

**‘DUBAI IS A TRANSIT LOUNGE’  
MIGRATION, BELONGING AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN PAKISTANI  
PROFESSIONALS IN THE UAE**

by

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis is a study of migration and its links to belonging, class, national identity and recognition in United Arab Emirates (UAE) federation. It focuses on Pakistani migrants, especially Pakistani professionals in Dubai, which is the second largest Emirate of the UAE because of its territorial extension and economic production (Davidson, 2008a). It is not only an empirical study but also partly a conceptual and analytical treatise on migration in the GCC countries. By comparing the extant literature on migration in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and the findings of my own field research, I argue the need to move beyond concepts such as ‘belonging despite exclusion’ (Vora, 2013), ‘citizenship as belonging’ (Vora & Kock, 2015) and ‘nationalism for nationals’ (Kock, 2015), which have dominated the literature on migration in this region, to better grasp that belonging, class and national identity are contested and situational. Dubai as a ‘transit lounge’ is an expression used by one of my Pakistani participants to describe the dynamic nature of the city. But more than that, it was used to emphasize that foreign workers’ life in the emirate is characterized by temporariness.

The UAE authorities have categorized people through the citizenship law (no. 17, 1972) in Emiratis and non-Emiratis by conceiving of them as two distinct categories. In my view, this might be interpreted as a fracture between two groups of individuals. In particular, non-Emiratis have been considered and represented in the literature as a monolithic group (Mahdavi, 2011), as disempowered individuals and, especially low-wage migrants, as victims of the market economy over which they cannot wield any control (Kathiravelu, 2016). The extant literature on migration in the GCC countries has *portrayed* the image of foreign communities in which the role of human agency in the migration experience is underestimated.

Starting from the historical evolution of migration in the Arab Gulf region and the links with African and Asian countries, which have contributed towards shaping the ethnic diversity of the UAE and the GCC countries, my research focuses on the presence of Pakistani migrant professionals in Dubai in order to understand the development of migration in the Emirate; the role and importance of the Pakistan Association Dubai (PAD) in contributing towards *determining* belonging; and therefore how migration affects the Emirati national identity.

This thesis challenges the extant literature on migration in the Arab Gulf region by questioning the dichotomy between nationals and non-nationals as two reciprocally-exclusive categories. Instead, it argues the need to look at inter and intra dynamics that take place in the ‘field’ between the two groups in order to understand how their relations are constructed. It is thus important to consider social interactions between nationals and non-nationals because individuals occupy contradictory and multi-layered locations, spaces and social categories (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Anthias, 2015). This reasoning stems from my historical analysis of ethnic composition and social stratification in the Gulf port cities, especially Dubai, where the coexistence of different ethnic groups resulted from economic exchanges and intermarriages with people coming from African and Asian countries, which in turn contributed towards shaping the ethnic diversity of the region. For example, the construction of belonging cannot be grasped only by looking at non-nationals as an ‘isolated’ category (Koch, 2015) but it has to be analysed and discussed in relation to ‘others’. As such, it is important to consider the role played by migrants and their ethno-national migrant associations in forging the discourse on the Emirati national identity. Migrants, through civic engagement and their participation in the Emirati public sphere, contribute towards strengthening Emirati national identity via their sense of belonging to the country and their agential capacity (e. g. migrant organizations).

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## **List of Abbreviations**

BOT	Board of Trustees
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
ECSSR	Emirates Center for strategic Studies and Research
EW	Engineering Wing
FNC	Federal National Council
GAIAE	General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GLMM	Gulf Labour Markets and Migration
GONGO	Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ILO	International Labour Office
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Iraq Petroleum Company
IT	Information Technology
LW	Ladies Wing
MBA	Master in Business Administration
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MERI	Middle East Research Institute
ML	Muslim League
MW	Medical Wing
NCCHT	National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking
PAD	Pakistan Association Dubai
POEA	Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
PPW	Pakistan Professional Wing
PYF	Pakistan Youth Forum
SCR	Supreme Council of Rulers

TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WPS	Wage Protection System

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## Conferences

The partial findings of the thesis have been presented in some conferences:

### **22<sup>ND</sup> – 23<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER 2016**

Conference: 5th International Crossroads Asia Conference: Area Studies' Futures

Title of the paper: The politics of belonging. The Pakistani community in Dubai

Panel: 4b. Borders and the Politics of Belonging

Venue: Center for Development Research (ZEF), Bonn, Germany.

### **22<sup>ND</sup> – 23<sup>RD</sup> AUGUST 2016**

Conference: The Gulf and the Wider Middle East: Transnational Dynamics in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Title of the paper: Transnational lives. The Pakistani community in Dubai

Panel: National Identities and Migrant Communities (Chair Prof. Madawi al-Rashid)

Venue: Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter (UK).

### **18<sup>TH</sup> – 20<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2016**

Conference: Geographies of Migration and Mobility (iMigMob).

Title of the paper: Migration and class. Dynamics and determinants of Pakistani migration to Dubai Panel: Highly Skilled mobilities I

Venue: Loughborough University (UK).

### **29<sup>TH</sup> JUNE – 1<sup>ST</sup> JULY 2016**

Conference organized at Northumbria University in collaboration with ESRC: Sojourners, Economic Migrants, Expats: Temporary Migrations in Global Perspective.

Title of the paper: Neither citizens nor nationals. Temporariness among Pakistani professionals in Dubai

Venue: Northumbria University (UK).

### **19<sup>TH</sup>-21<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2016**

Conference: Nationalism, Migration and Population Change (Association for Ethnicity and Nationalism – ASEN, London School of Economics)

Panel: Policies and Practices of Nation Building (Chair: Miss Sana Khan)

Paper: Migration and nation-building in the United Arab Emirates

Venue: London School of Economics and Political Science

### **17<sup>TH</sup>-19<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2016**

Conference: Migrants: communities, borders, memories, conflicts (Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies - SeSaMO)

Panel: Migration in the GCC Countries

Panel Organizer: Gennaro Errichiello

Panel Convenors: Gennaro Errichiello and Neema Noori

Paper: Migration in the Arab Gulf countries. Pakistanis in Dubai

Venue: University of Catania (Italy).

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

The thesis is a study of migration and its links to belonging, class, national identity and recognition in United Arab Emirates federation (UAE, in Arabic *al-Imārāt al-‘Arabiyya al-Muttaḥida*).<sup>1</sup> It focuses on Pakistani migrants, especially Pakistani professionals in Dubai, which is the second largest Emirate of the UAE because of its territorial extension and economic production (Davidson, 2008a). It is not only an empirical study but also partly a conceptual and analytical treatise on migration in the GCC<sup>2</sup> countries. By comparing the extant literature on migration in the Gulf countries (Figure 1) and the findings of my own field research, I argue the need to move beyond concepts such as ‘belonging despite exclusion’ (Vora, 2013), ‘citizenship as belonging’ (Vora & Kock, 2015) and ‘nationalism for nationals’ (Kock, 2015), which have dominated the literature on migration in this region, to better grasp that belonging, class and national identity are contested and situational. For example, belonging is dynamic and flexible; it is not necessarily linked to citizenship, and it cannot be limited to a specific locale, place, space and social category but it is constructed within a translocal and transnational perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> The transliteration of Arabic terms relies on the system used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. The only exceptions are those terms that are commonly used in English (e.g. rulers’ names and geographical names). The Arabic words used in the thesis are explained in the Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> The Gulf Cooperation Council is a supra-national organization established in 1981. It includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

**Figure 1.1 Map of the GCC countries (in green)**

**Blank**

Source: <https://www.google.it/search?q=map> [accessed 8 November 2016]

In this introductory chapter, I give an outline of the main characteristics of Dubai as a contemporary urban space that is occupied by a multitude of people of different national and socio-cultural backgrounds while governed by a traditional system of family rulers. The chapter also introduces the research aims that have guided my study, and demonstrates the original contributions of my thesis to the field of migration studies. Finally, the chapter includes an overview of the structure of the thesis, and a note on terminology.

## **1.2 Dubai: a ‘transit lounge’ for migrant workers**

Dubai as a ‘transit lounge’ was an expression used by Rahman,<sup>3</sup> one of my Pakistani participants (see chapter 2 and Appendix C), to describe the dynamic nature of the city, which has been able to respond to the contemporary challenges posed by globalization (Elsheshtawy, 2013). But more than that, it was used to emphasize that foreign workers’ lives in the Emirate are characterized by temporariness. In the UAE, foreign workers are considered as contractual temporary workers. Because of the sponsorship (*kafāla*) system,

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<sup>3</sup> The names of all my participants have been changed.

residence is allowed only if they have a work contract which must be guaranteed by a local sponsor. They are temporary workers because their contract expires after two or three years thus formally impeding their permanent settlement in the country.<sup>4</sup> This system, which was adopted in the 1950s to guarantee a job to the Arab Gulf local population (Baldwin-Edwards, 2011), has shaped the relations between the rulers and the ruled, ensuring that Emiratis have some privileges and benefits deriving from being nationals.<sup>5</sup> The *kafāla* guarantees the interests of the ruling families and the benefits of the ruled (see chapter 5). The mutual protection of interests and benefits is defined as a ‘ruling bargain’ (Davidson, 2005), which means that nationals, in exchange of political de-mobilization and no pressure for democratic reforms, have lots of benefits and advantages granted to them by the UAE government (e.g. free education, free land/house, and a job in the public sector). Each Emirate is governed by a specific ruling family,<sup>6</sup> which is represented in the Federal National Council (FNC). It is an institutional body that wields legislative power (Davidson, 2005). Moreover, each Emirate is administrated by a ruler, who acts as if he is a *pater familias* (Davis, 1991), who *looks after* nationals ‘from the cradle to the grave’. This paternalistic way of viewing and wielding power stems from the traditional social structure that revolves around tribal affiliation (Rugh, 2016). In this context, characterized by a massive presence of foreigners (Baldwin-Edwards, 2011), the ruler *cares for* nationals by giving them lots of benefits from which foreign workers are formally excluded.

The UAE is a ‘society in motion’ because of the presence of many foreign communities, cultures and religions; its population is socially, ethnically and religiously diversified. The discovery of oil in the 1950s and 1960s, the creation of the UAE federation in 1971 and the oil boom in the 1970s, required a foreign workforce to implement development projects because of the small size of the local population and the lack of skills among the locals. In the UAE, foreigners now represent 88 percent of the workforce

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<sup>4</sup> Some Pakistani professionals whom I interviewed worked for multinational companies situated in free zones. They had a permanent contract but they renewed their residence permit (*iqāma*) every two or three years. Free zones are areas established in the UAE (and in other GCC countries) where employment, visa requirements, censorship do not conform to the UAE laws. “Multinational companies enjoy fully ownership and profit repatriation within the confines of the free-trade zones” (Kanna, 2010, pp. 108-109).

<sup>5</sup> On the categories of Emiratis and non-Emiratis, see chapter 4.

<sup>6</sup> Abu Dhabi is governed by the Al-Nuhayyan family; Dubai is governed by the Al-Maktum family; Sharjah is governed by the Al-Qasimi family; Ras al-Khaimah is governed by the Al-Qasimi family; Ajman is governed by the Al-Nuaymi family; Umm al-Quwain is governed by the Al-Mualla family; and Fujairah is governed by the Al-Sharqi family.



(Winckler, 2010); most of them are employed in the construction sector and they are overwhelmingly men from South Asian countries (Human Rights Watch, HRW, 2006). The presence of foreigners has represented one of the main issues for the UAE authorities because it has led to a so-called 'demographic imbalance', where non-Emiratis outnumber Emiratis.

The links between South Asia and the Gulf countries, especially the port cities, is historically documented (Potter, 2009); it has led, in the course of several centuries, to millions of foreigners settling in the coastal areas and port cities, such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Indian and Iranian communities were the most important foreign communities in Dubai because they were merchants that also supported the rulers of the Emirate financially. They constituted communities that were linked to the political power, and these links pushed the local authorities to naturalize some Iranians and Indians, while other Indian merchants are now considered as 'half-citizens' because of some privileges granted to them even though they are not formally full citizens (Vora, 2013). Between the 1950s and 1970s, the discovery of oil, the oil boom and the development projects implemented by the UAE authorities triggered a new migration wave which included the presence of Pakistanis as numerically relevant. In 1971, Pakistan was the first country that recognized the UAE federation by establishing its embassy in the country. This official recognition led to a strengthening of the links between the two countries and it also fostered migration from Pakistan to the UAE. Currently, in the UAE, there are 1.2 million Pakistanis, who are mostly employed in the construction sector (35%), followed by people employed in sales (16%), whereas Pakistani professionals represent 8 percent of the Pakistanis working in the country, followed by those employed in agriculture (4%).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Dubai has "erupted onto the world stage as a media and tourism spectacle" (Vora, 2013, p. 6). Its fascinating history, characterized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by an extreme poverty and the presence of a few hundreds of individuals, dramatically changed between the 1950s and the 1970s when the oil economy transformed the poor and mercantile Emirate into a modern and global city (Abdulla, 2006b). The emergence of Dubai as a modern city and its development made it a metropolis embedded in the neoliberal world economy where the "human elements of the city seem to exist at extremes, with wealthy - and exploitative - Gulf Arabs and international business tycoons on one end, and downtrodden construction workers and maids, mostly from

South Asia, on the other” (Vora, 2013, p. 7). This separation between wealthy and marginalized and oppressed individuals has been addressed by the extant literature on migration in the GCC countries (Gardner, 2010a; Buckley, 2013; Vora, 2013; Kathiravelu, 2016). In Dubai, the separation between wealthy and poor individuals is clearly evident in people’s different lifestyles, tastes, dispositions and behaviours (chapter 6). But more than that, as indicated earlier, the UAE authorities have categorized people through the citizenship law (no. 17, 1972) in Emiratis and non-Emiratis by viewing them as two distinct categories. In my view, this might be interpreted as a fracture that has been imposed upon two groups of individuals. In particular, non-Emiratis have been considered and represented in the literature as a monolithic group (Mahdavi, 2011), as disempowered individuals and, especially low-wage migrants, as victims of the market economy over which they cannot wield any control (Kathiravelu, 2016). For Mahdavi (2011), the extant literature on migration in the GCC countries has projected the image of foreign communities as ‘flattened’ in which the role of human agency in the migration experience is underestimated.

In conclusion, Dubai has evolved from a small sandy community to a global metropolis, and, as Elsheshtawy (2013, p. 275) acknowledges, it should become a model for the Arab world “not through its megaprojects but because it accommodates multiple nationalities, a fact that may contribute to its unique response to globalizing conditions”. However, the presence of multiple nationalities, ethnicities, and religions does not erase the hierarchical social structure existing in Dubai and which creates a fracture within the Emirati society not only between nationals and non-nationals but also within the same ethno-national communities (e. g. the difference between the Indian merchant class and unskilled Indians).

### **1.3 Research aims**

The binary opposition between nationals versus non-nationals “as the primary form of social and economic structure” (Vora, 2013, p. 111) of the GCC countries has been the main topic on which different scholars have focused (Gardner, 2008; Ali, 2010; Kanna, 2010). This has been pursued by analysing the everyday life of low-wage migrants, especially of construction workers (Kathiravelu, 2016). Only a few studies have focussed on highly-skilled migrants in the GCC countries (Kanna, 2010; Ali, 2010; Vora, 2013). Several

studies have analyzed the presence of unskilled and highly-skilled Indians and Filipinos in the Arab Gulf region: in Bahrain (Gardner, 2010a), Qatar (Nagy, 2008; Vora, 2014), UAE (Vora, 2013; Hosoda, 2013) and Kuwait (Longva, 1997). Moreover, research on Westerners in Dubai and Doha has also been undertaken in the last few years (Walsh, 2007, 2009; Vora, 2014). However, the Pakistani community, which is historically linked to the Gulf region, has mostly been neglected by academics.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the extant literature has largely overlooked the role that migrant associations play for the migrants in this region.

Starting from the historical evolution of migration in the Arab Gulf region and the links with African and Asian countries, which have contributed towards shaping the ethnic diversity of the UAE and the GCC countries, my research focuses on the presence of Pakistani migrant professionals in Dubai in order to understand the development of migration in the Emirate; the role and importance of the Pakistan Association Dubai (PAD) in embodying migrants' agential capacity and intra-community relations. The PAD was established in 1973 and it is the only Pakistani association officially recognized by Dubai authorities. Thus, I adopted an emic perspective to unpack the internal complexities, dynamics and 'conflicts' of the Pakistani community in Dubai.

The thesis discusses the need to link international migration and social theory in order to elaborate substantive approaches that enable a better understanding of migration (Bakewell, 2010). To do so, the thesis revolves around the following aims:

- To advance the debate on structure and agency in migration studies. Hitherto, this debate has mostly been neglected in migration studies, thus impeding the development of a coherent theory of migration (Bakewell, 2010). The thesis will bring the debate about structure and agency to the core of migration studies by introducing the concept of 'migration project' in relation to Pakistani professionals in Dubai.
- To examine the role of migrant associations, which exemplify migrants' agential capacity and at the same time their knowledge of the local structures, rules and laws. The thesis will discuss the importance of the PAD in relation to the existing hierarchical social structure of the UAE in which migrants are not fully recognized as equal peers in social life (Fraser, 2000).

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<sup>7</sup> The only quantitative research on the Pakistani community was conducted at the beginning of the 1980s in Kuwait (Shah, 1983).

In order to address these aims, the thesis poses the following three research questions

- How are structure and agency linked in extant migration studies, and can a case-study of Pakistani professionals in Dubai move forward our theoretical understanding of migration?
- How has Pakistani migration developed in the UAE, and how can it best be understood?
- What are the key issues in the migration project of Pakistani professionals in Dubai?

Addressing these questions means substantially contributing towards understanding the link between international migration and social theory. As O'Reilly (2012b, p. 33) has put it, it "is only through the analysis of 'situated action' that we can see the outcomes of the interaction of structures and their perceptions". Focusing on those research questions entails thinking of migrants no longer as disempowered individuals and 'victims' (Mahdavi, 2011) but as agents who act in situ (Stones, 2005) and capable to modify, interact and project their life in a specific time and place. Thus, the notion of migration project allows recognizing that migration is dynamic, it is never taken for granted and it can change and develop in accordance with the context and situations. In the process of the interviewed migrants' stories, I could not overlook the role that these migrants played in shaping the discourse on the Emirati national identity (Vora & Koch, 2015). In my thesis, expressions such as 'nationalism for nationals' (Koch, 2015) and 'citizenship as belonging' (Koch, 2015) are contested because they portray a 'false' dichotomy between nationals and migrants as migrants, even though not formal citizens, are also involved with nationals in forms of governance of migration (e. g. the sponsorship system). However, this sort of 'inclusion' does not subvert the hierarchical social structure existing in the country.

#### **1.4 Contribution of the thesis**

Migration affects people's lives both as migrants and as non-migrants. Different theories, approaches and concepts have been adopted to explain why people migrate and their decision-making process (Massey, *et al.*, 1998; Castles & Miller, 2009; O'Reilly,

2012b). Multiculturalism, assimilation and integration have been discussed by several authors as the political projects that can contribute towards understanding how to deal with the diversity of religions, cultures and ethnicities that migrants ‘bring’ with them when they migrate (Modood, 2013). In the 1990s, globalization and improvements in technologies, transportation and communication led people and commodities to move around the globe cheaply and easily. Transnationalism and diaspora became the words commonly used by scholars to identify the fragmentation and the duality of migrants’ lives, which were fractured between the country of origin and destination and sometimes beyond (Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton Blanc, 1995; Brubaker, 2005; Faist, 2010; O’Reilly, 2012b). The settlement of migrants in host societies has represented new challenges for scholars, politicians and policymakers (Yuval-Davis, 2011), and nationalism, identity, hybridity, inclusion/exclusion, citizenship and belonging have become very common issues debated around the globe and especially in Western countries (Parekh, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Jones & Krzyżanowski, 2008; Castles & Miller, 2009; Özkirimli, 2010; Anthias, 2015).

My thesis, which examines international migration and patterns of settlement in the country of destination, aims to contribute towards discussing migration and its relation to belonging, class and national identity in a non-Western country. More specifically, the thesis makes the following three contributions:

Firstly, the thesis contributes to an in-depth knowledge of migration in the Arab Gulf region by focusing on an understudied group, that of Pakistanis. Within the context of the Arab Gulf region, Indians, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans and Filipinos are the most studied foreign communities. It might be easy to assume that unskilled and semi-skilled Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis face the same problems and constraints throughout the GCC area (Gardner, 2010a). However, if we look at the community level, the Pakistani community has a different history from, for instance, the Indian community, whose links with the Gulf region date back to the first movement of Arab merchants from the Arabian Peninsula to South Asia in the seventh and eighth centuries (Onley & Khalaf, 2006). Moreover, the presence of millions of foreign workers has also led to the formation of migrant associations. Nonetheless, the extant literature has largely overlooked the role that these organizations play for the migrants. Focusing on the PAD means understanding and discussing migrants’ agential capacity in the migration context.

Secondly, the thesis questions the dichotomy between nationals and non-nationals, as well as the homogenisation of migrants to the Gulf States. As said earlier, non-nationals, such as the old Indian merchant class, is involved in the management of the migration system. Moreover, we cannot assume that all South Asian communities deal with the same problems and constraints. For example, unskilled Indians or Pakistanis cannot bring their families with them, as it happens among highly-skilled migrants. Furthermore, among Sri Lankan communities in the GCC countries, women are the main breadwinners, which contrasts with the other South Asian communities (Gamburd, 2010). The need to move beyond the dichotomy between nationals and non-nationals, and to avoid the homogenisation of all South Asian migrants, is thus evident.

Thirdly, the thesis contributes to the debate on structure and agency in migration studies by emphasising the role of migrant's agency, which has often been underestimated (Mahdavi, 2011). I introduce the notion of migration project to emphasize the role and importance of human agency in the migration experience (Bakewell, 2010) and to emphasize that agency and structure are interrelated insofar as they both affect and shape each other. I also discuss the concepts of belonging, class, national identity and recognition, which contribute to an acknowledgment of the relation between structure and agency in migration studies.

