genetic?”. This question seemed to provoke some thinking. After a short time, they answered. “No, this one is not genetic, it is coming from who your father is.”. The debate continued for some time. I asked about skin (from the mother), height, (from the father), obesity (genetic), cancer (genetic), eyes (mother), gender (father), and etc. I continued these questions with many people throughout my fieldwork, with more or less the same responses. Diabetes, cancer,

misbehaving children, obesity, smoking habits, and both psychotic and non-psychotic mental illness: these conditions and behaviours were perceived to be genetic, while nationality, general behaviour, and the phenotypic attributes of appearance were said to originate with parents, and in the home. “Misbehaving, or naughty, children” is often a local way of describing autism, and increasingly is being attributed to genetics. The word for Autism in Arabic is التوحّد (Al TuwaHad) which is derived from تَحَدّ (TaHad) which means ‘defy’ or ‘defiance’. ‘Misbehaving Children’ shares a similar root, المَشَاغِب - (Al mashaaghīb) from شَغِبَ (Shaghrib) – ‘disturbance’ or ‘disorder’. The idea of ‘naughtiness’ is then associated with ‘disorder’ of the mind within linguistic structure while ‘Autism’ is more associated with disobeying, creating a confusion of medical and social categories. The topic of Autism warrants a lengthy discussion that examines the indigenous medicalization of behaviour, but I do not have the space for it here. Still, it is important to note that some families are now insisting on a genetic category for their children whom they feel are ‘naughty’, and their use of behavioural categories clashes with new institutions devoted to Autism in Dubai that do not categorize these children as having characteristics within the Autism spectrum. Western medical professionals that I have met feel that many cases of ‘misbehaving children’ among Gulf Arab nationals are results of behavioural problems originating in the home rather than in the child, and that parents do not want to take responsibility. They feel that the confusion of discourse is becoming a hindrance to caring for children with ‘legitimate’ Autism characteristics.

Genetics as Fatalism and Genetics as Scape-goat

The negative biological and social characteristics of traits perceived to be categorically genetic reopens a discussion on fatalism from the previous chapter. Within the context of imported Western medical knowledges, tests, and screenings, the presence of genes as external agents of hardship have become, for the Muatan, a new category of fate; one which is constructed biosocially. Rather than conflict with Gulf Arab cosmology, indigenous re-imaginings of genes and genetic traits have been moulded to form part of the religious canopy that sponsors fatalistic discourse.

The dynamics that exist between concepts of inheritance and genetics in Dubai and Abu Dhabi are certainly complex. It is quite difficult to pin down a true consensus on how these mechanisms are known to work, and the array of genetic understandings in the region lacks precision. Still, among the Muatan groups, I hope to have shown that there is a trend to understand genes as a physical entity, existing in the body and as an Arab signifier, and yet, something separate from kinship, and separate from the parts of nature that make an *individual*. They have their own agency. Whereas the Muatan can and does take steps to control the positive physical and metaphysical phenotypes of their child that are passed down through inheritance, genes are perceived as negative entities: antagonists of well-being that are inherent parts of the unseen world. Local knowledge dictates that there is little that can be done to force or decline their influence. Given the Gulf perspective of genes as carriers of disease, can genetics be seen not as a practice of the people, but as a practice of nature or heaven: a cosmological violence? This is one connection between Djinn and Gene. They borrow each other's language. Given the

discourse surrounding the negative influence of genetics on human condition in the region, it becomes useful to discuss genetics as a biomedical scapegoat, a protection against the anxieties that arise from new pathologies and the potential for individual and group behaviour itself to be causal. While Djinni can be linked to perceived peripheralities in sexual behaviour or desire or in other behavioural realms in which causality is nebulous (see again chapter 2), genes have begun to be given agency in affecting the body in other wellness categories where behaviour is partially causal.

Much of the Anthropological literature on scapegoating concerns sacrifice, and the specific cultural practices of sacred violence. René Girard's theories on mimetic desire maintain that violence is an inherent part of human behaviour that is sponsored through mimetic rivalry. For Girard, the underpinnings of religion are structured on scapegoat mechanisms that become necessary to contain violence (Girard, 1977). Violence, Girard tells us, leads to death, and "with death, a contagious sort of violence is let loose on the community, and the living must take steps to protect themselves against it" (Ibid, p. 255). The problems of the community are then placed on something; a culturally, and contextually appropriate Azazel³¹, external to the community. The peripheral victim

³¹ The name Azazel (Hebrew, to send away completely) is taken from the book of Yom Kippur in Jewish tradition, and mentioned in Leviticus, 16. It is the name of the sacrificial offering to God preceding Yom Kippur. A carefully chosen goat was taken by the priests of Israel to a cliff in the desert. A red string was tied around its neck and the sins of the community were ritually placed on its head. The priest would then push the goat off the cliff. It is credited as the etymology of the term scapegoat due to an early Greek misunderstanding for Azazel as "Ez ozel, the goat that leaves". It was translated *caper emissaries* in Latin translations of Leviticus, and then translated into English as *escape goat* in the King James bible. In Islamic tradition, Azazel is another name for Iblis, the great antagonist and mankind's tempter. It has a slightly lesser position in Milton's *Paradise Lost* as the flag-bearer for Pandemonium and the hosts of Satan:

"His mighty Standard; that proud honour claim'd
Azazel as his right, a *Cherube* tall:
Who forthwith from the glittering Staff unfurld

is chosen and sacrificed through sacred violence to restore social harmony. Communal violence is symbolically removed from the people, through ritual, from internal to society to external. It becomes a necessary act of collective therapy (Ibid, pp. 254-258). Bruce Kapferer extends Gerard's theories to his fieldwork among the Sinhalese. Concerning coping mechanisms for intense political violence in Sri Lanka he writes, "By means of the scapegoat, the disorder that is in fact internal to the community is expressed as an outside threat. The idea of the outsider as a threat is a fiction, the falsity of which the community hides from itself. (1997, 211).

The concept of Genetics as agents of disease in the Gulf does not fit perfectly into Girard's model. Specifically, there does not yet appear a way to culturally expel the dangers posed by these ambiguous agents of disease. Perhaps there does not need to be for the scapegoat to work. Similar to what Kapferer has mused about the Sinhalese, the violence internal to the community is easily placed on Genes as independent, and external entities. Most salient is the perception of Diabetes type 2. Many Muatan sufferers of the condition do not appear willing to consider personal habits as responsible for their well-being. The presupposed genetic Arab predispositions to the condition are often cited as the end all to discussions of treatment and lifestyle choices. In this case, the violence of the community is manifest in personal habits, dieting, lack of exercise, and etc. In light of scapegoating, I suggest that these habits are a form of personal violence embedded in many Emirati lifestyles. This type of violence is internal, and genes, as a category of fate,

Th' Imperial Ensign, which full high advanc't
Shon like a Meteor streaming to the Wind
With Gemms and Golden lustre rich imblaz'd,
Seraphic arms and Trophies:" (Book 1, 533-539)

or inducted into indigenous cosmology, are perfect foreign agents. They are embedded in the body, but not part of familial kinship. There is little that can be done to attack a genetic marker, and most importantly, their relevance is consistently, and exponentially confirmed in the community through adopted Western notions of empiricism. Within Muatan understandings of genetics, genes are ambivalent. They are perhaps perceived as sacred when they are categories of fate, or agents of Allah, and they are mundane as agents of disease. They might cause disease, but they are also thought to be at the heart of being Arab. They can act, at the same time, both positively and negatively, such is the nature of ambivalent agents. The same has been argued of the Pharmakon, making parallels between the etymological roots of the word as both poison and remedy, and its development and perception in modern times (Martin 2006, page 274; Derrida 1998, page 70, Reynolds-Whyte, Van der Geest, and Hardon 2005. page 6). In local imagination, the conflict is not problematic. For example, my friends say the same thing about the desert, that “the desert, of course, yes, it can kill you. It kills people. It used to be that it always did this. But we are the desert, and our strength always comes from the desert.” The powers of nature have their own designs, flowing with the will of Allah. They can in equal measure destroy a man and give him his proud identity.³² This is, of course, not without contradiction. In economic terms, the rulers of the city speak of ‘transforming the desert’ and being ‘masters of the desert’, and even ‘turning the desert lush and green’, proceeding as if human endeavour is what controls nature, and not the

³² Again, it is worth mentioning ethnographically that, like the internal conflict of the Urban Djinn, some of my informants feel that they, or if not *they*, then Emiratis at large, have in some way betrayed the desert, torn between the purity of their roots and the direction of modernity stating, ‘it made us who we are, and now people have no knowledge of it’.

other way around. However, there is anxiety here too. Un-watered gardens wither and die within hours of betrayal to the unforgiving sun. Shamal winds lift the Saudi Arabian landscape into the air, driving forceful arid storms hundreds of miles to recoat every urban surface in a carpet of fine sand like diamond dust in the Antarctic: a dry, emotionless deluge. The desert has its own desires. It *wants* its coastline back. The three Mo's, who carry bags of money and who have, simultaneously, complete trust and distrust in the future of the city, talk of the sands of the Rub Al Khali as they would a respected enemy. "We are always at war with these things. Probably one day we will lose". The tops of the towers of Shiekh Zayed Road become ramparts in the site of a great conflict.. The steel forces of modernity that light the sky with electricity form a wall parallel to the coast. Here, the forces of the Earth, powered by wind and sun, wage battle against titans of concrete and mortar that shield the city from the rhythms of nature. Yet, it is within this rhythm of nature that many choose also to imagine themselves; its energy fuels local identity.



Figure 7: Wijnand Van Till winning entry in the landscape category of the photo competition in the National Geographic's Netherlands edition.³³ (Croucher, 2010)

Widespread acceptance of genetics as agents of diabetes has invaded Muatan understandings of the social body. As I have mentioned, genetics is not yet the perfect scape-goat in a socially therapeutic sense, at least as argued from an anthropological perspective. The fact that there is not yet an accessible treatment, or biomedical engagement with Arab genes presents a problem. There is no perceived cure: no method of attack. How, then, is social balance restored? First, I must question, with caution, the

³³ See <http://www.vantill.org/> for more of Van Till Dubai (and other) photography.

idea of Diabetes as a disease, or at least the idea of Diabetes as problematic in a Gulf Arab sense. As a chronic condition, Diabetes, as discussed earlier in the chapter, lends itself open to fatalistic tendencies of thought. It forces reflexivity of the future, and hence there is a problem with Diabetes self-maintenance. This is what many health advocates and dieticians in the region fail to understand. They assume that when one is informed of a certain debilitating condition, they will desperately want to get rid of it. Western medical practitioners in the region, directors of health authorities in the UAE, and social researchers, myself often included, fail to grasp the ambivalence which pervades perception of some long-term conditions. Regardless of disease mechanism, and regardless of disease causality, whether genetic or Djinn, many patients are not in any particular rush to attend to a condition that requires worrying about the future. Such is the break between active agency and passivity within belief practice. I am reminded again of a verse from Bourdeau's peasant song "You who are hurried / stay and accept your censure". In an economic sense, it loses its weight in Dubai, but in a biomedical sense, it retains some truth of a certain mentality. Diabetes, and the threat of illness, is not what bothers the Muatan. The Gulf Arab has unique cultural tools to engage illness and hardship, but only hardship under certain conditions of causality, and so, it is not the disease that offends, it is the causality. I can extend here David Napier's observations on ecological art and foreign bodies to the perception of Diabetes in the Gulf, that what angers the centralized social self "is not the fact of death, but its context; even in the face of the most profound kind of transformation, it is the affront to our sense of context that troubles us" (1992, 36). In order to engage with a system of context and derive meaning from it, as a species we seem, quite often, to require a sense of perceived 'otherness' in

our line of sight; perception that is not self-referential. I could not begin to count how often I've heard people, from any background or culture, express their distaste for how they look on film, or in a picture. I hear, "The camera makes me look fat", or "I hate the way my face looks in photos", or in Dubai, the men say "the camera makes me look short", and the woman complain about their nose. In 30 years, I have yet to hear an individual claim to like how their voice sounds on audio. In my experience, most people cannot stand to have their voice played back to them, even those whom I have envied because I thought that they spoke profoundly well. Is it just a false sense of modesty? Perhaps it is, though I argue the truth is that most of us are simply offended by context that is self-referential. We claim the camera does something to us; that the camera somehow transforms us. I suspect we just cannot really pay attention when we look at a mirror. The camera, or the microphone, while inherently an impartial mechanical device, becomes an instrument of transformation and agency: a scape-goat for the great offences depicted in our reflection.

Why do we not see the truth in the mirror? Is it partly biological that our own voices are grating to our ears? I could not say. Studies have tried to show how people in general rank themselves more attractive than their perceived average. The ridiculous results then paradoxically demonstrate that the average is higher than the average. (Epley and Whitchurch, 2008; Dahl, 2010). As David Napier muses, "the reflection is more than the reality. It is the face of the extreme other – that is, the foreign – that enables one to become another while staying oneself; what is the same is two, and vice versa. In a mirror what one sees is oneself seeing oneself." (1992, 103). In many Muslim countries,

and certainly in the Emirates, certain types of artistic representation of physical entities is strictly forbidden. There does not appear to be unanimity in what is permissible and what is forbidden. The rulings on statues of any animate life are fairly explicit. There are, to my knowledge, no statues of any person living or dead in any public space in Dubai. I'm told that the prohibitions concern idol worship, and there are numerous hadiths and Quranic passages to defend its enforcement. The Emirati population was, at the time of my fieldwork, seemingly unanimous in its support for the Gulf War, and the ousting of Saddam Hussain's regime. I dare not begin to address the complexities of these politics and perspectives within this thesis, except to quote only my interlocutor, who, when asked about the justification of war in Iraq, shouted at me, "This man was no servant of Allah. That statue of [Saddam] was offensive to Muslims everywhere in the world, and we praised Allah when they were tearing this one down.... This man did not love God, he was an idol worshiper who loved himself". Presenting faceless mannequins in a shop window in Sharjah is punishable by prison, though Dubai malls are far more liberal. Two-dimensional representations are less offensive, and while there are no statues of the sheikhs in the Emirates, there are giant billboards of their portraits along the highways and on skyscraper facades, and their pictures hang above the desks of every government office. Many Emirati have images of their sheikhs on their walls at home. Still, some older Emirati, especially those elderly with Bedouin upbringing, are apprehensive about having their picture taken. Many other Emirati locals do not mind having their picture taken, but will not put photos on display, regardless of their generation. Photography and video should not be frivolous or indulgent. The apprehension, I am told, is fairly pan-Islamic. Portraits are not generally permitted in Mosques, and mirrors are also removed

from places of worship. Aside from pictures of the sheikhs, while Gulf Arab homes are often filled with extravagant art, they very rarely depict human figures, and if they do, the human figures are blurry or distorted. Their walls are usually devoid of family members' faces. Unlike with three dimensional objects, these cultural traditions are not related to idol worship. In a mosque, photos and mirrors are absent because their presence might distract from prayer, but in a home, distraction is not a relevant concern.

I argue, though it be rather speculative, that this suggests some evidence that Gulf Arab culture has developed protective mechanisms for the contextual aversions that self-referential systems provide. Human behaviour is a type of personal appearance, a phenotypic expression of the self that causes just as much offence as an unaltered photo. Napier further extrapolates his theories in a socio-biological framework in his *Age of Immunology*. He depicts, among other trends, how the defensive ways in which social groups concoct metaphors for the elimination of the non-self create transformations of context (2001). While his arguments often require, like Kapferer and Dumont's sacred violence, a social mechanism for transforming internal cultural paranoias into peripheral entities, I suspect his metaphors still hold true for the perception of genetics in the Middle East. My observations, in the simplest of terms, is that the consequences for the personal habits of the Muatan lead to type 2 Diabetes, regardless of genetic influence, but this hits too close to home for many people. Genes as ambiguous entities cannot offend; they force reflexivity away from encompassing the social self, and instead direct reflexive energy towards an already Islamically and culturally established cosmological self-

within-nature. For this reason I do not see the genetic scape-goat as problematic. It is the ambiguous mundane entity made sacred.

Genes as Djinn

Local discourse has very successfully identified genetic susceptibility of disease within the “Arab genome”, but rather than encourage more responsible behaviour from many locals, genetics are understood to be evidence base that one should *not* alter their habits, because there is nothing that can be done about their condition anyway. Though rates among Arabs are higher, there is evidence that shows that the rates of Diabetes skyrocket for any nationality, including British expats, who live in the Emirates. There is something about Dubai society that causes Type 2 diabetes, not just genetics. This is, so far, largely ignored. The indigenous cosmologies that pervade that region absorb the pieces of Western biomedical empiricism for which they already have a structural understanding. What we have provided is a biomedical language for the indigenous Gulf Arab to describe what he or she *already* knew. One of the best ways I can illustrate this point is to admit that it took me some time to realize that when I spoke about, say, a gene for diabetes, some informants would assume I was speaking about a Djinn, those ambivalent entities that are an inherent part of the unseen world; who can cause suffering to people, and yet nothing can be done to prevent them. Best not to worry. It does not help that the words sound identical. After some time, when I first realized my miscommunication, I was really quite embarrassed. I had been going on about genetics, and my interlocutor thought I was talking about Al Djinn. I tried to apologize and my

informants just laughed at me and said “... wa laakin fahemet (but I understood) ...mafi mushkila (it’s not a problem) ...hadhi mitl hadhi (this one is like this one)” “They are the same, these ones”. Whether or not he meant this literally is speculative. Certainly, though, the language one uses to engage with genes in the Gulf share congruencies with the way one might discuss Al Djinn.

In chapter two I presented a cultural weakening of the Djinn. They have lost some of their power within the urbanity generated by the social engines of the desert metropolis. They are confused. They have lost their boundaries, and they do not know where the city begins and the sands end. They are anxious. They crave both Earth and steel. They want their tents, but they want their towers. The Djinn, as I have described them, are psychic projections of indigenous desire. They become embodied anxieties, and their behaviour is a response to reason. They are not arbitrary cosmological inventions, but are, rather, a reimagining of the ambiguity in space and nature. When peripheral agents, including foreign knowledge systems, are introduced and adapted into previously homogenous epistemologies, the metaphysical embodiments of ambiguity are necessarily transformed. However, when I examined this process in the Emirates in depth, I was forced to question these transformations in terms of a restructuring of cosmological hierarchy. I had originally envisioned a sort of prescribed transformative pathway. Djinn, as I observed them, were losing their power, and any cognitive energies produced from structural understandings of the world that would have been directed towards the Ifrits of the expansive desert would begin to be redirected towards entities that have become, for lack of a better term, more powerful. I say ‘more powerful’

because these new entities are increasingly more authorized through the enforcement of Western designed empiricism, and I say ‘more powerful’ because of how I perceived the trendy gravitas and prevalent rebalances of social contrasts and inversions. The Earth was something to lament; steel was something to desire. If the Djinn is the Earth, then genes were steel. These trends are certainly observable in the region, but it was naïve of me to conceptualize them in terms of linearity. This was, of course, not really a transformation of the Djinn, but a reworking of perceptions of the ‘self’, and one’s engagement with society. Djinni behaviour is a social artefact. Observations concerning structural transformations as linear trajectories are a bit of a falsehood. The gift exchange between indigenous and Western knowledge systems is far more complex, and as I have come to see it, far more egalitarian than that.

I began to recognize my errors while speaking with a medical doctor about historical local resistance to biomedicine in the region. This doctor was a German expatriate, and had been in and out of Dubai for nearly 20 years. “There was an idea, and I still come across this, that we brought some of these conditions (Diabetes and mental illness) with us. Sometimes people might say ‘you made this problem so you fix it’, and I had no idea what they were talking about.” He was referring to the idea of Western expats as perceived agents of disease. “My father thinks these things”, a friend explained to me. “He thinks Diabetes is a conspiracy from Israel or something like this.” I asked why. “Well people didn’t have this problem, yaani, nobody used to have Diabetes. Or maybe they had it, I think, but nobody knew about these things. So they blamed everyone else. And now we know it is genetic, but even now some people don’t believe

that.” As I understand it, this perception makes much sense. There are a number of logics at play, but I will mention two of them. The first concerns Western imperialism as an agent of disease. If nobody was diagnosed with diabetes or schizophrenia in the Emirates before Western invitation, it becomes quite reasonable to understand that we brought it with us. The second concerns Western imperialism as agents of corruption, if not direct agents of disease. The lifestyle that lead to longer lives, expensive villas, SUVs, and flat screen televisions is also a contributing factor to many problems now attributed to genetics such as ‘misbehaving children’, depression, and diabetes. This provides a bit more clarity on my friends’ understandings of genetic disease. “They do not come from anywhere, that is what I’m trying to tell you”. In past years, Diabetes was not known to be a problem, and suddenly, one day it was.

Before there was a biomedical language to discuss this phenomenon, British, German and American expats were known by some to be the cause. Migrant workers from India, whom Emirati culture understands to be unclean, were known to bring illness by many as well. To extend my musings on the shifting ontologies of the anthropologist in chapter 1, I suggest that *we* were the Djinni: peripheral ambiguous entities given free reign and unheard of liberties in the cities. We were not part of any known laws. We set up grocery stores that openly sold pork with signs saying “no muslims”; we started a culture of alcohol and flaunted our drinking in hotels and in our homes; we brought our pet dogs³⁴, known by locals to be filth, and walked them on the beaches, streets, and parks, and those sheikhs in charge welcomed all of it with open arms, as if it was

³⁴ I have been told on several occasions that the most disgusting things that Expats do in Dubai is bring their dogs into the country.

uncontrollable: a category of fate. The thought is still very much present. I can reiterate my point from chapter 1 that I am at times a Djinn. As I discussed the genetic origins of well-being with my interlocutors, they were usually very eager to tell me which problems were genetic. However, I nearly ruined my relationship with Mo 1 during one of these discussions. He had told me that autism was genetic. As he describes it, autism is when children are unable to behave, even though they have very good parents. Mo had previously told me that mental illness of all kinds is probably genetic. From these conversations, as well as those from around the community, I felt that it was reasonable to assume that most kinds of human behaviours that Emirati society looks upon unfavourably would be attributed to genes. I casually asked Mo if homosexuality was genetic, and this was a mistake. He became enraged. “No of course not”, he shouted at me in the café. “Why are you asking me these questions! We have values here and you cannot come here and do whatever you want!” He pointed to a group of Australian woman who had just wandered in from the beach. They were fairly modestly dressed by Western standards with long skirts and tank tops, but their colourful bikinis were showing behind the straps of their shirt. “and like these people no one has any respect and you have no respect for where you live and your city!!” It took him some time to calm down, often reiterating that “you do not have to stay here, no one has to come here if they don’t like how we are living, you can go back home, you don’t have to stay here!” I have mentioned that I often got into fights with my Emirati interlocutors, but this time, I had not intended to set Mo off, and besides, this time was different. He was not interested in hearing me argue back, nor is Mo ever that bothered by scantily clad women. He is always first to point them out as objects of his desire, and quick to mention their physical

aspects. I had offended him by my questions and placed him under the sacred canopy. I had tried to breach this subject with other people. While no one became quite as upset with me as Mo had, some were clearly offended while others brushed it off. I did learn quickly, however, that homosexuality is *not* associated with genetics by most of the Muatan.