In conclusion, this thesis challenges the extant literature on migration in the Arab Gulf region by questioning the dichotomy between nationals and non-nationals as two reciprocally-exclusive categories (Vora, 2013). Instead, it argues the need to look at inter and intra dynamics that take place in the 'field' between the two groups in order to understand how their relations are constructed.<sup>8</sup> It is thus important to consider social interactions between nationals and non-nationals because individuals occupy contradictory and multi-layered locations, spaces and social categories (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Anthias, 2015). This reasoning stems from my historical analysis of ethnic composition and social stratification in the Gulf port cities, especially Dubai, where the coexistence of different ethnic groups resulted from economic exchanges and intermarriages with people coming from African and Asian countries (Potter, 2009), which in turn contributed towards shaping the ethnic diversity of the region (see chapter 4). For example, the construction of belonging cannot be grasped only by looking at non-nationals as an 'isolated' category (Koch, 2015)

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<sup>8</sup> In the thesis, I focus more on intra-community dynamics than inter-communities ones.

but it has to be analysed and discussed in relation to ‘others’. As such, it is important to consider the role played by migrants and their ethno-national migrant associations in forging the discourse on the Emirati national identity. Migrants, through civic engagement and their participation in the Emirati public sphere, contribute towards strengthening Emirati national identity via their sense of belonging to the country and their agential capacity (e. g. migrant organizations).

### **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis focuses on the migration of Pakistani professionals who reside in Dubai. It is structured as follows: Chapter two introduces and discusses the methodological approach, and the research methods I adopted to conduct the research. I opted for an ethnographically-informed approach, firstly, because of the specific socio-political context where the issue of migration, because of the demographic imbalance (see chapter 3), is a sensitive topic. Secondly, my financial constraints and visa regulations pushed me to opt for a time-intensive ethnography, which is characterized by a diversity and variety of people that I met and talked with while I was in Dubai.

Chapter three introduces the theoretical framework of the thesis, against the background of the existing literature in migration studies and wider theoretical discussions in sociology. In particular, this chapter focuses on the relation between structure and agency and puts forward an approach which tends to emphasize the role of human agency and individual capacity to act and make choices and its relation to structure. In the chapter, I discuss the notion of migration project and its links with belonging, class, national identity and recognition.

Chapter four is devoted to describing the context in which I conducted research. I analyze the historical dynamics in order to unpack the contemporary ethnic diversity and social relationships in the UAE. By adopting the literature on global cities and moving beyond methodological nationalism, I examine the complexities and dynamics linked to the understanding belonging and the porosity of the UAE as a nation-state. As I explain, the different nationalities, languages, religions and cultures and the lack of any policy aimed at integrating foreigners in the UAE society, has not hampered the coexistence of ‘diversity’

which is historically evident and that has become one of the markers and characteristics of the Gulf region in the twentieth century.

In chapter five, I focus on the historical evolution of Pakistani migration to the country. Moreover, I provide a preliminary analysis of the Pakistani community in Dubai, and how the relationships between Pakistanis and Emiratis have developed. However, discrimination, which is described in the extant literature on migration in the GCC countries (Gardner, 2010a, Vora, 2013), is not perceived by some of my Pakistani participants as an issue because they seem to accept the gendered and racialized hierarchies existing in the country.

In chapter six, I discuss the presence of Pakistani professionals in Dubai. It focuses on how they construct their sense of belonging to the Emirati context. People build belonging in reason of shared values, but more than that, belonging is constructed because individuals are located in a specific space, place, locale and social category. I also argue that belonging is flexible, which means that people belong, at the same time, to different spaces, places and locales. 'Flexible belonging' means that social relations are shaped by fluctuations between 'preserving' 'Pakistani-ness' and feeling part of the Emirati context.

In chapter seven, I examine the role and importance of the PAD, which epitomizes the role and dynamics of migrant organizations in Western countries. Because of the specific socio-political and cultural context, however, it has specificities and characteristics that are unique. I discuss the PAD first by developing a top-down perspective in which its positionality in relation to the Emirati context is addressed and then by developing a bottom-up perspective in which I analyse the PAD as a 'gated space'.

In chapter eight, I unpack strategies adopted by the UAE to deal with perceived challenges posed by migration and globalization to the Emirati national identity. I thus analyse the process of construction of the Emirati identity, in light of the changes occurring within the country, by examining the cultural dynamics that drive this process. Moreover, I argue that the participation of Pakistani professionals in events to celebrate significant occasions for the Emiratis contributes towards enhancing the sense of belonging of my participants to the Emirati context.

In chapter nine, I come back to the three contributions of the thesis.



## 1.6 Notes on Terminology

This section aims to explain concepts such as the ‘Islamic’ and the ‘Arab world’, thus helping the reader to identify the geographical, religious and socio-cultural area.

The thesis focuses on the Arab Gulf region which is the cradle of Islām and the first Islamic community (*umma*) that was established in 622 A. D. Before the advent of Islām, the Arabian Peninsula was characterized by the presence of different languages and religions. In the seventh century, God (in Arabic Allāh) revealed to Muhammad, who was married to a very successful merchant woman (Khadija), the principles and fundamentals of Islām. All these principles and fundamentals through the decades were gathered in a book, the *Qur’ān* and along with the *ḥadīth* (plural *’aḥādīth*) represent the two main sources of Islamic religion, social, economic, political and cultural life.

Saudi Arabia, with its holy places of Mecca and Medina, is the most important country for Muslims. The kings of Saudi Arabia apart from their political role have also the honorific title of the custodian of the two holy places (*khadim al-ḥaramāni*) of Mecca and Medina. Over the centuries and with the consolidation of the most important Islamic Empires and the spreading of Islām throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and in Eastern Europe with the Ottoman Empire, Islām became one of the three Abrahamic religions that is spread all over the world (Lapidus, 2014).

The historical links between the GCC countries and South Asia can be traced back for centuries (Potter, 2009). The diffusion of Islām in the Indian sub-continent dates back to the seventh century when cane farmers from the region of Sindh, in the current Pakistan, were imported to the Arabian Peninsula by Arab merchants (Izady, 2002). In this vast geographical area, my thesis focuses on the GCC (or Arab Gulf countries). The designation of the region is, however, contested, so the ‘Persian Gulf’ and the ‘Arab Gulf’ are both used in the literature. However, I avoid taking sides in this debate because it is not relevant to my research. Moreover, I also use the expression the ‘Arabian Peninsula’ to identify all GCC countries, including Yemen. The ‘Persian Gulf’ is also used in the literature and in my thesis to designate the whole area, in which case, Iran and Iraq are included and Yemen is excluded. I sometimes use the term ‘Gulf’ to identify the whole area (Arab and Persian side of the Gulf region) and when I need to refer to one specific side of the Gulf, I use the Arab or the Persian side of the Gulf.

Islām is spread all over the world; however, the ‘Islamic world’ and the ‘Arab world’ are two different concepts. The ‘Islamic world’ includes all countries that are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation: states that from North-West Africa (Mauritania and Morocco) reach South-East Asia (Indonesia and Malaysia).<sup>9</sup> The ‘Arab world’ includes all countries members of the League of the Arab States.<sup>10</sup>

I use the expression ‘non-Gulf Arabs’ or ‘non-GCC Arabs’ to designate all Arab migrants who are nationals of a non-GCC country. Moreover, I use ‘migrant worker’ as it has been defined in article 2 of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990), in which the term is used to identify a person “who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national”. However, the GCC authorities prefer to use the term ‘temporary migrant worker’ because “they work on a temporary basis and according to fixed-term employment contracts. Upon expiration of these contracts, they return to their home countries” (letter from the Ambassador Al-Shamsi permanent representative of the UAE at the United Nations in 2006, reported in HRW, 2006, p. 70).

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv3/states/?lan=en> [accessed 07 November 2016].

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.lasportal.org/ar/aboutlas/Pages/CountryData.aspx> [accessed 07 November 2016].

## CHAPTER TWO

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline analyse the methodological approach I used to conduct the field research within the Pakistani community in Dubai. I take the reader into my life and field site by discussing the encounter with the Arab and Islamic world and unfolding the complexities and dynamics of my research experience. I discuss the methodological approach, the data collection, the ethical concerns of undertaking field research in Dubai and I also reflect on my role as a researcher.

The UAE society is a ‘closed context’ (Koch, 2013) where it is difficult to interact with Emiratis (Kanna, 2011); a censorship system exists and media and the Internet are controlled by local authorities (Davidson, 2005, 2009b). In this regard, when I asked some participants to do Skype interviews they expressed concerns about using the Internet for this purpose.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, migration is considered a sensitive issue by the Emirati authorities because of the demographic imbalance, which means that Emiratis are a minority in their own country (Baldwin-Edwards, 2011). Dubai is also one of the most expensive cities in the world (Emirates 247, 2016), which poses a further barrier to research.<sup>12</sup> The specific socio-political context, the economic constraints and visa regulations forced me to reduce the length of my fieldwork in Dubai.<sup>13</sup> Despite these difficulties, I was able to undertake field research, collect data, interview people, observe and participate in the Pakistani community’s life, and talk with migrants of different nationalities (Filipinos, Egyptians, Bangladeshis, Indians, a British-Pakistani, and a Jordanian) who provided diverse and personal perspectives on their migration experience. I also had a conversation with a

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<sup>11</sup> However, John, one of my participants accepted to reply to some questions via email.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.emirates247.com/news/world-s-most-expensive-cities-where-dubai-abu-dhabi-rank-2016-03-15-1.624198> [accessed 20 May 2016].

<sup>13</sup> My research was funded by a scholarship granted by Loughborough University and contributions of the Department of Social Sciences. After my first field trip, I realized that Dubai was expensive; moreover, the more I engaged with the extant literature the more I realized that my topic was sensitive for the UAE authorities. Thus I opted for an ethnographically-informed approach that led me to reduce my permanence in Dubai. As an Italian citizen, in October 2014, I got a visit visa upon my arrival at the airport valid for 30 days and it could be renewed through a local immigration office for other 30 days. When I arrived at Dubai airport in October 2015, I discovered that the rules had changed, I got a visit visa for three months but I could not change my plans because I rented the accommodation for only a month and did not have the possibility to renew the contract.

representative of the Pakistani Consulate. My research is characterized by the richness of data collected, and the diversity of people with whom I talked and the places that I visited. The variety and abundance of information allowed me to provide a detailed, articulated and dynamic analysis of the Pakistani community in Dubai.

## **2.2 The origin of the topic**

The choice of research topic and methods are driven by personal and academic motivations; gender, age, class, religion, ‘race’ and nationality affected my research (man, white, in my thirties, working-class background, atheist and Italian) and how I carried it out. The interpretation of data, the discussion of research findings and conclusion are influenced by who I am, and my personal, emotional and academic stories.

In the mid-1990s, I undertook a long ‘journey’<sup>14</sup> to ‘discover’ the Arab and Islamic world, maybe for my inborn curiosity, maybe I just wanted to explore a different way of life, a different religion, a new language, a different history and events. This fascinating, sometimes difficult journey, led me to read, meet, talk and interact with many people of different ethnic origins, nationalities, gender, age, language and religion. It emotionally, physically and spatially led me to visit mosques both in Italy and in the UK, to participate in public events in support of marginalized people. In this long journey, my interest, passion and curiosity for the Arab and Islamic world has grown day-by-day and has widened from history to language, from sociology to anthropology and religion, and eventually to include not only the Arab world but also the African, South and East Asian countries. Much later, in 2005, a meeting with a Pakistani woman in my hometown represented another turning point in my life and studies; she told me the story of her family who migrated to Libya to work in the national oil company and that of many other Pakistanis who had migrated to Dubai. In 2008, I realized that the time was ripe to address my interest academically and explore the dynamics and complexities of the migration experience in an Arab and Islamic country. This interest culminated in a research project that combined my personal and scholarly attachment

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<sup>14</sup> The ‘journey’ I undertook related to the university degree and research experience among Arab and South Asian migrants in my hometown in Italy.

to the Arab and Islamic world with training in migration and ethnography. It took me a long time before starting this project (in 2014), but here I am.

This is a research project on the Pakistani community and especially professionals in Dubai (see chapter 6). It is a stratified community with internal divisions that seem to not have undermined its cohesion.<sup>15</sup> My background of studies and my personal interests drove the choice of my topic and the methods I adopted.

### **2.3 Overview of the methodological approach**

In this section, I briefly present my research design and data collection in order to provide the reader with preliminary information; however, these aspects will be unravelled in more detail throughout the chapter. For this research, I undertook two field trips to Dubai. I spent two weeks between October and November 2014 and, during this initial trip, I more narrowly defined my research aims in order to take into account the real situation I came across while I was in Dubai, such as my financial constraints, the difficulties in approaching migrants, especially construction workers in the labour camps (I initially hoped to look at these), and the difficulties in investigating such a sensitive issue for the UAE authorities because of the international condemnation of how construction workers are treated (HRW, 2006). Thus I decided to focus on Pakistani professionals because it was an under researched and interesting group that perform their migration experience in a different way in comparison with, for example, Indian merchants and businessmen in Dubai (Vora, 2013). During my second trip, I spent four weeks in Dubai between October and November 2015, I started working on my research but, as happens in ethnography, the unexpected is ‘behind the door’ and it showed up when I had the opportunity to conduct participant observation within the PAD. Thus I focused on Pakistani professionals’ and on the role and importance of the PAD to the Pakistani community.

My methodological approach was based upon a combination of ‘conventional’<sup>16</sup> and focused ethnography (see below) due to the particular setting and regulations in force in the

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<sup>15</sup> In this chapter, the divisions are mentioned in order to discuss how they ‘methodologically’ emerged during the field research. However, they will be analysed in detail in chapter 7.

<sup>16</sup> I use the term ‘conventional’ ethnography to identify the anthropological ethnography conducted in a non-Western country among people with an ethnic and cultural background that differs from that of the ethnographer. The anthropological ethnography is conceived as an archetype derived from the Malinowskian

country. This approach led me to fully grasp the complexities and dynamics of the Pakistani community in Dubai

In total, I have spent six weeks in Dubai where I had a multitude of spontaneous and informal conversations with many Pakistanis, Indians, non-Gulf Arabs and Westerners. Moreover, I undertook twenty-five in-depth, formal interviews, recorded in English:

- twenty interviews with Pakistanis, Emiratis, an Indian, a Jordanian and a British-Pakistani
- three interviews with Abdallah (Pakistani), who was my PAD key informant.
- two interviews with John (Pakistani), who was my key informant of the Pakistani professional group.

Of the twenty-two individuals above, sixteen were Pakistanis, three were Emiratis, one was Indian, one was British-Pakistani, and one was a non-Gulf Arab. I recruited my participants by adopting snowball sampling which means that I ‘used’ my first contacts to recruit other participants from their acquaintances, friends and family members. I opted for this sampling strategy because I initially only had one contact (John) and through his acquaintances and friends my sample was generated. I chose members of the Pakistani professional group that were known to and introduced by my initial contact (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1 Pakistani participants<sup>17</sup>**

Interviewees	Age	Occupation	Duration of interview	Generation	Residence in Dubai	Religion	Origin from Pakistan
John	60s	Banker/Media	6 hours	First	Not authorized to disclose	Born Muslim; identified as atheist	India/Punjab
Khalaf	50s	Pakistani official	1 hour	First	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	Not disclosed
Ismail	42	Teacher	1.30 hour	First	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	British Pakistan

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image of the ethnographer that travels alone in an ‘exotic’ place, he is male, white, live in the ‘field’ for one year or more, and establishes the tent in the middle of the ‘field’ to observe what happens around him. It is different from ethnography used in sociology where the segmentation of the modern society has required new developments and ‘tools’ to investigate and research social life (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> In this table, I included all Pakistani participants with whom I had informal conversations and formal interviews.

Ester	45	Manager	1.30 hour	First	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	Not disclosed
Leila	39	Marketing	2 hours	First	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
Peter	36	Accountant	1.30 hour	First	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	Baluchistan
Ali	38	Freelance	1.30 hour	First	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	Not authorized to disclose
Mahmud	48	Businessman	2 hours	First	Not authorized to disclose	<i>Ismā'īlī</i> Muslim	Gujarat/Sindh
Ibrahim	77	CFO	2 hours	First	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	Sindh
Zia	50	Businessman	1.30 hour	Second	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	Not authorized to disclose
Omar	30	IT	2 hours	First	Internet City	Muslim	Sindh
Abdallah	49	Doctor	5 hours	Third	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	Not authorized to disclose
Naseer	70s	Businessman	1.30 hour	First	Motor City	Muslim	Punjab
Muhammad	53	Businessman	2 hours	Second	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	Punjab
Rita	41	Manager	2 hours	Second	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	Sindh
Katie	31	Employee	1.30 hour	Second	The Greens	Muslim	Punjab
Rahman	41	Marketing	2 hours	First	JLT	Muslim	Not authorized to disclose
Rashid	37	Employee	2 hours	First	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim	Punjab
Bushra	27	Employee	1 hour	Second	Dubai/Sharjah	Muslim	Not disclosed
Suleyman	42	Engineer	4 hours	Second	Abu Dhabi/Dubai	Muslim	Not disclosed

As it emerges from the above table, the occupations of my participants are varied (manager, businessman, doctor) and this exemplifies how the category of middle-class professionals is varied and stratified (see chapter 6); the average or typical length of an interview is between one hour and a half and six hours; the majority of my participants are first generation migrants; I am not disclosing their residence because some of them did not allow me to do that and the region of Pakistan where they come from; they are all born Muslim, and all, with the exception of one, identify as Muslim.

As O'Reilly (2012a, p. 45) acknowledges, sampling is ongoing thus meaning that deciding "who to spend time with, where to be, what to watch and so on in not one-off decision, but is part of the practice of ethnography". In other words, during my field research I also decided to spend time and interview other individuals who were likely to enable a wider perspective on Pakistani professionals in Dubai. It happened that during my field research I met other people that I thought could provide a more insightful and/or a different perspective (convenience sampling). These are listed below (Table 2.2.).

**Table 2.2 Other participants**

Interviewees	Country of origin	Age	Occupation	Duration of interview	Residence in Dubai	Religion
Jamal	India	40s	Employee Dubai Government	3 hours	Not disclosed	Hindu
Kate	UAE	32	University student	1 hour	Rashidiyya	Muslim
Hussein	Jordan	35	Teacher	2 hours	Mirdiff	Muslim
Lisa	UAE	25	Employee Dubai Government	1 hour	Not authorized to disclose	Muslim
Helen	UAE	22	University student	1 hour	Rashidiyya	Muslim



As it emerges from the above table, the other participants are members of Indian and Arab (Jordanian and Emirati) middle-class, some of them are university students and other are employed by the Dubai government; they are Muslims and one was Hindu.

The main sample characteristics (Table 2.1) are important in my research because the interviewed participants occupy different niches of the local labour market; their ages ranged from their 20s to their 70s; they are of different immigrant generations; they are all born Muslim, with most of them being Sunni Muslims, while one participant was an *Isma'īlī* Muslim and one was an atheist with an Islamic background. The diversity of the sample enabled me to provide an account of different subjectivities and stories in my thesis. For example, those who are members of the first-generation migrants have a different story from those of the second or third generation, and this difference has allowed me to better understand the construction of sense of belonging and their social interactions both within and outside the Pakistani community. However, this sample also constrained my research because it was limited in terms of gender; the majority of my interviewees were men, and I only had conversations with five Pakistani women (see below).

Seven of my participants were women (three Emiratis and five Pakistanis), and fifteen were men (twelve Pakistanis, one British-Pakistani, one non-Gulf Arab and one Indian). Although gender is not a central dimension of the thesis, some Emirati and Pakistani women's voices have been included. These are women I met in Dubai in 2014 and 2015 (see pages 30-32). There are several reasons for the relatively small presence of (Muslim) Pakistani women in my sample. First, as a white Western and non-Muslim researcher it is very difficult to approach Muslim women because of the traditional division of male and female space. In the Emirati society (and in the other Arab and Islamic countries) gender segregation is seen as a way to safeguard family honour, and women “represent the public face of the family and it is women who pass honor [*sic*] to their male descendants” (Bristol-Rhys, 2010, p. 96). In this kind of society, as Bristol-Rhys (2010) argues, honour and modesty, which are both associated with the public behaviour of women, have to be protected and safeguarded. Any meetings between a male researcher and a woman participant would have to be chaperoned, thus creating an additional barrier to the recruitment. Second, in relation to Pakistani professionals, which is the focus of my thesis, the small sample of professional women also related to the difficulties I had with gaining potential access to Pakistani professional women via my key informant (John). John was able to provide the

contact details of six women, but only four of them accepted to be involved and to participate in my research (see ethical issues). Third, the majority of Pakistani men in Dubai are the main breadwinners in their family units, they undertake the initial migration and they travel on their own. Some of my male interviewees told me that they moved to Dubai on their own and that their wives (and children) only joined them after a few years. On all of these grounds, it is easier to facilitate research with professional Pakistani men than with professional Pakistani women.

To a certain extent, the limited amount of time spent in the field affected my sampling method which allowed me to interview more men than women because the former were more likely to talk with a white Western man and researcher thus facilitating our contacts and interactions. In terms of the racialized and gendered politics of the relationships I developed with Pakistani professionals, my contacts with Pakistani men were easier and more immediate than those I had with Pakistani women. Being a white Western man represented an opportunity to get easy access to the male sphere in this deeply gender divided society. At the same time, it also provided an obstacle to obtaining access to the female sphere.

Further to the more formal interviews, my research relied upon informal conversations in the PAD, field notes, observations, and on many spontaneous conversations I also had with taxi drivers (especially, Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Ethiopians) and with waiters/waitresses (mostly Filipinos) in restaurants where I had meals, and with some Westerners I met.

#### **2.4 The ethnographically-informed approach**

Given the context outlined above and my research aims, I adopted an ethnographically-informed approach that is a combination of ‘conventional’ and focused ethnography. In this section, before unfolding my approach, I discuss why I opted for ethnographic methods, the origins of ethnography and its recent developments, and I argue that such developments resulted from the segmentation of the modern and globalized society.

Ethnographic methods were suitable to develop my research aims because of their characteristics and developments (see below). Ethnography allowed me to catch the complexities and ambiguities of the migration experience, to observe and participate in migrants’ lives. As an interpretivist, I hoped to understand the meanings and aspects of

actors' life, which entailed spending time with them, empathizing with them, sharing personal and emotional experiences with them. As an interpretivist, I also participated in people's lives and groups in order to catch the meanings and make sense of what people did, thus understanding the migration experience from the participants' perspective.<sup>18</sup> My assumption is that ethnography should describe, understand and interpret cultural elements and that this does not necessarily require a prolonged period of data collection in the field. For example, I had enough experience and a specific personal and scholarly background that facilitated and reduced the necessary length of my permanence in the field. As ethnography is based upon interactions and contacts between the researcher and the researched, we cannot define *a priori* which elements, dynamics, and whether and to what extent people will accept to participate in the research. Nonetheless, my ethnographically-informed approach (see below) is based on the assumption that the ethnographer, instead of choosing not to undertake the research in a specific context or group because of financial constraints, or lack of previous knowledge, or difficulties in gaining access, should interpret and describe such difficulties as part of his/her research experience because they also serve to 'create' knowledge, which is the ultimate aim of any research.

#### *A) Ethnography: origin and developments*

In the nineteenth century, the term 'ethnography' was used to indicate research conducted in the so-called 'exotic' societies or in non-Western countries. The Polish-born anthropologist Malinowski (1884-1942), who is considered the founder of modern social anthropology, adopted ethnography as his privileged methodology (Macdonald, 2013). In the twentieth century, ethnography became a methodology adopted in sociology in order to study the everyday life in modern and urban contexts by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches (in this regard, it was a privileged methodology adopted by Chicago School, or the Chicago School of Ethnography) (Deegan, 2013).

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<sup>18</sup> The approaches and methods used by ethnographers can be influenced by different philosophical perspectives in social science. Positivism argues that the social world is external to human beings and it can be observed through our senses, but we cannot 'impinge' upon it (Brewer, 2000). Realism is based on the idea that a real world exists and acts "independently of our knowledge and beliefs of it" (Benton & Craib, 2011, p. 121). There are other developments such as the 'reflexive turn' and postmodernism (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; O'Reilly, 2009).

Ethnography involves a full immersion, for a protracted period of time, in people's lives in order to watch what they do and what happens, listen to what they say, ask questions and collect documents (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). It is a methodology based upon different methods of data collection, "such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, the use of personal documents" (Brewer, 2000, p. 59). It is characterized by "holistic participation of a researcher amongst a foreign and/or 'exotic', relatively bounded people...the researcher is typically unfamiliar with the cultural setting under study and enters the setting with a broad, undefined purpose (Wall, 2015, no page number). It relies on interactions among people, as such the unexpected is always 'behind the door' and this requires a dynamic and flexible approach.

Ethnography is a term that lacks "a single, standard meaning... And we can outline a core definition, while recognizing that this does not capture all of its meaning in all contexts" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 2). This 'flexibility' has allowed it to develop in order to respond to the new circumstances and challenges posed to social life by globalization, international migration, development of the Internet and social media that require new methodological approaches in order to grasp the complexities and dynamics of the modern society, such as multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995) and focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005). Focused ethnography is based on the premise that "we no longer need to travel far-away places to study culture; nor is culture defined only along ethnic or geographical lines" (Mayan, 2009, p. 37, cited in Wall, 2015, no page number). As such, it

usually deals with a distinct problem in a specific context and is conducted within a sub-cultural group rather than with a cultural group that differs completely from that of the researcher [and it is characterized by] short-term or absent field visits, an interest in a specific research question, a researcher with insider or background knowledge of the cultural group (Wall, 2015, no page number).

Focused ethnography is complementary to traditional ethnography insofar as it uses the same methods and techniques. For Knoblauch (2005), focused ethnography is able to respond to the segmentation and fluidity of the globalized world, and it allows focusing on a specific group, it does not require travelling abroad, it is conducted in a place that is geographically and culturally close to that of the researcher and it is time-intensive.

Focused ethnography has, however, some weaknesses. For example, Knoblauch (2005) enhances and encourages the use of modern technological devices (tape-recorder,

video camera) in order to build dynamic and inclusive data collection methods that take into account the different perspectives of people involved in the research (inter-subjectivity). Conversely, 'conventional' ethnography, because it is mostly based upon field notes, is subject to personal authorship, individual analysis and personal interpretations, thus becoming more subjective. However, I find this point a weakness in Knoblauch's approach insofar as technological devices can also be used in 'conventional' ethnography along with field notes, and notes of spontaneous and informal conversations and non-recorded interviews.

### *B) Ethnographically-informed approach*

In order to carry out my research within the Pakistani community in Dubai, which from my perspective as a Westerner is an 'exotic' place, I used an ethnographically-informed approach that is a combination of 'conventional' ethnography and focused ethnography. This approach means that I conducted research in a non-Western city among people with a different background from mine and it was time-intensive. I was an outsider but with knowledge of an 'insider',<sup>19</sup> I travelled abroad (I was alone, I am white and male), I focused on a specific group and organization of the Pakistani community thus reducing time in the field, and I came to this community with specific research aims in mind. This specific approach resulted from my background in Arab and Islamic studies and previous research experiences in Islamic contexts with Arabs and South Asians. This facilitated the contacts and interactions with Arabs and Pakistanis and made it easier for me to approach them and build a trusting relationship (see below). My specific approach allowed me to conduct field research in spite of the financial constraints and the sensitivity of the topic. Due to the demographic imbalance, migration is considered as an issue by the UAE authorities (see chapter 3). For example, the ethnographer (insert first name too) Ali was conducting research on the second generation of migrants (born of migrant parents) in Dubai (Ali, 2010). While he was in Dubai, he wrote a blog on his observations and ideas on migration and he did not

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<sup>19</sup> In 2002, I graduated in Italy in Arab and Islamic studies. I conducted ethnographic research for two years in a mosque in South Italy; I undertook ethnographic research with South Asians in South Italy (2002-2005). In 2011, I conducted ethnographic research, for four months, in Swansea (UK) within the local mosque mostly frequented by South Asians (Errichiello, 2007). However, I am aware that my knowledge of the local language, religion and customs could not represent 'insider knowledge' in an ethnographic sense, but certainly they facilitated my contacts and the building of a trusting relationship with my participants, as the results provided in the thesis demonstrate.

cover up his identity. During his last day in the city, the police knocked on his door and he was taken to the police station, where he was questioned for about twelve hours, they ransacked his room and seized his computer. This story encapsulates the discourse on the control wielded by the UAE authorities on the Internet and social media, the sensitivity of the issue of migration, and the potential risks that researchers face in Dubai.

Ethnography is a dynamic, flexible and reflexive methodology and it can thus be adapted to the unexpected that usually happens while conducting field research. My ethnographically-informed approach is based upon the idea that focused ethnography overlap with the ‘conventional’ approach. Ethnography is a flexible and adaptable methodology that, combined with my previous research experience, and a deep knowledge of the socio-political, cultural and religious context, allowed me to develop my specific and particular approach. I think the quality of the data from my intensive, short-term period of ethnographic research and qualitative interviewing has been greatly informed and enhanced by my previous experience, training and knowledge in Islamic contexts: I didn’t have to settle in Dubai and learn the way of life as a complete outsider. As I discuss in this chapter, the richness and variety of data collected, my field notes, observations and the conversations I had in the field helped me to interpret and analyze the dynamics and complexities of the Pakistani community in Dubai.

## **2.5 Gatekeepers and key informants**

Given my research aims (see chapter 1), I identified two different gatekeepers and key informants. In this section, I discuss the importance of networks and the ‘weight’ of reliable people that can facilitate and legitimate the ethnographer’s presence in the field.

The gatekeeper is a person that is able to grant access to a group or setting because s/he is in a position of persuading others or is an influential member of the group (O’Reilly, 2009). Moreover, in the field, it is also important to identify a key informant (s) who, because of his/her experience, role and status within a community or a group can provide lots of information, and s/he has a deep knowledge of the community or group.

My research revolved around discussing Pakistani professionals’ life and the role of the Pakistani association. The access to the Pakistani professional group was negotiated

through a member of this group, to whom I was introduced by a former Pakistani Consul in Dubai, who, in turn, was a friend of an academic that I contacted a few weeks before my first field trip in 2014. This former consul asked a friend of his, John, to help me while I was in Dubai. John is an important member of the Pakistan Professional Wing (PPW),<sup>20</sup> and because of his help I had the opportunity to meet and interview members of this group. He has been both my gatekeeper and key informant. This is a case in which both roles are overlapped. John became my key informant because as a member of the board of the PPW, he knew many professionals and, because of his long residence in Dubai he had a deep knowledge of the Pakistani community's constraints and dynamics. John was born in India before partition, in 1947 (see chapter 5) and he migrated to Pakistan in the mid-1969. He settled in Karachi; after his degree, he was employed by a Pakistani bank. In 1973, he was transferred by his bank to Doha (Qatar). In 1996, he moved to Dubai where before starting working in the media, he was employed by a local bank. He is married with a Pakistani woman; the rest of his family, his son and daughter, lives in a Western country, where he is planning to settle upon leaving Dubai (see chapter 6).

A gatekeeper might grant access to a specific group because s/he is a member of that group, but if the researcher needs to enter another group, s/he might need a new gatekeeper. In 2015, during my second field trip, in order to gain access to the Pakistani association, I contacted a Pakistani woman. I knew about her because she was introduced by Jamal, an Indian man who works in Dubai (see below) and, in turn, I was introduced to him by an academic. She contacted her friend, Abdallah, who is a member of the board of the PAD, and she told him that I was undertaking research on the Pakistani community in Dubai and that this was a good opportunity for the PAD to be known outside the local environment, thus she was my gatekeeper. Abdallah became my key informant because of his role within the organization and his deep knowledge of the history of the Pakistani community in Dubai. His support was necessary to gain access to the PAD, and in a certain way he legitimated my presence as a researcher in the field. Abdallah is a doctor who was born in Kuwait where his parents spent twenty-two years. Then, because of the nationalization policy adopted by the country (see chapter 3), his family migrated to Pakistan where Abdallah graduated as a doctor. He, then, decided to move to South Africa where he spent about fourteen years. He

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ppdubai.com/> [accessed 20 April 2016].

is married with a Pakistani woman; it was an arranged marriage (Errichiello, 2009) and he has got one son. In 2009, he moved to Dubai where now he works for one of the most important private hospitals of the city and he is one of the most prominent members of the PAD.

In this context, in order to build a trust relationship with my participants, I needed my presence to be legitimated by a credible person that they trusted. For example, the gatekeeper/key informant of the Pakistani professional group sent a collective email to his friends (this raised an ethical concern that I discuss below) and they all accepted to talk with me just because I was introduced to them by a person that they reckoned with. In this specific socio-political context, networks are fundamental to gain access and conduct field research (Clark, 2006).

The choice of having two different key informants led me to reflect on divisions within the Pakistani community. If I had talked only with Abdallah, the key informant of the PAD, where I conducted participant observation (see below) between October and November 2015, he would have said to me that the Pakistani community is united, cohesive and inclusive. During my first field trip, in 2014, John told me that Pakistanis in Dubai had a strong sense of belonging to their origins and roots; however, divisions within the community existed (from my field notes, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2014). In order to illustrate this point, it is useful to report some excerpts from the interview with Abdallah.

G [initial of my name]: During my research I perceived a sort of division within the Pakistani community and I am aware that it is a big community, and so it is 'natural' to have different perspectives. I also talked, this morning, with a Pakistani professional, and he said: 'yes there is a big division within this community'. Do you perceive this division? How could you explain it?

A [initial of his pseudonym]: I think that is the beauty of every society that you have different classes, but I do not think that it affects the community in general. You cannot have people of the same class. I do not see anything wrong in having different class in a community as long as they complement each other, they can assist each other. That is how a community is. I think everywhere in the world you will find that.

G: Apart from class differences that I expected to find in a group or association, I also believe that there is a sort of 'competition' or someone said to me 'envy' among members of the same community. Do you perceive this envy within the community?

A: No, not at all. Our association is a second home for the Pakistanis here in Dubai, anyone who is willing to contribute towards the community; he can come and join us. It is a voluntary organization. So, I do not see any reason why there should be any privilege or class difference related to the association. I would say you have been for some quite days, you have been visiting the association, and you have seen the activities (interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015).



In these excerpts, I was not talking of class division, but I was referring to the division or ‘conflicts’ within the community that was mentioned by John in 2014. This is why I asked the second question. These excerpts demonstrate that if I had only interviewed the key informant of the PAD (Abdallah), I would not have grasped the division within the Pakistani community, as I explain below.<sup>21</sup> Put differently, when talking with a member of the board of an association or a group, s/he might ‘flatten’ the community without highlighting the discrepancies and differences that nonetheless exist within a group or association. Thus it is vital to talk and establish contacts with different people in order to obtain different perspectives.

The role of the gatekeeper and key informant are central to ethnographic research and sometimes their roles overlap. They are the first persons that the ethnographer meet and talk with in the field. In some cases, the ethnographer needs access to different settings or groups and it is important to ‘select’ a new gatekeeper and key informant. In my research, in order to have access granted to both groups (PAD and professionals) I had to contact two different gatekeepers and key informants. Despite being members of the same community, there was no chance that the same gatekeeper or key informant could grant access to both groups. This led me to think of the division within the Pakistani community.

## **2.6 Participant observation**

One of my research aims was to investigate the role of the Pakistani association for Pakistani migrants. Thus, I used the main method of ethnography to conduct participant observation, which means to observe for a period of time people’s lives in the natural setting and investigate their social life that occurs in the setting. It also involves talking with people; asking questions; participate in some events and writing (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2007). In this section, I discuss the importance of participant observation within the Pakistani association and I argue that this method along with my background and experiences allowed me to catch the complexities and the divisions within the community.

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<sup>21</sup> These divisions also emerged during a conversation that I had with Bushra in the PAD (5<sup>th</sup> November 2015), however, as I explain in this chapter, she refused to deepen such dynamics.

Time is important in participant observation in order to build a trust relationship and ‘apprehend’ the cultural and social norms from people’s perspective (O’Reilly, 2012a). As outlined above, I was unable to spend many months in Dubai to observe and participate more deeply in the Pakistani community’s life. In order to conduct participant observation, I spent as many hours as possible in the PAD (at least thirty hours in about one month), on different days and times. I also participated in some events organized by the association where I talked with many people. Participant observation is an embodied experience (O’Reilly, 2012a) based on physical contact, interactions, and on empathizing with participants. In informal conversations and in-depth interviews (see below), I found that a way to empathize with them was to use some words that I had listened to and read in other ethnographic accounts, so words such as ‘discrimination’ and ‘frustration’ became part of my vocabulary and a way to express my emotional participation in their lives.<sup>22</sup> Participant observation allowed me to catch the complexities, dynamics and ‘conflict’ within the Pakistani community. For example, on 5 November 2015, one spontaneous conversation that I had with Bushra in the PAD, a young Pakistani woman who studied at an international university in Dubai, urged me to develop the approach to my research in a different direction. That conversation, along with the conversation that I had with John in 2014, pushed me to reflect on the division existing within the Pakistani community and it helped me to delve into its dynamics by asking my key informants specific questions on that division. However, only John, when I met him again in 2015, responded clearly by underscoring the existence of divisions within the community. The conversation that I had with Bushra led me to reflect on the importance of interacting with the participants; every occasion offered good opportunities to engage in talks with people in the field. It led me to think of the importance of informal chats and spontaneous conversations to my research

Since the 2000s, I have been undertaking ethnographic research with Arabs and South Asians in Italy and the UK. In that sense, I have learned to be culturally sensitive, which means learning about beliefs, habits and customs of participants and empathizing with them (Sieber, 1993). For example, I knew how to behave with Muslim women, and that some of them may not agree to shake my hand. My knowledge of Islām and religious precepts has always been a good way to ‘break the ice’ and easily build a trust relationship

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<sup>22</sup> This might appear ‘strategic’. However, by reading the literature on migration in the GCC countries, I felt emotionally involved in their own lives.

with Muslim men. I knew that I could not ask Muslim women and men questions on sex, and that I could not deal with issues such as atheism and homosexuality. I am aware that every context varies, people are different but the ethnographer can learn from previous experiences. In some authoritarian Middle Eastern countries, a researcher that shows knowledge of the local language, religion and cultural aspects might be viewed with suspicion by local authorities (Clark, 2006; Gentile, 2013). In my research, I felt a sense of discomfort in showing my specific knowledge especially in the PAD where I did not know who the people were and I feared that they could talk with local authorities and tell them that I was conducting research on migration in Dubai because, as I said above, migration is a sensitive topic. I initially felt that some of the people at the PAD looked at me with suspicion. However, the more time I spent in the PAD the more familiar they became with my questions and me, and my fear gradually disappeared.

Participant observation is a method that involves contact between the ethnographer and participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Although in some cases (depending on the context and the previous experience of the researcher) time is important to build a trust relationship with the participants, my previous experiences and background of studies were essential tools in facilitating the dialogue and relationships between me and the participants.

## **2.7 Ethnographic interviewing**

In order to investigate Pakistanis' migration, the ethnographic interview, which is conducted by the ethnographer during his/her research (Gobo, 2008), represented the main tool to unfolding the dynamics within the community. In this section, I discuss the ethnographic interview as a technique that I adopted to gather information. It can be a spontaneous and informal conversation that takes place in the field or it can be arranged in a separate place and at a different time (in-depth interviews or guided conversation). The ethnographic interview might be divided in two different categories: those that are spontaneous and informal conversations that take place in the field and those that are

formally arranged at different times and places established by participants (O'Reilly, 2012a).<sup>23</sup>

In the PAD, I had lots of conversations with different people, I observed what happened and asked questions. For example, the Health Awareness event, which is organised by the Medical Wing (MW) of the PAD (see chapter 7) to deal with health problems of migrants, and takes place every last Friday of each month, produced a good occasion to observe what happened in the field and 'provoke' spontaneous and informal conversations. I found out, for example, that men and women with children were seated in the courtyard; they were in two different but adjacent areas of the patio; that the staff of the PAD distributed medicines, that there were Pakistani doctors both men and women and one American doctor. All these led me to think of the importance of such events to the peoples' life insofar as some of them do not have enough money to go to hospital, to buy medicines, and no health insurance because some are illegal migrants.

On 5 November 2015, I was in the PAD and I was talking with some participants and one of them asked me what I had discovered about the Pakistani community. I explained that I thought that it was a united and well-organized community. At this point, Bushra said to me that it is not true because the community is divided. I asked to arrange a private conversation because I realized that it was not the right moment to deal with this issue, but she refused. I interpreted this refusal as a way to conceal the discrepancies within the Pakistani community; I perceived her frustration and at the same time the 'remorse' for what she had told me. I met Bushra on another occasion (during the Health Fair, organized by the PAD in the Pakistan Education Academy, on 7 November 2015) and asked for a meeting, but she kindly declined my invitation. This conversation has been useful for my research because it let the divisions within the Pakistani community emerge (see chapter 7).

Before starting participant observation in the PAD, on 19 October 2015, during my first and second field trips to Dubai (2014-2015), I had already interviewed nine people: Jamal, an Indian academically-oriented professional (see below) and eight Pakistani professionals (six men and two women). As I embarked on my observations in the PAD, I expected to meet some of the Pakistanis I had already interviewed. In 2014, in an informal

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<sup>23</sup> In my research all in-depth interviews, which were pre-arranged with the interviewees, have been recorded with an electronic device. However, on four occasions I had pre-arranged interviews that were not recorded: with Jamal on 28 October 2014; twice with John on 29 October 2014 and on 21 October 2015; and with Khalaf, the member of the Pakistani Consulate on 5 November 2015 (see Appendix C).

conversation, John told me that the PAD is a “religious-oriented group that he [John] defines as a fundamentalist association”<sup>24</sup> (from my field notes, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2014).<sup>25</sup> In three in-depth interviews with Abdallah, the key informant of the association and in eight in-depth interviews with Pakistani professionals, I asked if the whole community was as united as it appeared. The division within the community was never mentioned, and they ‘strived’ to project the image of a united community, except for the personal confidence of the aforementioned Pakistani professional (John). I knew that the community was stratified but as they shared the migration experience and difficulties that such experience entailed, I supposed that they were close to each other. The conversation I had in the PAD, on 5 November 2015, shed new light on my research and led me to interpret these divisions as a key to understanding the internal dynamics of the Pakistani community. What initially appeared as a discrepancy, which could ‘compromise’ the findings of my research, had become a way to interpret the internal dynamics of the community from their own perspective, where divisions and discrepancies are integral parts of the whole (O’Reilly, 2012a).

The recorded, formal interviews and the more informal conversations I had in the field have been analysed by adopting thematic analysis, which is defined as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). I opted for this method because it implies an active role of the researcher in “identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80). Having chosen unstructured interviews (see below), I had pre-conceived ideas about the main topic to be covered during the interview, which was to understand and discuss their migration story. I encouraged my interviewees to tell me what they thought was important in relation to their experience as migrants in Dubai, and then I followed the topical trajectories, thus themes like the decision-making process, belonging and temporariness became important aspects and topics of conversations and interviews with my participants. I read through the interviews and transcripts and noted down codes and concepts that I thought were important and these emerged as common patterns/themes in all interviews. The identified themes became crucial in order to address my research questions (see chapter 1).

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<sup>24</sup> I asked my participant to explain the meaning of his words, but he did not want to go in detail.

<sup>25</sup> John asked me to not record that conversation and to not mention to anyone (within the Pakistani community) what he said to me.

Conversations and in-depth interviews are important elements of ethnographic research because they shed light on specific circumstances, they clarify some aspects, and they let divisions and ambiguities emerge. These are not being viewed as a ‘problem’ but as a part of the ethnographic research.

## **2.8 Data collection**

As I outlined above, my research was based on ethnographic interviews that can be distinguished between spontaneous and informal conversations, which take place in the field, and more formal, in-depth interviews, which are pre-arranged in a different setting and time established by the participant (O’Reilly, 2012a).

In addition to ethnographic observations and spontaneous and informal conversations, I recorded twenty-five in-depth and unstructured interviews<sup>26</sup> with twenty-two different people (on sampling see above). It means that I interviewed some people more than once (Abdallah and John). I chose this style because it allowed me to go in-depth and follow the topical trajectories. I did not have any predetermined questions, but only three or four topics that I thought could be important in order to develop my research. This style encourages reflexivity and there is room for letting ‘conflict’, doubts and fears emerge (O’Reilly, 2012a).