I know two things now that I should have realized then. Genetics, while not necessarily associated with familial kinship, *has* been incorporated into understandings of an Arab identity. When the Muatan say that diabetes is genetic, they often mean that it is an inherent part of being Arab, and own it proudly. By insinuating that homosexuality could be genetic, I was essentially asking if homosexuality was an inherent part of being Arab. This is, of course, an offensive question in an Islamic society. Secondly, I had not given enough weight to the Djinni from the West. Mo had decided upon the connection that I was bringing sexual promiscuity into Dubai, and if not I, than I by association as a representative of England. Recall from chapter two the words of some Arab patients during psychotherapy concerning their sexual habits; “these actions are not my own, these thoughts are not my own”. They do not always blame the Djinn. If the thoughts are not theirs, than whose are they? Decentralized sexual activity is also sometimes discussed as a product of urbanity, but so are the anxieties of the Djinn, and in either case, who delivers urbanity? For Mo, and many like him, the presence of Westerners in the country can still be quite dangerous. They exist outside the jurisdiction of accepted social norms and incite infectious behaviour. There was a prevailing sentiment among many Arab nationals that European and American expats simply stumble around

aimlessly in their sexual habits, affected by contagious symptoms of shamelessness, and are completely unaware of Islam and decorum befitting a moral member of society. There are many causes attributed to the lack of Western propriety. One of the most interesting to me was that pigs were shameless animals. If someone were to maintain a diet consisting of pork products, the shamelessness of the pig would be absorbed into their system and they would then exhibit shameless behaviour. They would become incapable of being embarrassed by their sexual actions, and instead come to understand them as acceptable in society. Men were said to be particularly affected by pork. Eating the meat would disrupt a man's ability to become jealous, leading to woman's sexual liberty. Regardless of speculative enterprises regarding Western propriety, what is important is that the perceived haphazardness and neutral ambivalence in which Western men and woman present themselves publically is markedly similar to indigenous representations of the Djinn. Mo was equally bothered by the neutrality of my line of questioning. If genetics is authorized as a category of fate within local understandings of human well-being, but not for sexual behaviour, than I, by presenting the idea, am the Djinn. I become an agent of fate, and therefore a bit dangerous, and possibly even threatening. Mo eventually opened back up to me when his friends came by and I told them about my 2 year old nephew and how much he loved cars and how I was going to see him soon. The Mo's love talking about cars, but I think speaking about family removed the smokeless fire and brought me back to flesh.

The concept of the Djinn, then, is not *replaced* by trends in modern biomedical discourse, but rather exists in a sort of ontological partnership with many foreign imports,

and it participates in a market of ideological exchange. On a certain level, as my informants have made clear, it makes little difference in attempting to distinguish between genes and Djinn. For some, they simply occupy the same space. Djinni haven't transformed into genes. The latter's authority as a more modern and powerful construct is a falsehood. Rather, the cosmological and ontological knowledge of Djinn seems to remain the more powerful cultural presence, informing and imagining the biomedical import, just as it has done to the Western expat in the past.

Conclusion:

“The language of biomedicine is never alone in the field of empowered meanings, and its power does not flow from a consensus about symbols and actions in the face of suffering.” (Haraway, 1991 (1988), 203)

It becomes sometimes an easy thing to voluntarily confirm the authority of the expanding biomedical canon. How this is accomplished socially is, however, far more delicate. The process of Western academic biomedical inquiry within hospitals, laboratories, and other research institutions requires a type of socially constructed empiricism. The findings, and the disseminated, peer-reviewed publications of biological, cellular, genetic, and molecular mechanisms provide data that is marketable and reproducible. One of the problems with such a system is that when a particular piece of biomedical ‘truth’ is so mechanistically robust, one might assume that the epistemologies

that pervade the understandings of such systems are equally robust, that the pathway that leads from scientific ‘fact’ to social knowledge is linear. It is not. I fear I am often found guilty of falling into this trap. I have, in some sense, after a number of years of laboratory work, been engrained in the authority of Western inquiry into genetics. I have specifically worked in cancer genetics in Seattle, studying mechanisms for tumorigenesis. I spent another two years working in behavioural neuro-genetics in Boston, trying to elucidate the cellular pathways for circadian rhythms and sexual behaviour. My main task as a technician in the laboratory was to mutate mice and *Drosophila Melanogaster*, or the common fruit-fly, to create specific genetic strains of animals with phenotypes of behavioural abnormality. We created flies with normal vision that did not appear to cognitively recognise daylight. We created strains of organisms that would only practice homosexuality; male insects who would only court other males, sometimes creating homosexual mating practices in which large groups of males would sing each other courtship songs with their wings and then form large ‘trains’ of copulation. The laboratory publishes these results, not as science for science’s sake, but as a universal truth: that there is an unambiguous genetic component to behaviour. Fruit flies cease to be fruit flies. They become a nameless ‘animal model’ that we make synonymous with human beings. They highlight a novel agency: an agency of acid. DNA codes RNA, which translates into amino acid organization that form proteins which interact with one another in unfathomable chaotic complexity. And yet, DNA is just a ‘thing’, and a chromosome is just a molecule, albeit a large one (the largest... as far as human biology is concerned). How and why and where its agency flows, I suspect, is not coded nearly as neatly as my hair colour. As it spreads its constructs across the globe, so much of

specific genetic knowledge systems proceed as if they own the fate of the thing, sifting through systems of relations in their movements in somnambulism.

Within the community of biology labs, the discourse is, of course, contextually appropriate, yet things with social lives can be promiscuous. As this presentation of knowledge is exported cross-culturally into the heterogeneous satchel of social languages, the cognitive reworkings of biomedicine become multifarious. As a young researcher, I would sit in our laboratory common room with the other techs and PhD students, drinking coffee and discussing the great social ramifications of our research. One day, after listening to us ramble on about genetics and sexuality and our research success, a frustrated Ghanaian post-doc in our lab scolded us as he made his coffee. “You are aware”, he spoke condescendingly, “that fruit flies are not people? ...yes? ...no?”. Of course we were aware. Fruit flies are very small insects. People are not. We told him so. “Just be careful”, he said, “these P.I.s here all think they are going to win the Nobel Prize, but they should teach you all to be more careful”. After years of ethnographic research, I find far more poignancy in his words than I did as a biologist. When he told us to ‘be careful’, I assumed he was talking about secrecy, as we were discussing our unpublished work in a common room. What he meant concerned the presentation of knowledge and the assumptions of an inherent trajectory of dissemination and public engagement. He was warning us about the trap: the assumptions of our science as socially prescriptive. To borrow again the words of Donna Haraway, “The cultural and material authority of biomedicine’s productions of bodies and selves is more vulnerable, more dynamic, more elusive, and more powerful than that.” (Haraway, 1991 (1988), 204). My ethnography

has shown me she is right. One might very successfully empirically demonstrate unambiguous genetic components to disease or behaviour, but anthropologically speaking, so what? Bruno Latour has famously written that “Give me a laboratory and I will raise the world” (1983) partly suggesting that the language of culture determines the power of scientific projects. Rather than fight the intrusion of imported biomedical categories into indigenous culture, the people of the Arabian Gulf have readily absorbed it into their cosmologies as social fact. The knowledge of genetic dispositions has not lead to the behavioural change that health authorities, academic institutions, and government bodies have assumed it would. It has instead *reinforced* an Arab identity. Nor is it simply a static piece of Western knowledge reworked, it has been integrated throughout the various intricacies of the Emirati self; as a category of fate, as a symbol of Arab unity, as its own well-being. If we read Paul Rabinow’s concept of Biosociality as a trend to reveal scientific enterprise as informed rather than informing, where, again “nature will be modelled on culture understood as practice (Rabinow, 1999, p.411), than we can view the perception of genetics cross-culturally as superficially, rather than inherently authoritative. Detailed, reproducible genetic science becomes a cultural anecdote: magical rather than empirical. We fetishize it in so many different, unique ways, and its power stems not from its empiricism, but from latent socio-cultural practice. This is really what I mean in designating genetics as the new Djinn. The historical indigenous truths of human well-being do not disappear. The structural peculiarities of the pearl diver and the Bedouin, the unique ontologies of the Southern Arabian peninsula, the tribal kinship practices of the Bani Yas, and even perhaps the phenomenological effects of the sands of the Rub Al Khali: they do not fade away into the sludge of urbanity, or

become garbled by that awkward congregating of so many specific social microcosms into the macrocosmic slosh we often refer to as globalization. These beautiful specifics do not go anywhere. They are reimagined, re-termed, and most importantly, redeemed from imperialist projections. These re-workings do not decay and wither the sacred canopy. When it gets leaky, they patch its holes and tears with replacement ontologies. The façade looks different, but its structure remains intact.

Chapter 5

Wearing white: Bottled Identity

“It’s *grotesque*. What they are doing is *grotesque*”. It’s a common sentiment and I hear it often, at the café, dinners at expat houses, on the street. In this context it concerns cosmetics and plastic surgery, puffed up collagen lips, facelifts, and bleached, ghost like skin. They, mostly expat Arab and Western women, and occasionally Emirati social activists, use the term pejoratively. I wonder, can the grotesque be removed from the perception of human distortion and placed into the psychological, its own behavioural description, and evoke an understanding rather than hasty disdain? The *grottesche* was originally an artistic convention, derived from a Roman villa tradition of the fanciful, the elegant, and the extravagant. This, I believe, is too Romantic to be adapted to human condition, but it is part that. It is also partly tragic, and partly beautiful, and partly surreal, and partly mundane. Most of all, it is perhaps an intensity of the mundane, embodied by an individual. In literature, it is well portrayed through the writings of American gothicists, specifically the American Southern storytellers Flannery O’Conner and William Faulkner.. Most saliently, I believe in the poetic, and tragic portrayal of the grotesque presented through the imagination of Sherwood Anderson as he envisions the vignettes of those residents of Winesburg, Ohio; the beautiful and the ugly, the anxiety and the ennui, the lives of hidden Americana; a work of fiction, but a practice in the Anthropology of the Grotesque.

“That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about the world were the truths and they were all beautiful... There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and of profligacy, of carefulness and abandon. Hundreds and hundreds were the truths and they were all beautiful. And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them. It was the truths that made the people grotesques... the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood.”

(Anderson, 1919 pg.9).

This chapter will present one such truth, and indeed, one such falsehood, that of whiteness, absorbed into the individual, but also into a culture. Specifically, how and why is it embodied, and is it indicative of something, social change, a loss of self, or perhaps the embodiment of a new self? Is there tragedy in the Grotesque, weakness and strength, racism and elitism, beauty and societal anxiety? The phenotype of the Grotesque is whiteness, its outward expression, but what is its psychology? In the Gulf, there are two layers of whiteness; one of clothing, one of skin, or it can be argued, only one layer, but adorned in different ways by different people, clothes for men, but skin for women. I will examine both, and attempt to come to an understanding of how whiteness

is absorbed and magnified by the individual and the community, how it speaks to and informs the construction of race, genetics, beauty, and novel anxieties.

Part One: National Dress

The Dishdash

The first thing I notice about Gulf Arabs when I meet them is their dress. It is hard for me, as a Westerner, not to pay attention to it. The dishdash (kandura) and abaya have become an instantly recognizable, and dramatic, cultural and world symbol. In Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi, the men wear a dishdash when they put on national garb. It is essentially a long dress coat with a high neck and long, cuffed sleeves. No stretch of skin except the hands and face, and maybe the feet should be seen. It stretches to the ankles, but should not touch the ground. Gulf Arab men's shoes and sandals usually have heels to this effect. The purpose is less a cultural style, and more a necessity for keeping the dishdash clean. One of the most important social traits of a Gulf Arab is maintaining a spotless dress. Invariably, the dishdash is white, and there can be no question of its whiteness. They are rarely form fitting, usually stretching wider as their length increases. This, coupled with the heeled sandals, has the added effect of making the wearer seem larger than he is. Their exceptional whiteness make them unmistakably noticeable in many settings, and sets them apart from the common dress of the majority of the UAE's population. All government employees are required to wear them, including custom officials, (except for those in military attire) and so it is often the first

thing a visitor sees when greeted at immigration upon arriving in the country. Most Emirati men, however, wear the dress out of choice, whether they are at work or not. Every Emirati I spoke to has claimed that they would always choose to wear the dishdash while engaging in normal public activity (going to work, going out to eat or going shopping, going to the mosque, etc). The dress is said to be quite comfortable, especially in Dubai's climate. The men wear undergarments, also bleached white, similar to a t-shirt and underwear, but no trousers, and so the dishdash is open and airy while remaining quite modest and formal.

Many expatriate men, half joking, claim that they would love to wear one all day and would gladly trade the suit and tie. This, however, is not condoned in the region and is very rarely done. There is no law in Dubai regarding the regulation of foreigners wearing the dishdash, but the community is aware that the national dress is for Arabs only, and mostly Gulf Arabs. This trend is a curiosity because this has not always been the case. British expatriates who moved to Dubai 30 years ago used to wear the dishdash in public and claim the Emirati community welcomed it. The shift towards exclusivity is about 15 years old. A Scottish security manager for the Dubai airport still wears his at home. He explains:

“My first was actually given to me by my neighbour as a gift. An Emirati family who lived next door to us in our first place in Jumeirah. My wife brought them a peacoat. My son and I got dishdashes and they got a peacoat. I think we got the better end of the deal. He would wear it [the peacoat] sometimes when he came

over which was hysterical. ... that was back when you actually knew your neighbours ... I'd buy [the dishdash] every now and then when they'd get faded or I'd spill something on it. I don't know how they keep them so white. I started wearing them to work one day when it was bloody hot out, I figured, everyone else wears one ...”

Me: “Why did you stop.”

Him: “oh you cant do that anymore. Eventually, like 5 years later, someone asked me not to, one of my employees, which was a bit cheeky, but enough people started giving me dirty looks ... I wear it around the house though, they're lovely, embarrasses the kids.”

As there is no law governing this type of dress in the UAE, it is up to the society to self maintain the rules of engagement, and Emiratis are highly successful in this endeavour. While cheap, novelty dishdasha are available wherever there are tourists as well as in discount superstores, authentic dress remains self-selecting. I have known expatriates who wished to obtain a proper dishdash to be sent away from outlets in the malls that cater to Emirati.

I have asked why westerners cannot wear the dishdash. The usual response is that we can, as Mo tells me, “sure why not? Anyone can wear it, but you should know Arabic, and maybe at least be Muslim, and also maybe be Arab.” Mo was not joking, I

do not think he sees the contradiction. It is national dress, so many like Mo see it as a liberal gesture to allow, say, a Jordanian or a Palestinian to wear it. Other Emirati disagree and believe it should be worn only by Gulf Arabs, against the normally cohesive bonds of pan-Arab unity. It is evident that the dress then is seen by these people as ‘fully cultural’, possessing no Islamic roots, despite the perception that they are mutual. Some say its exclusivity is due to tribal pride. Qataris, Bahrainis, Omanis, and Saudis all wear the same type of dishdash, while other Arabs either wear a different style, or more likely, as in the case across the Mediterranean, (i.e. Syria, Lebanon, North Africa, etc.) do not wear one at all. They say it sets them apart. It is *their* dress, and helps the Gulf Arab maintain a clear dichotomy between themselves and their neighbours, literally upholding the discrepancy of black and white, cleansing unambiguity.

The kandura, in this sense, retains a latent magic. It becomes a certain locus of the ‘desert’ self, where history is imbibed by the threads of the white fabrics. Though unspoken and unwritten, there seems, in practice, to be a profound concern regarding the protection of this magic in the kandura commodity, the maintenances of which seem to happen in tune with Durkheimian models of statehood, a cohesive intelligence spurred by a shared and unspoken anxiety, or this may also be viewed as a material manifestation of what Pierre Bourdieu had in mind when he defined embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). I do believe in the sub-conscious magic of the dishdash; not just as a retainer of the Gulf Arabian self, but as a very tangible port for the liquidity of the past, because I have seen its effects so often in practice, and so I believe I understand the power it gives to the Aristocracy, who maintain their elitism on their inherency. I then understand why

those who wish to embody that inherency are so keen to control their cultural textile as a vessel, or a typification of that inherency; a subconscious avoidance of what Michael Taussig admonishes his readers for in his laments on the redemption of Indigo. “In effect ... we exploited the magic, the surplus value, of colour to empower the magic of the commodity-form itself, what Karl Marx came to call the fetishism of commodities, something you might consider next time you slip into the blue of your blue jeans – that ‘intense deep blue of the ocean in stormy weather’” (Taussig, 2008, 12). Mohammed says to me “it is better for us to wear [it], for us it is like wearing the desert, and always you are feeling the desert winds, because thus is ours, and it came from the desert”. A poetic gesture indeed, and one that may be lost, for what inkling does the Westerner, or indeed the young Emirati, who ventures out to indoor ski-slopes and French bakeries in a bleached dishdash, have that he is wearing the desert? What happens to that modicum of Arabic selfhood when the magic of the garments are osmotically diluted and benign? Without historical elasticity, the material symbols indeed could fade, become just another step in ‘fetishized commodity’, or perhaps the subconscious fear is that they could do worse than fade, they could be made profane. T. E. Lawrence muses on the transformative power of the Kandura as he attempted to fragment himself from his colonial ties. “In my case, the effort for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only.” (1922, page 14). He failed to change skin partly because the magic of the commodity form is tied to symbols of the lived history of the people who wear it, their religion (a system of

relations to which Lawrence admits he could never embody), their historical movements from sea to sand, and their specific aesthetic intimacies between their bodies, skins, and clothes. The image of Peter O'Toole, with his caricatured Aryan features, dramatizing Lawrence's contrast of the kandura with the colonial dress of British officers, itself becomes a practice of matter out of place. Because the kandura is so symbolic of the Gulf Arab man, the act of a Westerner wearing a dish dash highlights his non-Arabness. So, for the expatriate trying to fit in, for many of my interlocutors, few things can be less effective than wearing national dress. Yet, it is more than a caricature. If wearing the kandura was only farcical, then the danger lies only for the anatopism, the incongruous Westerner. As I will discuss, informing and informed by novel anxieties, the real danger lies to the local man who protects the spell of the white threads from the destructive anti-magic of modernity.

The Power of clothing

Daniel Miller (2010), in his musings on the power of clothing, suggests that clothing has its own agency. He borrows upon the fairy tale of The Emperor's New Clothes to imply that clothing can not be reduced to representing a person's body. "On the surface is found the clothing which may represent us and may reveal a truth about ourselves, but it may also lie... We are not emperors represented by clothes, because if we remove the clothes there isn't an inner core. The clothes were not superficial, they actually were what made us what we think we are." (2010:13). This emphasis on the agency of clothing, and the specific way in which people understand and enact their

relationship to the sartorial has implications for the protection of local national dress from expatriates. If clothing has power in and of itself that mechanistically transforms the way one constructs selfhood, and if power is thought to be an intrinsic part of local Aristocratic selfhood, than it makes sense for the *muatan* to take an active role in protecting that magic from fading. A British man wearing a kandura makes the kandura banal, and the enchantment is broken.

The protective tendencies of traditional or ‘national’ dress in an Islamic city is also curious in the context of its practice against other Muslims and indeed other Arabs. It is common to hear locals and Muslims preach that “[In Islam], we are all brothers, we are all cousins, we are all equal.” My experiences have led me to conclude that this tends to be true in some mosques, but only within the mosques. The national dress is a clear and striking example of the belief in an Arab social hierarchy. I claim hierarchy because the perception of the Gulf dishdash by locals is not just that it is culturally exclusive, but that it is a privilege of cultural superiority, and I believe that its underlying mechanism relies on cultural concepts of purity. As discussed previously, social egos in the gulf are largely satiated on their self perceptions of purity, which help maintain Arab bonds. Gamal Abd Al Nasser, the second president of Egypt, in his rhetoric on pan-Arab unity would define three circles of unity regarding the state of Egypt; that of the Arab linguistic person, that of the African continent, and the largest being that of the international Islamic communities, the ‘brothers in faith’ (Nasser, 1955). Raphael Patai has amended Nasser’s cosmological depictions to say that, within the ‘Arab mind’, the three circles of

unity include linguistic Arabs, the middle East, and again brothers in Islam. He critiqued Nasser's assessments as political, and argued that African identity means very little to the North African Arab, and so maintains a sphere of middle Eastern identity (Patai, 1976, 10-11). If we are to accept this cognitive cosmology, than it is clear to me that such concentric 'spheres' are undervalued. It is evident that there is a fourth that is unique and exclusive to Gulf Arabs. They believe that they have levels of purity that other Arabs cannot maintain, and the dishdash helps them demonstrate their hegemony.

Part of this mechanism may be Islamic. When a Gulf citizen claims to be a national, he is also claiming to be Muslim. The same cannot be said everywhere in the Arab world. Indeed, many Egyptians, Syrians, and especially Lebanese (of whom there are many in Dubai), while unambiguously Arab, are in no guarantee Muslim. Even non-Gulf Arabs who are Muslim are far more likely to be secular, or non-practicing. The national dress is also an indication of wealth, which seems a universal excuse for hegemony. It is assumed in Dubai that when someone is wearing national dress that they have certain affluence. Non-Gulf Arabs often do not have the wealth to which Gulf Arabs are accustomed. Indeed salaries for Mediterranean Arabs are usually lower than their Western colleagues in the city while Emirati salaries are expected to be kept on par. There is a joke in Dubai that you can tell the wealth of a person by the whiteness of their clothes, or as they joke in the gold souks, "the whiter their dress, the more they spend."

Because of its connotations, the national dress is one of the first things Emirati, and other Gulf Arabs, look at when they meet someone. It is a quick way to assess

someone's status. Because of this, Emirati men admit that it is horribly embarrassing to have even a slight blemish on one's clothing. The clothes are bleached and pressed to a degree that seems extreme to foreigners and non-Gulf Arabs and Muslims alike. In hasty discourse, they appear to cleanse themselves this way inherently. When asked how they keep their clothes so white, most men have looked puzzled, responding "what do you mean" or "Is it? I haven't noticed" and only when pressured admit "I don't know, my wife/maid does it".³⁵ I told this to Mo, and he assures me "trust me, everyone notices". Again this comes down to cleanliness. "Things happen over the day, plus some of [the dishdash] are slightly different than others, maybe you wear a different one to work and then a different one to come here [the café we were at]." "... We change many times a day". I've asked a number of Emirati how many dishdash (kandura) they own. Most have lost count and claim to have between 40 and 60, all tailor made.