On 28 October 2014, I had a long conversation with Jamal in his office. On 3 November 2014 (I also met him in October 2015), I met him again and I recorded an in-depth interview that lasted more than an hour. He works for the Emirati government and he is also a journalist. He is married and has got one child. He moved to Dubai in 2000, after finishing his PhD in India. Jamal is a successful Indian migrant who is also member of the Indian middle-class, described by Vora (2013) in her book. He enjoys his life in Dubai and he is planning to return to India and establish an NGO to help Indians to acquire skills so that they can easily find a job either in India or abroad (from my field notes, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

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<sup>26</sup> The ethnographic interviews can be distinguished in three different styles: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. In a structured interview, questions are prepared and predetermined with explicit research aims. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has a sort of ‘interview guide’ that is a list of questions to ask in a predetermined order, however, in this kind of interview, the interviewer has room to follow topical trajectories as they emerge from the interview (O’Reilly, 2012a).

In 2014, I interviewed Hussein, a Jordanian man and my housemate. He is a teacher and he moved to Dubai in 2012; he is single, and he has a well-paid job in an international school in Dubai. Moreover, I also interviewed his colleague and friend, Ismail, who is a British-Pakistani and moved to Dubai in 2011. He is separated and has got two children who live with his (ex) wife in the UK. During this field trip, I interviewed Kate, an Emirati woman; she is 28 years old and she is a student at Zayed University. She was one of the guides of the tour at the Centre for Cultural Understanding (see chapter 8). These first interviews helped me to understand that the topic was sensitive and that to approach Emiratis would not be easy. For example, during one conversation with Jamal, I asked him to address me to an immigration office in order to ask how to renew my visa if I decided to stay longer (see footnote 15). He said not to visit an immigration office whilst I was in Dubai because the local authorities would register my name and details and asked the reason why I wanted to renew it, which is something to avoid when conducting research on migration. He said that I would better ask to the Emirati Consulate in the UK or in Italy.

During my field trips I hoped to interview some Emiratis (see chapter 4) in order to understand their perspective on migration in the UAE. However, it was rather difficult to talk with them because most of them “are still reluctant to open up to outsiders” (Kanna, 2011, p. 12). It is not easy to approach them unless you are working or studying with them. In a shopping mall, I tried to approach an Emirati man who was working in customer service, but he was very formal. I asked questions about his dress and he replied but soon after he returned to his duties. The only way I found to overcome this *impasse* was to participate in two tours (6<sup>th</sup> November 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2015) around the old Dubai organized by the Centre for Cultural Understanding (see chapter 8) where I interviewed the two Emirati guides: Kate, as I said above; and in October 2015, I also interviewed Helen, who is a student at Zayed University in Dubai and works as a volunteer at the Centre. Each interview lasted about forty minutes. On 26 October 2015, I met Jamal again and on that occasion I complained how difficult it was for me to talk with Emiratis. He asked if I wanted to talk with Lisa, his Emirati colleague. I did not lose this opportunity, so I accepted. She joined me and Jamal left the room. I explained my research and aims. This interview lasted about forty minutes. Lisa is twenty-two years old and she graduated at Zayed University. She started working for the Emirati government few months before I interviewed her. Her father is a

retired policeman who migrated when he was 14 years old from the emirate of Ras al-Khaimah to Dubai.

I arranged and recorded in-depth interviews with Abdallah, the key informant of the PAD; we met three times and I recorded three interviews with him that lasted about thirty-five minutes each. Our meetings were pre-arranged via email and phone. In the first two meetings, we met at the PAD; our last meeting took place in his office. I also recorded interviews with some Pakistani professionals and the link between the interviewees and me was John (see above). I arranged meetings with them via email or phone. In some cases, it was the first time that we met, and I explained to them who I was, what I was doing, and how I would use the interview. Our meetings lasted no less than an hour.

The meetings took place in different settings: PAD, offices, hospital, cafe, park, shopping mall and private houses. Sometimes the setting was a 'problem'. I interviewed many professionals in their offices. On the one hand, I thought it was good because they felt comfortable and we had a quiet place to talk. On the other hand, it represented an obstacle. On one occasion, I struggled to conduct the interview because every five or six minutes someone knocked on the door to talk with my interviewee (Abdallah). In two occasions, I recorded interviews with Ali (on 15 October 2015) and Suleyman (on 9 November 2015) in cafes and I also recorded the voice of waiters, other people around us and music. Ali was thirty-five years old when I met him. He works as a freelance in media and communication, he is married and his wife also works in Dubai in the fashion sector. He arrived in Dubai, after his MBA in Lahore, in 2011 and he started working in media production because there are some Pakistani channels in Dubai. Suleyman was thirty-nine years old when I met him. He moved to Dubai when he was very young and he did his A-level in Dubai. He is married; he is an engineer and works for an airline company.

These interviews, the different settings (where they were recorded) and the people whom I interviewed provided information, experiences, ideas, 'conflicts', projects and stories that helped me to understand migration from the participants' perspective. As an interpretivist, stories, events, observations and interviews represented a useful means to understand people's lives.

To sum up, I conducted twenty-five unstructured interviews with twenty-two individuals. I met my interviewees in different places: they were sometimes noisy, and sometimes very quiet. I spent more than one hour with each interviewee, on one occasion I



spent four hours in a cafe by talking with the participant (Suleyman). I was able to build a positive relationship with each interviewee because I knew how to behave and which topics and aspects I could enhance to make them aware of my knowledge on Islām and the Islamic world. This facilitated me in building a friendly and trusting relationship with the participants.

## **2.9 Field notes**

Ethnographic accounts rely on field notes that are the first written representation of the social world that the ethnographer has decided to study (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2007). In this section, I discuss the role of field notes as the first written ‘document’ in my research. They were a key component of my research because I ‘recorded’ my thoughts and ideas.

Based upon my previous experience as ethnographer, I knew that field notes represented a written form of my thoughts, ideas, events, observations and reflections. The importance of field notes to my research was linked to the need to avoid forgetting, overlapping and confusing events, words and people. They helped me to make sense, distinguish and reflect on what happened in the field. By writing field notes, I matched observations, events and thoughts to a specific day and person. In my research, I wrote field notes as soon as an event or conversation occurred, or observations pushed me to reflect but I also wrote them when I returned home, usually in the evening. I did not have a specific ‘rule’, but it depended on to what extent an event, words or observations struck me (and, in turn, it pushed me to reflect and the opportunity that I had at the time to sit and write).

In my view, field notes have to include thoughts, reactions, ideas, and questions. Observation, writing and interpretation are related phases and the ethnographer cannot write about events and actions without describing, interpreting, and adding his/her thoughts, ideas, questions and doubts on what s/he has observed. One day when I was in the PAD, I had a spontaneous conversation with a participant who asked what I thought of the Pakistani community and I underlined that it was seemingly a united community, as I said above. At this point, Bushra said

but what kind of Pakistani community you are talking to. Here there are rich Pakistanis that you never see around, they never come here, and they just organize their own events but only

for them. I interpreted her words and anger with which she stated her point of view as a sign of division, a split within the Pakistani community. During my fieldwork in the PAD and my interviews with professionals I realized that the professionals have never participated in the PAD's activities and events. Thus I had already perceived this detachment within the Pakistani community but I did not know how to interpret it. Today, this girl has helped me to interpret the split within the Pakistani community as a question of class (field notes, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

On this page of my field notes, I described the event as it happened in the PAD. On the same page, I also reported my thoughts, ideas and interpretation of the conversation. My understanding of the event was based on my observations, ideas and conversations I had with several Pakistanis. This event provides me with a key to interpreting the discrepancy within the Pakistani community. In my perspective, the interpretation of the action or event in the field cannot be separated by the event or action itself.

Field notes represent the first written 'document' that attests the physical presence of the researcher in the field. I used them extensively because they include details, facts, thoughts, ideas and they helped me to interpret the events occurred in the field.

## **2.10 Ethical issues**

Conducting field research in this kind of socio-political context raises ethical considerations that are unique and also involves the researcher's sensitivity. In this section, I discuss some of the ethical concerns that arose from my research.

In ethnography, ethical considerations are prominent (Brewer, 2000) and they should be addressed in order to "keep us reflexive and critical" (O'Reilly, 2012a, p. 63) instead of considering them as a reason not to undertake research. There are several issues to analyse such as the role of the researcher, consent and confidentiality. There are also ethical issues raised by the setting or group in which the research is undertaken.

### *A) Common ethical issues*

In my field research, I always disclosed my researcher role to the participants. In some cases, it is rather impossible to hide your role and identity. As an ethnographer, I have previously conducted research in Islamic contexts, such as in mosques. For example, in

mosques, I was the only Westerner, I disclosed my role because I was not Muslim, and as such, I could not participate in any of the daily five prayers.<sup>27</sup> Thus, I was ‘forced’ to reveal my role; there was no way to hide who I was. In my ethnographic research in the Pakistani association I was the only Westerner and I could never conceal my role and identity. In specific contexts, the characteristics (gender, age, skin colour, religion) of the researcher may ‘force’ him/her to disclose his/her role and identity. In order to get fully informed consent, I explained to my participants what I was doing, why I was doing the research, and how I would use the interviews and my notes. At the beginning of our conversations and in-depth interviews, I always said who I was; I gave them a leaflet (see Appendix A) to explain my research and to show that I was linked to an academic institution. This helped me to build a trust relationship and made it easier to gain full and informed consent from the participants. I also explained to them that all personal information, in terms of surname (some of them provided their surname or business card), town of origin, name of wives or husbands, and children would not appear in my thesis. I explained that all names would be changed and that I would use pseudonyms to protect them from potential repercussions (confidentiality).

### *B) Specific ethical issues*

In the last few years, several field researches have been conducted in the Arab Gulf region. Among these researches, just one mentions the difficulties in conducting field research in Dubai (Ali, 2010); in other researches the methodological aspects are only superficially touched upon (Kanna, 2011; Vora, 2013; Kathiravelu, 2016) and two discuss in detail the methodological aspects (Longva, 1997; Gardner, 2010a). The ethical implications of undertaking field research in the GCC countries are mostly (almost completely) neglected in the literature. My research raised some ethical issues not analysed by previous field research. In the UAE, the Internet and other media are controlled by authorities (Davidson, 2005). Despite the existence of free zones, where it is assumed that the Internet is not controlled, during my fieldwork one of my participants told me that this is not completely true. During my sojourns in Dubai, I tried to access specific sites and blogs, but a page appeared on my laptop which stated that I was about to enter a prohibited website

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<sup>27</sup> A Muslim is required to perform five prayers on a daily basis: 1) *fajr* (dawn); 2) *ẓuhr* (noon); 3) *‘aṣr* (afternoon); 4) *maghrib* (sunset); 5) *‘ishā* (evening). Friday is the day for Muslims to perform the *ṣalāt al-jum‘a* (collective prayer) that must be made in common in the mosque.

according to the UAE law and if I had surfed it would have been done at my own responsibility. Despite living in a free zone (Dubai Internet City), I realized that Internet usage could be unsafe. The ethical issue that this suggested was how to preserve the confidentiality of email exchanges or any other conversation, for instance, by Skype. When I was in Dubai, I avoided providing many details and accounts of my meetings by email. I saved my interviews on my USB and I did not send any attachments. It is undeniable that the issue of migration in the UAE is a sensitive topic because of the growing imbalance between nationals and non-nationals (see chapter 3). Thus, I realized that this research could represent a risky situation for both the researcher and the researched. In order to protect the participants, I never recorded details (name, occupation, contacts) on my laptop just on paper. I never memorized their mobile numbers in my telephone. Thus, I tried to create a sort of paper archive with details and I read these details repeatedly so that I could memorize some of the details, in case I would lose it.

Moreover, because of the socio-political context, I was concerned that my reliance on the snowball sampling technique that I used to contact especially Pakistani professionals, where everybody knew with whom I talked, meant that anonymity was compromised because the key informant sent a collective email (Clark, 2006). I did not feel very comfortable but I realized that the key informant of the Pakistani professional group was a person that deserved respect and some Pakistani professionals accepted to participate because they trusted him and in a certain way I ‘enjoyed’ his credibility. Suleyman, one of my participants, cancelled our meeting three times. At last, I told him that I would leave in a few days and he arranged a meeting the day before I left. When we met, on 9 November 2015, he said to me that if he had not met me he would have been disrespectful towards my professional key informant (John), who, in turn, was a good friend of my participant’s father. This sort of respect for my key informant was also expressed by a few other participants, especially when they called him ‘uncle’. This would lead the reader to think that all my participants were under pressure but it was not the case because the collective email that my key informant sent was forwarded to more than twenty-five people but only some of them accepted to be interviewed. Moreover, when I met the participants I always said that they were free to withdraw their consent to be interviewed if they did not feel comfortable to talk with me.

Other ethical issues relate to the sensitivity of the researcher and her/his involvement in the participants' lives. For example, how could I interpret the divisions within the Pakistani community that were distinctly expressed during my research? It was frustrating to contradict or 'challenge' what Abdallah, one of my key informants, told in relation to the cohesiveness of the whole community in light of the 'discrepancy' that instead emerged during my research, especially when I talked with John. This is not strictly related to this particular socio-political context though. It might create a problem when my key informants will read my research as some of them asked, thus compromising further research within the same community. However, during my research I always revealed, contradicted and provided my interpretations of the events, observations and conversations that I had in the field and they were aware that I acknowledged the division within the Pakistani community.

Still, when I talked with Khalaf, the Pakistani Consulate's representative to whom I was introduced by John, I felt discomfort because I disagreed with his words but I was in a diplomatic institution in a foreign country. I realized that what he told me did not correspond with what other people said to me, with the relevant literature and personal observations. However, I had to nod and apparently agree with him; silence was the best option I had but I perceived this as hypocrisy (Clark, 2006).

Moreover, to protect me from potential problems during my fieldwork in Dubai, I also filled in the risk assessment of my university. Thus, my institution, supervisors and members of my family knew exactly where I was and whom to talk to in case of problems. I also stayed in regular contact via e-mail with my supervisors.

Ethnographic research raises several ethical issues, some common to any kind of research and others specifically related to the setting, group, or people with whom the ethnographer is conducting the research. There are no specific prescriptions on how to deal with uncertain situations; it is only an informed sensitivity to issues as they arise that can help the researcher to avoid potentially risky situations.

## **2.11 Reflexivity**

In this section, I explore my role as a researcher within the social world in which I conducted the research. I discuss how I felt in relation to my research experience and how

my previous experience and background help me to deal with the difficulties in undertaking field research in a Middle Eastern country.

For O'Reilly (2012a), it is important to acknowledge the role of the researcher as a part of the social world s/he is studying. Reflexivity means making the researcher aware of the dynamics and relations with the participants in the field (Gobo, 2008). As Finlay (2002, p. 211) acknowledges, the researchers try "to make explicit how intersubjective elements impact on data collection and analysis in an effort to enhance the trustworthiness".

My journey in the Arab and Islamic countries started in the mid-1990s by reading books and listening to stories told me by Arab and South Asian migrants in Italy and the UK. At the beginning, it was only an emotional journey but on 26 October 2014, it became a physical and geographical journey when I arrived for the first time in Dubai. It was late evening, I took a taxi from the airport and the taxi driver, an Indian man, drove me to my accommodation which was in Mirdiff, a residential area in the outskirts of Dubai. It was very late, I was struck by the big buildings, lights of the city, the huge roads with two or three lanes on each side and the panorama changed rapidly, for a few metres I was looking at big skyscrapers and a few meters ahead I was looking at big desert areas and then buildings again. In the morning, I looked out of my window and I realized how big the compound where I lived was: hundreds of houses, buildings and villas, where Westerners, a few Emiratis and Arabs were accommodated (Picture 2.1).

**Picture 2.1 View of Mirdiff compound**



Source: Photograph by the author, October 2014<sup>28</sup>

I also saw two black African men who were cleaning the cars of some residents in the compound (Picture 2.2).

**Picture 2.2 Africans working in Mirdiff**



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<sup>28</sup> All the pictures included in the thesis have been taken by the author.

On that morning, I started thinking that when I arrived at the airport all drivers and taxi drivers were South Asians and Arabs, and then I saw two black African men while they were cleaning the cars. These observations led me to reflect on how the presence of foreign workers in Dubai is pervasive, and they are willing to do even the most menial jobs in order to work. This, in turn, pushed me to question why they migrate to the UAE and why they accept these kinds of jobs; maybe some of them are highly-skilled migrants. These thoughts, in a certain way, drove my research in Dubai. Despite focusing on Pakistani professionals, I realized that I could not neglect what was evident in Dubai and peculiar of the UAE society, namely the presence of millions of migrants in menial jobs and construction workers that have ‘built’ this country, as some of the Emiratis told me. In Dubai there were dozens of construction sites because the emirate will host the 2020 Expo event, and I was struck by the presence of hundreds of construction workers on each site. I had the opportunity to observe that they work in safety; I saw construction workers wearing helmets and jackets on the sites I passed by (Picture 2.3). However, accidents at their workplaces are very common. For example, in 2005 in Dubai, 39 construction workers died (HRW, 2006).

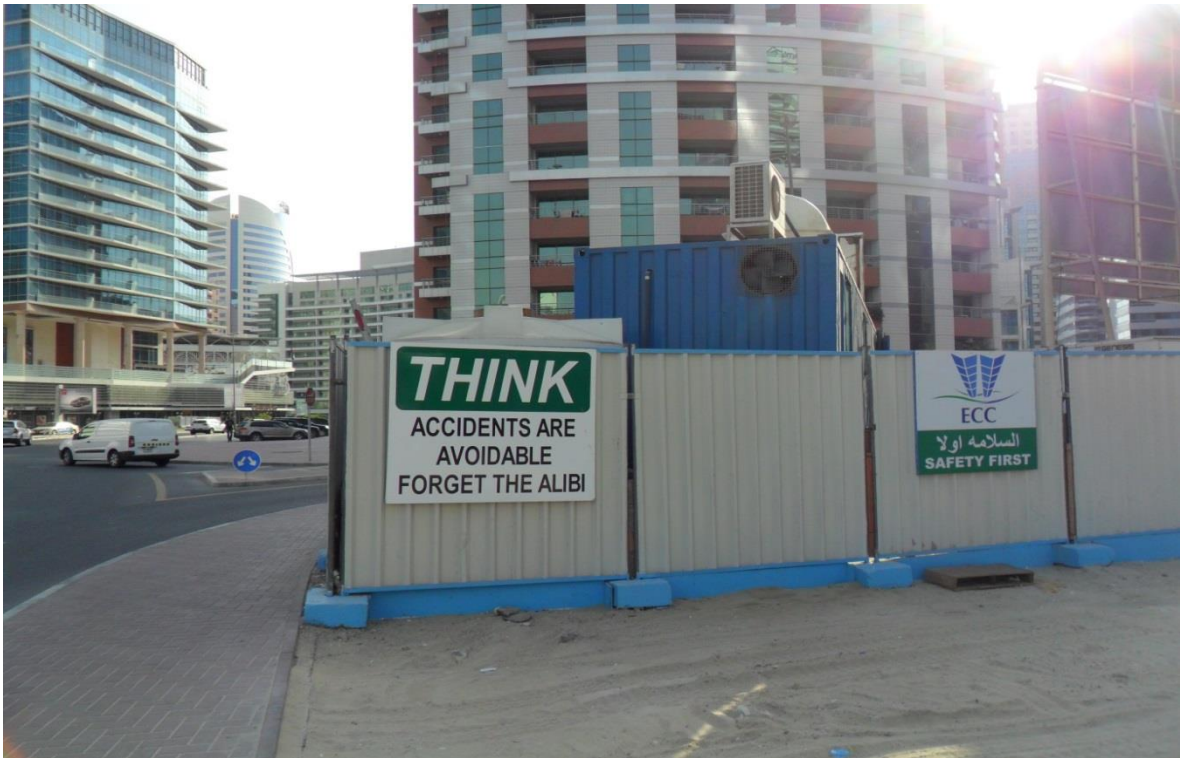
**Picture 2.3 Construction workers in Dubai**



Outside of the construction sites, it was very common to find signs that explained how important safety is (Picture 2.4).



**Picture 2.4 Sign outside a construction site, TECOM, Dubai**



The view of these signs led me to think of the ambiguity on how construction workers are treated. On the one hand, the need of guaranteeing safety is proclaimed to all workers as evident from the sign (Picture 2.4). On the other hand, the way in which the construction workers are treated, the long working hours in the hot summer in Dubai, even though they should stop working from midday to 3.00 pm, the constraints of the sponsorship system (sometimes the passport is withheld, and sometimes the first salary is not paid) are not considered as part of a system that should also guarantee 'safety' in a broader sense outside the construction site (HRW, 2006).

During my trips in Dubai, I had the opportunity to visit the city and observe what happened around me. By walking in Dubai, I was impressed by the presence of millions of foreigners (and tourists as well), and only a few Emiratis. I perceived why some of my Emirati participants in our conversations talked of a sense of detachment and 'frustration'. In Dubai, the financial and consumer service is managed by foreigners (Westerners, Asians). They are the productive component and they work in the private sector, whereas Emiratis mostly work in the public sector (Kapiszewski, 2002). However, during my second trip I saw some Emiratis that worked in customer services. This led me to think of the changes within the UAE society, to think of stereotypes very common in Western countries. I

remember when I said that I was going to Dubai, my family said to me that I would only meet rich people; they associated Dubai with oil and luxury life. The reality is different, not all Emiratis are rich, and not all people in Dubai work in the public sector.

During both trips in Dubai, I talked with many taxi drivers coming from Egypt, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Syria, and everyone had something to tell me, everyone had different stories to tell, but they all have in common the sense of temporariness that characterized their lives in Dubai, the need to plan the future back home because they know that at a certain point they will have to leave the country. I heard many stories, many different plans, many different ideas, but all linked by the need to migrate to find a job, even a temporary job, but it was thought of as a sort of investment. They borrowed money, they were suffering the constraints of the sponsorship system that crushes their lives, and which makes them powerless and vulnerable. For example, I talked with Rashid, a Pakistani participant in the PAD who told me that he got married a few years before leaving Pakistan where he had been working previously. But a friend asked him to move to Sharjah, the emirate not too far away from Dubai, to earn more money. He accepted because in the UAE “there is a better lifestyle, it is a safe country and you can combine the modernity, security with the Islamic component” (from my field notes, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015). His wife is still in Pakistan and he is planning to return to his country in a few years and establish a garment company with his brother.

Dubai has developed in the last fifty or sixty years to become an international financial centre. One day I was walking along the Dubai Creek on the Deira side, and I saw many *dāws*, which are the traditional boats that leave from Dubai and travel to India, Iran or East Africa (Picture 2.5).

Picture 2.5 Some *dāws* on the Dubai Creek



This reminded me of the history of Dubai, its seafaring activities, its multi-cultural and cosmopolitan environment, and the importance of links with Persians, Indians and Africans (see chapter 4). I had not grasped the extent to which those historical links are still evident in the modern Dubai; I realized that something of the past was still there. During my second trip in 2015, I also visited the historical area of Dubai, which revolves around the Dubai heritage village. When I visited this village, it was quite empty and I questioned the importance of this historical area. I then came to understand that it is important for Emiratis, as a symbol of the past and national identity that risks being ‘uprooted’ because of the presence of millions of foreign workers and forgotten by the young generation whose lifestyle is often modelled on that of Westerners (Picture 2.6).

**Picture 2.6 The entrance of the Dubai Heritage Village**



I heard many stories, I talked with different people and I recorded interviews. I talked with lots of taxi drivers and by listening to their stories I felt part of their lives, they made me aware of how much they earn, how difficult the life was in Dubai. However, when I talked with professionals, who obviously had a different lifestyle and did not suffer at least partially from all the limitations and constraints of the sponsorship system, I realized that they had different stories, and words such as poverty and insecurity were not mentioned in our conversations.

As Mauthner and Doucet (2003, p. 416) acknowledge, it is important to incorporate “reflexive observations into the actual analysis” of the data. Reflexivity is not time and space bound but my current position of self-reflexivity is informed by my previous experiences in the field. One of the challenges in ethnographic research is the unequal balance of power between the researcher and the researched, which means the need to avoid that the latter feels exploited by the former (O’Reilly, 2012a). As Roald (2001) argues, the relationship

between Muslims and Western researchers is flawed by the participants' perception that social research is a means of establishing a sort of Western imperialism. Thus, "Muslims [...] believe that non-Muslims misunderstand Islamic ideas and practices either deliberately or as a result of a conduct of attitudes" (Roald, 2001, p. 69). The relationship between the Western, non-Muslim researcher and the Muslim research participant is a 'party game', where the Muslim agrees to be studied because s/he gives a 'real image' of Islām and Muslims, and the researcher analyses and interprets the structures and attitudes that constitute the object of his/her research (Roald, 2001). This perspective, as it may seem utilitarian by both parties, worked in my relationship with Muslims in terms of mutual interests and benefits. When one of my female gatekeepers in Dubai contacted a member of the PAD to invite him to participate in my research, she writes in her email invitation that this was a good opportunity for him 'to give the right perspective' (from the email sent by one participant to the key informant of the PAD on 12 October 2015) on the Pakistani community in the UAE.

As a white Western researcher, the power relationship between the two involved parties, the researcher and the participants, might be viewed as unbalanced insofar as the latter could feel exploited by the former. In terms of positionality, in my research in Dubai, there was an intersection of whiteness, nationality, student and masculinity. I was aware that as a white Western researcher I was in a privileged and advantageous position compared with my interviewees. They presented themselves to me as highly-educated migrants with a family background characterized by an affluent lifestyle, thus showing that they were different from the majority of unskilled and semiskilled Pakistani migrants in Dubai. They could afford a lifestyle that most of the migrants could not. In this regard, I perceived their will to project the image of affluent and educated people able to interact with a white Western researcher and as such able to understand the purpose of my research.

Being a non-Muslim could represent an obstacle to the full development of good relationships. However, my previous experience with Muslims, my knowledge of Arabic language and Islamic religion facilitated the dialogue and the rapport between the researcher and the participants. Many times, when I was introduced by a previous participant to acquaintances or friends, I was referred to as someone who knew and studied the Islamic culture and Islamic world. To be a white Western and non-Muslim researcher could be viewed as an obstacle and create an unbalanced power relationship, but my experience, my

knowledge and my sensitivity was perceived and viewed by my participants as an ‘ice-breaker’, thus breaking down barriers and facilitating the dialogue.

As a student/researcher, I was in a non-privileged position compared with my participants. I was seeking knowledge and they were those who could provide me with the knowledge and information that I was seeking. I perceived myself as having an inferior social status also because some of my participants could afford to live in and enjoy a lifestyle in Dubai that I, as a white Westerner, could not afford. Age was also another element that emerged as important in terms of self-reflexivity. Some of my participants were younger than me and they had a permanent and a good job. As a white Westerner, I perceived that inequalities between myself and the research participants could go both ways; for example, as a student I was in a precarious economic situation which could not allow me to live in Dubai, whilst younger Pakistani professionals whom I interviewed could live in the city and enjoy an affluent lifestyle that at my age I could not afford.

It is undeniable that as a man, I was facilitated in approaching and building trusting relationships with Pakistani professional men rather than with women. It is easier to get access to women’s sphere for a female researcher than a male researcher (Roald, 2001). Based upon my own experience as an ethnographer who has conducted research for some years in Islamic associations, I was very aware of the difficulties in engaging in any kind of discussion with Muslim women (Errichiello, 2007, 2008). I had the opportunity to interview a few Pakistani women in Dubai, and although I thought that they could feel a sense of discomfort from talking with a white and non-Muslim man, I was surprised when, in our meetings, none of them actually wore the headscarf and they all shook my hand. I interviewed Pakistani professional women in public spaces, so their behaviour, their physical contact (e. g. by shaking my hand) impressed me in relation to the closeness and separation that I experienced in my previous research. The different behaviour between Muslim women has been important because it has allowed me to reflect on the importance of context and class. To conduct an interview in an Islamic association, which is mostly frequented by Muslim men, could be viewed as compromising women and men’s honour and respectability. Muslim women who had a job or interact outside their ethno-national community, as it happened in Dubai both with Pakistani and Emirati women, had a more ‘open’ attitude than those who did not work (as it happened when I conducted my research

in Italy and UK), thus meaning that their boundaries were strictly demarcated by their belonging to the Arab and Islamic community.

The Pakistani professionals (men and women) I met in Dubai were educated, they spoke English, as it was their first language, and they understood what I was doing. They are among the privileged who have the opportunity to migrate without coping with the constraints and difficulties that are experienced by low-wage migrants. Their social status entails some privileges (e. g. bringing their family with them) from which unskilled and semiskilled migrants are excluded. This makes their migration experience less traumatic and difficult than those who have a different economic and social status (Gardner, 2010a). In Dubai, I interviewed my Pakistani participants in their office and in cafes and I perceived their sense of freedom from the alleged pressure of their community. This facilitated the dialogue; they described themselves and their sense of belonging to the Pakistani community, but also their independence, which was also evident among Pakistani women who are working outside the home. Some of these women are also the main breadwinners; for example, one of my participants is a single mum, and another one lives on her own.

Within the Pakistani community in Dubai, I perceived a very friendly atmosphere. For example, I remember many hours I spent with Suleyman in a café. He told me the anecdotes of his life in Dubai and things that even his wife did not know. I found an open community, generous and willing to help their fellow nationals, not embedded in and infused with religious extremism; it seems open to the ‘other’ and seemingly inclusive of all Pakistanis regardless of their class or job. In spontaneous and informal conversations with the Pakistani participants, they argued that the image projected by media, which often associate Pakistan with religious extremism, *madrasa* or *burqa*’ was flawed by a Western bias. I met friendly and sociable people who were willing to be part of my research. For example, on 16 October 2015, I spent a few hours with Mahmud, a Pakistani participant in his studio/office by enjoying together Pakistani food and talking and discussing his life and family in Dubai.

On 5 November 2014, I had a conversation with Khalaf, a Pakistani official in Dubai. He asked me to not record the conversation. He started saying that Pakistanis were happy to live in Dubai, that the Pakistani government encourages migration because of the importance of remittances to the Pakistani families back home. For him, Pakistanis did not complain about their lives in Dubai, and they lived well in the labour camps because they were well-

equipped where labourers found all facilities they needed. He added that in case of problems they could complain to the UAE federal court. This led me to think of how many of them are educated to do so and with which consequences for their visa and job. At the beginning, I considered this meeting rather useless; however, it turned out to be very enlightening. I expected that the Pakistani authorities tended to project a positive image of Pakistanis living and working in Dubai. This experience shed light on how Pakistanis with whom I talked had a lifestyle rather different than the Pakistani authorities perceived. I think that the latter were conscious of difficulties of poor migrants in Dubai, but they tended to hide this aspect to a researcher. However, the illegal migrants and poor Pakistanis can survive only with the informal support of the entire Pakistani community without asking help of the Pakistani authorities in Dubai, as some participants told me. Despite the image projected (to me) by the Pakistani authorities that seems detached from the reality and the division and multi-layered structure of the Pakistani community, this experience pushed me to reflect on the fact that this community was more open and inclusive than I expected.

One of the weaknesses of my fieldwork relates to economic concerns, which prevented me from spending lengthy, uninterrupted periods of time in the field. This impacted on my ability to engage with my participants' everyday life. The length of time required to get to know my participants in a more intimate way, which could potentially facilitate invitations to their family homes, was simply not available to me. Moreover, it would have been challenging for me to invite my participants to my own home in Dubai, as I lived in rented accommodation where I was not allowed to have guests. Therefore, I was not able to spend time with my participants in their home or at social events outside the confines of the PAD. Nevertheless, despite the time limitations, my research has a central strength because it is the first attempt to conduct research among Pakistani professionals in Dubai, a topic that has largely been neglected by the extant literature on migration in the GCC countries (see chapter 3).

The positionality of the researcher in relation to the field is shaped by the distance between the data collection and writing up. This distance in time and space let my ideas, thoughts and interpretations, which are, in turn, embedded in my personal and emotional experiences, take a shape. Reflexivity is an emotional 'exercise' that serves to shed light on the research experience. The stories that I have been told, the events in which I participated and the places that I visited represented my personal, emotional and embodied experience of



ethnography through which I am trying to take the reader into my life and my research practice. My personal and scholarly background has made my experience lively, dynamic and real.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW.**  
**MIGRATION BETWEEN STRUCTURE AND AGENCY**

**3.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the extant literature on migration in the Arab Gulf countries, which will be read through the lens of the concept of ‘migration project’. This concept allows me to achieve a balanced approach that covers both structure and agency in migration studies; it brings in migrants as agentic subjects while considering how their actions and perceptions are shaped by internal and external structures. This chapter also includes a discussion of four concepts that I view as central to the migration project; namely, the concepts of belonging, class, national identity and recognition. These concepts contribute to an acknowledgment of the relation between structure and agency in migration studies. Belonging helps to understand how migrants interact with the local context; class is important due to the focus on Pakistani professionals in the thesis; and national identity and recognition refer to how migration affects not just migrants but also the receiving society and how that society manages its relations with migrants

The contribution of this chapter to the whole thesis relates to the adoption of the notion of migration project, which relies on individuals’ ability to cope with unexpected circumstances, migration policies and the social structure of the country of settlement that may push a person to change his/her migration plans.

The chapter is structured as follows. After explaining the notion of migration project, I discuss a further four key concepts of the thesis: belonging, class, national identity and recognition. I also provide an overview of the extant literature on migration in the Gulf region and I focus on some ethnographic accounts which discuss migrants’ everyday life and how their migration project has been modified in relation to their personal experiences, circumstances and events (Mahdavi, 2016; Ahmad, 2017).

### 3.2 The notion of migration project

Different theories have been proposed in order to explain migration (Massey et al., 2008), and as Bakewell (2010, p. 1692) argues, the relation between structure and agency “is a major stumbling block for the development of an integrated and coherent theory of migration”. Some attempts to bring to the core of migration studies the relation between structure and agency have been made by adopting either the duality of structure (Giddens, 1979; Goss & Lindquist, 1995; Morawska, 2001) or analytic dualism (Archer, 1995; Iosifides, 2001, 2017; Carter, 2000).<sup>29</sup> In this regard, it is necessary to identify a theoretical perspective that is able to bring the debate on structure and agency to the core of its discussion, thus elaborating substantive approaches to explain migration. For Bakewell (2010, p. 1702), this can be gained by adopting a critical realist approach especially analytic dualism (Archer, 1995). However, I find his argument not fully convincing insofar he does not use, in his paper, any research to demonstrate that analytic dualism provides a different and more coherent view of migration. By following Morawska (2001, 2009) and Goss and Lindquist (1995), in the thesis I introduce the notion of migration project which allows bringing together the discussion of the duality of structure and agency in migration studies. It focuses on migrants and their actions but at the same time also considers how structures affect and shape human agency.

The term ‘migration process’ “sums up the complex sets of factors and interactions which lead to international migration and influence its course. Migration is a process which affects every dimension of social existence, and which develops its own complex dynamics” (Castles & Miller, 2009, p. 21; see also Van Hear, 2014). It seems to me that migration process is a ‘neutral’ term that does not unpack the migration experience, practices and migrants’ everyday life, at least in the Arab Gulf countries. I thus propose the notion of migration project to affirm that migration is characterized by a conscious, concerted and dynamic decision made by migrants in accordance with their families and households. It does not mean that there is a project established *a priori* but it emphasizes the ability of

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<sup>29</sup> At the core of Giddens’s approach there is the concept of duality, which means conceiving of structures and agency as independently variable but mutually interdependent. Archer (1995) defines Giddens’s approach as conflationary in which both components are interdependent and intermingled; they have no autonomy from one another but exist, transform and reproduce themselves only by virtue of their interdependence. In opposition to duality, Archer defines her approach as analytical dualism meaning that structure and agency “belong to different strata, there is no question of reducing one to the other or of eliding the two and there is every reason for exploring the interplay between them” (Archer, 1995, p. 62).

knowledgeable agents to mobilize and articulate their migration experience in order to deal with the evolution of migration and the arising/emergence of any new circumstances.

The migration project is a complex set of choices, decisions, mechanisms, procedures and institutions through which migrants shape and modify their migration experience. It is not limited to the decision-making process, which is related to the reasons that push people to migrate, but it is negotiated, created and recreated every day. It focuses on the structural context and how it shapes the migration experience, but at the same time it also focuses on migrants' agential capacity to interact with the structure and modify their migration project in relation to the structural context. It focuses on the agency of individuals, groups and households to mobilize resources in order to migrate and their knowledge of structures that can enable and constrain their agential capacity. Agents are "not only...always rooted in a structural context, but [they]...inevitably [draw] upon their knowledge of that structural context when they engage in any sort of purposeful action" (Stones, 2005, p. 17).

In my view, Giddens' (1979) notion of duality appears to be the most useful framework to explain the historical-sociological evolution of migration in the Gulf region. First, it conceives of structure and agency "as processes of continuous "becoming (rather than as entities fixed in time) and their forms and contents as always changeable and never fully determined" (Morawska, 2013, p. 223). Thus, the historical-sociological perspective fits this sense of becoming, movement and dynamism, as Morawska (2001) argues.

Second, the notion of duality "holds that the answer to *why* social phenomena come into being, change, or persist, is revealed by demonstrating *how* they do it, that is, by showing how they have been shaped over time by the constellations of changing circumstances" (Morawska, 2013, p. 223, original emphasis). In other words, migration is shaped by structure and agency insofar as macro-structural circumstances and events affect the micro-lives of migrants (Morawska, 2001; Mahdavi, 2016). When the structural context changes, migrants use their agency to adapt and respond to these new events.

In conclusion, the migration project relies on the relation between structure and agency, on the ability of knowledgeable agents to interact with structures in ways that define and negotiate their migration by adapting to the new circumstances and events that migrants encounter in their everyday life.

### *3.2.1 Structure and agency within the migration project*

As said earlier, the migration project relies on duality, thus meaning that structure and agency are interrelated and conceived of as two reciprocally-inclusive components; it means that they are independent and that they have a certain autonomy granted. But it also means that changes in one component inevitably affect the other component because agents are rooted in a structural context, and their knowledge of the context drives their purposeful action (Stones, 2005). Structure and agency develop and change independently, but when a change has occurred inevitably the other one is ‘forced’ to modify itself in order to adapt to the new circumstances and events. This is the sense of ‘becoming’ proposed by Morawska (2001). Giddens’s notion of duality relies on the idea that structures are part of agents as knowledgeability or memory traces (Stones, 2001). As O’Reilly (2012b) argues, there is the mutual involvement of agents and structures and neither agents nor structures are given primacy; the connection between structure and agent “is complex because structure is part and parcel of the agent and the agent is part and parcel of the structure” (O’Reilly, 2012b, p. 17).

Structures are conceived of as “more or less enduring organisations of social (including economic and political) relations and cultural formations, [which] are created and recreated through the everyday practice of social actors” (Morawska, 2009, p. 3). They are constituted by a multiplicity of elements and characteristics, such as different-purpose organizations and strong and weak informal networks (Morawska, 2001), that make them endowed with different capacities to enable or constrain human agency (Morawska, 2009). The interrelatedness of structures and their dependence on human agency makes them mutable (Morawska, 2001) and “dynamic, not static” (Sewell, 1992, p. 27). This definition of structures resembles the idea of external structures as it has been proposed by Stones (2005) and O’Reilly (2012b). External structures are conditions of action; they “are, conceptually, the context that exists before the ‘agent in focus’ acts” (O’Reilly, 2012b, p. 23). For Stones (2005, p. 52), external structures are autonomous of the agent but “they work on the basis of agents acting in situ”. In other words, external structures represent the structural context of action within which the agent in focus acts. There are also internal structures, which drive human agency. One such internal structure is defined as habitus (Bourdieu, 1979; Stones, 2005). Habitus is “the set of dispositions inculcated in each of us by conditioning that follows from our social environment” (Elder-Vass, 2010, p. 99).

Habitus is produced by social conditioning and pushes us to behave in ways that reproduces the existing practices; it might be viewed as virtual at least in the sense that it represents a repertoire of knowledge that individuals have acquired through their social life and unconsciously *transmitted* from practice to practice; however, it does not mean that Bourdieu underestimates the role of reflexivity, as Crossley (2001) instead argues. For Elder-Vass (2010), individuals have choices to make every day and this pushes them to ‘act in situ’, to reflexively act in relation to the context especially in time of crisis.

For Giddens (1979), structures are rules and resources that exist on a virtual level; they are instantiated “when people draw on them in order to act or interact in time/space” (Mouzelis, 2007, p. 313). In other words, they are part of knowledge or memory traces of agents and they are actualized in concrete social contexts (Mouzelis, 2000). For Sewell (1992, p. 7), rules should be replaced by (cultural) schemas because individuals are knowledgeable agents, and “what people know is culture”. Broadly speaking, culture is defined as those abilities, notions, beliefs and practices that individuals acquire in social interaction (Kuper, 1999; Eriksen, 2010; Parekh, 2006). Culture is created and continually recreated by people through their social interaction, rather than being imposed upon them. Culture is therefore constituted by symbols and those symbols have to be interpreted, and social interaction is contingent upon such interpretations (Cohen, 1985).<sup>30</sup> For Sewell (1992), schemas are virtual because of their generalizability or transposability, thus meaning that they represent a sort of repertoire (to adopt a definition used by Morawska, 2001) of principles and strategies of action that rely on past experience and memories that are “adjusted to present situations and projected outcomes in the future” (Morawska, 2001, p. 53).

Structures are also resources (Giddens, 1979), which can be human (knowledge, skills, positions in different social structures and the opportunities derived therefrom) and nonhuman (animate and inanimate objects) and both “are media of power and are unevenly distributed” (Sewell, 1992, pp. 9-10). The resources are actual because they “exist in time

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<sup>30</sup> In this regard, Giddens (1984, p. 21) has argued that “Formulated rules – those that are given verbal expression as canons of law, bureaucratic rules, rules of games and so on – are thus codified interpretations of rules rather than rules as such. They should be taken not as exemplifying rules in general but as specific types of formulated rule”. In other words, when Giddens used the expression *codified interpretations of rules*, he implicitly recognized that such interpretations depend on the context, circumstances and human agency. Following Geertz’s (1973) approach, it can be argued that those interpretations rely on a system of meaning and symbols.

and space as specific characteristics and possessions of historical actors, and it is their actualization in people's minds, bodies, social relations, and the physical surroundings they control that makes them resources" (Morawska, 2001, pp. 53-54). They can be transposable to new and different circumstances that actors have to deal with in their everyday life when pursuing their purposes. Thus, resources and schemas reciprocally reconstitute each other over time.

Agency is an attribute of all humans (Sewell 1992), and for Giddens (1984), structures enable and constrain human agency. For Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 970), human agency means

*the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations (original emphasis).*

In their definition, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) identify three different but analytically intertwined dimensions: the iterational, projective and practical-evaluative. The iterational (or habitual, as Morawska defines it) dimension means that agents recall, select and apply the taken-for-granted schemas of action developed through the past interactions. In migration studies, this dimension of human agency relates to what Massey et al. (2008) defined as the 'culture of migration', thus meaning that migration has become part and parcel of individuals' everyday life, especially in specific socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

The projective dimension means that human actors are also inventors of new possibilities for thought and action; agents tend to act reflexively in order to reconfigure their actions to their hopes and desires for the future (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The projective dimension relies on actors' capacity to move from past orientations toward future possibilities.

The practical-evaluative dimension means that actors have the capacity to identify and respond to the emergent circumstances in the present situation by looking at the past and future (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Actors exercise their agency in order to pursue their aims and projects thus challenging and transforming the context of action itself.

These three dimensions do not correspond to a precise temporal sequence (past, present and future); rather they explain that social action is constructed through "a sequentiality of discrete acts or stages of one act" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 972). As

these three dimensions of agency illustrate, there is interrelatedness between human agency and structural context. A certain degree of autonomy and reflexivity on the part of agents is, however, recognized. The agency of individuals is not always predetermined and taken-for-granted, and individuals can exert their reflexive capacity. As Giddens (1984, pp. xxii-xxiii) points out, the “reflexive capacities of the human actor are characteristically involved in a continuous manner with the flow of day-to-day conduct in the contexts of social activity”. This capacity emerges at the level of practical consciousness, which is the level where agents know how to ‘go on’ in everyday life; it consists of practical knowledge which is taken for granted “that it is hardly noticed, if at all, by the person exercising it” (Stones, 2005, p. 28). This is the routine, which is viewed by Giddens as the basic element of everyday social activity. The repetitiveness of daily social activities is what Giddens (1984) defines as the recursiveness of social life. However, for Giddens (1984), agents are always able to act otherwise; or as O’Reilly (2012, p. 19) has put it, it “is always possible to say no, or to refuse to comply”.