A spotless dress is a public declaration of purity and Islamic value. It is able to contradict itself; a gown used to imply that the wearer is cleaner, wealthier, more pure-blooded, and more powerful, while at the same time commending the modesty of its owner. In addition, it is perhaps able to transform the wearer into something he is not: its whiteness a contrast to the dark figure underneath; perhaps bleached to balance what many in the Arab world know to be the impure man underneath with the propensity for violent emotions, strong sexual desires, and the need to eat and also to expel waste. It could make sense then that the dishdash is as white as the abaya is black, with a woman underneath who, in Gulf tradition, everyone can tell hides herself from the eyes of

³⁵ See Shove (2003), in which she demonstrates that technological processes in the West contribute to growing anxiety over dirt, and perception of dirt.

others, a beacon of purity, a fragile and delicate woman who keeps herself for her husband and takes care of her home.

Alternatively, perhaps its design is psychologically opposite in the Gulf Arab mind. Perhaps it is the world that is filthy, and the Emirati or Qatari man who is above all else clean, secure in Islam, and the dishdash is a reflection of this, reiterating his internal whiteness as a garment over his skin. It could then make sense again that the dishdash is as white as the *abaya* is black, hiding a woman who is dirty and menstruates, who so easily tempts men and causes impure desires, polluting his mind and causing his thoughts and energies to stray from Islam. The dishdash appears to be both these things at once, its only consistent philosophy being that its appearance be in contrast to everything around it, a material form that separates man from woman, rich from poor, and foreigner to national. Perhaps this is its most useful, and only inherent feature. It seems to acknowledge the intensity with which many men in the Emirates battle and defend against ambiguity, and responds by sweeping the grey areas under the carpet, and only black and white are left. It is important to note that this is not without contradiction. The *abaya* is claimed by some to be a celebration of the mystery of women. The implication is that the woman underneath is more attractive because she is mysterious, and so rather than Islam abhorring ambiguity, it values the unseen, though as we have seen in previous chapters, the unseen is itself a type of amoral force, recalling again the notion of the hidden and concealed within the lives, behaviours, and even the very linguistic structure of *Djinn*. However, I suspect this view is quite often more of a spoken rationalization of wearing the dress while not addressing the blatant

juxtapositions of black and white, male and female, clean and impure. This is how I view the national dress working, its underlying mechanism is that it creates status by exaggerating boundaries and borders. It is here that we return to the Anthropology of the Grotesque. It is the bigness of the thing, an absorption of a superlative by an individual, the bigness of whiteness, contrast, cloth, manhood, and power. These things become exaggerated, Grotesqued... and within the Grotesque we see the anxiety exposed by the naked self, unadorned with symbols and agentive skins.

National Dress and exclusionist policy

The national dress in the Gulf does vary slightly by country and emirate. The kandura in Dubai is slightly more form fitting. It may have a tighter collar and cuffs, with cuff-links to heighten this effect. Elsewhere (Saudi, Bahrain), the gown may be more flowing. Those with extended political and social power may wear different colours instead of white. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid al Makhtoum is famous in the region for his 'controversial' choice of colours and *kandura* fashions. He often wears gold coloured robes, or a non traditional white dishdash covered by a black bisht with gold trim as a symbol of power. It is more acceptable for the dishdash to stray from white for the common man as one strays from the Arabian sea. Many Omani wear different coloured dishdash, especially in winter, and some rural women wear strikingly bright blue *abayas*.

The *guthra* (headscarf) is also a crucial piece of national dress for men. While many visitors are not able to tell the difference, the *guthra* is styled differently in each region and country, and many Gulf Arabs are able to immediately know where a man comes from by the way he wears his *guthra*. The styles also change by generation, with younger men or teenagers wrapping them differently, often to their elders' chagrin.³⁶ The styles also change with latest trends. Kuwaitis, for example, currently wear bleached white *guthras* tucked in around their collar. Emirati gentlemen leave theirs free flowing. Teenagers fling one side over the head (akin, I am told, to how American teenagers might wear a backwards baseball cap), and Qataris and Abu Dhabi Emirati have been wearing them asymmetrically, with the ends of the fabric wrapped around one side of the neck. Saudis are very likely to wear red and white tessellated *guthras*, though some members of other Gulf states wear this pattern as well, as it represents Bedouin tradition. Most *guthras* worn by Emirati are as white as the *dishdash*. Sheikh Mohammed wears both patterns, and switches between the two. Underneath the white *guthra* is a white *ghafiya*, or skull cap. It is often woven with lace. Omani tend to wear their *guthra* tied as a turban of sorts, or forgo the *guthra* altogether and just wear larger, more colourful *ghafiya*. The beloved Sultan Qaboos of Oman wears the former style in formal settings, with a large pink, purple, and blue wrapped turban that is considered quite flamboyant by even his own subjects.

³⁶ For a similar discussion on cultural dress in India, see Banerjee and Miller (2008) for an ethnography on the Sari where the authors demonstrate how the Sari is able to adapt and thrive when most cultural dress has been run over by Western Clothing.

Rather than break the dualist mould set by Gulf tradition, these exceptions to whiteness perhaps highlight the common black-white social boundaries by illuminating the peripherality of offending wearers. In other words, only those ‘above’ society, a powerful Sheikh or a Sultan, might demonstrate their separation from the masses through a display of colour. Here, Sultan Qaboos’ *guthra* and Sheikh Mohammed’s gold trims serve in much the same way that Tyrian purple might have been utilized in ancient Rome, leading, for many centuries, to a fairly ubiquitous monarchical monopoly of the colour.³⁷ Indeed, not only does it reinforce the centralization of the national dress, but it gives power and justification to Emirati ownership of the colour white, and the moral and social symbolism of the colour. The white fabric becomes their second skin, and issues regarding the moral jurisdiction of that fourth, smaller, sphere of unity seem to cause a slight anxiety among the adherers of such social constructs. Mo tells me, “They maybe should be wearing another colour.” I have prompted Mo to talk about Sudanese and Yemenis who wear the white Kandura.

Mo: “They maybe should be wearing something else maybe because this comes from us, it is our country’s national dress. In Africa they wear other things I think, but here we wear this one”

Me: “and Quwait and Bahrain too? They wear the same National dress...”

³⁷ See Avery, William T. (1940) for a reading on the construction of royal aesthetics in 4th century Rome, and Jensen (1963), for a history of Tyrian purple dye in the Mediterranean and Middle East.

Mohammed: “Yes but they are our cousins and they are like us so Mafi Mushkila.”

Me: “and people from Yemen?”

Mohammed: “They are our cousins, yes”

Me: “why shouldn’t they wear white then for national dress?”

Mohammed: “they are hmm like other tradition. And they are some like African also I think, but they are not white so they should wear maybe something else here.”

Me: “but they wear it in their home country”

Mohammed: “Maybe they can wear in their own country but here is better not to...”

Me: “so you can tell where they are from?”

Mohammed: “that is not important and probably we can tell anyway because we know each other”

Me: “but then why can’t they wear white if it is not important to know where they are from”

Mohammed: “but ok in Dubai we like to know where everyone is from because we are so many cultures”

Me: “yes but white kandura?”

Mohammed: “but that is our tradition here in UAE and maybe it is better if when they come here they are wearing a different colour”

Me: “but what about Qatar and Bahrain?”

Mohammed: “yes, they have the same tradition because they are our cousins”

Me: “But Yemenis have the same tradition and they are your cousins.” The circular conversation proceeds this way for some time. “you know”, I tell him, “I think the people of Yemen are so much older than Emirati people, they probably were wearing it first”. This made Mo frustrated with me and he was no longer interested in talking about kandura.

Here again we return to the issue of purity. White gowns as symbols of purity are not unique to Arabia. In Western traditions, white garments are used extensively as

signifiers of purity, or at least a recognition that a particular social domain is characterized as culturally recognizable purity. Christian baptismal garments are white, as are a traditional bride's gown. In traditional Judaism, a man also wears white at his wedding by tying a *kittel*, which is also worn during Yom Kippur. In certain Chinese contexts, whiteness has become associated with science and modernity, itself conceived as a type of ironic purification (Chen, 2003). Especially within the context cleansing rituals of Yom Kippur, however, we might question the garments as representing the purity of the individual, and instead reconsider the whiteness of the *kittel* as part of the cleansing ritual, a type of whitening of the body. Perhaps national dress in the Emirates might work under similar mechanics.

As my informants have subtly indicated above, people from sub-Saharan Africa, including Islamic Africa (aside from Egypt), are perceived to be dirtier than their Muslim 'cousins' on the Arabian peninsula. The distance from Mecca seems to cause a perceived displacement from Islamic authenticity. There is also the issue of skin colour, which I will discuss in much detail later in the chapter. Citizens of Sudan or Yemen might be recognized to be devout, practicing Muslims, but they are treated often as if they are getting it wrong, that despite praying five times a day and keeping their fasts, there is something lessening their value as a Muslim and a person. Yemen, while still a large part of the Arabian peninsula, is often discussed as being culturally polluted. The country is critiqued as having a drug abusing populace, who chew qat and become distracted from Islam, but more than that, the country is said to be the Arabian gateway to Africa. As discussed in the previous chapter, the genetics of the Yemeni are thought to be polluted in

some way, and they lose some of their ‘Arabness’. The Southwest corner of Yemen is only about 30km from the coast of Djibouti and Eritrea, separated by a strait that links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.³⁸ Not only people, but also perceived moral and physical impurity, including darker skin, is understood to migrate into Yemen from this site, bringing the political and social uncertainties of the Horn of Africa and beyond into Yemen. Traditionally, the Rub Al Khali has protected the people of the Gulf from these infringements, and virtually only the great Arabian seafarers had insight into the ‘polluted’ and colourful communities of East Africa. Now that the shores of the Arabian Gulf are so easily accessible to peoples from abroad, there is a problem of infection. We might conceive, then, of the national dress as not just a symbol of cleanliness, but also as a cleansing instrument itself. Its exaggerated whiteness does not just show one to be clean, it often has the effect of *making* one clean, or if not actively cleansing the individual, then protecting the individual from becoming dirty. It creates a physical shield against not only the sand and air of the city and desert, but also against the pollutants of the foreigner. We might reason that a motivation for obsessively bleaching a gown, or buying dozens of spare kanduras is not only because of a desperate need to display an Aristocracy, but also because bleached garments are *safer* and more efficacious as immunology, like taking a vitamin, a construction of *materia medica* (see chapter 4) though materiality. Protecting the use of the kandura is also protecting its

³⁸ The strait is called Bab Al-Mandib (sited often as ‘Gate of grief’, or ‘gate of tears’ though I have not heard the word Mandib being used in the Gulf in this way in normal speech). The Strait and the local isthmus have become an important site of research among genetic historians because, based on mitochondrial DNA studies, many believe it to be the earliest successful route for human migration off of the African continent. There exists, then, a sharp contrast between the geneticist who values the strait as a site that historically represents a type of genetic purity, and some in the Arabian Gulf who recognise the strait as a pathway for genetic *impurity*.

efficacy. I have been told many times when I discuss the dishdash with local men that the clothes have always been white, but have not always needed to be so bleached. The type of preparation that goes into wearing a kandura in public is said to be relatively recent (from the last 20 years). Part of this is means and technique. I never met a man in Dubai who washes his own clothes. The maid, or the cleaner, or someone else altogether is responsible for the work that goes into bleaching, pressing, and stiffening the cloth, and the time and effort required takes considerable funds as well. Still, the growing presence of migrants and expatriates to the Gulf, and the fact that Emiratis compose such a small minority in their own country give motivation and drive to the method and adornment of the material Grotesque.

The irony is that Mo (all three of them), as well as many Emirati that I met would joke to me about how comfortable the dress was and how I should wear one. Reem would occasionally tell me, “It would make you look very handsome, and all the woman would want you to call them”, yet when I asked where to buy a good one, most people would be hesitant. Only Reem would be direct with me “finish learning your Arabic first.” I did go shopping in the Dubai mall, a few weeks before I left Dubai for England, for an Authentic tailor made Kandura in the section of the mall designated for Emiratis. The shopkeeper was a well-dressed Indian man, and he was not wearing one. I was worried about stigmatization so I spoke to him in my broken Arabic. As his Arabic was worse than mine, we switched to English and when he knew I was American he loosened up (also, the prices were far too high for a poor PhD student and he probably gathered he did not need to push a sale).

“Where is yours?”, I joked with him.

Clerk: “Ha, I only sell them, never am I wearing them...”

Me: “are you allowed?”

Clerk: “ha, no, no, not allowed, but no need. Is better for me anyway. I never even tried one on, but I do not like them so much.”

Me: “Maybe they should have an Emirati working here...”, I joked with him.

Clerk: “what, a local?”. The merchant broke out laughing. This idea he found very funny.

Me: “maybe I will come back with some money and buy one”

Clerk: “Asallamu, ha, maybe if no-one is looking”, he jested.

And so, despite the lack of *legal* regulation on the use of the kandura by foreigners, the Emirati and gulf population has been able to protect their clothing as culturally exclusive to select groups. The dishdash, at least in Dubai, then becomes a symbol of the aristocracy. I suspect it represents more than that. Its whiteness becomes a representation of pathology; of social immunology. The excessive bleaching, and the social embarrassment of any slight discoloration, has become exacerbated in the Gulf with the influx of the migrant and expatriate populations. Certainly the white dishdash has long been a cultural icon of the region historically, yet its importance in the region seems to be recently heightened. Like the behaviour of the Djinni (see chapter 2), perhaps this is symptomatic of cultural anxiety. Alfred Gell has theorized that personhood is distributed through the intimate relationships that people develop with

material objects (1998: 21). Sophie Woodward, borrowing from Gell, has suggested that a person's wardrobe is easily one such route to externalizing the self. (2005, page 22)

However, it is more than that. As she writes, "Putting on clothing is a form by which one exposes one's self to the outside world. The clothing becomes a conduit that allows other peoples' intentions to penetrate deeply into the intentions of the wearer" (ibid).

Following both Woodward and Miller, if the self is exposed by clothing, and clothing is its own agent, than it makes sense to protect its threads, to guard who can wear them, and to exaggerate their aesthetic boundaries. I am hesitant to over essentialise the fabrics, but I suggest that if one becomes what one thinks other people think one is, than one cannot allow one's perceptions of others' perceptions to become distorted. In this sense, national dress becomes a material renaming of the self, or to borrow Maussian terminology, a technique of the body, for which techniques individually are the man as a whole (1979).

It is an immediately accessible device to manifest the sort of binary systems visible in local discourse and that often govern social relations in the Gulf, whether they be Emirati or Islamic, (if we are to distinguish between the two). Selfhood, then, can be purchased at a store, and so the stores are hidden in de facto Emirati only sections of shopping establishments, and non-local men are refused purchases even from non-local sales staff.

These cognitive dependencies arise as foreigners flock to the region as pathogens, and become a cultural necessity in maintaining Aristocratic elitism. Maintaining the National Dress has proven successful for the Emirati, and is one of their most useful tools in distinguishing themselves from expats, migrant workers, and especially other Arabs, with whom they share so many phenotypic similarities. With the ever increasing influx of political discourse from the West, and genetic and racial discourse from within, both of

which tend to serve as consolidators of Arab identity, other culturally specific methods of identity protection must be employed to maintain an Emirati selfhood. While the dress may be symptomatic of cultural anxiety, I believe the true cognitive trap lies in material arenas which more directly offend the dualist structures that pervade the imagination in the region. Such is the rising problem of skin colour.

Part Two: Whitening Creams and Racism in a Bottle:

Skin-whitening

Emirati women take part in a fast growing trend of skin whitening. These whitening practices are part of a larger trend towards implementing emerging techniques of body alterations in the region. Plastic surgery is everywhere in the city. There seem to be far more clinics devoted to this specialty than all other medical practices combined. I was invited by the German Clinic for Neurology and Psychiatry to a networking event for all the clinics at Healthcare City in Oud Metha, with whom the German Clinic belongs. Of the 40 or so clinics that attended the event, nearly half were devoted to cosmetic surgery. Two of the directors of Healthcare City (HCC), both outgoing Emirati women, have told me this did not represent an accurate cross-section of clinics and was rather just the nature of the networking event. Half the clinics were missing, but they did admit that it has become a challenge to create medical diversity at the city, and that cosmetic surgery over represented by far. However, as the property owners of HCC are focused on

real-estate, and not medicine, and as real-estate is currently stagnant in Dubai, landlords are filling space in the city with countless cosmetic clinics, which are never short of demand. When I had originally began research in the Emirates, I had not intended to explore these body practices, especially since this project has been limited by the pool of informants with which I can intimately engage. That is, this thesis is largely about men, and the way men find ways to understand and get about their day. While men increasingly take part in body alterations, it is still a realm of aesthetic intervention that is explored far more commonly by women. However, the demands that men have on women proved insightful to understand how race, gender, inheritance, and purity are constructed. Furthermore, local outcries in the country against certain body practices began to force public debate, especially on skin whitening. As a result, I found that conservative women with whom I might not normally be able to speak about the body would discuss their anxieties with me. Many expatriates in the region, namely white Europeans and Americans, tended to associate cosmetic practices with American pop culture, stereotyped Hollywood residents, Southern Californians, haphazard breast implants, and tanning salons. However, these associations belie the Anthropology of the body in the region, and the very complex concerns and anxieties that govern motivations for changing one's appearance. I became specifically interested in the idea of skin lightening, partly because of its accessibility and visibility, but also because of the way in which people spoke about it, whether positive or negative. As I learned more about this practice, I realized it was centred on changing perceptions of the self in the region, indicative of Islamic purity, and a manifestation of uncertainty through a novel Grotesque.

As I mentioned, one of the great limitations of this project is that I am not often privy to the company of Emirati women alone. I very rarely have access to them in public, and even less often in private. On rare occasions when I have had the pleasure of their company in private, I suspect they have been just as insecure as I was. It is difficult to assess their physical appearance under the abaya. They travel in groups in shopping centres and hotels covered in Abayas. While not all Emirati women wear burkas (indeed, most do not), they do tend to shield their faces from wandering eyes. The abayas are a contradiction. Many claim to wear them out of modesty, but they are often flashy, with laces, patterns, sequins, and even diamonds on the fabric of the head, neck and sleeves, and down the middle seam. Their cost and style leads some women in the Emirates to debate the nature of true ‘modesty’. Some women suggest that wearing the abaya is simply modesty of the body, implying that aristocratic modesty is an entirely different construct. Others claim that the simplicity of the Abaya, even if it is laced with small gems, is a modest type of aesthetic individualism, that it is a false impression that the abaya standardizes a woman’s public appearance. Emirati women have told me that foreigners might not be able to recognize subtle differences in the abayas, but local women most certainly notice, and so the abaya, like the national dress of men, is also partially a statement of wealth, status, and nationality. The way in which women engage with fabric is very complex, and again, I cannot write more on the topic here, but as part of a superficial observation, I can claim that the pitch black cloth does mostly hide a woman’s figure and nearly, if not all her skin. As a result, women’s skin colour is generally off my radar. Its not something I generally pay attention to anyway, and

combined with black abayas and the exclusivity of Emirati women, the skin whitening is something that escaped me until it was explained to me by a Jordanian woman. I had always noticed advertisements all over the city for skin products: Famous Bollywood actors and actresses rubbing lotion on their faces across billboards on Sheikh Zayed Rd, and Arabic women with “before and after” pictures, but I suddenly realized it was all for skin whitening products and bleaching clinics.

I began to pay closer attention. 80 per cent of working Emirati are employed in government offices. At the immigration office (where I had often had the unfortunate opportunity to spend a few hours), Dewa (utility) offices, and Etisalat (telecommunications) buildings, there are plenty of Emirati women in national garb, and only a few wear a burka. As negotiating red-tape in Dubai generally requires . . . patience . . . I was afforded plenty of opportunity to assess their appearances. All the women had significantly lighter faces than their male counterparts. One can expect this type of sexual dimorphism due simply to cultural dress and norms. Women, even as girls, tend to stay indoors and be completely covered. Men may do as they please outdoors and do not always have their head covered. For a simple example, being on the ocean, families in the UAE enjoy the beach, and while men wear simple swim trunks, Gulf Arab women still wear full body swim clothing akin to a lightweight wetsuit that hides body shape. Yet, while some of the skin I see appears to be naturally lighter, some is exaggaratingly white, especially on the face. The effect is sometimes almost ghost-like on a face with naturally dark skin.

It is difficult not to think that this is a post-imperialist phenomenon. Combined with other trends in cosmetic surgery, wealthy Arabs appear to be mimicking Western features, and deserting stereotypic Arab skin tones and facial structure. I've spoken with plastic surgeons at Health Care city, and they tell me business is booming. Women from all over the Gulf come to Dubai for plastic surgery and many also go to Europe. According to doctors, they most commonly want nose alterations, breast enlargements, and skin whitening, with the former two being done at specialty clinics, and the later usually done at spas and parlours, or at home with creams. The clinics tell me these women do not come on their own. Their parents want them to have nose jobs, or their husband or boyfriend, because Arab noses are seen by Arab men as ugly. This must be a relatively new phenomenon and cannot be attributed entirely to tradition. In Brazil, new social science research has linked cosmetic body alterations to medicalised beauty and novel indigenous constructs of equity. While many practitioners and locals suggest that the miscegenation unique to Brazil allows for local imagination to define racial identity, and therefore racial features in less concrete ways,

“When pressed, however, surgeons readily admit that patients ‘always want to move the nose in the direction of Europe, not Africa’, and in fact officially term the procedure ‘correction of the Negroid nose’. Beauty practices show that Freyre’s vision of ‘triumphant brownness’ has not, in fact, entirely displaced an earlier ideology: *embranquiamento*, ‘whitening’.” (Edmonds, 2007, pp 373).

It is easy to read the heavy bombardment of skin lightening advertisements on the massive streets of the Emirates and on television in a similar light. The fact that this trend seems to be ubiquitous in Asia is alarming to some. I have Filipino interlocutors with whom I became close who hated working at their café, and would prefer to work in the Filipino dominated retail sector of Dubai, but told me they could not get a job because their skin was too dark, hence they are stuck in catering. In neighbouring India, the obsession for white skin is overwhelming. Adverts in the UAE for whitening products often show Indian or Asian women who cannot get their dream job, or cannot catch the eye of a young man for whom they have a crush. The man just ignores her behind his newspaper while she works as a waitress and serves him coffee. After using whitening cream, however, the advert flashes to an office with a smart, successful and whiter woman being congratulated by her boss. Another scene flashes to the ignored waitress, now whiter. The young man becomes suddenly aware of her beauty and cannot help but ask her out. The commercials depict what Edmonds sources as a tool embedded in hegemony. “When access to education is limited, the body – relative to the mind – becomes a more important basis for identity as well as a source of power.” (2007, 378).

Whitening beyond racism

Opponents of these ads refer to the products as “racism in a bottle”, and I have heard the term used many times in Dubai. Dr. Fatma al Sayegh, a Fulbright scholar, professor of UAE and Gulf History at the University of Al Ain, and a woman’s rights activist, has spoken out against the practice. She is disturbed by some of the lengths that

Gulf women go to maintain a whiter skin. One such practice is brewing a homemade white paste derived from beauty products and home chemicals, and then spreading it across ones face when one goes outside. “I was scared by the custom,” she says. “They say it is part of their culture, that when they leave the house and they put on this powder, which is like a mask, it turns them into someone different.” (Salem, 2010). In this sense, whitening becomes an enhancement technology. Like the dishdash for men, some consider the whitening creams to be a sort of transformative magic, a phenomenological experience that alters the way one is able to ‘be’ in the world. But why bother?

There has been much social research into skin-bleaching as evidence of self-hate and low self esteem outside Muslim and Arab communities, especially among black-skinned Caribbean groups. Arguments generally accept this self-loathing is a cultural legacy inherited from the psychological scars of subservience and slavery (Abrahams, 2000; Singham, 1968). The results, as Abrahams has written, was “the traditional denigration of everything black or African-looking... Black mothers told their black children they were ugly because their lips were thick. Their kinky hair was 'bad'. Brown was better than black; the paler the brown the better. White was best. So, as in America, everybody black tried to straighten their hair and bleach their skin” (Abrahams, 2000). Others have singled out, more broadly, colonialization, and specifically, plantation culture, as bequeathers of psychological scarring (Beckford, 1972). Indeed, this broad category is more fit to the Gulf region as there does not appear to be cultural memories of slavery among the Arabs of the region, yet the hegemonic relationships produced from Western colonialization, and French, British and Portuguese colonialization specifically,

are still quite engrained in living memory, let alone cultural memory. These cultural memories are still engrained and pervasive in emerging technologies, especially those that allow for a construction of the body, and research shows how this seeps into the emerging digital world. Users of online media are asked to project themselves into a digital universe, creating avatars and virtual physiologies that project and feedback unto the self. The notion of race and the depiction of racial features are then necessarily defined by the constraints of the virtual interfaces that are developed in light of stringent racial aesthetics. Users are forced to reimagine themselves, and recreate themselves, as ‘white’ with Western Features. Users then must inhabit large virtual worlds under these conditions. (Kafai, Cook, and Fields, 2010; Monson, 2012). In this light, skin bleaching can be seen as more of a product and adaptation of self-hate, mechanized by the principles David Fischer poignantly demonstrates in *Albion’s Seed*, in which he traces four regions of different Americans from their geographical and cultural roots in Great Britain to show that ‘cultural legacies leave historical shadows’ (Fischer, 1989).

However, one aspect of skin colour alterations that adds complexity in the debate, at least in Arab culture, is that it may not be to mimic western appearances. Dr Al Sayegh thinks,

“ . . . it is not a culture of fairness as much as an obsession with the opposite. Some Emirati people here are darker than others and I remember when I was studying in America and England, the preferred skin type was tanned. The ideal man was tall, dark and handsome. It was the opposite to what western men looked like. Here, too, it is the same thing. People are obsessed with something that is not ordinary. Fair skin is not common, so people like to look unusually white.” (Salem 2010)

I believe the obsession is deeper than that. According to the Emirati women with whom I have spoken, the obsession with whiter skin on women has always existed in the Gulf. “Traditionally, one of the reasons Bedouin women wear a leather burga (not to be confused with the more common burka) is not necessarily for modesty, but to protect from the sun and to keep the skin pale.” Emirati representatives from the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding teach that before the Western world arrived in the Gulf, women would prepare a paste and plaster their cheeks and nose with it under their burga to beautify their skin, and so the burga was more of a beauty product than a repression of women. I am not entirely convinced this was a main purpose of the burga; the centre for cultural understanding here in Dubai is exceptionally apologetic regarding cultural practices ‘commonly misunderstood’ by foreigners to the region. Yet, if maintaining pale skin was important to women, it makes sense that they have developed ways to utilize traditional garb in their beauty regime.

In any case, it seems that the importance attached to skin whitening predated increased Western influence in the region. I have asked Emirati men about the appeal for whiter skin. “We do prefer whiter skin. It is more beautiful. Darker skin makes a women look hard, and lighter skin adds to a woman’s purity.” Purity is one aspect of whiteness that I believe is key in understanding the tradition. Again, discourse and behavioural practices in the Gulf (as they are in many places of the world) are often characterized by visible, tangible binary systems of relations and clean, unambiguous dichotomies. Perhaps skin is a by-product of expected sexual dimorphism, and like traditional garb, should be as contrasting between the sexes as possible. The obsession with purity maintains that this contrast be in black and white, and skin whitening

becomes a practice in symbolic inversion. If men are to wear unblemished white on white in an attempt to show their purity to the world, and then be secretly unpure underneath, dark, hairy and harsh, than woman are to wear black on black to remind men of the impurity of women, and then of course be secretly pure underneath, white, hairless, and delicate for their husband.

Arab Islam, of course, teaches that non-Muslims are unclean, but that Hindus and non-Muslim Africans are especially unclean. When Gulf Arabs would see the skin of their Hindu and African neighbours with whom they have been in contact throughout the millennia, it would often confirm what they already knew to be true, that darker skin is indeed impure. This trend is still true today, and is a tool for the perpetuation of xenophobia and racism in the region. Many Emirati men have light skinned lovers from around the world, and especially Russians, light skinned Philipinnas, and Germans. The appeal of Russian prostitutes by some select Emirati men is renowned in Dubai. I always thought this was curious, and it was unwittingly explained to me in a display of racism. I was asking a group of Emirati Muatan men about skin whitening and purity, and they told me “lighter skin on women does help keep them pure” “It is unfortunately true that darker women spread diseases, and now we know that they have sicknesses and AIDS” Another at the table says, half jokingly “this is why Russian women are good, they do not have any diseases.” “Really?”, I asked, “and they look like white Arab peoples”, he replied. The conclusion to make, then, is that whiter skin, in addition to being more beautiful, innocent, and pure, also has a remarkable immunological effect in the Gulf, to the degree that, within some individuals’ imagination, a Russian prostitute is

more physically clean than the average Kenyan woman. The Kenyan migrants, of course, like all legal expats in the UAE regardless of nationality, will have been tested for HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, and Tuberculosis in order to stay in the country, (I myself was tested twice for my residencies here). Because of the nature of sex-trafficking, however, Russian sex workers would not have been tested as their employment might be external to bureaucratic regulation.

The perception of dark-skinned Muslims from Africa, namely, Sudan, among Gulf Arabs is complicated. We are told constantly from religious groups in the region “everyone can be Muslim, everyone should be Muslim, it is the will of Allah”, and it is forbidden in Islam to deny a fellow Muslim entrance to a mosque to pray. Nevertheless, dark skinned Sudanese often find that they are not welcome in state mosques. This is adamantly denied by Emiratis with whom I speak. Most Emirati men were offended at the accusations, yet Sudanese men are wary of their perception. “we go [to the mosque], even at the mall where there is everyone else, and [the locals] stare at us. And then, at the mosque, they ask us ‘did you wash, did you wash?’ (make ablutions), but they do not ask other people”. Some observers may comment that there is a paranoid perception of the self among dark skinned Muslims due to their skin colour, and so they over-exaggerate prejudice against themselves. I am told that its common to have guards, or a sort of ‘mosque patrol’, maintain the purity of their houses of worship. Indeed, I have always been followed around very carefully whenever I was at a mosque to make sure I did not make profane anything I crept near. ‘Mosque patrols’, in my experience, are nearly always Keralite migrants who would never admittedly question a local for fear of

offending them and incurring punishment. From my experience, it's certainly possible that they sometimes follow Sudanese around simply for something to do, but I think, in general, that this is a naïve position. Just as in the right to wear a kandura, Emiratis are profoundly aware of skin colour and nationality at the mosque and in general public as somehow superseding Islam. This perception is not new to the region, or indeed new to Arabic tradition. During his journeys, the great Moroccan traveller Ibn Battutah wrote extensively on the 'country of the blacks', that is, modern day Sudan and Mali. He visited this country in 1352, and was disgusted by many of their habits. When local authorities speak to merchants through an interpreter, he "was sorry I had come to their country, because of their bad manners and contempt for white people". When he is given *anli* (millet mixed with honey and milk), he asks "is it for this that the blacks invited us?... I then became convinced that no good was to be hoped for from these people...". He does not seem to know what to make of them. The people are Muslim, but they threaten his knowledge of the Islamic self in ways no other group of people had. He writes of them,

Conditions among these people are remarkable, and their way of life is strange. The men have no jealousy. No-one takes his name from his father. But from his maternal uncle. Sons do not inherit, only sisters' sons! This is something I have seen nowhere in the world except among the infidel Indians of Al-Mulaibar. Nevertheless, these people are Muslims. They are strict in observing the prayers, studying the religious law, and memorizing the Qur'an. Their women have no shame before men and do not veil themselves, yet they are punctilious

about their prayers... Women there have friends and companions among men outside the prohibited degrees for marriage, and in the same way men have women friends in the same category. (Battutah 2003).

After leaving Sudan and Mali, and somewhere in the vicinity of Niger, Battutah encounters the Tuareg and appears relieved to be back in ‘white’ lands “Their women are the most perfectly beautiful of women and have the most elegant figures; they are pure white and very fat” (Battutah. 2003). Over 650 years later, this confusion on the status of black skinned Muslims has not departed from, in the least, Gulf discourse. As I have discussed earlier in the chapter, embedded in local knowledge of geography, it seems it is noble for these Saharans and sub-Saharanans, to attempt to be Muslims, yet despite their just efforts, there is something inherent about their beings that locals feel keeps them from being fully capable of full Islamic value.

The idea that Africa and black skin is inherently polluting despite religious and theological adherence is certainly not unique to the Gulf. Indeed it is a ubiquitous phenomenon that has been noted throughout world literature. That discussion is quite lengthy, and so I will say only that where I grew up in the Southern United States, there were many cases of black American children being refused entry into youth baseball and soccer fields because, as it was claimed by some in 1980’s Atlanta suburbs, “African people’s skin was black because it was singed by the fires of hell”. This perceived inherency persisted despite a fervent tradition of African Pentecostalism in Atlanta. In the Arabian Gulf, it is unclear to me if skin colour is viewed as a cause or casualty of

this inherency, or indeed if the land of darker-skinned Africa is itself somehow polluting. I met an Arab friend from Zanzibar whose father was a Zanzibaran Arab and whose mother was Emirati. He had grown up in Zanzibar and Dar As-Salaam (among other places), but had moved to Dubai to work in real estate. He believed he was stigmatized simply from originating from the Zanzibar coast. “It is good that I don’t look Tanzanian, or I would never get a job. I tell people that my mother is Emirati and they love me, but I’ve lost my job before because they found out that I was actually from Zanzibar.” He applied for his Emirati passport 10 years before I met him, and turned his Zanzibar passport over to naturalization authorities at the same time. As of writing, he has still not received his Emirati passport or citizenship, and he hasn’t left the country in 13 years. “I think they think I’m here to infiltrate their government or something, is the impression I get when I ask about my passport. Well, I am I guess, but I’ve been here half my life already and my business is here and my girlfriend. If my father was from Lebanon or something I’d have had it in a few months.” I spoke about his case to locals one afternoon, and they (Mo) responded, “His mother should never have married someone from Zanzibar”. I have written in the previous chapter about federal kinship regulations and the ownership of the Kholasat Al Qaid, or “family books”, and how authentic Emirati citizenship is passed down not only genetically, but racially and paternally, and aristocratically.³⁹ It is difficult to say for certain, but I cannot help but think my friend is being punished for the ‘sins’ of his mother, ruining the purity of Emirati blood by mixing with an African. The etymology of Zanzibar is derived from Persian, *bar* (place of), and Zangi (black).

³⁹ See UAE Federal Regulation No. 17 of 1972 for their specific citizenship criteria.

The problem of white skin after globalization presents a major philosophical problem now for some Emirati, and I believe helps perpetuate the cultural secrecy, a retreat to the private culture within a culture. As discussed, whiter skin is important not only because it is pure, but also because it is specifically *not* African or Hindu, at least not historically. (India has its own fascinating post-colonial trends in skin whitening and anglicization that might be a volume unto itself). This is where skin whitening fits in a thesis on cultural anxieties. It might have been a point of pride for Arab women to have white skin as a demonstration of their superiority over their Indian, and African neighbours, and indeed even other Arab neighbours. For example, locals claim that the Yemeni, and to a lighter degree, Omani, have the unfortunate luck to be both poorer in money and darker of skin, traits that Emirati often see as indicative of one another. Even between other Emiratis, “the preference for fairer skin is a big issue in the UAE, where it is not unknown for families to rule out marriage with those of a darker skin colour” (Bhattacharya 2010). The problem is that it is not in any way natural. Gulf women have to work very hard to have lighter skin. The offence is that now there is a massive Western population in the Gulf that comes across this skin genetically. Novel discourse in the region situates skin colour as an ambiguous hereditary entity. Genetic discourse suggests to some that there is an inherent model of the person that is spread and shared by locals. Local knowledge systems emphasize the fatalistic aspects of genes, but also the agency of the mother in affecting their children’s inherited appearance. Some women now claim that they must take measures to counter the effects of genetics, or in other cases, they feel they must live up to their genetic

potential. As the concept of the local genome becomes increasingly integrated as a proud component of the local body, and as whiteness has long been owned as category of the local self, women find themselves in a novel predicament of self-hood. This is in direct contradiction to the Gulf Arab's concept of the self, with a cultural ego that maintains its own superiority but with threatened categories. Skin colour, then, becomes akin to concepts of wealth, of dependency, of ownership, perhaps shielding themselves from foreign eyes; a revert to comfortable cultural categories. Like purchasing automobiles and leaving wrapping over the seats and the price tags on the windows, women begin to abandon their simple powders for expensive daily lotions. It is reported that as porcelain-like skin is increasingly valued as the aesthetic ideal in the Middle East, Emirati women alone spend close to 1 billion dirhams (US \$272 million) every year treatments and beauty supplies. Simply being lighter than average is no longer enough, women must be as unnaturally white as possible to begin to compete with the influx of whiteness from abroad.

Kinship, Lamarckism, and Body Alterations

Because of the ways in which many people conceive of inheritance, a potential mother's prospects and value vis à vis marriageability are often largely informed by her appearance, and therefore her ability to change her appearance. I discussed briefly in the previous chapter the cultural implications of Lamarckism, where the physical attributes of a child, their skin colour, the shape of their nose, can be related to the lived experience of the mother. Jean Baptiste Lamarck, the great French biologist, had conceived of a

hereditary model in which acquired traits of a parent were passed down to further generations. The typical example taught in the history of science during my undergraduate education used the long necks of the giraffe as a case study. Lamarck would suggest that the particular phenotype of the giraffe was developed as part of their quest for high-reaching food in a Serengeti open canopy. As the giraffe reaches for food, it slowly stretches its neck over the course of its life, and its children acquire the traits as inherited biology.⁴⁰ The model was largely questioned by Charles Darwin, who proposed the idea that inheritability was not a product of experience, but of survival. In other words, the giraffe who *already* had a slightly longer neck than his brethren was more likely to reach food, more likely to consume more nutrients, more likely to be stronger and attractive to mates, and therefore more likely to have the opportunity to reproduce. The raw material (at the time, the idea of the gene was preceded by a number of speculations) that produced longer necks was not developed over life, but reproduced through advantages of the strongest to procreate. Darwin's work, partnered with Gregor Mendel's inheritance studies, have become the philosophical and empirical underpinnings of all of current biology, and Lamarck's theories were eventually all but discredited. Still, while Mendelian/Darwinian models of inheritability and evolution have certainly dominated Western Scientific discourse for the last century, recent trends in molecular biology have suggested that one might not entirely disregard the Lamarckist thought process, and indeed, through the emergence of epigenetic studies (from 'above/outside of genetics'), we find that Lamarckist ideology is making a small comeback. Some new trends in Anthropology call for an exploration of the role in which

⁴⁰ See Jean Baptiste Lamarck's *Philosophie Zoologique*.

epigenetic discourse plays in shaping the way people construct their health and even identity. Margaret Lock and Vinh Kim Nguyen (2011, 335) have recently mused about the ability of epigenetic knowledge to move groups of people beyond genetic determinism. Elsewhere, Lock (2005) has also pursued the notion as further fuel for the construction of the embedded body, as epigenetics begins to conceptualize people as part of kinship groups that do not necessarily share traditional models of biology. Lock examines the relationship between anti-determinism and its clash with current healthcare regimes in preventative care and speculation for Alzheimer's, advocating a partnership between anthropologists and epigeneticists to truly understand the role of the embedded body informing emerging paradigms of health.

It is useful to have a model that incorporates molecular biology with lived experience, where gene expression remains responsible for body phenomena, but where society can intervene on a molecular level. However, as my fieldwork has shown, when one begins to explore inheritance models cross-culturally, a discourse emerges where quasi-Lamarckist views of the body are evident within social practice, where an individual can change themselves physically, somehow, and alter the destiny of future generations. Many of my informants do not need the field of epigenetics to inform their knowledge systems because they have always known this to be true, or at least, they put these theories into practice. As I mentioned before, it is not uncommon for the family members of a groom to disallow their son's marriage if the bride's skin is too dark. As discussed, they might be concerned with the purity of the woman, her prospects in society, or her wealth and status. However, marriage brings to the fore the question of

children, and for traditional Muslim families in the Gulf, it is the most important question. A dark skinned mother provides darker skinned children, as skin colour is often thought to be inherited from the mother in an often vague osmotic way, independent of genetics. The potential mother, then, has further strong motivation to whiten her skin because if she can make herself whiter, it is thought that her children will be whiter. Her marriage prospects become better, she becomes more valuable, and in turn, can marry into a wealthier and more prominent family. I am told, “They know she is doing this (skin whitening) because they are doing it too, but it is ok if she can be beautiful.” It is not always successful. One of my informants, a younger man, has explained “sometimes they make her get naked. Not my family, they would never do this, but sometimes some people do it, to make sure all of her is white, if they think maybe she is lying.” Others have suggested, “it is not about skin colour, it is about money or maybe they don’t like her family, and they use it as an excuse”. Still, for many women, skin whitening becomes a creative technique to ensure a comfortable future.

An analytical approach that merges anthropology and psychology has offered much promise in understanding the failure of individual reconciliation of a black/white binary structure (Littlewood, 1980). Littlewood presents the case of Beatrice Jackson who comes from a Jamaican evangelical cultural background that allows her, and other black members of society to become ‘white in fantasy’. She is unable to reconcile her white concept of herself with the whiteness of British society and becomes insane. Her 13 year old son, being black skinned, is a reminder of her impurity, and so she begins to have localized pain, rationally, in her uterus (Littlewood, 1980). Is skin whitening, then

a practice in fantasy, and is it a religious experience among Muslim communities in the Gulf? Certainly individuals are increasingly able to participate in the fantasy on a very physical level, and entrepreneurs are able to take advantage of this psychological necessity. Yet, despite the availability of physical alterations, it does not seem to be enough for Emirati men and the families of Emirati men, who seem, more and more, to demand an inherent whiteness from a bride. As in the case of Beatrice, the social response in the Gulf seems to be directed against the womb of the Arab woman; a blight despite phenotypic disposition. The site of the body alteration shifts, then, from the epidermis to the uterus. The womb becomes a site of anxiety and uncertainty.

Faced with newfound choice for long-term partners (lovers and sex workers aside), Emirati men are overwhelmingly choosing whiter skin. While for Emirati men to marry Western foreigners is technically permitted, it is still somewhat taboo. However, Emirati men can now easily marry Lebanese, Palestinian, Jordanian, and Syrian women, all of whom are generally significantly whiter than Gulf Arabs, with more locally desired Mediterranean features, and this is where Emirati women find their harshest competition. Advocates for women's rights in the region suggest obsessive skin whitening is symptomatic of the regulation of female movement. As the Emirati director at Health Care City, herself a *sheikha* who has gone to university abroad, explained "Men are allowed to go abroad, and go to school abroad, and they meet partners abroad and bring them back here. Many woman are not allowed to go abroad, except on vacation. Men can marry who they want, but woman are only supposed to marry Emirati men. It cannot last forever. We have already run out of men. There

aren't any left for us women!, and so, yes, this is partly why they do these things (plastic surgery, skin whitening). This, and anything else men want them to do." It does not help their case that Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Mahtoum, the popular ruler of Dubai and Vice president of the UAE, followed (and perhaps leads) this trend by taking a junior wife in Princess Haya bint Hussain of Jordan, the beautiful, and very white, daughter of King Hussain of Jordan and his wife Alia, whose beauty was famous across the middle East. The nation celebrated the birth of their first child a few months after I arrived in Dubai. He also is known among the Emiratis to have many lovers, and, as listed on his official homepage, has children from a European woman (suspected to be German according to the official fan page). As a representatives of manhood and of male ideals, the elite of the elite in Dubai, the Sheikhs are confirming the trend that darker Arab women are immunologically impure through their pursuits of genetic whiteness. Yet they are not trendsetters, they are perpetuators of a symbolic system.

Conclusion

In viewing the skin whitening phenomenon as pathology, it is difficult to assign origins to the trend. Is the enhanced skin whitening trend simply the end product of a transition to modernity; a somewhat inevitable conclusion to 'Westernization'? As Littlewood has acknowledged in discussions on anorexia and bulimia, "To take a particular society with its distinctive pattern of psychopathology... and then argue that 'the cause' is simply the most immediate aspect of everyday life to which it appears to have a formal relationship... is partial." (Littlewood, 2002). In Dubai, we have not

disordered dieting in this case, but obsessive skin bleaching to general beautification to consider. If we are to hastily blame the presence of Western influence, why then is there such a proud 'ownership' of whitening as a cultural tradition? Social research in Japan suggests that the underlying psychology of emerging cultural anxieties may be dependent on recognizing imbalance in the ways that traditional society becomes contemporary; *Bunmeibyō*, 'disorders of Western civilization' (Lock, 1992). The analogy to skin whitening is that it can then be seen as a proactive practice, to help push the modernized self forward into society. Although anorexia and skin whitening may bear some philosophical similarities as acts of phenomenological body imaging, it can be quickly argued, especially in context of traditional notions of Islamic purity, that skin whitening is a way of keeping the Emirati 'self' within the confines of tradition, vis à vis the contemporary 'selves' emerging in 'modernized' society. In this light, it is a protective mechanism. The whiter Gulf self, then, is not a modernized self, but an enhanced 'traditional' self, or in more descriptive terms, caricatured. I tend to hold with this view. Indeed, this idea gives fuller meaning to my informants' invocation of 'racism in a bottle' (see above) in which the commercial products are not simply indicative of Gulf Arab prejudices, but are indeed bottled identities themselves. It certainly seems to be a present anxiety of those few in Dubai who abhor the trend. To quote those voices of opposition, "Your nationality should be part of who you are naturally, we shouldn't have to purchase it at the store.", and "there is nothing natural about [these products], they are thoroughly un-Islamic". It is difficult to explain the paradox. The 'impure product', this chemical external self that one can purchase at drug stores and supermarkets, is nevertheless advertised on billboards across the city, "for

purity of skin”, or “be yourself”, an oversized and whiter South Asian man or woman smiling down on the polluted individual as they drive to work or walk the skyscraper laden Sheikh Zayed Road, and more recently, Bollywood’s most famous actor, standing tall at Dubai’s busiest intersection, holding a bottle of Vaseline product under the slogan ‘fair and handsome’ in English and Arabic, and Facebook advertisements delivered to users in the region with Bollywood actors and actresses that warn us “people see your face first”.