In conclusion, the migration project relies on the duality of structure and agency. Social actors bend their habitual responses and future-oriented projects to their evaluation of the practical circumstances of the moment. As Morawska (2001, 2009) points out, this reproduction relies on the capacity of actors to appropriate, reproduce, and potentially to innovate in relation to their ideals, interests and events. This capacity, which is a common feature of socially embedded actors, is based upon cultural orientations and resources available in a specific time and place. As Morawska (2001, p. 54) has put it, human agency “arises from the actors' knowledge of schemas and (some) control of resources, which means the ability to apply these tools to new situations. New situations, in particular, enable actors to reinterpret schemas and redesign resources”. Thus conceptualized, the migration project relies on a duality in which the capacity of migrants to move into or between different environments and challenge new circumstances becomes evident, and their agency is enabled and constrained by structures. The notion of migration project allows recognizing that migrants’ activities “are neither simply the products of structures nor their agentic volitions but of the time- and place- specific contexts of the interactions between the two” (Morawska, 2009, p. 5).



### **3.3 Belonging and the migration project**

Belonging is a central concept in the thesis because it allows understanding how migrants interact with the local context. Migrants construct their sense of belonging as ‘agents act in situ’ (Stones, 2005). As such, the migration project is shaped in relation to the agential capacity to construct a sense of belonging, which relies on different aspects and characteristics and varies according to the context and people.

Belonging has been used interchangeably with identity (Antonsich, 2010) and it has also been used in association with citizenship (Parekh, 2006). In recent years, the concept of identity has been criticized in the social sciences because of its inability to grasp the dynamics, complexities and difficulties of the migration experience, thus suggesting that it “has become something of a catch-all concept, which is used to support uncritically an untenably disparate range of claims” (Jones & Krzyżanowski, 2008, p. 39). Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue that identity “means too much..., too little..., or nothing at all” (p. 1) because, in the social sciences, it has been used both as a category of practice (used in everyday life experiences) and a category of analysis (used by scholars) and this makes the discourse on identity complex. Brubaker and Cooper (2000, p. 14), therefore, advocate the use of “less congested terms”, such as identification and categorization. Despite the efforts to theorize identity as a fluid and multi-layered process (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000), some scholars have focused more on belonging rather than identity because the latter has lost its appeal and efficacy. However, identity is still used as a heuristic device (Yuval-Davis, 2006) because it continues to have a meaning for many people in everyday life (Antonsich, 2010).

One of the most prominent academics who have used the concept of belonging is Yuval-Davis (2006), who argues that there is a difference between belonging and the politics of belonging. Belonging denotes what people feel, their orientations and attachments to places, locales, and social categories. It is a dynamic process and it is constructed through different and interconnected facets. Belonging is about different social locations that are linked to different axis of power and social categorizations. People belong to a specific social location, such as gender, age and class, and their belonging is constructed in light of certain positionalities that they tend to have along axes of power in each historical moment. Belonging is about people’s attachment and identification to different groups and collectivities. Belonging is also about shared ethical and political values, which means that it relates to how people who identify themselves as belonging to the same group or

community value the people with analogous social locations, thus suggesting its intersubjective nature. Yuval-Davis (2006) also focuses on the politics of belonging which means the capacity to construct boundaries and which determines “the inclusion or exclusion of particular people, social categories and grouping within these boundaries by those who have the power to do this” (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 18). The politics of belonging refers to the contestations, negotiations and struggles around who belongs and who doesn’t belong (see chapter 8).

Yuval-Davis (2011) argues that belonging is constructed along multiple axes of difference, such as race, gender, age, and class, and the intersectionality approach (Crenshaw, 1989) allows acknowledging that discourses on differences have their own ontological bases and that they cannot be reduced to each other but have to be analysed as constituting each other. In other words, in order to understand how belonging is constructed, it is important to examine intersections between all different social locations.

Anthias (2006) has also written extensively on the concept of belonging. For Anthias (2006), belonging is more than shared values, because an individual can share with ‘others’ some ideas about racial equality but the same individual might not be a member of any minority group. Belonging is then more than shared values because it also relates to spaces and places “to which people are accepted as members or feel that they are members” (Anthias, 2015, p. 6). Belonging is also forged in relation to belonging ‘with’, which means that one belongs with ‘others’ because s/he shares with them the everyday experiences and engagement. Anthias (2015) also contends that belonging relates ‘to’ people with whom one shares values, customs, culture, tastes and dispositions. Belonging ‘to’ is an expression of belonging to a group, social club, or being accepted within a nation, and it does not mean that you cannot belong to something else. For Anthias (2015), belonging is both boundary-making and boundary-breaking. It is boundary-making because it identifies people who share customs, culture, traditions and language, thus creating a boundary with ‘others’ (Anthias, 2015). At the same time, it is also a boundary-breaking concept because it moves beyond shared culture, gender, class, ethnic and national identities to also include the ‘others’. Hence, the impossibility of thinking of belonging ‘to’ without considering the practices, experiences and everyday life that people share with ‘others’ (Anthias, 2015; May, 2011).

Anthias (2015) advocates the adoption of what she calls a ‘translocational positionality’ approach, because it enables us to recognize the role and importance of the context and the situational nature of struggles, practices and emotional ties. She argues that the translocational approach allows viewing belonging as no longer linked to a fixed place or location, but to a range of different locales in different ways. Translocational positionality focuses then on locations rather than on cultural differences and boundaries, and it allows conceiving of belonging as a process thus emphasizing that it is constructed in relation to and with ‘others’ (Anthias, 2015).

Apart from their different theoretical approaches, Yuval-Davis (2006), as mentioned earlier, distinguishes between belonging and the politics of belonging, whereas Anthias (2015) finds this separation not fully convincing because contestations and struggles around who belongs and who does not belong revolve around and include emotional and affective ties. It means that people are pushed to struggle because they are driven by feelings and emotions attached to a locale, place, context or a social category. In my view, and I agree with Anthias (2015), the separation between belonging and the politics of belonging seems blurred because boundaries are determined by emotional and affective ties which can also be ‘institutionalized’ (e. g. through a specific citizenship law, see chapter 4).

As Anthias (2015) argues, agents’ sense of belonging is created and recreated in light of the specific context and location where they are placed; belonging is thus considered as situational and contextual. It follows that belonging is never predetermined and stable but it is dynamic and mutable. In this regard, Ahmad (2017, p. 190), discussing conversion to the Islamic religion by South Asian women, argues that becoming “Muslim ... is a dynamic and encompassing process in which the boundaries between Islam and other forms of belonging are conceived as porous and fluid, where they are configured and reconfigured together “. In the same vein, migrants tend to adopt their agential capacity to shape their migration project in their everyday life and consequently they renegotiate their sense of belonging in light of the structural context in which they act and spend their life.

In conclusion, belonging is linked to the migration project insofar as the latter is negotiated in light of the context, place and social location. For example, South Asian domestic workers in Kuwait have negotiated their sense of belonging in light of their conversion to the Islamic religion, and this has pushed them to recreate their migration project in their everyday life (Ahmad, 2017).

### 3.4 Class and the migration project

Class, which is also a key concept in the thesis, relates to my focus on Pakistani middle-class professionals. The concept is also relevant because it allows understanding the migrants' decision-making process, their settlement, and their construction of a sense of belonging in Dubai. Class affects the migration project because it focuses on how capital (in Bourdieusian's terminology) informs the migration experience: the routes, channels, settlement and residence in the receiving countries (Van Hear, 2014).

The relevant literature on migration and class has focused on Western countries, and on the outcomes of migration in terms of socio-economic inequality in the country of origin (Van Hear, 2014); it also addresses migrants coming from developing countries; and on how the presence of migrants has allowed many indigenous workers to move from unskilled positions and gain a "real social promotion" (Castles & Kosack, 1973, p. 478).

Moreover, the literature is also focused on how class affects relationships within a migrant community. For example, research conducted on British people in Spain demonstrates how "class judgments are employed to militate against" other British (Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010, p. 62). Furthermore, it is important to highlight the link between class and belonging. This link was partially emphasized by Anthias (2015) when she argued that belonging relates, amongst other things, to material resources and economic gains, because they tend to provide a sense of safety and participation in a society. Material resources (and formal membership) thus seem to contribute to building a sense of belonging to a society.

However, Benson's (2014) contribution on residential choices, class and belonging is really valuable. In her analysis of housing choices made by middle-class people in London, Benson (2014, p. 3097) argues that residential choice is driven by the acknowledgement "that belonging is a dynamic process, generated and maintained through residence that feeds back into understandings of classed identities" (p. 3097). In other words, Benson recognizes that residential choice is linked to habitus because the decision to settle down in a specific residential area relies on an unreflexive, taken for granted and unquestioned choice driven by the unconscious *transmission* from practice to practice. However, Benson (2014, p. 3106) also recognizes that reflexivity drives residential choices insofar as it indicates social mobility, or, as she has put it, the choice made by some members of the middle-class of living in a residential area which is different from the place/area where one has grown up or

spent much of her/his life seems “to indicate a change in ... habitus” (p. 3106). This process, discussed by Benson, is also visible among the participants in my research (see chapter 6).

Another important point to address is how migrants are able to mobilize capital in order to migrate and how it affects the migration project in terms of “migrant decision-making, routes, channels, and destinations” (Van Hear, 2014, p. 101). I would also add how resources (or capital) can inform migration. In other words, capital drives and affects the migration experience. In this regard, Brubaker (1985, p. 761) argues, “class divisions are defined not by differing relations to the means of production, but by differing conditions of existence, differing systems of dispositions produced by differential conditioning, and differing endowments of capital”. According to Bourdieu (1987, p. 4), there are different forms of capital

firstly, *economic* capital, in its various kinds; secondly *cultural* capital or better, informational capital, again in its different kinds; and thirdly two forms of capital that are very strongly correlated, *social* capital, which consists of resources based on connections and group membership, and *symbolic* capital, which in the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate (original emphasis).

Each person has a position in ‘social space’ because s/he is endowed with capital, which can be economic, cultural, social and symbolic, as Bourdieu (1987) argues. Capital is very important in migration studies because “it helps to explain how someone with little economic capital may be able to convert their social capital so as to be able to migrate” (Van Hear, 2014, pp. 104-105). For example, Indians in Kerala mobilize their symbolic and social capital to help Indian would-be migrants by providing information, accommodation and a job in the GCC countries (Osella & Osella, 2009). Each person is endowed “with certain volumes of capital in certain compositions or propositions” (Van Hear, 2014, p. 111).

The migration project is a class-based concept, in the sense that whatever the amount and type of capital that migrants possess and mobilize, it seems to drive their migration experience (Van Hear, 2014). The migration project is linked to migrants’ agential capacity to mobilize, convert and transfer their capital (e. g. by mortgaging their assets, such as livestock, land, and house; or by borrowing money from friends and family) in order to migrate. They are also likely to possess knowledge of the structures or macrostructural forces and events (e. g. the sponsorship system) that occur in the destination country. It follows that capital can inform their agential capacity and their choices. For some migrants who possess

a certain ‘quantity’ and type of resources it is easier to migrate than those who are not endowed with sufficient capital to convert or transfer. As Van Hear (2014, p. 111) acknowledges, “international migration is not typically for the poorest of the poor, but is engaged in by those who can mobilize some level of resources”. As the ethnographic accounts illustrate (see below), would-be migrants from South Asian countries tend to migrate by mobilizing their network resources. This is why they incur the ‘debt bondage’ and, as Gardner (2012) argues, they thus tend to fuel the ‘migration industry’.

In conclusion, the migration project is a class-based concept; however, as demonstrated by some research undertaken in South Asian countries, and despite poverty, there are forms of capital (e. g. network) that would-be migrants can mobilise. In other words, capital possessed appears to not entirely determine the decision to migrate; however, it does affect the migration project in various ways (e. g. migration routes, channels and the settlement in the destination country).

### **3.5 National identity, recognition and the migration project**

As stated above, national identity and recognition are two further key concepts in the thesis. Both relate to the migration project insofar as migrants’ agential capacity is enabled and constrained by the structural context. In other words, national identity, when it is ‘threatened’ (e. g. by migration and globalization), is reshaped via the adoption of rules and laws, and through the enhancement of some aspects and characteristics (e. g. by celebrating the national day) that can enable and constraint human agency (Parekh, 1995a). At the same time, migrants bring with them their pre-existing ‘national identity’, which is often expressed through the establishment of migrant associations in the land of settlement. This entails being recognized by the local authorities as members in social life. Thus recognition “implies uniform or identical treatment” (Parekh, 2008, pp. 41-42) in contexts in which some groups or individuals are marginalized. These associations embody migrants’ agency and their knowledge of the local rules and laws. Therefore, I discuss national identity and recognition as two important concepts which tend to affect the migration project.

Broadly speaking, national identity represents a set of elements, characteristics and aspects which are thought to be of great importance for a community, and those elements are used to differentiate one's national identity from another. In this regard, several authors (e.g., Smith, 1991; Triandafyllidou, 1998; Guibernau, 2007) conceive of national identity as sharing certain common features (e. g. a presumed common descent, a shared culture), which distinguishes members of a group from members of another group. Parekh (1995a) also argues that national identity is based upon shared common features. However, the value of his approach lies in his contention that national identity has a dynamic, fluid and adaptable nature in order to react to the changes taking place within a society. As such, national identity is reconstituted and reshaped by reinterpreting the past to respond to present needs and aspirations. The construction of boundaries between different groups is a marker of national identity because every society tends to define who belongs on the grounds of having something in common. In so doing, every society also distinguishes those who do not belong (Cohen, 1985).

For Parekh (1995a), national identity is divided in two overlapping levels: cultural and political identity. Cultural identity refers to a shared way of life (or a shared culture) that is a way in which members of a community tend to organize their life, interpret ideas, past and myths, and assign meanings to each other's behaviour and words (Parekh, 1995a). This is why a community is never homogeneous and static; instead, it varies according to the meaning and significance that individuals attribute to things and that as such may regulate their lives (Cohen, 1985; Parekh, 2006). Political identity refers to shared rules, procedures and institutions implemented to manage society's collective affairs (Parekh, 1995a). These two levels overlap because the political identity of a community is shaped by its wider culture and vice versa. The distinction between political and cultural identity will be discussed in chapters 4 and 8 respectively.

Migration and globalization are rendering boundaries among countries blurred, and this undermines the traditional systems of values, beliefs and meanings of a society (Parekh, 1995a). Countries tend to defend their boundaries and define who belongs and who does not belong. When these changes are deep, communities are required to redefine themselves and 'adjust' their identity (Parekh, 1995a). This process, defined by Parekh (1995a) as 'self-creation', occurs within a historical framework. When a community feels a sense of insecurity and detachment, historical roots and traditional way of life are recovered in order

to spread a sense of belonging among its members (Cohen, 1985). It thus starts to reshape its 'authentic' self (Vannini & Franzese, 2008). Seemingly, there might be a contradiction between the concept of 'authenticity' and the dynamism of national identity. In my view, this contradiction does not exist. Here I follow Parekh (1994, 1995a), for whom national identity has an adaptable, fluid and dynamic nature; as such, it is able to respond to the contemporary needs, expectations and aspirations of a society. Moreover, as Vannini and Franzese (2008) argue, the definition, and perception of what is 'authentic' changes over time, according to the priorities, people, emotional experience, and demands of a society. Thus, the concept of 'authenticity' is also dynamic and situational. In specific contexts, such as the UAE where the foreigners outnumber nationals (Davidson, 2005), national identity is reshaped in ways that create a fracture within the society, in which ethno-racial and gender hierarchies drive the migration project. Thus, for example, the use of tribalism as a political component to reshape the Emirati national identity tends to establish a division within the UAE society between nationals and migrants (see chapter 4).

However, it is also important to bear in mind that migrants bring with them their 'national identity'; it means that migrants tend to express their sense of belonging and safeguard their own traditions and customs within the same ethno-national community. At the community level, this is evident in the establishment of migrant associations, which embody migrants' national identity, traditions and customs. The importance of such organizations also relates to the issue of recognition, which has informed the current debate on the politics of collective identity.

By recognition, I mean that a group of people is recognised by others as constituting a group of some kind. For Honneth (1992), as for Taylor (1994), recognition has a relational nature because it is built through the relation with the 'others', and it is a matter of intersubjectivity. It follows that misrecognition (or the denial of recognition) "impairs these persons in their positive understanding of self" (Honneth, 1992, p. 189). For Taylor (1994) and Honneth (1992), recognition is an important matter for living a good life: when a group's identity is recognized by 'others', the members of the group feel, in some sense, valued. For Fraser (2001), this model, which she calls the identity model, has an implicit risk that relates to the pressure imposed on a single individual to conform to the group's collective identity.

On a different level, Fraser (2001) argues that recognition is a matter of justice because "it is unjust that some individuals and groups are denied the status of full partners



in social interaction simply as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value” (p. 26). Fraser (2001) proposes a new model of recognition, which she calls the status model.

In this model

what requires recognition is not group-specific identity but rather the status of group members as full partners in social interaction. Misrecognition...means *social subordination* in the sense of being prevented from *participating as a peer* in social life...in the status model, rather, it means a politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with other members (Fraser 2001 p. 24; original emphasis).

For Fraser (2001, p. 24, (original emphasis), when groups or individuals are conceived of as inferior and their worth is determined by institutionalized cultural patterns that regard the ‘others’ as inferior thus excluding them as “full partners in social interaction, then we should speak of *misrecognition* and *status subordination*”. In the status model, the split within a society among different groups is institutionalized by the dominant culture (Parekh, 2006), and as such, it should be addressed by focusing on cultural elements (e. g. by re-evaluating disrespected identities and valorizing cultural diversity) rather than on political, legal or economic ones (the redistribution-recognition dilemma). I adopt Fraser’s approach, and, as I explain in chapter 7, recognition of the PAD seems to create ‘integration’; however, I argue that it is more gratitude than recognition of the Pakistani’s status within the UAE society.

In conclusion, national identity, migrant associations and recognition are interrelated within the migration project. The reshaping of national identity is ‘activated’ in order to create a sense of cohesion and stability for nationals thus excluding the ‘others’ (e. g. migrants) (Parekh, 1995a), who are to some extent forced to shape their migration project in accordance with the structural context. It follows that their agential capacity is simultaneously enabled and constrained (Giddens, 1979) by the rules, laws and socio-cultural elements enhanced by the local authorities which tend to institutionalize the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (see chapter 4). The migration project also relates to the establishment of migrant associations because it reveals migrants’ agential capacity to interact with the structural context. Migrants (some more than others) as knowledgeable agents are aware of the local rules and laws that regulate the establishment of such organizations. They exhibit their agency to act in situ (Stones, 2005) both within and outside their ethno-national community. Migrants’ agential capacity relates to recognition from the receiving countries’ authorities; it means that, within the migration context, migrants are

recognized as peers in social life in the local context. However, recognition is also entangled in the ethno-racial and gender hierarchies existing in the GCC countries, and such hierarchies enable and constrain migrants' agency. The basic idea of recognition is that humans interact *as equals* (Fraser, 2001; Parekh, 2008), however, in the Emirati social structure, social interactions are mostly hierarchical, and the idea of equality seems to conspire against recognition as expressed by extant literature (Fraser, 2001). I will return to this aspect in chapter 7 when I discuss the role of the PAD in Dubai.

### **3.6 Literature on migration in the Arab Gulf countries. An overview**

The previous sections of this chapter have provided an overview of the five key concepts that I use in the thesis to examine and understand the Pakistani professionals migration to Dubai (migration project; belonging, class, national identity, and recognition). Before I introduce the findings of the study in relation to these concepts, the thesis needs to be situated in relation to the specific literature on migration in the region. As said in chapter 1, the contribution of my thesis relates to the discussion of the Pakistani (middle-class) community in the Gulf region. As will emerge in the following sections, the extant literature has mostly focused on Indians, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans and Filipinos. Socio-economic and demographic studies, as well as ethnographic accounts, have focused on different aspects and communities in the Gulf region, but the Pakistani community has been subsumed under the label 'South Asian', thus neglecting the peculiarities that Pakistanis bring as migrants. This thesis is the first attempt to unpack their experience in the Gulf region.

As Thiollet (2011) argues, the narrative of international migration in the Arab Gulf countries is well documented and articulated. The first and foremost important studies were carried out in the 1970s (Birks, Sinclair & Seccombe, 1986, 1988) and focused on the impact of the oil boom in the Arab Gulf region from a socio-economic perspective by identifying those structural and economic factors that triggered migration outside and within the Arab world (Birks & Sinclair, 1977, 1979a, 1979b, 1979c, 1980a, 1980b). These studies emphasized the historical, economic, demographic dynamics of migration in the Gulf

countries (Seccombe & Lawless, 1986a, 1986b, 1986c, 1986d; Seccombe 1983, 1986b; Serageldin et al., 1983, 1986).

In the 1980s, some quantitative research explained the paths, the evolution and institutions that facilitated migration from South and East Asia to the GCC countries (Keely, 1980; Arnold & Shah, 1984; Huan-Ming Ling, 1984; Halliday, 1984; Nagi, 1986a, 1986b; Choucri, 1983, 1986). These studies focused on the macrostructural forces that pushed the Arab Gulf countries to foster migration from Asian countries and how the latter provided the legal and political frameworks to encourage migration to the Gulf region.

Between the 1990s and 2000s, several quantitative and ethnographic studies were carried out which underscored the economic, demographic, and social composition of migrants and the everyday issues that they have to deal with when migrating to the GCC countries. The most important studies in this regard were those carried out by Kapiszewski (1999, 2001), Longva (1997), Ali, (2010), Kanna (2011), Vora (2013).<sup>31</sup> In particular, Kapiszewski's (1999, p. 27) studies, which were mostly based on a sociological perspective, addressed "some major problems treated to population growth and to the development of the workforce". In so doing, he adopted a multidisciplinary approach in order to "cover complex social, economic, political and cultural issues" (Kapiszewski, 1999, p. 28).