Figure 8: Local adverts for skin whitening products for men.

As genetics become increasingly crucial in local knowledge and kinship systems, families become increasingly focused on the physical attributes of women in an effort to construct a category of aristocracy that incorporates novel notions of the body into perceptions of wealth and power. With an influx of migrant and expatriate labour taking residence in Dubai who are both light and dark of skin (Emiratis make up only 9 per cent of the population, a small minority in their own country), for many families, physical attributes become a crucial component in assessing marriage potential because of a declared need to keep contrast between different bodies. Because Lamarckist

systems of inheritance still persist in the region, often outside the discourse of genetics, many women feel that they *can* still take action to create a “true” self, or to be what they claim they are “supposed” to be, or, to borrow terms from genetics, to create the phenotype they know their genotype to be. When we are given evidence of orthodox whitening habits, we must be careful not to assume what it is they see exactly inside the cosmetic bottle. Is it a Western woman inside, or the ‘supra-Emirati’? More in depth ethnography into feminine Emirati identity may provide some insight, and it is a domain for which I, as a male Westerner, do not have responsible access. As for men, the trend is still emerging. Less Emirati men than women are publically using the product, preferring still to ‘man-scape’ their facial hair in the style of their Sheikhs and higher Aristocracy. For those men who do partake, perhaps it is much safer to argue the presence of the ‘Western image’ in their minds, at least among Arab men as opposed to other South Asian groups. Although, as in the case of the Emirati kandura as a status symbol among Arabs, I do not think it unreasonable to suggest that skin whitening for men could evolve not into an identifier of Western preference, but again into a heightened caricature of intra-Arabesque masculinity.

So, finally, are these products “Racism in a bottle”? I *do* think that one can think about the use of colour and fabric in the region as a practice of racial suppression. Indeed, I do not wish at all to be apologetic to the practice, yet the phenomenon is complex, and racist sentiments provide only a narrow view of whiteness in Dubai. My argument is that, in a sense, the idea of the true-self is what is being marketed. In general, Gulf Arabs see themselves as the owners of whiteness in contrast to the world

around them, both in the present and historically. They embody it in their skin, and adorn it with their clothes. Racism is fervent, yet that is perhaps not what is in the bottle. Symbolism is in the bottle, taken from the body and put in commodity form, and the user will adapt it as he or she will. I see access to this bottled symbolism reflective of Victor Turner's notion of Liminality and Communitas in which the 'primal ground' of Gulf culture, this illusive inherency, is accessed through symbolism (Turner, 1969). The influx of otherness into the region, especially from the West, has forced an externality of the Arab self. Whiteness remains central to identity, yet ironically no longer a phenotypic inherency at, say, birth. Bottled identity can be seen as a set of attempts in reconciliation of this paradox. The previous notion of the self has been taken from them. The ironically olive or tan-skinned Emirati then enter a liminal state in which the former self must be re-attained. Arnold Van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* outlined three stages of ritual; preliminal, a separation from the world; liminal, the transitional world; and postliminal, an incorporation into a new world (Van Gennep, 1977, pg. 21). Perhaps skin-whitening in Dubai is one of these liminal rites, but not a transitional practice to enter a *new* world, rather, a transitional practice to return to the *old* world, the inherent world that has escaped the natural order of things. The new symbol is a magnification of the old one; men with their bleached gowns, and women with their bleached skin, a self continually remade to mirror the unattainable but ever visible body falsehood. As Bakhtin writes, "The *grotesque* body, as we have often stressed, is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world." (1984, 317). Like with the

dishdash, or Taussig's Indigo textiles, the magic of the commodity form, the racism in the bottle, the bottled identity, causes it to become fetishized, for what it can do, what it can provide for its user, a marketable anti-liminality, and a set of swallowed skins... an absorption of truth made falsehood... a return to the perception of inherent nature through the *Grotesque*.

Chapter 6

The Aristocracy

The Desert Flâneur

I've always had a deep fondness for aquariums. There is something magical about the aquarium, its three-dimensionalism perhaps, coupled with the surrealism of movement that water provides for gliding organisms. The water is clear, like air, but water provides so much more resistance. Life slows down; organisms that do not appear designed to fly appear ably to fly. The colours and sheens of objects in the aquarium are different than they are on land. Their wetness is aesthetically transformative. When scuba-diving in the day time, without a lamp, colours, made visible by the sun's light fade the deeper one dives because the depths slowly absorb colour, first reds, with the longest wavelengths, then oranges and yellows, and finally blue. The aquarium gives us this depth, but without the loss of colour. If time and movement slow down behind panels of glass, they often slow down for me as well, standing and gazing through air. It is a powerful aesthetic. Dubai claims the world's largest aquarium.

Of all the superlatives that pervade the rhetoric of Dubai, the largest man-made port, indoor ski-slope, shopping mall and artificial island, a 'seven-star hotel', the list goes on, the aquarium is the only one that produces, for me, any emotional response or sense of awe. It's not an objective assessment, others would disagree. It's a matter of

personal taste. It resides in the Dubai Mall, the largest shopping mall in the world, and contains thousands of organisms, including many sharks and rays that swim in large circular patterns behind the world's largest acrylic panel. A clear acrylic tunnel has been built directly through the aquarium so that observers can stroll through the water, though I suggest the view from the front is better. At the front of the aquarium is what is referred to as the world's largest candy store. Strolling past the aquarium, at the end of the West-side of the mall, are the world's largest fountains. They spiral and dance to music every twenty minutes or so. The fountains spin around a series of canals that form a moat surrounding the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest tower. Across the moat lies the Souk Al Bahar, with its twisting Arabic architecture. The Souk sits at the end of "Old Town Island", a residential city with a city. The name "Old Town" contained some humour for some of the residents as the neighbourhood is one of the newest in Dubai, though its extravagance and location make it one of the most desirable places to live in Dubai, if one can afford it. The neighbourhood is eclectic, but its transitions are seamless, and it has been given the name "downtown Dubai". It is the epitome of local urban imagination: a profoundly constructed modernity partnered with the Arabesque. It is one of the few places that locals are clearly visible en masse. Like many of Dubai's inhabitants, they go there to shop, but more profoundly, they go there to stroll.

Walter Benjamin, from what I understand, would have very much enjoyed becoming lost among the maze of shopping avenues lined with Arabic lanterns and the often intense smell of *Oud* perfume. In his *Passagen-Werk*, he betrayed his love of the Arcades, even in his critiques of capitalism. "Most hidden aspect of the big cities: this

historical object, the new metropolis, with its uniform streets and endless rows of houses, has given material existence to those architectures of which the ancients dreamed – the labyrinths. Man of the crowd. Impulse that turns the big cities into a labyrinth. Fulfilled through the covered passageways of the arcades. (839). Mythic powers became alive again “The visible theoretical armature of the Passagen-Werk - is a secular, sociopsychological theory of modernity as a dreamworld, and a conception of collective “awakening” from it as synonymous with revolutionary class consciousness...” (Buck Morss, 1989. 253). Benjamin’s dream-scape thrives again in the desert. It is exactly the language that my interlocutors use to describe their ‘downtown’, the realization of their dreams, the power of their leaders who gazed upon the open desert and muddy Dubai Creek, closed their eyes and breathed the sand, pictured the impossible, exhaled and made the unimaginable come into existence. It is exactly as the Sheikhs dreamed it, and as one moves through the Arabesques and the souk, the canals of old town, and the fountains of Lake Khalifa, the aquariums and candy shops, they wander through the dreams of the Sheikhs. People from all over the world can be seen in downtown Dubai, but they are part of the image of the dream-scape, fading in and out, visiting, not being. They cannot collectively see the city as the *Emirati* knows the city, they cannot stroll as the Aristocrat strolls. Downtown Dubai has her own ‘man of the crowd’, the Emirati Flâneur, who moves through air-conditioned vaults in slowly swaying gaits, floating almost too slowly for black and white garments to wave to the rhythms of leisure.

Still, integration remains limited. There are hallways, ironically hidden in the basement, that are unspokenly Emirati only, where abayas, dishdasha, and Arabic

perfumes can be purchased. I have wandered in, only to be subtly ushered out. Strange, too, are luxury grocers only metres away that have sections of their markets with large signs that say 'No Muslims'. Dozens of restaurants and bars line the canals of Old Town and Lake Khalifa where local expatriates and visitors alike crowd terraces below the Burj and along the Mall, while Emirati men and women stroll past, but rarely ever sit. There are locales they frequent instead, the men sitting in groups of three or four in the Armani café in a quiet atrium, while their wives sit opposite the walkway in Fauchon. The women order expensive French cakes and tartes. Shiny and glazed, covered in colour, they look more like glass objects or painted porcelain than they do food, Aristocratic commodities that Roland Barthes might suggest are not really meant to be eaten at all, a type of ornamental cooking "whose consumption can perfectly well be accomplished simply by looking" (1993, page 79). Indeed, the coffees are always emptied, but the plates are often left mostly full. Mo orders cake every weekday morning. Most of it gets thrown away. "Why", I ask him. He answers. "I only want a little bit, and you can't order just a little bit". There is sometimes something anxious in the air as well. Mo has small change, certainly enough to order coffees and cakes, but he always pays in large bills, sometimes he fails to eat any of the food he orders. It is part of his image as the faux-flâneur aristocrat, but when his caffeine is finished, and his strolls reach the borders of the arabesque mini-cosmopolis du jour, his Baudelairian image fails, and he goes back into hiding. He ceases to be characterized by detached immersion, and is instead set apart behind tinted windows: a man who lives behind increasingly thickened walls, whose city that he should own remains property out of possession. He and his friends have told me as much in moments when the urbanity sparks particular reflexivity. "This

city is for everybody but us". The cakes, the coffees, the aquariums and candy stores, the fountains and the artificial souk, the world's tallest tower... they distract from, and yet create anxiety. They are part of the art of forgetting, as Forty and Kuchler (1999) have suggested, where history can be both memorialized, but also forgotten through engagement with the material world. The landscape itself, too, can be both 'forgetful and memorious' (Harrison, 2004), and indeed, 'downtown Dubai' very much has that potential. Towers bear the names of the Sheikhs and yet the name 'old town' can be read as a betrayal. The people in Dubai circle the great monoliths certainly with a sense of awe, but sometimes with longing, and sometimes with fear, and so some of them order more cakes, or re-circle the towers or the air conditioned arcades again, and again, and again. Walter Benjamin suggests that "The path of one shrinks from arriving at his goal will easily take the form of a labyrinth... The same holds for the social class that does not want to know where it is heading. Moreover, nothing prevents it from revelling in this roundabout way and hence substituting the shudder of pleasure for the shudder of death." [J61,9] (338). My informants, as discussed in chapter 3, have a complex and powerful language of fate, but it does not mean that they do not think of the future. They think often of the future, and they think of the past, too. An Ozymandian awareness begins to take root. And why not? From a high enough vantage, one can see the sand dunes, only 300 metres away, that Percy's traveller reports, waiting, biding their time until they can nest again on vast and trunkless legs. For some Emirati, the themes of future-past provoked through landscape transform into action. They fight for sustainability and plead for action to preserve the efforts of their state. For others, quite the opposite. An inaction sets in, a protectionist, isolationist regime begins. It is with

this latter group that this chapter focuses: The *Muatan* aristocracy. They find that not only the desert encroaches on their heels, but much of the world comes now to crowd their spaces. I mentioned in Chapter 1 Beltzalls (1964) critique on American WASP aristocracy. I borrow his charting of decline here.

“When, in any society, there is an upper class which protects its privileges and prestige but does not continue 1. To contribute leadership or 2. To assimilate new elite members, primarily because of their racial or ethnic origins, I shall refer to the process of caste. If an upper class degenerates unto a caste, moreover, the traditional authority of an establishment is in grave danger of disintegrating, while society becomes a field for careerists seeking success and affluence. The caste process is the very antithesis of the aristocratic process and inevitably, in the long run if not immediately, leads to the decline of *authority* and a crisis in leadership”
(8)

In some ways, exclusionist practices have succeeded, in other ways, they have ironically failed, and the *muatan* identity is at stake.

Case Study: No One Else in the World...

“There is not anyone else in the world who could have done this thing. No other rulers could dare to do this”, Ali tells me of the World Islands in Dubai. I will give context to this statement. Ali works for Nakheel, one of Dubai’s most important

development companies. He sits in an air-conditioned office in the middle of the desert, just off the shore past Jebel Ali Port. The offices do not look like much from the outside. They are built from large portable rectangular cubes, and one could easily drive past without noticing. Indeed, the complex was never meant to be seen except by those who work within it. There are no facilities to wash the façade, and so the complex is covered with a layer of sand, providing it with an unintentional but natural camouflage. However, the aesthetics are much less grim inside the portable offices. They house the development team for a project called Waterfront, and some of the structures have been formed into stylish lobbies. There is a car park in front of the complex where I always have to park my jeep. To help protect the cars from the sun and sand, the car park is completely covered in dense netting that provides excellent shade. The netting droops over each car due to the weight of collected sand. However, on rare occasions when it does rain, the rain water hits the sand on top of the canopy, and the mix of water and sand drip through the mesh covering all the vehicles in a thick layer of sludge.

Waterfront was a project to create the largest man-made development on the planet. Giant billboards lined the motorway that feeds into the site. They proudly showed visions of futuristic skyscrapers and read in bold that Dubai's Waterfront would be "Larger than the island of Manhattan!". It was a plan to transform the desert into a series of urban islands and canals in the form of a massive crescent moon. I was told that the design represents Dubai's destiny. The sentiment echoes the paradoxical symbolism of the moon on the mosque, which I have presented in earlier discussions on 'Islamic

fatalism’ in Chapter 3. On this occasion, when I spoke to Ali, the offices were nearly empty. It was not always like that. When I first started coming to the desert offices, the space was rather crowded. The employees were mostly white expatriates and a mix of Arab nationals. In January of 2009, the effects of Dubai’s financial crisis became evident. Nakheel and all the other companies that shared space in the Waterfront development offices began their layoffs. The office space seemed filled with an air of panic that often gave way to intense emotional release. The majority of employees were Western expatriates who worked in development: Engineers, IT, Lawyers, Architects, and Human resource managers.



Figure 9: Promotional Master Plan of the Dubai Coast Line provided by Dubaiworld. <http://www.dubaiworld.com.au/downloads.aspx>
The ‘Waterfront’ development was to be the large crescent engulfing palm Jebel Ali.

Over the course of a few months, from January to April, all of these employees were made redundant. A few of them were contract workers who had always expected their time in the desert to be short. The rest were permanent employees and residents of Dubai. Redundancy at work, especially in an economic environment where finding work is difficult, is naturally stressful. However, becoming redundant is particularly harrowing in Dubai for many expatriates. Employees must be sponsored by their companies for their residency. When an employee is made redundant, their passports are taken, their visas are taken away, and their debts must be settled. Expatriates can apply for a new job and a new residency visa, but without employment, they must leave the Emirates within a short period. The problem of debt places many people in a troublesome, and for some, an ethically nebulous position. Taking out loans is often necessity in the Emirates. Expatriates are lured to the country by high-paying jobs, and tax free salaries. They are required, however, to pay a full year's rent in advance as a general policy, and to purchase a car with cash. New immigrants come to Dubai and are forced into a culture of debt as loans are the only way to pay for housing and transport. These loans are manageable for most people as long as they are employed. Problems arise during redundancy. In Dubai, it is, on many levels, illegal to be in debt. The inability to pay back even small loans is punishable with prison until the individual, or his family, can repay the loan. I am told that stain and sin of debt is embedded in Sharia law.⁴¹ This is opposed to many current Western systems in which private debt can result in repossession practices that lay outside governmental and judicial interference, but one

⁴¹ I have written more on the notion of debt as a form of dirt or filth in a chapter called Giving to Give and Giving to Receive: The construction of Charity in Dubai. Publishing pending from Gerlach Press as of May 2013

does not go to prison for bouncing a check. During the recent global financial turmoil, the Emirates' treatments of debtors led to new expatriate anxieties. Many of the residents I knew well in Dubai had cash stashed secretly in their house so that they could flee quickly in the event of unexpected unemployment. It became a common practice to hide around 20,000 Dirham (about £3,000), if not more, in a drawer somewhere so that one could purchase plane tickets in cash in the short period between losing a job and having one's passport taken.

It is partly with this in mind that people began to panic at Waterfront. Mired in Dubai debt, and without any real prospect of alternative employment in Dubai's development industry, recently redundant expats often faced a difficult decision. Even without the problem of debt, one's residency is cancelled immediately without employment. For those who have built their lives in the country, forced expulsion can be very traumatic. Redundancies were given in a state of panic, and so they were sudden and erratic. For three months I would listen to people as they suddenly found out they lost their job. A few were prepared, and even somewhat relieved, though most were rather shaken. The first two months were depressing. Everyday that I was at Waterfront, at least one individual would sit in the lobby, or the expat café that was built into the complex, and sob uncontrollably, unsure of how to handle their affairs. I offered to buy them some tea and cake to try and relax, and listen to their anxiety. This was often the last time I would see some of these faces that I was accustomed to seeing every week. Within 48 hours, many of them had left the country. The Waterfront site became a condensation of depression and anxiety. Many workers started taking lunches at odd

times of the day, early in the morning, or nearly at the end of work hours, simply because they “don’t want to have to say hello to anybody. Every conversation you have here is awkward.”

A few British contract employees whom I would see regularly were less stressed than some of their ‘permanent’ colleagues. They were lawyers for a large international bank that was working with Nakheel. Their contracts were set to finish in April that year, and so they had always known when their time was up. Because of this, they outlasted most of their expatriate colleagues, and by the end of March, they were some of the only expatriates left working for the company at Waterfront. I caught up with them before they left while they let off steam by smoking cigarettes behind some piles of sand about a minute walk from the back entrance. One of them had lost patience with his Emirati co-workers and went off on a rant. “This place died months ago, these people haven’t worked in weeks, the company is bankrupt, and they talk as if this project is the greatest thing that anyone has ever done on Earth”. They were commenting on a general trend in local discourse; a refusal to admit that anything has gone wrong. During the financial crisis, while Western media was filled with the failings of companies and banks, Dubai’s media rarely mentioned money. Whilst people in Dubai’s financial institutions claimed the country was bankrupt, local news insisted that Dubai’s economy was set to see unprecedented growth. Some months later, when Dubai World and Nakheel announced that the country could not pay back their investors, there was a sense of shock in the

community.⁴² When I would first ask locals about the debt, many would still insist it did not exist. A sentiment quickly spread around the community that Western media outlets had invented the story because Western economies were jealous of Dubai's greatness in the face of global economic adversity. Local media outlets were quiet on the issue, but the truth of Dubai World's debt was soon undeniable. Local position on the issue changed from the idea that Western media propagated lies about the country, and shifted to the idea that Dubai's inability to pay debt is somehow different than defaults in other countries, and that Westerners simply do not understand the country. This idea was quickly reinforced by public statements from the Sheikh who insisted Dubai was strong and that the world 'lacks understanding'.⁴³

At Waterfront, of course, Nakheel's problems were much more evident. For workers at the site, the name had become a proper noun for a doomed superlative. The lawyers whom I had befriended left in disgust. They, like so many other expats and observers, angrily washed their hands of the sand and labelled their Emirati co-workers as being in denial. I left them and immediately sat down with Ali and his friend, both employees of Nakheel. It is in this context that they began to wax lyrical about Nakheel's World Islands. "There is not anyone else in the world who could have done this thing. No other rulers could dare to do this", Ali says of Sheikh Mo. "And this project we are doing is bigger than Manhattan, it is incredible."

⁴² For some initial international reports, see Teather (2009), Surk (2009), and Spencer (2009)

⁴³ <http://gulfnews.com/business/general/world-lacks-understanding-of-dubai-world-debt-crisis-mohammad-1.542934>

The appearance of denial, and the responsibilities of the Muatan

Ali's companion got up to leave. The café stocked a bunch of magazines that got updated every month or so. However, there were not that many, and by the middle of the month, it was likely we had read most of them, and so we sat there, silently reading magazines we had already read.

“Right, we should probably get to work”, I said after some time, and started to get up.

He looked in a mild panic, “Actually, I think I could use some coffee”, Ali said seriously.

He gave me some money, but we had been drinking coffee for hours already, and my hands were shaking, so I got Ali a fresh Americano and grabbed myself a cup of water and some broken gingerbread men. Ali began to babble about movies, and how he liked Keira Knightly. The British consultants who had been in the café all day came back inside from their cigarettes out on the sandlot. As they passed us, Ali waved and told them to sit down. One of them replied “No, I ought to get back to the desk, thanks though”. His partner gave him a funny look and there was apparently a change of heart. “Actually, I could use a coffee break”. The two of them went and bought fresh espressos and sat down with us, happy to make fun of Ali's love for Keira Knightly. After a half hour or so, Ali got up and bought another Americano, and brought it back to the table.

He had not, however, finished the one he had, and he moved it to another table with a good deal of half drunk drinks piled on top of it. I suspect Ali had decided his drink had gotten too cold, and so he needed a fresh one. Still, I could not help but laugh. I recall Lewis Carroll's Mad Hatter who was on bad terms with time (definitely a man, not a *thing*, as the mad hatter reminds us), and was forced to suffer through endless tea times. After singing 'out of time' in front of the Queen of Hearts, she then decreed his death. Time (in solidarity with the Hatter, or as punishment?) had refused to allow the clocks to proceed past tea, and so the hatter sits at a table all day that slowly becomes overwhelmed by increasing numbers of pointless tea sets.

This became a common occurrence. It was clear to me that the employees who remained at Waterfront, both Emirati and expatriate workers, would, for whatever reason, avoid their office at all costs. The claims of the British critics, that their Emirati co-workers *truly* believe that everything is fine, were bogus. My experiences in these offices suggest quite the opposite. As I have mentioned previously (in Chapter 4), my Emirati interlocutors at Waterfront often were unaware of their job description, or title (in English anyway). The process of government sponsored programmes that forcibly place Emirati nationals in 'private' company employment have created a small workplace culture in which many employees feel their primary role is to be Muatan. This unofficial job description seems to often preempt any official job description. On several occasions I became involved in small arguments trying to understand peoples' roles in a company, as I needed help myself. On one occasion, I made the mistake of referring to a woman at

reception at Waterfront as a secretary, or more specifically, I asked if she was the secretary, as I needed someone to contact security.

She seemed offended. I later asked what she did for the company, and she replied “I work here”.

Me: “Oh, ok, what department do you work in?”

Secretary: “I work here, in this building”.

Me: “Oh right, what type of work do you do here?”.

Secretary: “I am an employee. Here. At this building.” She shouted at me.

I have had similar conversations in local government buildings... drivers' licence centres, immigration offices, work visa centres, government hospitals, and etc... looking for the right person to talk to get to the right desk, the right cue, or the right paper work. There is always the problem of language (this conversation was in English). However, aside from language, there is a sentiment among some workers that they are hired simply to represent Emiratis, to be a local presence in a multicultural office. Their title and job description simply did not matter all that much as long as they acted like nationals. They often had small tasks to do, paperwork to fill out, and some did appear to take their positions very seriously. I suggest, however, that a primary purpose of their presence

was to help solidify aristocratic ownership of offices and projects, and to maintain the rhetoric and image of the *muatan*. In a sense, it was their employment to continually reiterate the incredibleness, the immensity, and the uniqueness of the country's plans. They became spokespeople for the superlatives that dominate the discourse of Dubai.

On Superlatives and identity

The stated use of superlatives and exaggerated speech by Arabic speakers is an old subject. Both Western and Arab commenters have spoken on the habits of using exaggerations in everyday life, part of what Raphael Patai, referencing Sapir (year) has called 'under the spell of language' (2002, pp 52-62). Patai sums up his argument stating

“In the course of learning to speak Arabic, Arab children acquire not only the Arabic vocabulary and grammar, but also style, including the specific stylistic devices known as *mubaalagha* (exaggeration) and *tawkid* (overassertion). Recourse to *mubaalagha* and *tawkid* soon becomes, and remains throughout life, as natural to an Arab as his use of vocabulary and grammar. This means that, when the average Arab uses exaggeration and overemphasis, he actually is either not at all, or only barely aware of employing these specific stylistic devices. In his mind, as well as in the mind of his Arab interlocutors, exaggeration and overemphasis register as simple statements.” (page 62)

Shauby (1951) is particularly antagonistic towards the habits of Arabic speech, suggesting that there is a profound transformative reaction towards Arabic style that stifles thought. Patai, while not explicitly agreeing, makes a similar claim on substituting words for action (page 67). I leave the refutation of this cognitive stunting to experts on language and cognition (see Justice, 1987, pp44-45, for an excellent rebuttal). I can only speak from ethnography, and I dare not write on “the Arab” as Patai essentializes. I can, however, contest the claim that Arabic speakers in Dubai are “barely aware” of exaggerations in Arabic speech. It is, in my interactions with Arabic speakers, a common acknowledgement, of which my informants, both Emirati and other Arab nationals, are proud. They joke about it with me often. In formal speech, however, my informants agree that exaggerations (as heard from an English speaker) are registered as simple statements. That is because, in formal Arabic, they *are* simple statements. The use of ‘exaggerations’, in my experience, are not transformative to the local ‘self’. When my informants translate everyday Arabic into English, the exaggerations that English speakers might translate disappear. In higher, grander forms of Arabic speech and rhetoric (I refer to political speeches and statements from officials to the public, or religious speeches translated from mosques or religious authorities), the *tawkid* does translate into English. However, exaggerations and over assertions in these speeches are not utilized any more, or less, than in political or religious speech I have heard anywhere else.⁴⁴ I suggest that these superlatives are not sub-consciously embedded in the ‘Arab

⁴⁴ Lake Superior State University publishes an infamous annual list of words that voters suggest should be banned from English use. The list is meant to be tongue in cheek, pointing out exaggerations, mis-used and over-used words, and cliché phrases that pervade the media and public English rhetoric during that year. See <http://www.lssu.edu/banished/>

Mind' at all, but are, rather, politically minded, conscious acts simply performed in Arabic style.

The ownership of the superlative does take on a different meaning, however, in the context of Dubai. As a political tool, the superlative seems to me to mirror to construction of national identity, while remaining indifferent towards personal identity. I present some thoughts from various local employees with Nakheel and Waterfront.

“In a thousand, thousand years, people will look at Dubai from space and remember our rulers”

“In the entire history of mankind, no-one has ever had dreams as big as this”

“Now everybody knows that Dubai is the centre of the world. It is the gift of Allah who rewards our people and our leaders for being a model to the world”

Some of my younger Emirati informants explain. “Dubai’s status in the world is dependant on being bigger and better than everyone else. That is why locals talk this way. Its just what we do, and its expected of us.”

And another... “what is the point in building the world’s largest whatever if you don’t say anything about it. Its part of the image of Dubai, you know, glamorous and everything is big and flashy.”

Of course, the biggest ‘whatevers’ to which my friends refer are more than exclamatory remarks. Some of them are real, tangible buildings, constructs, or landscapes, and their perceived successes have fuelled speech and action. Without the rhetoric, the world’s largest aquarium is just a fish-tank, the world’s largest fountains are, well, just fountains. The superlative is in the presentation, but as Dubai develops, and especially in light of the financial turmoil I witnessed in the nearly four years I lived in the city, the superlatives become increasingly detached from reality. The DubaiLand visitor centre is a prime example of this superlative in action. DubaiLand was intended to be a series of theme parks in the desert. The development was to be, as it was referred by many, the ‘world’s greatest playground’. Among the many centres joining DubaiLand were a Six Flags theme park, a Marvel superheroes theme park, a Tiger Woods theme park, and a large Arabian Nights themed development. It was developed by Tatweer, a subsidiary of Dubai Holdings (owned by Sheikh Mohammed). The project was announced in 2003, though it was put ‘on hold’ in 2008, and has not resumed as of writing. Tatweer became a victim of the financial crisis, and was dissolved in 2010.

The marketing of Dubai Land is interesting. For years, massive billboards decorated the highways advertising attractions that would never exist such as Marvel and Universal Studios. A Dubai Land visitor centre was constructed in the desert for anyone to visit, but it was marketed to investors and other businessmen. As one walked into the centre, two live large tigers sweltered in the heat behind thick glass to greet visitors as they entered. Staff proudly told me that they were the Sheikh’s personal tigers. There

were mini-booths and rooms in the centre advertising and promoting the various pieces of DubaiLand. Participants could use a small putting lawn alongside a life-size cardboard of Tiger Woods, or take their picture in a fake Formula One vehicle. The most prominent feature of the centre, however, was a scale model of the desert transformed into a surreal fantasy landscape. The model covered some thirty metres of floor space and included indecipherable themes of constructs that melded into one another, sometimes buffered by a golf course or a series of lakes. Some of my favourites of these constructs was a 20 story tall UFO that had apparently crash landed into an erupting volcano, and a pair of twin mountains topped with massive spires made of glowing orange crystal. Visitors would crowd around taking pictures, impressed by the sheer immensity and vision of it all. The men in charge, however, tell their own story of DubaiLand. “No, we made all of it up to look cool. No-one even told us what the plan was, just make something that looks awesome... there didn't have to be themes or anything, it was one of the most ridiculous things we've ever had to do. We still have absolutely no idea what it is we've made”.

The idea was not to present a landscape plan, or an idea of what DubaiLand might, or even could look like. Rather, the visitor centre at DubaiLand simply presented a superlative that existed outside the developers expectations. As one manager of DubaiLand explained “I never understood that visitor centre to be for investors, even though it seemed to be aimed at investors. ...The investors would know better, and they would know exactly what they were investing in. Business never happens in a business centre anyway, it happens in a hotel room. I reckon it was for tourists, and for other

Emiratis, so that they could think ‘wow, look how amazing Dubai is!’. In the public development offices, *muatan* employees will talk about these images and landscapes as future realizations of aspirations of genius. And why shouldn’t they? It has happened before. The DubaiLand centre is in the middle of the desert, surrounded by vistas of flat, rocky emptiness to the north, south, and east, and Al Barsha almost visible towards the West on a clear day, the indoor ski slopes of the Mall of the Emirates faintly poking through the haze. The emptiness adds to the image, the ability to make something for nothing. Photographic montages of various neighbourhoods displaying ‘before and after’ shots of landscapes are popular in Dubai for just this reason.

These displays are, in a way, very culturally Emirati. They are not, however, transformative on their own, rather they are symptomatic of *muatan* expression. It is, as I try to explain the previous chapter, the Dishdash that is transformative, or the position of the *muatan* at the office. One individual is responsible for acting out many different, often opposing roles in society. The same individuals who might wax lyrical on the dreams of the sheikhs or the coastlines of Dubai will state just the opposite off the aristocratic stage. I return to Ali at Waterfront. His colleagues have left and he is no longer wearing national dress. Aside from a Filipina cashier at a convenient store, and a Sri Lankan barista at the café, we are alone.

I ask him, “where is everybody?”

Ali laughs: “I think everyone has lost their job”

Me: “Well not everybody, there’s a few people”

Ali: “Yes but what’s the point of coming to work?”

Me: “So what do you think is going to happen to [Waterfront]. What are you still working on?”

Ali throws his hands into the air and shrugs and smiles: “We are waiting for Abu Dhabi... Abu Dhabi is going to pay for everything, that’s what the bosses are saying. They are creating a new bank company to do it all and it is taking a long time I think.”

Me: “What are you going to do?”

Ali: “I probably am going to be like everyone else! I only came to work today because I thought they were going to tell me that I don’t have a job. It is too stressful everyday. I thought I would just get it over with finally, and then I will go on vacation I think. But no one is here so maybe I came here for no reason. Ha!”

Ali felt that it was his responsibility as an employee, and as an Emirati national to confirm, in many contexts, that the company’s plans were solid, that money was flowing,

that the coastline was going to be transformed beyond one's dreams, that Dubai was to be an international urban model, and that this was all happening tomorrow. If I did not know better, I would have understood from Ali that the sheikhs have already succeeded in building Waterfront. Ali speaks of the failed project in the same way he speaks of the underdeveloped World Archipelago: "There is not anyone else in the world who could have done this thing. No other rulers could dare to do this." However, Ali and his friends are neither ignorant nor delusional, as their expat colleagues claim. Ali and his compatriots do not sit in a café all day because they 'believe' everything in the office is fine. They do it because they are trying to avoid seeing their bosses, afraid that they might lose their jobs, and they are avoiding their other colleagues, too, tired of keeping up appearances, and tired of seeing their colleagues disappearing. There is an intense anxiety as well. "All of us are very anxious", Ali claims, "because we don't know what to do if we don't have this job". Ali will likely find another position quickly. He is uncommon among his colleagues in that he has a skill as an engineer, at least on paper. Many of his colleagues, especially those whose job title was illusive, do not have marketable skill sets. It may be some time before they attempt to find a new job. Fatima, from Health Care City, explains, "for them [muatan], it is especially hard. They are used to the government paying for things and giving them jobs. But if there are no jobs, what can they do? And the government does not have as much money to give away! This is why I try to say how important education is for us, especially now, and especially for women." Fatima, who tries to discourage plastic surgeries and skin whitening practices among women, is especially worried about the fate of young Emirati women. "I think more and more calling yourself a national is not enough, and women cannot rely on men

to marry and give them everything. The men don't have anything! and the ones that do want different things out of relationship now. These *muatan* are going to disappear. It is so important for women to go to university”.

Fatima envisions a large cohort of individuals who will find themselves falling between the cracks in a city that slowly develops into a sustainable economy. She is not alone. Many in the Emirati community preach the same message, though not all critics of the *muatan* are as harsh as Fatima, though most seem concerned with the lack of marketable skill sets. As one Emirati critic explains,

“People always call themselves nationals, and people will always call themselves nationals because that is about being proud of where you come from, but in the future, it will mean different things. Now when you say you are a national it means a certain thing, that we have privileges and that. I think soon, you will have to work more and live more on the ground. Now already, I think, it is like this, but not everyone knows it yet. Already, they can't build these things they say, and they will have to stop...”

He refers to the arrest of automatic aristocracy based on national identity alone, but he alludes to something else as well... the death of the Dubai superlative. “People talk like this, and they think it will always be like this, but already it is a problem, and people will have to stop talking like this.” What the future holds for the economy, and for local wealth, is speculative. While many claim that Dubai's rapid growth is over, there are

equal measures who claim that the state is healthier than ever. It may be that construction on these projects suddenly picks up again. I make no definitive projections. I only aim to show how the fear of the death of a social class affects those within that circle of relations, and how this ricochets through culture. In turn, the actions that many people take as a response to many threats have the ability to transform the future of *muatan* identity.

Global Aristocracies

The Muatan aristocracy, like all social-cultural movements, is made specific through unique historical trajectories, local resources and landscapes, political dynamics and cultural heritage. The class structures of the Emirates can only be truly understood through the context of the people who participate in those structures. Still, some parallels can be made through a comparative look at aristocratic constructs elsewhere. The stability of class hierarchies has been closely examined in other parts of the Arab world. Specifically, Hammoudi (1997) examines Moroccan authoritarianism as a model for the type of power relationships that pervade the Arab world. He suggests that male authoritarianism is supported through Islamic ideology that utilizes a strongly defined binary system of pure authority and complete submission. Hammoudi does not see globalization, and colonial preconditions of Moroccan globalization, as culturally transformative movements. Rather, he contends that a master-slave paradigm is so embedded in Moroccan life that Morocco's global political and social relations, first with Europe, and then with the rest of the world, have only reinforced the paradigm as all

emerging relationships are only understood through the lens of embedded Islamic authoritarian structures.

Michael Gilsenan explores this dialectic in his 'Lords of the Lebanese Marches' (1996). Gilsenan's research explores violence narratives in a Sunni town in Lebanon. However, underpinning these narratives is the construction and decline of a type of Lebanese aristocracy. Gilsenan's 'lords' (or beys, locally) are shadows of the feudal-like system of society that has governed Lebanon for centuries. Essentially landlords, these families were elitist groups who represented the various components of multi-culturalism (Gilsenan describes no less than seventeen separate ethnic groups) that modern Lebanon has evolved. These lords were always vying for power, appearing feudal, but paradoxically providing stable competition to maintain a relatively sustainable diverse society. The lords created a type of hierarchy that was evidenced not only through wealth and violence, but through landscape and cosmology. Landlords lived on top of hills, creating a visible hierarchy in their social cosmos. Gilsenan witnesses these men in the midst of their long decline. Their aristocratic status depended on their fiefdoms remaining peripheral. Local systems of honour and manliness paradoxically created authority but assisted in providing the conditions of unsustainability; increasing cosmopolitanism combined with mismanaged dwindling resources aggravated the conflict between the lords and the people who supported them. The violence between these groups was rampant in the past, but carefully balanced. Gilsenan finds this balance to be broken, and many beys are now shades of their ancestors. Gilsenan finds humour and irony in the narratives he collects, but they seem to betray a local romanticisation of

the past. Gilson conducted his research in the seventies, and decades later, this violence still defines the Lebanese peripheries.

Hammoudi partially focuses on Islamic value and mysticism as governing local behaviours that support Moroccan aristocratic constructs, while Gilson presents a more nuanced explanation through local narratives. In both cases, colonizing forces are reframed through class tradition that had long existed (see also Mitchell (1991) for similar studies in Egypt). However, their positions in North Africa and along the Mediterranean add historical complexity to these local power relations, and one might question the definition of 'colonialism' in this region. Further south of the Sahara, colonial effects on aristocratic structure are arguably more lucid.

Rene Lemarchand (1977 and 1996) examines aristocratic movements in Rwanda and Burundi, focusing on the role that missionaries and colonizers played in orchestrating political violence that has lasted over a century (see also Newbury 1988). The Tutsi, Lamarchand explains, were an 'elite' class of indigenous people in Rwanda defined by their possession of land and animals over other groups, namely local Hutu groups, though defining economic features of the elite were often vague. Missionaries began converting both groups in the late 19th century. The Tutsi aristocracy was originally supported by new missionaries who reorganized the terms of engagement between the Tutsi elite and local peasant classes.

“No longer was birth their sole justification for claiming ascendancy over the peasant masses; they could also invoke their superior education and technical competence to strengthen their supremacist claims. By providing them with Western skills and knowledge, with the literary media necessary for the elaboration of their own traditional culture, and, above all, by formally acknowledging their innate superiority, the Christian missionaries gave the Tutsi aristocracy the means and opportunities to reinforce their sense of group identity and cultural superiority.” (Lamachand 1977, page 76).

Political and social stabilization partly informed through foreign missionaries were reinforced during German and Belgian colonization as only Tutsi were allowed to share in local government. However, the Tutsi, empowered by colonial forces began to assert more authority with foreign government, and resisted the church. Belgium rule began to favour the Hutu and much of the Tutsi aristocracy fled to exile in neighbouring countries after the second world war. Intense resentment continued after many central and East Africa nations gained independence, and the relationship between the aristocracy and the Hutu was marked by intense violence from both sides. The conflict eventually led to the Rwandan genocide in the mid-nineties which culminated in the deaths of over half a million Tutsi (see Lemarchand 1996). These tensions continue into the 21st century, it has been argued, due to “chosen amnesia” by local masses that recall in detail the horrors of genocide but refuse to remember the decades of class struggles that led to the violence (Buckley-Zistel 2006, pp. 146-147). Similar patterns, exist in the construction and part-decline of Kandyan rural aristocracy in Sri Lanka, the radala caste,

who existed under the Kandyan kings, but were utilized and reconstructed by British colonial rulers who borrowed Sinhalese class systems to stabilize local imperialism regimes. The Radalas have largely lost overt political authority due to social reform, but they still live in the shadow of Sri Lankan Buddhist caste authority as rural elite. The ‘elite’ individual, it is argued, has become inert in Sri Lanka, but the image of the elite was nonetheless utilized to fuel local violence (Spencer 2002).

Marshall Sahlins has warned against the seemingly automatic trend for Western audiences to assume a determinism in the effects of colonisation on indigenous people. In analysing historical accounts of Hawaiian aristocratic gluttony after the introduction of Western culture, he writes

“Modern scholars are sometimes too ready to understand the like as normal economic behaviour: the transparent “effect” of exposure to the temptations of the capitalist market economy, if not also the natural tendency of the human species when freed from constraints of a traditional “subsistence” economy. Yet reference to the addictive character of market commodities – let alone to human nature – will never be a sufficient explanation of the economic habits acquired by the Hawaiian aristocracy...” (Sahlins 1990, page 27)

Rather, Sahlins suggests that the native Hawaiian aristocratic downfall was unique even among the Pacific Islands. He demonstrates how the seeds for unsustainable class behaviour were planted and then enacted by local people, not as a result of colonialism,

but in partnership with it, and in fact, Hawaiian materialism “succeeded in amplifying the ‘impact’ of the World System” (ibid 55). The aristocratic class, the *ali’i*, also exploited their chief valuable commodity, sandalwood, which they traded with merchants both east and west in the Pacific. This exploitation may have some parallels to Arabian Gulf concerns over oil, which I will explore later in the chapter. After an initial period of relative economic and political stability under king Kamehameha, the leader of the newly unified Hawaiian state, the *ali’i* too readily engaged in wanton consumption. Local Sandalwood forests were depleted after a decade, and the market collapsed due to competition from India and elsewhere in the Pacific. Local food supplies were also strained as the elite class had sent all their labour to sandalwood production. Population declined, and the masses collected massive debt which could not be repaid (ibid, pp 35, 54-55). This led to the total collapse of Hawaiian culture, and the eventual supplanting of all local government by American colonial forces who called themselves the genuine aristocracy, declaring that foreign rule was the best thing for the country and people (see The New York Times, 1894). Materialism among the *ali’i* was also a form of competition among the aristocrats, and this conflict was itself a re-enactment of cosmological conflict of family and class within Hawaiian mythology; myth, argues Sahlins, proved to be too potent.

Models of mythology were also influential in feudal Japan in constructing aristocratic claims, though in very different ways. Wakabayashi (1991) shows how class can exist independent of power. He traces the fall of the shogunate aristocracy, essentially warlords and military rulers, and the rise of the new aristocracy after Japan’s

imperial Meiji restoration. Through increased trade and relations with Western powers, imperial Japan became concerned that Japanese society would be eclipsed because of inferior technology and rule. A number of influential men then worked to restore the absolute sovereignty of the emperor, creating a new class based on a system of relations to the emperor. This new class of aristocrats, the *kazoku*, was modelled after English peerage, with similar titles and ranks (Lebra 1993). Peasants and working class Japanese did not have connection to the emperor, who was too removed from public knowledge, but they did know of the titles and ranks that the emperor bestowed (Wakabayashi 1991, page 50). The ritualized titles solidified the authority of the aristocrats through 'hierarchies of divinity'. This is perhaps one reason why the shoguns failed to maintain power. The shoguns had both power and wealth, but it was not enough to maintain control in modernizing Japan. For the Japanese public, lineage was more important than materialism and military power. Lineage appealed to the mythology of divinity, and perhaps more importantly, to ideals of racial purity (ibid 55). The *kazoku* was dissolved in 1947, but the cultural conditions that supported the aristocracy are still pervasive in Japan, and the *kazoku* are still perceived as nobility.

The Japanese Meiji restoration was meant to mirror the English peerage system which Japanese scholars considered a source of the success of British imperialism. However, at the same time that the *kazoku* were solidifying their power over the peasant classes, the British aristocracy found itself in a crisis. Large land ownership became expensive and unsustainable as Britain found itself in an agricultural depression (Perren 1995). Growing international competition lowered aristocratic income and peers were

pressured into selling off parts of their estates (Cannadine 1999). The House of Lords' continued resistance to political change, especially increased land taxes, led to a significant loss of political power following the Parliament act of 1911, which denied the Lords' rights to veto legislation (Ensor 1952, pp. 420-423). Parliamentary influence continued to decrease as Commons seats became more standardized, disallowing pocket patronage in government, and political parties began to separate themselves from the English peerage (Cannadine 1999). Finally, the economic hardships of two world wars proved disastrous for the conservative aristocratic system, and those who survived re-identified themselves not as political or power authorities, but as relics of Britain. Still, as in the case of the *kazoku*, and to a lesser degree the *radala*, British aristocratic status still exists in more subtle forms, though the nature of social engagement has been radically changed.

The culture of racial superiority is a recurring theme in global aristocratic movements. For Japan, it partly fuelled the restoration of imperialism, and the eventual aligning with the Axis powers in the second world war. For the Tutsi, it was developed as evidence for association with Christian and European colonizers, who viewed Africans as children, but supported the Tutsi aristocracy as racially closer to the whites, and therefore more fit to govern. In the United States, it supported the subtle claims of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant aristocracy that existed in the face of a democratic and competitive society without designated peerage (Baltzell 1964), whose Gatsby-era showmanship of materialism without title in pre-depression America might rival the indulgences of the Hawaiian elite that shocked Pacific travellers in the mid 19th century.

ASs Wakabayashi argues for modern Japan, these conditions still pervade the American landscape. As I have argued for the elite class of the Emirates, racial superiority is in the forefront of kinship constructs for the Muatan, though the notion of what a particular group believes constitutes ‘superior’ blood is often dynamic. New ideals for body aesthetics influenced by the West clash with emergent knowledge of the Arab genome. The issue is made further complex by the interrelations between economy, politics and the body, and there are implications for trends in kinship practice in the country.