Several studies have also focused on the links between migration, oil development, and class. For AlShehabi (2015), the demographic profile affected the political and economic structure of the GCC countries, thus contributing towards the segmented structure of the population divided between citizens and non-citizens, which resulted from the "restricted citizenship with unrestricted migration" (AlShehabi, 2015, p. 3). Khalaf (2015, p. 55) focuses on the role of migration in the rentier<sup>32</sup> Gulf states, and how migration has become "an integral tool in the ruling families' strategy to maintain the stability of their regimes". For Khalaf (2015), this has been possible because the ruling families have been able to maintain the stability of their rule in light of the fragmentation, segmentation and hierarchies that exist and are perpetuated by the ruling families. Tibi (1990, p. 128) described this aspect

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<sup>31</sup> This list is not complete, and I have mentioned only some of the many ethnographic studies on migration in the GCC countries that have addressed different issues of migrants in the region. I shall use these studies and many others throughout this chapter and the whole thesis when I discuss the evolution and dynamics of migration in the Arab Gulf region.

<sup>32</sup> In rentier states, "rulers disburse funds in order to build a cohesive, stable state, and buy themselves the political consent of their people" (Babar, 2014, p. 409).

by introducing the concept of ‘the simultaneity of the unsimultaneous’ meaning that there is “the parallel existence of two social and political patterns with their origins in crucially different historical periods: the old tribes and the modern nation-state”. Hanieh (2015), by criticising ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002), which focuses on a single nation-state as self-contained unit, focused on space, class and region, inspired by radical geography. Hanieh (2015) proposed a new lens through which it is possible to look at labour migration to the Gulf region: migration can be explained as a process of class formation defined by citizenship, which creates boundaries within and between nationals and migrants. In so doing, he advocates the need to break with ‘methodological nationalism’ because of its limited outlook. He argues that migration should be analysed as a “‘spatial structure’ that extends beyond the nation-state and reflects both the uneven and combined development of the region as a whole, and the nature of the Gulf’s position within the wider world market” (Hanieh, 2015, p. 72).

In conclusion, these studies have focused on migration in the Gulf States from a political economy, geographical, sociological and demographic perspectives. They have discussed migration and its relationship with macrostructural forces and events that have fostered the emergence of the rentier economy. Further studies have also been conducted (see also, Kapiszewski, 1999), and especially from the 2000s some ethnographic accounts have focused on migrants’ everyday life in the Gulf countries. However, none of the extant studies have focused explicitly on Pakistani migrants to the Gulf region.

### **3.7 Ethnographic research on migrants in the GCC countries**

By the end of the 1990s and throughout the 2000s, many ethnographic studies were undertaken to examine migrants’ everyday life in the Gulf countries. This section draws upon some ethnographic accounts focused on Asian communities in the GCC countries, especially in the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. Ethnographic methods (O’Reilly, 2009) allow capturing the complexities and ambiguities of migration as emerging from migrants’ voices.

Ethnographic works serve to widen the perspective on migration in order not to reduce a migrant to a *homo oeconomicus* (Longva, 1997; Kamrava & Babar, 2012; Babar,

2017). This broader approach emerges in some studies conducted among Westerners in Dubai and Qatar. For example, Walsh's ethnographic works (2007, 2009; Coles & Walsh, 2010) have, amongst others, focused on the emotional and sexual behaviour of the British expatriates in Dubai. Walsh (2007, 2009) underscores the need to examine the migrants' lived experiences in a broader perspective in order to forefront the complexity and ambiguity of migration through the migrants' narratives. Vora (2015) has focused on expatriates (North American and Europeans) in Doha. In her research, she deconstructs the idea of camps as places that only accommodate construction workers. She focuses on those "camps occupied primarily by white professionals from North America and Europe" (Vora, 2015, p. 170).<sup>33</sup> These camps reflect specific tastes and lifestyles that differ from those of unskilled workers. As Benson (2014, p. 3110) has put it, people accommodated in a specific area can "become familiar with and align themselves to new residential environments". Thus, the expatriates, with their lifestyles and everyday experiences and practices, perpetuate the GCC ethno-racial hierarchies that are based upon a strict spatial and ethnic separation (Vora, 2015). These ethnographic studies focus on migrants' everyday life in the Gulf countries. However, both Walsh (2007, 2009) and Vora (2015) claim that there is an ethno-racial system that encapsulates the white Western expatriates in a hierarchical structure in which they are subject to uncertainties and instability of migration and are also entangled in a system of residential segregation.

In conclusion, ethnographic works demonstrate that migrants articulate their migration project in light of their skills, resources and knowledge of the structural context. In the last few decades, ethnographic accounts have demonstrated the importance of moving beyond the economic aspects in order to grasp the complexities, constraints and difficulties of the migration experience (see below).

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<sup>33</sup> Vora's work on the Indian middle class in Dubai has been discussed throughout the thesis, see also chapters 4, 5 and 6.

### *3.7.1 Ethnographic research: decision making, networks and recruitment,*

Ethnographic accounts illustrate that migrants as knowledgeable agents ‘employ’ their families, kinship, community ties and recruitment agencies to migrate with the aim to alleviate their poor economic conditions but also to escape from dangerous situations. Migrants’ agential capacity is projected in new situations and places for future possibilities. At the same time, external structures (in Stones’ terminology), and the existing migrant institutions (Goss & Lindquist, 1995) such as recruitment agencies and the sponsorship system, enable and constrain migrants’ agency.<sup>34</sup> For Gardner (2012, p. 54), in the decision-making process there is a subjectivity “aligned to a set of pre-established identities (like the “Gulfie”) constructed in an early era when the association between Gulf migration and wealth was more assured” (see also Osella & Osella, 2000). The decision-making process seems to be shaped by habitus, or what is also defined as the ‘culture of migration’; it relies on a conscious and concerted choice made by agents by adopting their reflexive capacity which, according to Elder-Vass (2010, p. 101), Bourdieu recognises that individuals employ in “times of crisis, or critical moments”.

Gardner (2012), in his ethnographic work among Indians in some GCC countries, suggests that the decision to migrate is not simply a personal choice but that it also involves families and households that view migration as a means to diversify their sources of income (Castles & Miller, 2009). For Gardner (2012), the decision-making process, however, is also driven by structural violence (Farmer, 2004) in the sending countries, which means that social disorders and political turmoil induce migrants to leave their countries (Gardner, 2010a, 2012). For Afsar (2016), the decision-making process of Bangladeshi migrants, apart from economic reasons, is driven by several factors such as marital discord, family violence and drug abuse. But more than that, the decision-making process of many unskilled and semi-skilled Bangladeshi would-be migrants is affected by the visible effects on neighbours whose lives have changed from 'rags to riches' as a result of migration to the GCC countries (Rahman, 2016).

For Osella and Osella (2009, 2012), the reputation and achievements of early Indian migrants in the GCC countries play a key role in supporting the Indian would-be migrants

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<sup>34</sup> Migrant institution is “a complex articulation of individuals, associations, and organizations which extends the social action of and interaction between these agents and agencies across time and space” (Goss & Lindquist, 1995, p. 319). Migrant institutions are individuals, networks, recruitment agencies, governmental organizations, rules and regulations that help migrants find a job abroad and regulate migrants’ everyday life in the receiving countries

by providing information, accommodation, and a job in the Arab Gulf countries. This is also observable among the Pakistani professionals in Dubai (see chapter 6) For Hosoda (2013), solidarity within the Filipino community in the UAE represents a net of assistance in case of troubles for all Filipinos. Social and ethnic networks are advantageous because they provide support to potential migrants by exchanging information. However, information exchanges are not always beneficial. For Gardner (2012), some South Asian migrants are engaged in the production of disinformation about the real working and living conditions in the GCC countries. Migrants tend to project a positive image of their migration experience in the Arab Gulf countries because they do not want their family, or community to perceive their experience as a failure.

Recruitment agencies employ their gained experience, their knowledge of rules and resources (e. g. the sponsorship system) and their contacts to help would-be migrants to find a job in the GCC countries. Theoretically, the recruitment process should be virtuous and safeguard migrants' interests. However, this is not always the case. For Breeding (2012), asymmetric information<sup>35</sup> about wages and recruitment of job candidates in the rural areas jeopardize the effectiveness of the procedure, and 'force' migrants to enter illegally the GCC countries or become irregular (Shah, 2009). It thus allows for abuses and corruption (Breeding, 2012). For Gardner (2012), the GCC countries are not the only ones that take advantage from migration, but also recruitment agencies and agents that work as brokers, and cheat potential migrant workers (migration industry). The stories told by Wadhawan (2016) illustrate how the role of recruitment agencies is not beneficial for Nepali women who migrate to the GCC countries to work in the domestic sector. In particular, in 2012 the Nepali authorities imposed a ban according to which all Nepali women under thirty years of age are prohibited from migrating as domestic workers to the GCC countries. As Wadhawan (2016, p. 196) contends, this ban "has led women to rely on unregistered agents who channel such migrants through illegal means and charge higher fees to facilitate the process".

For Osella and Osella (2012), the informal networks do not have a sharply negative effect but they are also useful because they help migrants in Kerala (India) to benefit from knowledge and experience of previous migrants to overcome the obstacles present within

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<sup>35</sup> Asymmetric information means that job recruiter does not disclose to the job candidate all conditions of the employment in the Arab Gulf region. Agents 'fish' for candidates in Indian rural areas and they tend to create a nice picture of life in the Gulf cities and not mention the long working-hours, work outdoors at high temperature, and living in the labour camps (Breeding, 2012).

the system. They argue that the Indian would-be migrants are aware of the working and living conditions that they might find in the Arab Gulf region and the salaries that they might expect (Osella & Osella, 2012). Thus, most would-be migrants decide to get a tourist visa to go to Dubai and, through their contacts in the Emirate, they can easily find a job.

In conclusion, these ethnographic accounts illustrate how macrostructural forces affect the micro-lives of migrants. The establishment of recruitment agencies, the adoption of the sponsorship system and the ensuing ban imposed by some South Asian countries on migration to the GCC countries have constrained migrants' agency but also enabled their capacity to find a way to migrate. In other words, migrants' agential capacity becomes evident when they adopt strategies to overcome the legal obstacles, for example when they migrate as illegal migrants (Wadhawan, 2016).

### *3.7.2 Ethnographic research on migrant women*

This section, which focuses on migrant women, gives better evidence of how migration project works and its implications for migrants' everyday life in the Gulf region. In the last few years, the GCC countries have undergone profound changes that are evident when considering the participation of national women (Zovighian, 2012) in the local labour market and the ensuing presence of migrant women who are mostly employed as domestic workers.<sup>36</sup> The 'feminisation of migration' is the term used to capture "the changing pattern of female migration flows – women migrating for work, often without family – rather than a mere increase in the number of women migrants" (Timothy & Sasikumar, 2012, p. 20). As such, it requires gender-sensitive policies because migration entails gender-distinguished experiences and outcomes.

In the GCC countries, the main flow of migrant women is from South and South-East Asia (Timothy & Sasikumar, 2012). In these countries, the domestic work is unregulated and the national labour laws are not applicable (Khan & Harroff-Tavel, 2011; Lori, 2012). Once in the GCC countries, the migrant domestic workers are in an extremely vulnerable position and at the mercy of their *kafil* (see chapter 5). This happens because the

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<sup>36</sup> Between 2008 and 2011, migrant domestic workers working in the GCC countries were 1,132, 641: in Saudi Arabia (506,950), in Kuwait (310,402) and the UAE (146,075) (Fernandez, 2014).



sponsor has total control and power over a domestic worker's employment and sojourn in the country. In order to cope with problems encountered by 'their' women employed in the Arab Gulf countries, Asian governments have imposed some restrictions on the migration of women to these countries.<sup>37</sup>

Ethnographic accounts have underscored the importance and the role of migrant women in information exchanges in the home countries (Osella & Osella, 2012), and how migrant women contribute significantly to family incomes (Gamburd, 2008). Moreover, Vora's (2013) ethnographic research among the Indian middle-class in Dubai, suggests how Indian women view migration and their life in Dubai as a concrete opportunity to build their own independence, and, because of lack of constraints from male and family, it is a chance to become 'emancipated'. However, women are the most vulnerable in terms of exploitation, abuses, harassment (Breeding, 2012) and trafficking (Mahdavi, 2011). In her ethnographic research on the informal economy in the UAE, Madhavi (2012) underlines how the notion of trafficking has been narrowly viewed in terms of sex trafficking, and she calls for a reconceptualization of this notion by looking at the migrants' narratives, where a discrepancy between lived experiences and policy framework emerge.<sup>38</sup> For Mahdavi (2012), the sponsorship system needs reforming because as it is conceived, it protects only the employer (sponsor) and not employees.<sup>39</sup>

Mahdavi (2011, 2016) and Ahmad (2017) focus on the intimate lives of women in Dubai and Kuwait respectively. In their research they both emphasize how the migration

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<sup>37</sup> "A policy of restricting the migration of female workers below a specified age exists in India, Indonesia and Pakistan. Female migration, especially of domestic servants, from Pakistan has been almost non-existent. During the last few years, Bangladesh has introduced a rule restricting overseas employment as domestic workers to those women, who are accompanied by their husband. Sri Lanka has imposed no restrictions on the migration of female domestic workers, but has placed a ban on the migration of nurses" (Shah, 2004, p. 185).

<sup>38</sup> In her analysis, Mahdavi (2012) argues the need to enlarge the notion of 'trafficking' because it has been conceived of and interpreted only in terms of 'sex trafficking' thus neglecting other situations in which, especially domestic workers, are trapped when they have to escape from specific situations and abandon formal economy and are forced, because they are not protected by laws, to enter informal economy (sex worker).

<sup>39</sup> In 2016, in the UAE, the system has been reformed, so "most migrant workers are permitted to seek different employment when their contract ends; without penalty, workers and their employers can mutually agree to terminate their contract; and workers can unilaterally decide to end their contract as long as they comply with the legal requirements of early termination, including providing one month's notice" (Parreñas & Silvey, 2016), but these reforms do not apply to the domestic workers. In 2009, in order to protect foreign workers, the Wage Protection System (WPS) was also implemented, which entails that UAE-based companies have to transfer "the wages of their workers through banks, money transfer companies and other service providers, rather than make cash payments" (National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, NCCHT, 2014, p. 23). Still, a reform implemented to protect low-wage migrants but not domestic workers. There is, to a certain extent, a reluctance to enter the private and domestic sphere from the UAE authorities. In Bahrain, the system was also reformed in 2008 (Hertog, 2012).

experience (or what I have defined as migration project), is negotiated and recreated in light of the new circumstances and events that take place in the migration context and affect their migration experience. Mahdavi (2011) argues that when new circumstances take place, migrants can decide to change their migration project; this is evident in the conscious choice made by some migrant women to start working in the sex industry. Thus, Mahdavi (2011) emphasizes migrants' agency and their ability and knowledge of the structures that they can use to make money.

Ahmad's (2017) ethnographic research emphasizes how conversion to the Islamic religion by South Asian domestic workers represent a change in their migration project insofar as some of them decide to settle down in Kuwait *permanently*. Her research illustrates how migrants' agential capacity relates to structural forces and how their conversion was mostly driven by a spiritual and emotional attachment to the new context rather than a chance to overcome the social hierarchies existing in the country. As Ahmad (2017) has put it, being a (converted) Muslim does not erase ethno-racial and gender differences.

In conclusion, women, who are mostly employed as domestic workers, risk being exploited and abused by the recruitment system because of the lack of legal protection in the GCC countries. However, the current literature also portrays women as agents; they are not always viewed as victims of exploitation or as disempowered individuals that are making unreflexive choices. It is undeniable that women's agential capacity and chances to improve their status are entangled with existing ethno-racial and gender hierarchies (see chapter 4).

### *3.7.3 Ethnographic research on belonging and class*

Ethnographic accounts focus on how migrants use their economic, social and cultural capital to migrate (Vora, 2010, 2013; Buckley, 2012, 2013), and how they use their capital once they have settled in a GCC country to overcome complexities and difficulties of the migration experience (Gardner, 2008, 2010a). Since the mid-2000s, some ethnographic works have illustrated how migrant labourers (Buckley, 2012; Kathiravelu, 2016), the Indian elite (Vora, 2010; Gardner, 2010a), and the Indian middle-class (Vora, 2013) have coped with the complexities of migration in different ways.

Since the 2000s, the Dubai government's strategy has focused on diversifying its economy, thus paying more attention to construction, tourism, service and financial sectors (Davidson, 2008a). Dubai's 'adoption' of neoliberalism (see chapter 4) has resulted in increasing foreign investments and labour attracted by "lower taxes and customs, relaxed environmental standards, and the privatization of governance into the hands of individuals" (Vora, 2010, p. 47). In her ethnographic research, Vora (2010) argues that neoliberalism in Dubai has been functional to the Indian elite, who, acting as 'unofficial citizens', have been able to enjoy the benefits of Dubai's free market. In other words, neoliberalism has allowed the Indian elite to become part of the structure of power and get involved in the management of migration (Vora, 2010). Vora's discourse on the Indian elite revolves around the idea of belonging/non-belonging, thus meaning that the Indian elite consider themselves as Indians "and nothing else" (Vora, 2013, p. 101). In other words, they are not interested in belonging politically to the UAE through citizenship or other ways. This sense of belonging/non-belonging is also articulated in preserving the Indian tradition and "providing a platform from which to educate their children to Indian customs, language, and history" (Vora, 2013, p. 101). For Vora (2013), the Indian elite or merchants are more attached to their Indian traditions and customs and are more patriarchal in their family structures than those of middle and working-class Indians. However, Vora (2013) contends that the Indian middle-class (unlike the Indian elite) in Dubai is suffering from the changes that have occurred in the Emirate over the last decade because of neoliberalism (Vora, 2013), which has resulted in property owners and business managers who are increasing rents and are recruiting white Westerners who provide "companies with a better "image", and raising prices on consumer items so that it [is] practically impossible to save money" (Vora, 2013, p. 124). Vora's (2013) ethnographic research underscores how the Indian middle-class suffers the consequences of neoliberalism because of the Emirate's failure in supporting a truly free market where employees can freely 'sell' their skills (Vora, 2013).

Between 2002 and 2003, Gardner (2008, 2010a) conducted ethnographic research on the Indian diasporic elite in Bahrain. He defines the Indian diasporic elite as professionals, skilled workers, and merchants that bring their families with them to Bahrain. By contrast, he defines the Indian transnational proletariat as a class composed by the Indian working-class, individual men that left their families in India (Gardner 2008). In his ethnographic

research, Gardner (2008) talks of ‘strategic transnationalism’ (see chapter 6),<sup>40</sup> which is the ability of the Indian diasporic elite to construct transnational networks to diminish the vulnerability that non-citizens face in Bahrain while seeking to profit from local labour market opportunities. This has led Gardner (2010a) to conclude that even the Indian diasporic elite are subject to the vulnerabilities and constraints of the transnational proletariat. However, unlike the Indian working-class, the Indian elite is able to cope with the vulnerabilities of the sponsorship system because they have tools and chances to opt for convenient strategies in order to relocate their family, work and investments in several places and locations.

From a different perspective, Buckley (2012, 2013) examines the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis<sup>41</sup> on the Indian construction workers in Dubai. Her research is interesting because it shows that the migration project of low-wage migrants was severely affected by the economic crisis. Unlike the Indian elite and middle-class, the Indian low-wage migrants were forced to remain in Dubai because they did not have money to leave the country; an option that was available to Westerners and the Indian elite and middle-class, who left Dubai and abandoned their luxury cars at the airport (Hilotin, 2009). The Indian low-wage migrants’ narratives illustrate that they suffered the effects of the economic crisis because many construction projects were cancelled or scaled down; they were forced to borrow money to pay the recruitment agencies and survive in Dubai, where many of them were obliged to stay because their passports were withheld by their employers (HRW, 2006). Since the 2000s, Dubai has attracted many professional migrants and foreign firms, which contributed to inflate construction workers’ wages (Buckley, 2013). The growth in the cost of rent and food, and wage theft by employers,<sup>42</sup> made it impossible for many Indian builders to survive in Dubai (Buckley, 2013). Therefore, Indian construction workers suffered the consequences of the growth in the cost of living and some were helped by private welfare initiatives to survive. For Buckley (2013), these initiatives, established to help Indian

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<sup>40</sup> This concept relies on the notion of ‘flexible citizenship’ proposed by Ong (1999).

<sup>41</sup> For Irudaya Rajan and Narayana (2016), the 2008 financial crisis, which represented another macrostructural event that could affect the migration project, only a “few thousands [migrants] lost their jobs and had to come back but the number migrating to the Gulf has hardly fallen” (p. 305). However, this macrostructural event had effects on micro-lives of migrants.

<sup>42</sup> It is a common practice, among employers in the UAE, to withhold wages of their employees. This happens because employers want to prevent workers from finding a better job after few days or one or two months in the UAE. This ‘custom’, however, entails serious effects for migrant workers, because they cannot pay recruitment agencies, so the interest raises, and they cannot send money back home to families (HRW, 2006).

migrants squeezed by the economic crisis, have not influenced Dubai's autocratic and authoritarian regime because they have served to "maintain workers' body capital" (Buckley, 2013, p. 264). In other words, Dubai's authorities have tolerated these initiatives because they have addressed workers' corporal needs (food and shelter) and not their political needs (Buckley, 2013).

These studies demonstrate how the migration project cuts across classes and how it can be shaped and negotiated differently according to the context, situations and circumstances.

#### *3.7.4 Ethnographic research on migrant associations*

One of the chapters (chapter 7) of the thesis focuses on the PAD, which is the main Pakistani association in Dubai. In this section I therefore examine extant literature on migration in the Gulf countries that pay particular attention to migrants' organizations. Thus far very few studies have been undertaken on the importance and role of migrant associations to the foreign communities in the Arab Gulf region. Migrant associations are places where the sense of belonging and identification is very strong (Fortier, 2006). Migrants bring with them their 'national identity' and migrant associations are places that embody this sense of belonging. The role and importance of migrant associations has, in my view, been neglected within the most influential literature on migration in the Arab Gulf region. However, these associations are important, as they clearly embody migrants' agential capacity and their ties with their home country. Furthermore, the associations illustrate that migrants are aware of the local structures, rules and laws that regulate the establishment of migrant associations.