Aristocratic kinship and Consanguinity

One domain in which the threats of local identity have surfaced markedly is in the construction of the family. Recall again the ownership of the Kholasat Al Qaid, the ‘official’ citizenship recognition from the state and clan. The Kholasat Al Qaid, the ‘family book’ (see chapter 4) can be read as both a cause and casualty of local anxieties in the sense that its presence both encourages social protectionism, but is perpetuated as a result of local protectionist policy. Still, it is symptomatic of a much larger debate on the indigenous construction of kinship and kinship practice. Kinship in the Gulf, as I have alluded to in previous chapters, is massively complex. I do not have the space to fully explore it in this thesis. However, I highlight trends in consanguinity in the region as they are partly informed by novel genetic discourse, and of course of local economy, both political and financial (if one is to isolate the two). Consanguinity also speaks to local anxiety as one’s place within kinship, in finance, and in the world at large can always be at threat. There are understandably many factors that influence consanguineous

behaviour in the UAE, and census data in the Emirates is notoriously difficult to ascertain. Studies indicate that slightly over half of Emirati marriages are consanguineous (Bener et. Al). However, as the local population increases, and as the Emirati population has more access to education and health services, the rates of consanguinity have increased. Contrary to patterns in many other parts of the world, in the span of one generation, research indicates that rates of consanguineous relations have risen another 10%, and the preferred marriage is between first cousins (Al Gazali et a. 1997). Studies in the Emirates are beginning to examine the effects of the trends in marriage practice on health patterns (Ghazi, 2009; Abdulrazzaq et al, 1997; Al Gazali, 1997). “It is not like it is in other places; everyone here (Emiratis), it used to be that there were not many of us.” Mo tells me. “Everyone knew each other here and also in other towns here, and still it is like that”. Mo is hinting that, with small populations, and also bickering local tribes, that families had no choice but to marry within kinship circles. It is a simple depiction, and it may help explain marriage practices in the past. However, some of the directors of research for the local health authorities are now trying to understand why consanguineous rates are, as Al Gazali (1997) points out, increasing. The Emirati population is now much larger, social movement is much easier, and relationships between tribal leaders are excellent. As Mo’s limiting factors rapidly decrease, why does kinship isolation increase? Mo suggests that family bonds are tight, and more important for Arab people than for people from the West. But in his musings he also invokes genetic knowledge as a rationalization of behaviour. “Now we know that also we have Arab genetics, and so if course it healthier for us to have these things”. Many geneticists would take issue with Mo’s statement, encouraging genetic diversity over homogeneity as a factor of well-

being. However, 'health', as it is understood, is relative, and in any case, for Mo, speaking to me in English, is a rather limiting word. What he means is that it is 'healthy' and 'good' to be Arab, and if protecting genetics helps one 'be Arab', then one has a moral responsibility to consider the biologically arabesque body.

As discussed in previous chapters, the issue is highly complex. There is no static nor stable understanding of the gene in local discourse. Many of the same men who argue for genetic isolationism to protect Arab biology also schedule surgeries for their wives or girlfriends to improve their 'Arab nose'. Some men suggest that one should take an Emirati wife to keep blood lines pure. Others are now taking foreign wives, suggesting that being Emirati is genetic, and is passed on by the father. The mother only contributes to superficial traits. Some imagine the Arab genome to be racial, others seem to specify that genes also speak to nationality, not just race. Still, there is a prominent thought in the region that genetics are important enough to protect through marriage. However, while this helps explain why many constructions of misogyny are unallowed in the region, it does not explain why first-cousin marriages are increasing. I suggest that the trend is partly informed by novel aristocratic anxiety. Local consanguineous relationships become attractive for some of the same reasons that locals over-tint their car windows, it hides them and isolates them from the larger society. First cousin marriages can be seen as a product of local isolationism from other Muslim groups and Arab groups (see section on hierarchical social circles from Chapter 4), but also as a form of isolationism within their own society. A 'true' *muatan*, or a 'true' Dubaian, can easily trace their unique lineages through the Bani Yas and Al Falasi tribal system. Status in the

tribe is closely associated with property, landscape, the urban environment and a constructed authenticity. Uncertainty drives a family to protect their still newly acquired money and tribal status. Many of my informants remember a landscape where roads did not exist, where oil did not exist. Wealthy urban Dubaians in their 50s remember when their families bought their first automobiles, when Abu Dhabi was a city of enemies, and when oil was discovered in the 1960s. They have lived in a turbulent region, witnessing, with heads down, violence and war; in Iran in the 70s and 80s, and Kuwait and Iraq in the 90's through to the present day. During my time in the Middle East, my informants lived through a financial collapse with a politically silent, but ever watchful gaze. So too did they watch many of their neighbouring states, their 'cousins', march into an uncertain future; in Tunisia, in Egypt, in Libya, and closer to home, Bahrain. Dubai has largely avoided these problems through isolation, remaining hidden, private, and exclusionist. The mentality has seeped into conventions of society. Protecting money, homes, and status, the *Kholasat al Qaid* leads to consanguinity. It is a way for the Aristocratic class to close themselves off from society at large.

Of course, the possibility exists as well that ideas of 'relatedness'⁴⁵ do not translate well from Arab society to current kinship systems common in the West. Mo is married to two woman. His first wife is one of his 'cousins', though I do not know their precise blood relationships. His second wife is not as closely related, though she was Emirati. Mo tells me "We have many many cousins. It is not always like that, that we know our cousins well, sometimes there are so many. And we call everyone our cousin.

⁴⁵ See again Carlsen (2000)

So we don't know them". The idea is that even if someone is related by blood, they might be considered only distantly related, even if they are first cousins. Men who have multiple wives might also segregate their families. Dubai men often give their separate wives separate incomes and separate houses. A first cousin marriage between the son of a man and his first wife, and the daughter of the groom's uncle and the uncle's second wife may never have met, or at least, may not conceive of themselves as that closely related. Other Emiratis who are trying to discourage consanguinity tell me this is not true. They maintain the emphasis *is* on relatedness, that relatedness is key because it is safe. I'm told by opponents of the practice that first cousin marriages are sometimes planned before children are conceived. The family might have a long standing plan to protect their wealth and assets. As rates of consanguinity increase, families become increasingly isolated from Dubai's multicultural society, but they also become increasingly isolated amongst themselves and alliances are not formed. Consanguinity is one of the main focuses of the Health Authority of Abu Dhabi due to its suspected effects on congenital conditions and disease, but it is the social aspect that worries younger Emiratis like Fatima. "A family cannot grow and evolve if you don't branch out". Her logic follows that Emiratis consider the family as the most important aspect of Dubai society. If families become stifled, so does Dubai.

Some of the issues raised in thinking through consanguinity in Dubai speak to larger trends in society. In light of the Kholasat al Qaid, people seem to construct a notion of authenticity towards their nationality that makes them 'more' Dubaian than a those without one, and certainly more authentic than non-Emiratis. The problem in

understanding this construction is that in order to authenticate that one belongs in the Emirate, one must take measures to separate themselves from the city and society. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what the city *is* for the aristocracy. Marilyn Strathern has tackled this question in Essex, Britain, writing on the construction of villager authenticity from the perspective of exclusionary residents, stressing the importance of the village as a reference point for how residents come to understand the world at large (1981). As Strathern has analysed,⁴⁶ kinship ideology in the village actually speaks to the construction of social class, and residents utilize the former as a way of communicating the latter. A similar system has developed in Dubai, where family names are displayed as a way of stating social hierarchy. But what of the city itself? If I understand her correctly, Strathern's villagers know their village to be a model for the English state. This is why their kinship ideology is an effective language. But Dubai is a living contradiction. My informants operate as if kinship ideology is a modality for class discourse, but increasingly, some of them find that Dubai operates outside of this modality. Their discourse only remains true within private circles, and so it is to privatization that they turn. Many residents and workers in Dubai share a similar experience. At some point in their Dubai careers they meet a national, who, after a tense encounter, or a moment when demands are not met, states "Don't you know who I am!?". Increasingly, the answer is no. Of course, these encounters can still be quite dangerous for the foreigner, depending on the situation.

⁴⁶ The ethnography was not Strathern's alone. She analyzed data collected from students of Edmund Leach, who, through the early sixties to the mid seventies would send his students to Elmdon villiage to practice fieldwork.

Arabic and English and the language of the Aristocracy

There is sentiment among some Emirati that it is a positive way of living for locals to remain separate from the community. As it is sometimes explained, “Because if we get too mixed up in other peoples business here than we will have to fight to be ourselves. Right now we don’t have to fight to be ourselves, we just be ourselves.” However, the results of a cultural withdrawal from the city has had some consequences contrary to the intentions of Emirati culture. This is most clearly demonstrated in the popular use of Arabic. I discussed in chapter 1 the dangers of speaking Arabic with locals. There are of course many locals who, when they heard Arabic spoken from a Westerner, were excited to speak with me, and encouraged me to continue learning. Still, there are many for whom the sound of Arabic spoken from a Westerner caused alarm. It caused distrust and apprehension. Part of the distrust was possessive in nature. “Why are you speaking Arabic if you are not Arab?”. Arabic is perceived by many locals as ‘their’ language, a private communication reserved for them, not to be spoken by foreigners. Its perceived exclusivity has its benefits, as I have alluded to earlier. Local speakers are able to utilize Arabic not as tongue for the common man, but as an aristocratic privilege that allows them to negotiate with more power and authority in certain contexts. I do not view the use of Gulf Arabic in these situations as causal to the protection of the language, or reason... rather, it simply exists in tandem with the trend towards privacy in the region in general. As more and more foreigners flocked to Dubai, from the Phillipines, India, the UK and the rest of Europe, English quickly became the dominant language on the

city, but this was hastened by the fact that locals refused, and still refuse to teach local Arabic.

Part of the protectionism of language was, and still is, due to the fear of corruption, not only corruption from English or Hindi, but from other forms of Arabic, mutually intelligible to Gulf Arabic, but distinctively Egyptian, or Lebanese, or Syrian. Part of the protectionism of language was a response to perceived violence, that subtle structural violence of English colonialism that so much of the world knows all too well. My informants know it too. “That is what English does, it comes and takes away what everyone else is speaking”. However, the social response to the viral use of English was not to project Arabic into the community, but to horde it, lest it be devoured and expelled by foreigners. The solution seemed to become that Arabic would be reserved for the language of government and aristocracy, often synonymous constructs that have always been intensely private. As one of my Arabic (Lebanese) teachers complained to me “The language was always going to fail in this way”. As a result, English was able to swiftly become the dominant social language.

Many commentators suggest, of course, that this was going to happen anyway, blaming globalization and the hegemony of access to high education. Patricia Ryan Abu Wardeh, who teaches English in the Gulf, presented a TED talk at TEDxDubai, pinpointing the industrialization of English as a seemingly necessary component of quality higher education (2010). Many parents associate English skills with the ability of their children to succeed in life. Abu Wardeh was shocked to discover that, when

speaking to her Emirati students, she found that English was the language that they speak at home, often from parents whose English skills are poor. The result is that Arabic becomes increasingly marginalized, but English skills also remain poor.⁴⁷ Not only is indigenous language destroyed, but there are no potential gains. Many young people are unable to adequately articulate their education in either Arabic or English. Wealthier families engage in aggressive English training in the home, often shunning Arabic. Until recently, I am told that American English teachers were preferred, as the American accent was preferred in the region. Recently (from around the turn of the century), the preference has shifted to a British accent.⁴⁸ My fieldwork suggests, however, that this imperialist portrayal of English, while certainly poignant, is still incomplete. There are aristocratic structures internal to the community that facilitate disrupting Arabic education outside the aggressive politics of the Anglophone world. Emirati cultural advocacy groups explain. “Yes, parents are speaking less Arabic to their children, but also, they often don’t speak enough to their in any language. A big problem is thought to be with maids. Noone is raising their own children. We all have maids who take care of the children all day.” Indeed, almost every Emirati family with whom I spoke have maids to help them with their children. This, in my experience, is not specific to locals, but is a general trend among families with money in the UAE, and, in fact, most couples

⁴⁷ See Abu Wardeh’s full talk at <http://www.tedxubai.com/speakers-2010/282/#131>

⁴⁸ No-one can really tell me why. Some say the American accent was preferred because parents expected their sons to go to American Universities, others claimed it was because of popular media, or because of American military presence in the Gulf. Others claimed that there were efforts to move away from British culture in the eighties, after the withdrawal of British rule. In any case, the British accent is now said to be preferred, perhaps to match the British expatriate population, or because of recent preference for British higher education institutions.

that I knew in the Emirates with children had nannies or maids to help with their children in some capacity, regardless of nationality. Migrant workers are not allowed to have their wives or families live with them in the city, and expat families from developing nations, by and large, cannot afford to have their families stay with them. Therefore, children are a relative luxury in Dubai, reserved for wealthier Arab and Indian families, and American and European expats on standard, but generous expatriate wages. Some older Emirati have complained to me that they can no longer understand their grandchildren's Arabic. Maids and nannies are typically from South Asia or the Philippines, speak no Arabic, and speak rough English. Arabic teachers in the region (all from other Arab nations) encourage their students not to repeat the Arabic on the street, but to stick with class, as few people in Dubai public use the language properly.

The retreat of local culture becomes a casualty of itself when viewed through the lens of language. While some of my older informants fear that Arabic is dying, I make no such claim. In some ways, Arabic is very much still thriving in the Gulf, it simply is not the high, pristine Arabic that many perceive it to have been. Language, as some linguists argue, neither truly progresses nor decays, it simply changes (Aichison, 2001, pg 260). Its social use, however, has shifted widely, and so, from the perspective of many locals, it is *perceived* to be dying. It is no longer the language of offices, businesses, checkouts at grocery stores, or restaurants. Even some 'Emirati only' stores and clothing outlets are often staffed with Indian and Filipino men and women who speak little, or no Arabic. The ways in which languages shift and sway, absorbing and expelling the new and the useless, and possibly even die is massively complex. The field of linguistic

anthropology alone encompasses decades of thought on the relationships that people form with, and through language. I have not the space here to think through the transformations that Arabic undergoes in the Emirates. My focus is on the local construction of Arabic as an aristocratic tool. The language of the *muatan* has been hoarded, because of its perceived purity, and because of the benefits it was thought to protect. For many reasons, the more public language of the city shifted from Arabic to English, and the current generation of Arab youth in the Gulf state have begun to lose the Arabic of their parents and grandparents. Some local families now speak English at home, while at the same time hoarding their language among their peers, lest it be corrupted. They often assume the strength of Arabic will transfer to their children without the effort of practice. As one of my friends informed me during our discussions of inheritance (see chapter 4), language is much like genetics. It is an inherent part of the Emirati. If nationality is, in some ways genetic, and the language and aristocracy are traditionally tied to nationality, it makes sense to conceive of traditional Gulf Arabic as guaranteed by both nature and God. But this is not dogma. It was an assumption, and now many are upset that the assumption did not hold. The perceived generational loss of language adds to the anxieties of the *muatan*. The issue is particularly touchy among middle and older generations, and sparks anger, against television and media, video games, universities, and against foreigners, but it also invokes some self-critique. The Mo's, who in many ways epitomize the Emirati ideal, after reeling at the forces that they perceive destroy their speech, complain about their wives, their maids, and their children, and exclaim, "God, what have we done!" Over a year after my fieldwork was completed, Sheikh Mohammed drafted and made public the Arabic Language Charter to combat

what is perceived to be the destruction of Arabic in the country.⁴⁹ However, the charters do not, and possibly cannot address the social use of language. My colleagues who are Gulf nationals explain that this is at the front of political discussions all over the small Gulf states, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and the seven Emirates. They insist that, at this point, the problem of Arabic cannot be alleviated by the government, but with the citizens, and the conditions that promote the decline of Arabic only grow.

Oil (ظرفن) and the desert's wealth

Language is not the only Aristocratic possession that causes anxiety. In the previous chapter, I discussed aristocratic clothing and skin colour. The former, I argue, has been successfully protected, while the local aristocratic ownership of whiteness, especially by women, is more complex. Many other material engagements help define the *muatan*, and as Dubai grows, some of these engagements are perceived to be at threat. The global price of gold as I finished my fieldwork was at an all time high, and many of my informants, for whom gold is an exceptionally important cultural material, became increasingly concerned with its value.⁵⁰ For the local people, there is, of course, a

⁴⁹ The Charter in its entirety can be downloaded from the UAE government portal here. http://www.government.ae/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=12531&folderId=98433&name=DLFE-3605.pdf

⁵⁰ Research into the socio-cultural presence of gold in Dubai is important for a larger ethnography on the city. I do not have the space to explore the mineral in this thesis, but gold remains a crucial component of the city's image and waking life, not just for Emirati, but for Western foreigners and Indian tradesmen as well. Dubai's famous gold souks are, arguably, the most important public markets in the Emirate due not only to the business it creates in the local economy, but also to the ways in which the souks extend out into the world.

commodity far more valuable than gold, and that is the oil found in the Gulf and the desert, and the ensuing energy that can be extracted from the land.

Before I went to Dubai, and even after I arrived, whenever I brought up the city in conversation with people who had visited, or even those who had not, the concept of oil would always somehow be recalled, even among non-Gulf Arab peoples. Typical statements invoked the nothingness of the Gulf without its oil, or “Indoor ski-slopes... artificial islands in the shape of the world... it’s amazing what you can build with oil!” When I arrived in Dubai, however, I found that discourse on oil was conspicuously absent. Most locals refused to talk about it, or share their thoughts on the Emirates’ famous commodity. Some would even become angry at the very mention of the substance, and other, confusingly, would deny its existence. Those who were willing to calmly talk to me about oil would work at changing the subject quickly. There are many reasons why the conversation is so avoided, though I isolate four main reasons here. The first is that oil and its development and production in the country is highly protected, as it is everywhere in the Gulf. Foreign workers who work on rigs told me they sign non-disclosure agreements in their contracts. I know very little about the politics, economy, and massive complexity of the world’s oil market, but I am told that speculation is crucial to the construction of value and price. Locals are aware that the topic is fairly taboo. Secondly, this secrecy extends, I expect, to most locals. While oil is deeply embedded within the construction of *muatan* identity, very few are involved with its production. They may have strong ideas on the ‘concept’ of oil, and its association with wealth, but they admittedly know very little about the industry itself. In any case, some become

frustrated when others hastily associate Emirati people with oil. “We are so much more than that, it is not worth talking about”.

Thirdly, it became clear over time that discussions on oil and wealth made some locals uncomfortable, not because oil was meant to be secret, but because they viewed oil as disgusting. A contradiction exists in discourse. Some claim that oil was a gift from the desert to its people, from Allah to his people. The tribal leaders were aware, from before its discovery, of its potential, and the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai spent many years actively searching for underground reservoirs.⁵¹ Yet despite the perception of oil as a divine gift, the oil itself is perceived as profoundly polluting. “It is a vile thing”, Mo tells me, “physically and spiritually.... It is really very horrible. The most Filthy...” Mo makes spitting gestures. Though my opinion doesn’t matter, I completely agree, and it is one of the few things Mo and I never argued over. It can be viewed as a blight, a horrible black stain on the environment, but that is not what Mo means. His disgust with oil is due to the substance being a such a source of wealth. The Emirates as a political entities remain conspicuously quiet in the politics of the middle East at large. Still, among the Emirati, especially among the middle and older generations, there was a general strong support for both Iraq wars, George Bush, and the American presence in the region. There was public disdain for both Iraq and for Saddam Hussain who was commonly called, among other things, a demon and an idolater. There was also the presence of oil, hovering in the imagination, known locally to be a source of war and

⁵¹ For a history of Oil discovery in the region, and an excellent history of Dubai’s development in general, see Krane (2010)

suffering so close to the borders of the Emirates. So often one hears, “it is so tragic that people suffer over so little a thing (as oil)”, but oil is not a ‘little’ thing, and my informants know it. It was oil that brought peace and prosperity to the Emirates, ending so many years of tribal war, and yet it is known to be a source of death only a short distance away. There is an understanding among locals that one may reap the benefits of the land, but it has a power and a will of its own that should not be taken for granted. Oil becomes an ambiguous amoral agent of the desert, much like the Djinn themselves. It can bring both prosperity and destruction. To bring it to the front of discourse is to potentially disturb the inherently unstable alliance shared between man and desert. As Westermarck, again, has said of the Djinn, “to pronounce their name would be to summon them” (1926. I: 263). The issue becomes highly taboo because it is potentially dangerous. Furthermore, Mo enjoys wealth. He even flaunts his wealth, as do his compatriots, but they know that money itself is ironically dirty, and the source of money is especially unclean.

Lastly, and most importantly, one reason oil remains taboo is that it is thought to be depleting. As I mentioned earlier, the mechanics of the industry are highly secretive. It seems impossible to know exactly how much oil is left in the country’s reserves, but the amount is irrelevant. What is important here is how it is perceived. Expatriates in Dubai will often muse how the oil is running out while locals, as I mentioned, remain mostly silent. However, oil *is* understood to be the source of aristocratic wealth and power. For the *muatan*, it is an aristocratic possession that is known to belong to all Emirati, even those who know little about its production. Thrice during my years in the

city, the price of petrol increased, to the shock of many locals. Expatriates with cars were largely unconcerned. Petrol was still a small fraction of the price one would pay in their home country. However, many Emirati were livid. Some blamed the government, upset that they were paying for petrol at all, when foreigners should be footing the bill. The prices also caused local worry, as they could be evidence that the word on the street might be true, that oil was running out. As my younger local friends admit, “people (locals) do not want it to be true sometimes, but we all know that it is true, I think it worries everybody”. The sentiment that the powerful source of wealth may be depleting grows in the city, becoming increasingly heavy upon the imagination. Some Emirati advocates for social change try to make these discussions public. My informants in various sectors, and especially in health care city, speaks about the dependency on oil constantly, again advocating education, especially for women, as the most important means to move local society away from failing dependencies and into a globalized city. For others, the perception of oil adds to the cultural retreat, the social rheumatism that Lambek (2004), again, describes as ironic. As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the inability for the city to pay its international loans came as an embarrassment and a shock to many people. During the build-up to the announcement, popular discourse insisted that Dubai could never suffer the financial problems of the rest of the world. It was assumed that the sheikhs and their wealth, and, therefore, the oil that helped provide this wealth, would carry them through. In 2010, petrol stations began running out of petrol. No *muatan*, expatriates, or visitors could pinpoint precisely why the pumps were closed. There was much speculation. Some claimed there were political issues within the government, other believed that petrol companies had not been able to pay their bills,

the newspapers were predictably vague, citing statements from petrol spokesmen about ‘maintenance’, others simply believed it to be proof that oil reserves were numbered, though automobile petrol, as I understand it, is not refined in the Emirates anyway, it is transported into the country. However, it does not really matter *why* the pumps were closed. Cheap and free-flowing petrol was symbolic in the city, even if it was many steps away from the raw material extracted from the Earth. The off road championships and festivals celebrated in on the edge of the Rub Al Khali that I described in chapter 1 were partly a celebration of petrol and the mobility and mastery of the desert that petrol represents. The shortages caused some panic. People sat in cues for hours, precious air-conditioning ironically drinking their tanks dry as they waited to refuel in the pumps that were open. My local informants would ask me “I don’t understand... how could this have happened?”. I suggest that many people are nervous to talk about oil, not just because it is private, or that they are unknowledgeable, or even that it is ‘dirty’ or taboo, but because it has come to materially embody and represent the decline of a social class built on the shoulders of an inherently unsustainable industry.

Mandana Limbert (2010) has examined this phenomenon in her excellent ethnography on the relationship that people have with oil in Bahla, Oman. Her informants, only a few hours drive from Dubai, too, are faced with the impending finitude of oil. They look towards tradition and the past, and envision their future as a return to their ‘barasti’, modest palm frond huts that symbolize the simplicity and poverty of life before luxury. As her informant claims, “That is where we came from, and where we will be returning” (172). She invoke as well that public acknowledgement of destiny

for which the Bedouin are so commonly stereotyped. My informants, however, find the city to be too corrosive to history. Indeed, if I asked the Mo's what a 'barasti' was, they could tell me with nostalgia, but most only know the name 'barasti' from a famous, and massive outdoor nightclub on Jumeirah beach. There are no backyard 'barasti' to return to. "We are not stupid", Ali tells me. "Everyone knows that oil should not be so important. But I don't know why not many people do anything about it". Instead, there are many in the city who begin to horde. Mo and his friends horde cash in their purses, but aristocratic life in Dubai is largely about *spending*. The desert flaneurs leave their white 4x4's in an air-conditioned lot in Old Town and spend aimlessly, on cakes one does not eat, designer handbags and the latest fashions, gadgets and games. Money might be unclean, but wealth must be displayed. They leave the shadow of the world's tallest tower and horde themselves instead.

Conclusion

It is puzzling to try to piece together conflict of desire. My informants are anxious, trying to decide what it is exactly that they want most, moving haphazardly between seemingly incongruent modes of experience. They want the city, and they want the desert; English and Arabic. They say they want the freedom to drive around without their windows open, but they do not want anyone to see where they are going. The apparent contradictions are evident everywhere. Mo 2 lectures me on the influence of foreigners.

Mo: “If they stay here maybe. If things stay like this, I don’t know what will happen”

“I didn’t know what to do for my kids. Yaani, do I stay, or do I go to somewhere else.”

Me: “where would you go

Mo: “Maybe London”

I thought Mo was joking, but he was not. He and many others have homes in the English capital, It was at first hard to understand how a fear of globalization, or perceived dangers of modernity might convince the conservative Emirati man with two wives and a Filipina mistress that he should abandon the desert coast for the London megalopolis, but I began to understand. It is the domestic retreat that he fears, the internal conflict that he worries leads to stagnancy. In Europe, Mo’s identity is definitive. He is a wealthy Emirati man who can live as he pleases. In London he is a stranger in someone else’s country. His identity stays intact, even heightened. In Dubai, he feels he becomes a stranger in his own country, and everything is thought to be at stake.

Ali explains, “There are some people who just think it would be better if everyone left, and there are other people who are afraid of what will happen if everybody leaves.” “What do you think”, I ask him. “I think like most people we love people to come here and we love to share our country. But maybe some people are meant to come live here,

maybe some people should only come visit. Smaller is ok too, all these towers... It will be good to slow down, or else people (locals) will never leave their homes, and the people coming here will be bored, and they will stop coming... people are becoming very selfish.... They [muatan] do not have to do much. We need to be better” My friend’s concerns seem reasonable. How long until the solitude of self-interest leaves the palm lined avenues empty and in disrepair? Certainly I could not say. For Marquez’s fictionalized Macondo it took 100 years, seven generations of solitude amidst the rise and fall of the Columbian town. There are many in Dubai who imagine a centenary fate for the city as well, fifty years to rise, and fifty years to fall. In the end, for Macondo, the trajectory was known, written, albeit opaquely, upon parchment by the gypsy Melquiades, finally translated by the last of the alone.

“Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatably since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth.” (421)

It’s there inscribed in the symbols of the desert as well, written on Frazer’s tides, circled in the silhouette of the moon draped between two towering minarets atop the sand coloured Arabesque domes of the houses of God. And for Rahman in Jumeirah, at least,

it is ok. “Of course, I love everything here. But nothing, but God, lasts forever”. My friend brushes the air in wide strokes and smiles big as he invokes an Ozymandian fate. “One day the winds will come and wipe the city clean.”

Conclusion: Agents of the City and the City as an agent

“The concept of progress acts as a protective mechanism to shield us from the terrors of the future” - (Herbert, 1999; 313).

‘Modernity’ and ‘globalization’ are elusive concepts. One issue that this ethnography explores is the introduction of Western imports into indigenous knowledge, and how these imports inform local systems of relations. In the first chapter I introduced this theme by presenting the construction of the new aristocracy in the Emirates, and how they relate to the influx of foreigners, including myself, into the region. Imports themselves are not always integrated as novelties, but are rather understood through an indigenous tool set that local people have long held at their disposal. In other cases, such as the use of petrol and automobiles, imports lose their foreignness altogether, and become locally ‘owned’ materials of both desert and aristocratic identity. Still, my informants in the region often find that foreigners, as they flock to the Emirates for whatever reason, as South Asian migrants building skyscrapers so that they can send money to their families in Kerala, or British and Swedish expatriates working in banking or development, attracted to the Gulf for career advancement and tax-free income, fall outside the systems of logic that have served as a bases for social engagement in the tribal communities. The idea of the ‘Westerner’ specifically is tied to ambiguity, lawlessness, and the inability to make ‘sense’ in an increasingly illogical world. There is danger in globalization too, and it is this danger that informs a conflict of identity for people trying to find their place in a changing urban landscape.

As the tribal people of the Emirates attempt to remake themselves in the city, conflicts of interest and desire creep upon the landscape and create, for some, an anxious energy. In the second chapter I explore how this conflict and anxiety are re-enacted in local cosmology. I argue that in the Emirates, the Djinn act as the articulations of individual and communal desires. Their actions in the city, through sexual influence and through violent outbursts, represent a language for uncertainty, uncontrollability, and the inherent problems presented in the quest for modernity. They also serve as an articulation of fate. In chapter three, I further explored the notion of fate as portrayed in the Gulf in both historical accounts of visitors to the region, and in the language of destiny that is owned by local people. Fate, as I have found, is evidenced everywhere in the Gulf, in the philosophy of Islam and scanned in the rhythms of nature, but it is not always practiced in the ways that its language portrays. The historical notion of fatalistic behaviour being derived from Islam, or even from the desert, does not, I argue, hold strong as an explanatory model. Rather, fate is a more transient category of thought that is evinced often through discourse rather than national character.

In chapter four, I explore the introduction of another foreign knowledge system into the Emirates, that of genetics. Borrowing discussions on fate and Djinn from previous chapters, and using genetic dissemination as a model, I demonstrate how some local categories of knowledge, kinship, illness, cosmology and well-being, to name a few, remain cogent despite the perceived exploitative influence of 'globalization'. Rather than simply replace the cultural models of the world that the Bedouin and coastal tribes of the

UAE know to be true, foreign medical and scientific concepts are re-shaped and interpreted through the languages of the desert, themselves becoming common discursive elements of public knowledge. In thinking through ‘genes’ as agents of disease, and Djinn as ambiguous spirits of the desert, my informants see congruencies. Djinn and genes become a metaphor to depict the fallacies inherent in the designs of globalization and in the assumptions embedded in Western scientific empiricism and dissemination.

In the last two chapters, I demonstrate these fallacies in other social practices and movements. Chapter five explores identity as it is adorned by the body, through clothing and skin. As foreigners flock to the Emirates, many local people are torn between the past and the present, and are anxious about the future. These anxieties are often antagonistic to the heterogeneity that ‘globalization’ promises. As a result, many body practices that represent and enforce local identity become exaggerated, and ironically continue to increase even as they lose their potency. The practice of skin-whitening and other body alterations are specifically re-enforced through the presence of immigrants and foreign knowledge systems. Like conditions understood locally as the products of genetic susceptibility, the perceived authority of body practices is heightened by the dissemination of genetic knowledge and other constructs brought into the country. The ways in which the body is publically presented in the UAE speaks also to social protectionism and isolationism that arises in conjunction with a novel urban life. The last chapter expands on these social phenomena and addresses the future identity of the aristocracy in light of the issues raised throughout the thesis. A type of cultural rheumatism characterizes the position of many people in the country who feel ultimately

torn between the promises of modernity and the beauty of tradition, and so when faced with the conflicts of urbanity and multiculturalism, rather than fight for the past or for the future, many simply do nothing, or socially retreat. Like the Djinn, the novel aristocrats claim that they are anxious. They are unable to see themselves in a globalised future, and they feel that they were unable to hold on to the past which brought them forward into the city. A growing sentiment has emerged in Dubai that their position is unsustainable, and borrowing the language of fate, some see their destiny acted out by nature: the moon, the sand and the sea.

As stated in the beginning of this thesis, broadly speaking I began my research in the desert to contribute to a very complex question: What happens to identity within indigenous culture when faced with globalization and modernization on such a rapid course? Dubai, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, is well suited to afford opportunities to explore this question. I began the project through a medical lens, thinking through health issues that accompany the rapid development of a new urban landscape. The chaos of ethnography led me to study fate, Djinn, and genes, but the city itself became a protagonist, an anti-heroine. In the years I lived in the city, I was able to watch megaliths rise from the sand. Countless workers from South Asia spun webs of steel and scaffolding from dawn until after dusk. Every evening the towers were half a metre taller. One can drive somewhere in the morning, only to be lost when the road is wiped away by evening. The city is a fortress against nature, a place that, even for my informants, could not be, should not be. It is an impossible landscape, save for the vision of the sheikhs, and the blessings of God. Dubai, for many local people, is itself an

articulation of their sub-conscious, arising from the dreams of their leaders who imagined the wealth of the city as they stared across what was once a tiny creek babbling along sand and rock. Because of this perception of Dubai as a materiality of local dream-scape, her betrayal is especially harsh. Many of the muatan who watched the first cargo come to Jebel Ali Port, and who remember the first hotels and towers, now feel that the city is designed for everyone except them. Some people act as if the city has its own agency, and there is a sense of amorality in its development, but for my informants, who are fiercely loyal to each other, to the sheikhs, and to Dubai, there is a sense that Dubai has not reciprocated, that at some point the city began to be disloyal.

There is a sentiment that foreign imports and foreign people have in some way unwittingly poisoned the city against the locals, and objects and people from abroad can poison the culture as well. This fields the topic of contamination which is also at the forefront of local discourse. One of the great limitations of this project is the inability to think further through local constructions of purity and contagion. The concept of the 'germ' in local imagination is strongly linked with that of the Djinn and the gene. Purity is constructed and idealized in complex ways in the Gulf. It exists in partnership with the local environment, Islam, economy, biomedicine and globalization, and it warrants a lengthy discussion and ethnography that I aim to pursue far beyond this thesis. Still, as much as foreigners are often blamed for intruding on and polluting local society, my informants do also blame themselves for what they perceive to be a decline in tradition, language, and culture. Their fears of the future leave them torn, and while I do not wish

to shy away from complexity, it can be frustrating for the anthropologist because there are so many ambiguous and contradictory attitudes present among the people.

Completely incongruent desires often exist simultaneously. The fire and sexual appetite of the Djinn is the heat of the individual who is filled with an anxious energy that so often has no outlet. This often leads to great internal conflict for the Muatan who tell me that their problems are not really due to modernity and globalization. Rather, I suggest as a final thought that cultural anxiety in the Emirates is partly the result of the inability of many local people to define what modernity means to them; it is a word that must be ethnographically extracted. I do not always understand all the ambiguous and contradictory sentiments of the desert metropolis any more than I do anywhere else in the world, but I know that their existence is inevitable simply because the world is so ambiguous and contradictory.

Perhaps Dubai's betrayal is that it grew too quickly. Foreigners come to the desert and sift in and out of memory and landscapes, but it is the Muatan who are left to make sense of the shadows of all this movement. Genes and Djinn, germs and fate, SUVs and oil, clothing and skin colour, the towers on Sheikh Zayed Rd and the sands of the empty quarter all must be constantly reimagined, and it can be arduous work. Emirati citizens value tradition and preservation, and they do want to preserve the new city. The task at hand is how paradoxically to create tradition and sustainability from something entirely new. The fate of the city is uncertain, but through the conflicts of identity that arise in the

struggles of ever illusive modernity, there are people and forces on the desert coast who may see a balance in culture, value, class, economy and religion that can truly last.

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Appendix A – Stigmatization Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed as an ethnographically minded study to attempt to compare qualitative and quantitative data on severe mental illness cross-culturally (see Littlewood, Jadhav, and Ryder, 2007). This appendix includes the questionnaire in both English and Arabic. The Arabic questionnaire was adapted from the English survey with the assistance of A. Bustani, a professional translator. It was cross-translated twice to be informal and to best fit local (Gulf) readings. It was then given a final edit with the director of behavioural sciences in the hospital in Abu Dhabi, and practiced in person with the ethnographer and bilingual volunteers before it was administered at Khalifa hospital. It is important to note, then, that this Arabic translation is most appropriate for an informal Gulf audience, and may need to be edited for Arabic communities more broadly.

The Questionnaire :

Stigmatisation Questionnaire (English language version)

Are you a patient, or a friend or family member of a patient?

Thank you for your help in answering some questions about a person who becomes ill. It would be helpful for us to know a little about you. Please answer these questions. They are confidential and we do not need your name.

A [Personal details of respondent: gender, age, marital status, ethnic origin, country of birth, first language, occupation, father's occupation, years of education, family's religion, plus "Has a close friend or relative in your own family seen a doctor for emotional or psychological difficulties?" Yes/No]

B Here is a short account of a person who became ill. Please answer the questions about him:

This young man is twenty years old. He is not married and lives with his parents. He is friendly and hard working. He works in a local factory. One day he becomes ill and starts imagining things that are not true. He cannot do his job properly and eventually loses it. He spends a lot of time by himself. He hears people talking to him when there is no one there. His parents now become anxious but he does not get better. He starts shouting at the voices which he hears, and he tells his family that they themselves are trying to hurt him. On one occasion he hits his father.

The family are very distressed and frightened and do not know what is happening. They ask their neighbours: nobody thinks this is any sort of religious experience. The family take him to the local doctor who tells them the young man is ill, and gives him some tablets. The tablets do not help him. He does not eat properly. He seems puzzled by what is happening. He does not dress himself properly and is often dirty. He wanders about and says embarrassing things to people whom he meets in the streets.

His parents do not know what he is talking about. His doctor sends him to hospital where he stays for two months. He gets better on some new tablets but still needs to take them when he leaves hospital. He does not hear the voices anymore, nor does he have the strange ideas, but he is very quiet and stays alone for much of the time. He occasionally talks to himself but is usually polite to his family. He goes often to see his doctor to get his tablets, and wishes to go back to work.

Here are some questions about this person. Each one must be answered by whether you agree with the question:

Yes, very much Yes, a little No, not much No, not at all

Put a tick in the appropriate box for each question. Remember this is not a test of knowledge but about how you really feel personally.

1. Would you be frightened if this man came to live next door to you?
2. Would you be content if he was to work together with you in your workplace? (If you do not have a job, answer as if you did.)
3. Do you think he will get ill again even if he takes the doctor's medicine?
4. Should he take part in meetings of his family which are to make important decisions?
5. Would you be happy if he married your sister?
6. Could he suddenly become physically violent?
7. If he was your brother would it be important not to let other people know that he had been ill, to avoid shame for your family?
8. If your local hospital opens a clinic for people like him in your neighbourhood would you hope the local council would object?
9. Is the cause of this sort of illness something passing down in the family?
10. Should the doctors tell him not to have any children in case he passes the illness on to them?
11. Should the doctors have let him out of hospital?
12. Is his illness something he might have brought on himself?
13. Should the doctors only let him leave hospital on condition he goes to see them regularly?
14. Do you think a sympathetic family and friends can stop him becoming ill again?
15. Will a sympathetic family be more help to him than regularly taking medicine?
16. Would it be wise for this man to inherit his parents' property?

17. If he becomes ill again do you think it would be better to call the police first rather than the doctor?
18. Would you be happy if this person became the teacher of your children?
19. Will he be able to return to a completely normal life?
20. Should he stay in hospital for his whole life?
21. Would you eat food which he has cooked?
22. Would you avoid talking to him if possible?
23. Might he have any special powers (to heal, to predict future events, to cause illness)?
24. Could this illness be caused by some spirits or an enemy harming him?
25. Has any person you know personally ever had a similar illness? Yes/No
26. Could you give a name to this illness?.....

Thank you for your help. Please hand the questionnaire back.

الاستبيان:

استبيان العار (النسخة العربية)

شكراً لمساعدتك في الإجابة على بعض الأسئلة عن شخص أصيب بمرض نفسي. نريد أولاً معرفة بعض المعلومات عنك، لذلك يرجى الإجابة على الأسئلة التالية مع العلم أنها سرية ولا داعي لذكر اسمك.

أ- (معلومات شخصية عنك: جنسك، عمرك، حالتك الاجتماعية، جنسيتك، لغتك الأم، مهنتك، مهنة والدك، عدد سنوات دراستك، دينك، بالإضافة إلى ذلك: هل راجع أحد أصدقائك المقربين أو أفراد عائلتك طبيباً نفسياً؟" نعم / لا)

ب- فيما يلي قصة شخص أصيب بمرض نفسي. يرجى قراءتها ثم الإجابة على الأسئلة المتعلقة بها:

شاب عازب عمره اثنان وعشرون عاماً يعيش مع والديه ذو شخصية محببة ويعمل بجد في مصنع محلي. في أحد الأيام أصيب بمرض نفسي وصار يتخيل أموراً غير حقيقية مما أثر على عمله إلى أن طرد منه في النهاية. أصبح يجلس وحيداً ويسمع أشخاصاً يتحدثون إليه مما أقلق والديه. راحت حالته تتدهور وصار يصرخ على الأصوات التي يسمعا ويتهم والديه بأنهما يحاولان إيذائه ووصلت به الأمور إلى ضرب والده في إحدى المرات.

شعر أفراد العائلة بألم وهلع شديدين وهم لا يفهمون ماذا يحدث. سألوا الجيران من حولهم فأجابهم الجميع بأن حالة الشاب ليس لها أية علاقة بالدين. وهكذا أخذت العائلة الشاب إلى أقرب طبيب حيث أخبرهم أن ابنهم مريض ووصف له بعض الحبوب ولكنها لم تساعده. لم يعد الشاب يأكل جيداً وصار شارداً معظم الوقت. كما ساء مظهره وصار يرتدي ثياباً متسخة ويتسكع في الطرقات ويشتم الناس من حوله.

لم يعد والدا الشاب قادرين على التفاهم معه فأرسله طبيبه إلى المستشفى حيث أمضى فيها شهرين. تحسنت حالته بعد أن أخذ بعض الأدوية الجديدة، ولكن يجب عليه تناولها باستمرار بعد خروجه من المستشفى. لم يعد يسمع أصواتاً وزالت عنه تلك الأفكار الغريبة لكنه صار هادئاً جداً ويحب الانعزال. ما زال يكلم نفسه أحياناً ولكنه يتحدث بأدب مع عائلته، وهو يراجع طبيبه باستمرار للحصول على أدويته ويتمنى العودة إلى العمل يوماً.

فيما يلي بعض الأسئلة عن هذا الشخص. يجب الإجابة على كل سؤال بإحدى الإجابات التالية:

أوافق بقوة أوافق قليلاً أعارض قليلاً أعارض بشدة

ضع علامة (✓) في المربع المناسب أمام كل سؤال. تذكر أن هذا ليس اختباراً لمعلوماتك إنما هو عن شعورك الحقيقي.

- 1- هل تخاف إذا انتقل هذا الشخص للعيش بجوارك؟
- 2- هل تشعر بالراحة إذا كان هذا الشخص يعمل معك في نفس المكان؟ (إذا كنت لا تعمل فأجب وكأنك تعمل)
- 3- برأيك، هل ستعاوده نفس الحالة حتى لو استمر بتناول الأدوية التي يصفها له الطبيب؟
- 4- هل من حقه المشاركة مع عائلته في اتخاذ القرارات الهامة؟
- 5- هل تقبل أن يتزوج أختك؟
- 6- هل تتوقع أن يصبح فجأة عنيفاً جسدياً؟
- 7- لو كان هذا الشخص أذاك، هل ستخفي مرضه عن الآخرين لكي لا يلحق العار بعائلتك؟
- 8- إذا فتح المستشفى القريب من سكنك عيادة للأشخاص المصابين بنفس المرض في منطقتك، هل تتمنى أن تعلق السلطات تلك العيادة؟
- 9- هل تعتقد أن هذا المرض ينتقل بالوراثة؟
- 10- هل يجب أن يمنع الأطباء من الإنجاب لكي لا ينتقل المرض إلى أبنائه؟
- 11- هل كان قرار الأطباء السماح له بمغادرة المستشفى صحيحاً؟
- 12- هل يمكن أن يكون هو الذي جلب المرض لنفسه؟
- 13- هل يجب على الأطباء عدم السماح له بمغادرة المستشفى إلا بشرط أن يراجعهم بانتظام؟
- 14- هل تعتقد أن تفهم العائلة والأصدقاء سيمنع عودة المرض إليه ثانية؟
- 15- هل تعتقد أن تفهم العائلة أهم من تناول الدواء بانتظام؟
- 16- هل يجوز أن يرث هذا الشخص ممتلكات عائلته؟
- 17- إذا عاوده المرض مرة أخرى، هل تعتقد أنه من الأفضل الاتصال بالشرطة قبل الاتصال بالطبيب؟
- 18- هل تقبل أن يصبح هذا الشخص معلماً لأبنائك؟
- 19- هل يمكن أن يعيش هذا الشخص حياة طبيعية كاملة؟
- 20- هل يجب أن يبقى في المستشفى طيلة حياته؟
- 21- هل يمكن أن تأكل طعاماً حضره هو؟

- 22- هل ستتجنب الحديث معه قدر الإمكان؟
- 23- هل يمكن أن تكون لديه أية قوى خاصة (يشفي، يتنبأ بالمستقبل، يسبب المرض)؟
- 24- هل يمكن أن يكون سبب المرض بعض الأرواح أو عدو يريد إيذاءه؟
- 25- هل تعرف شخصاً أصيب بمرض مشابه؟ نعم / لا
- 26- هل تعرف اسم هذا المرض؟ -----

شكراً لمساعدتك. يرجى إعادة الاستبيان.