Gardner (2010a, p. 100), who has focused on the Indian associations and clubs in Bahrain, argues that they are "the primary social foundation for foreign workers' participation in the complex public sphere of contemporary Bahrain". For Gardner (2010a), the presence of Indian associations and clubs in the public sphere serves to display the division between nationals and non-nationals. In this view, these associations and clubs are not agents of change but are public manifestation of 'India-ness'. Gardner's approach relies on Habermas's concept of public space, which is conceived of as a space in which "individuals develop a collective identity and a set of interests distinct from those of both

the private sphere and the state” (Gardner, 2010a, p. 97). The establishment of these associations is tied to the migration project insofar as they represent migrants’ capacity to interact with the structural context in order to create a space of belonging and identification which in turn can be supportive of migrants’ needs and exigencies.

In conclusion, Gardner (2010a, p. 117) warns us against the risk of conceiving of these spaces as “components of discrete diasporic public spheres, [thus suggesting] we think of them as active participants in this plural and more comprehensive Bahraini public sphere”. Gardner’s conclusion seems to locate migrant associations in the public sphere as equal to Western and Bahraini associations, however, as I will discuss in chapter 7, in Dubai, these organizations are officially recognized but subject to the scrutiny of the local authorities.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to contribute to the debate about the relationship between structure and agency in migration studies. For Bakewell (2010), the extant literature on migration is not able to propose a substantive theory that could explain migration. In order to overcome this impasse, it is important to put at the core of migration studies the debate on structure and agency. I have addressed this debate by focusing on the duality of structure (Giddens, 1979, 1984). In this regard, I have thus introduced and discussed the notion of migration project in order to explain that migration relies on the link between structure and agency. Furthermore, the concept of migration project emphasizes the agential capacity of migrants to create and recreate their migration experience and interact with structures in their everyday life. In my view, the notion of migration project is able to better grasp the relation between structure and agency, as it emphasizes how the structures enable and constrain human agency whilst also serving to emphasize the idea that migration is a concerted and reflexive choice made by individuals who, as knowledgeable agents acting in situ, are able to mobilize their resources in order to deal with circumstances and events that occur in their everyday life.

Belonging, class, national identity and recognition have also been discussed in relation to the notion of migration project in order to demonstrate that the relation between

structure and agency is fundamental to better grasp the complexities and dynamics of migration; to understand how macrostructural forces and micro-lives of migrants interact.

In conclusion, the main contribution of this thesis is twofold. First, the thesis focuses on the Pakistani middle-class professionals, which is often subsumed under the label 'South Asian', and it emphasizes their subjectivity and their peculiarities. Second, the thesis introduces the concept of migration project and suggests that it enables us to better understand and explain migration, especially in specific geographical and socio-economic contexts such as Dubai.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES AND DUBAI.**  
**ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL RELATIONS**

**4.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I have introduced the notion of migration project and its relation to the main concepts (belonging, class, national identity and recognition) discussed throughout the thesis; in this chapter, I focus on the setting of my field research, its characteristics and peculiarities. Until the mid-twentieth century the borders of the Gulf port cities, such as Dubai, Lingah, and Bandar Abbas between the Arab and Persian sides of the Gulf were fluid and culturally dynamic (Fuccaro, 2014). This fluidity and cultural diversity has been recorded by archeological findings and has been explained in terms of relationships and exchanges among people living in the coastal areas (Potter, 2009) (Picture 4.1).

**Picture 4.1 Map of some Gulf port cities**

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Source: <https://www.google.it/search?q=map+of+Dubai+and+Bandar+Abbas&biw>



These links, over the centuries, led to the establishment of the *khalījī* ('Gulfies') community (*al-mujtama'a al-khalījī*), which was a multi-cultural community, stratified and economically dependent on the seafaring activities (Potts, 2009; Redha Bhacker, 2009).

The aim of this chapter is to analyze the historical dynamics in order to understand the contemporary ethnic diversity and social relationships in the UAE. The analysis relies on my personal observations, field notes and the existing literature on history and migration in the Gulf region. My argument is that, despite the presence of different nationalities, languages, religions and cultures and the lack of any policy aimed at integrating the foreigners in the UAE society, migrants and nationals coexist, at least on the surface, peacefully in the country. However, the existence of gender and ethno-racialized hierarchies is evident (Mahdavi, 2011; Vora, 2013).

The starting point of this chapter is to discuss the evolution rather than the disintegration (Chernilo, 2007) of the *khalījī* community, which led, between the 1960s and 1970s, to the formation of a new form of socio-economic and political organization, namely the nation-state. This sense of continuity between the past and the present and the spirit of cohesiveness was partially resurrected in the 1980s by the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Naufal & Genc, 2012). It thus becomes evident that in order to understand the formation of the nation-states it is necessary to move beyond national borders and to look at the relationships that the Gulf countries have developed within and outside the region. In other words, it is important to acknowledge the need to move beyond methodological nationalism, which is the idea of nation-state as a bounded societal entity (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). For my particular context, methodological nationalism can be 'overcome' via the concept of 'global city' (Glick Schiller, 2010), thus meaning that city is viewed as a site in which are concentrated "financial services and [it] acts as a command and control centre for the rest of the world" (Elsheshtawy, 2013, p. 21). This concept in relation to Dubai, allows acknowledging the internal tension between local and global, between Dubai's need to 'safeguard' its socio-cultural and religious background and the vocation of being global with its neoliberal policies that have *created* ethno-racial and gender hierarchies (see also chapter 8).

The relevance of this historical analysis to my research relates to the need to illustrate that Emiratis and non-Emiratis are dynamic, contested and multi-layered categories, and the latter appears to be 'integrated' in the UAE social fabric. This allows moving beyond

methodological nationalism and through the concept of global city, it is possible to grasp the transnational and multi-cultural ‘nature’ of Dubai. The extant literature on migration in the GCC countries has largely treated these two categories as opposing and static without grasping their dynamic and fluid nature (Gardner 2010a; Vora, 2013). The discovery of oil in the twentieth century (Errichiello, 2012a), the formation of new polities in the 1960s and 1970s affected the economic and commercial aspects of the old Gulf’s community but did not undermine the social fabric of the region (Izady, 2002; Potter, 2009). In port cities, such as Dubai, the presence of foreigners was so pervasive that they contributed to its development and prosperity.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the first two sections, I discuss the ethnic diversity of the Persian Gulf whose economic survival was linked to the seafaring activities, and the formation of the UAE federation. I then discuss the UAE as a nation-state in terms of its political structure and measures adopted in order to institutionalize the ethno-racial and gender hierarchies (e. g. sponsorship system) and the need to move beyond methodological nationalism thus avoiding being trapped in its reductionist and circumscribed approach. The emergence of Dubai and the ‘adoption’ of neoliberalism as a market ideology are addressed in the next sections that through the lens of the concept of global city allows acknowledging Dubai’s tension between local and global. Lastly, I address the relationships between Emiratis and non-Emiratis and how ethno-racial and gender hierarchies have developed in the UAE.

## **4.2 The historical evolution of the Persian Gulf**

In this section, I analyse the dynamics that have shaped the history of the coastal areas and port cities of the Gulf, which led to the formation of the *khalījī* community.

A “view from the sea” (Potter, 2014, p. 2) allows outlining the historical evolution of the coastal cities of the Persian Gulf. Recently, historians (Potter, 2009; Fuccaro, 2014) have considered the littoral area and port cities of the Gulf as a cultural area, where people, until the mid-twentieth century, shared a common social structure, economic, cultural and environmental characteristics (Fuccaro, 2014) that made this area different not only from the rest of the Middle East but also from the interior zones of the Persian Gulf (Potter, 2009).

The historical lack of borders among port cities in the Gulf region (Peterson, 2011), a multiplicity of identities and the relative autonomy that the Gulf cities enjoyed led to the formation of a hybrid society (Potter, 2014). It means, for example, that in the tenth century in Oman and Aden was very common to hear people that spoke Persian, or Persians in Lingah that spoke Arabic (Potter, 2009). In the nineteenth century, a British politician (Lewis Pelly) noted that the population on the Persian side of the Gulf “appeared to be African” (cited in Potter, 2009, p. 7). This hybrid community was the result of commercial exchanges and of the role played by the slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Gulf (Potter, 2009).

In the coastal areas of the region, the most productive economic activity “was limited to the exportation of pearls and dates, the importation of goods from abroad, shipping and ship-building” (Onley & Khalaf, 2006, p. 192). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, before the discovery of oil (in 1908 in Persia and in 1932 in Bahrain) (Errichiello, 2012a), fishing, pearling industry and trading represented the most important economic activities for the coastal people. The pearling industry dominated the local labour market (Onley & Khalaf, 2006); it employed many workers for a seasonal period (July to October) each year. It was such a lucrative activity that at the beginning of the twentieth century, Indian pearl merchants moved to the Gulf cities to buy pearl harvest from Arabs and Persians and then they sold pearls in the Indian market (Onley, 2014).

The links with the African continent started developing when Arabs and Persians moved to East Africa before the advent of Islām (seventh century A. D.). In particular, the Iranic Barzangi<sup>43</sup> dynasty moved to East Africa (Izady, 2002) because they needed to establish new commercial routes to develop their economic activities that were in contrast with “the nascent Sasanian dynasty of Persia [they reigned from 224 to 651 A. D. in Persia]” (Izady, 2002). However, from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, the enslaved Africans in the Gulf port cities became a pervasive presence because many of them were employed in the flourishing pearling industry (Hopper, 2014). Both in Africa and Asia, Arabs and Persians consolidated their presence through intermarriages between the Gulf merchant families and the local elites. Thus, the “resulting genetic diversity overseas sooner or later reflected itself back in the Gulf as well” (Izady, 2002, p. 45).

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<sup>43</sup> This dynasty was “originally from the Shiraz area but dominant in the Laristan-Shabankara region of the northern Gulf coast and the Strait of Hormuz” (Izady, 2002, p. 41).

People living on the coastal cities in the Trucial States<sup>44</sup>, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and in Persia were physically separated from the interior zones because of the presence of the Zagros mountains in the north, and the deserts of Najd in the west and Rub al-Khali in the south (Izady, 2002). It was thus ‘natural’ for people living on the coastal areas to decide to move to the Indian Ocean to secure a livelihood and establish contacts and settlements in East Africa, India, Southeast Asia, and South China (Izady, 2002). This expansion contributed to the Gulf’s ethnic diversity that is also observable today. During my field research, I realized that this ‘diversity’ is reflected in the physical characteristics of some Emiratis.

Over the last few days, I have walked around Dubai, especially in some shopping malls, and I have seen many Emiratis who have different physical characteristics in terms of appearance. So for example, I have seen Emiratis with brown skin, others with dark skin and others with white skin and blue or green eyes. This has led me to reflect on the fact that the UAE society is ethnically different, and whose history and ethnic diversity has been shaped over the years because of the contacts of local merchants, fishermen and Muslim preachers, who travelled for commercial and economic reasons in different areas of the Indian Ocean, with people from East Africa to East Asia (from my field notes, 6th November 2015).

As Kanna (2010) points out, the ethnic diversity existing in Dubai resulted from the movement and connections between the Gulf countries with Asia and Africa. The Indian and Persian merchants moved to Dubai at the beginning of the twentieth century and still today they represent the backbone of Dubai’s society. They enjoy some privileges but, as Kanna (2010) argues, they are considered by the UAE authorities as second-class citizens (see below). This diversity is historically sedimented and has become one of the major characteristics of Dubai.

In the Gulf region, the traditional social and political structure revolved around the prominent role of tribes and tribal affiliation. As an ideal type, “tribes represent large kin groups organized and regulated according to ties of blood and family lineage” (Khoury & Kostiner 1990, p. 4). Before the formation of new polities (e. g. the UAE federation in 1971), the tribe represented a social and territorial unit, whose members were tied because of different factors, such as livelihood, territorial proximity and, in some cases, a presumed

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<sup>44</sup> Until 1971, the sheikhdoms of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah were known as the Trucial States. Sheikhdoms (in Arabic *mashyakhat*) “were small scale in terms of their economic, military, political and demographic resources...their populations were small...their boundaries were fluid and shifting, defined by political loyalties rather than political borders. Sovereignty was seen in terms of people, not territory” (Onley & Khalaf, 2006, p. 191).

common descent (Heard-Bey, 2013). However, the tribe could join other units and in this way it “began to develop new affinities when they identified themselves with groups which were geographically near to them or which had adopted the same primary source of livelihood” (Heard-Bey, 2013, p. 23). The tribal groups gave preference to genealogical, territorial, geographical and occupational elements and this is why they included among their ranks different units and members of other tribes or ethnic groups, which were dispersed across a vast geographical area. This led these tribal groups to increase and to disperse over a vast area of the Persian Gulf (Cooke, 2014).

In the twentieth century, tribal affiliation was very important in the Gulf region because tribes were “the key to forming modern states in the Arabian Peninsula, and the dynasties presently ruling there are all of tribal origin” (Potter 2009, p. 2). Tribalism is still alive and well in the Gulf (Al-Qassem, 2012) and it coexists with the modern state (Tibi, 1990).

### **4.3 From the *khalījī* community to the UAE**

In this section, I discuss the evolution of the *khalījī* community and the formation of the UAE federation, which challenged the economic and political stability of the community but not the social fabric.

The lack of borders, the commercial exchanges, intermarriages and tribal affiliation led different ethnic groups to interact with each other. For Beeman (2009), the similarity in lifestyle based on the seafaring activities in the Gulf littoral area, and the practice of unrestricted movement led to the formation of the community of the ‘Gulfies’ (*al-mujtama’ al-khalījī*), which resulted from social interactions between people of the Persian Gulf with people arriving from India, Southeast Asia and East Africa that occurred over the centuries. Potter (2009, p. 2) uses the word *khalījī* to invoke a “distinction between dwellers on the Iranian or Arabian coasts and those living in the interior”.<sup>45</sup> Despite people on the coastal areas in the Persian Gulf had intense economic and social relations, they did not share a common identity (Potter, 2014). The term *khalījī* community encapsulates the Gulf’s ethnic

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<sup>45</sup> Today this word is not applicable to the Persian Gulf because Iranians tend to identify themselves as Iranians and not as *khalījī*, “and do not embrace a Gulf-wide identity” (Potter, 2014, p. 12).

diversity. It was a community, which had more “*internal* cultural communality than explicit ties with either the Arab or Persian cultural world” (Beeman, 2009, p. 147, original emphasis). This community was not based on an integration of different cultures and groups but was an aggregation of different ethnic groups held together for economic and commercial reasons (Cohen, 1985). As such, this community was not uniform, and ways of behaving varied among its members. This diversity and variety of behaviour did not disrupt the sense of belonging and boundaries of the *khalījī* community (Cohen, 1985). As Cohen (1985, p. 21) has put it, although members of a community “recognize important differences among themselves, they also suppose themselves to be more like each other than like the members of other communities. This is precisely because, although the meanings they attach to the symbols may differ, they share symbols”. The *khalījī* community was ethnically different and, in spite of this ethnic diversity, it found its stability and balance by sharing a common lifestyle based on the seafaring activities; on the emergence of a ‘business mentality’ (Izady, 2002) stemming from commercial and economic activities, and exchanges within the Indian Ocean arena; and on the open and inclusive tribal structure (Heard-Bey, 2013).

In this context, characterized by the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups, who were related to each other for economic and commercial benefits, in 1971 the UAE federation was proclaimed. At the same time, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman also became independent (Kuwait became independent in 1961) from Britain.<sup>46</sup> The new states established structures and institutions to manage their internal affairs. The British withdrawal entailed drawing borders and establishing new states (Potter, 2009). However, the sense of belonging to a ‘single’ community was partially resurrected only ten years later in 1981 when, along with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, these states joined to form the GCC (Naufal & Genc, 2012).

The formation of the UAE federation (Picture 4.2) was the result of a process of state-building; it “required to find ways of becoming open and inclusive, of turning fellow nationals into fellow citizens, and creating a secure public space in which the abstract, impersonal and rule-governed institutions of the state [could] take root” (Parekh, 1995b, p.

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<sup>46</sup> The British presence in the Gulf states of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman (Muscat) and the Trucial States was linked to the need to protect the British ships towards India from piracy, which was practiced by the Al-Qawasimi family of Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah in the Street of Hormuz. British presence in the Gulf dates from the winter of 1819–20, when the authorities in British India sent a naval expedition against the al-Qawasim family. “Upon the conclusion of the expedition, the British imposed an anti-piracy treaty—known as the General Treaty of 1820—on all the rulers and governors of the Coast of Oman” (Onley, 2005, p. 30).

36). The state-building process required the establishment of political, bureaucratic and economic apparatuses to manage state affairs.<sup>47</sup> The formation of this new polity did not undermine the role and the importance of tribal affiliation, which is still emotionally and socially relevant (Tibi, 1990), as well as economically and politically essential in framing the balance of power in the Gulf states (Al-Qassemi, 2012; Rugh, 2016). Moreover, tribal affiliation symbolically strengthened the sense of belonging among members of the new polity by recovering the past and creating ‘national histories’ (Cohen, 1985), and it politically reinforced ties among locals through a specific citizenship law (no. 17, 1972) (see below).

**Picture 4.2 Map of the UAE**

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Source: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/middle-east/united-arab-emirates/>

After independence, the UAE authorities found themselves in a position of managing a huge wealth deriving from the oil, which was discovered between the 1950s and 1960s both in Abu Dhabi and Dubai (Davidson, 2009b). In order to avoid creating dissatisfaction, political and social instability, the ruling families<sup>48</sup> decided to involve the local population in the

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<sup>47</sup> For the political and administrative apparatuses, see Davidson, 2005.

<sup>48</sup> The seven Emirates are a family-based system linked to some tribes. The emergence of the ruling families dates back “to the 1700s and 1800s. The ruling families were those which had become the strongest and most prestigious in terms of marital skills and success in forging political marriage alliances, and by gaining control of economic resources with which they could support their followers” (Van der Meulen, 1997, p. 46).

defence of state's interests. This is what Davis (1991) defined as 'statecraft', which means the ability of the ruling elites to govern with the support of the local population. By reinterpreting the past and using the collective memory, the ruling families have been able to involve the local population in constructing a consensus among their nationals in order to strengthen their rule. When the ruling elite are not able to create a link with the populace based on symbols such as a national flag or anthem, they risk losing their hold on people and they risk seeing their authority challenged. When there is no link between the ruler and the ruled, the former does not have power to legitimate his authority on the latter (Khoury & Kostiner, 1990).

In the UAE, the involvement of the local population in the management of national and collective affairs has led to the establishment of a 'ruling bargain' (Davidson, 2005); a bargain in which "valuables distributed by the state would be exchanged for political demobilization" (Kanna, 2011, p. 25). The 'ruling bargain' is a strategy adopted by the ruling elite who distribute wealth, benefits and good jobs to ('pure') Emiratis (see below) in exchange of internal de-mobilization and no political pressure.

#### *4.3.1 The UAE as a nation-state*

As said in chapter 3, for Parekh (1995), a political community exists when its members share common rules, procedures and institutions in order to manage their collective affairs (Parekh, 1995). In 1971, the UAE federation was proclaimed. It was thus necessary to 'build' the political and economic apparatuses of the new polity. In this regard, the Emirati authorities implemented a series of measures with the aim of constructing a political community with its own particular laws, institutions and principles (Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah & al-Mutawa, 2006). At federal level, the highest authority is represented by the presidency. The president of the federation is elected by the rulers of the seven Emirates for five years. He acts as head of the state. Theoretically, every ruler can be appointed as a president of the federation (Davidson, 2005). Practically, since its inception the UAE federation has had only



two presidents elected and always within the same family, that is, the al-Nuhayyan family of Abu Dhabi<sup>49</sup>. This is the ‘pathology’ (Davidson, 2005) of the UAE political system, in which the traditional rulership of Abu Dhabi prevails. It is the largest and wealthiest Emirate of the federation and it is the major contributor to the federal budget; thus “this historical association of the presidency with the ruler of Abu Dhabi has now been informally accepted by the other emirates” (Davidson, 2005p. 189).

The implementation of some measures (e. g. citizenship law), as I discuss below, serves to differentiate, categorize and identify those who belong and those who do not belong. Therefore, the UAE authorities constructed boundaries and identified who were to be included and excluded within those boundaries (Yuval-Davis, 2011). In the UAE, migrants cannot ostensibly belong to the Emirati nation, which uses its symbols, imagery and narratives to build its national identity, and from which migrants are seemingly excluded (see below), so “they remain relatively outsiders not only to the nation but also to the state” (Parekh, 1995b, p. 37). The Emirati authorities implemented measures aimed at excluding foreign workers from benefits deriving from working and living in the UAE (Van der Meulen, 1997). In order to reshape and strengthen their national identity in terms of who belongs and who does not belong, the UAE adopted several strategies, such as revitalizing tribal bonds, encouraging marriage among nationals, reviewing the citizenship law and implementing the sponsorship system.

In the UAE, the political identity discourse is mainly articulated through tribalism, which is still “alive and well” (Al-Qassemi, 2012, p. 1). Despite Eriksen (2010) arguing that the term ‘ethnic group’ has replaced the term ‘tribe’, in the UAE the tribal identity represents a primary identity for youth because it allows them to distinguish themselves from the massive presence of foreign workers (Cooke, 2014). For Cooke (2014), the tribal bond is a social, political and cultural resource for young people. Tribal links are still important in the management of political affairs and the distribution of wealth and jobs (Van der Meulen 1997; Davidson 2009a). The Emirati political identity is based upon the tribal leadership and the prominent role of the ruling families of each single Emirate who are linked to specific tribes. The traditional tribal system does not undermine the federal structure because, as Davidson (2005) argues, the UAE is an ‘open’ federation in which (apart from a very few

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<sup>49</sup> The first president was Shaikh Zaid al-Nuhayyan who reigned from 1966 (before the proclamation of the federation and he was the ruler of Abu Dhabi) to 2004; he was re-elected every five years. The second president is Shaikh Khalifa al-Nuhayyan who was elected in 2004.

sectors such as army, foreign affairs and immigration) each Emirate acts independently. Tribal bonds are reinforced through close family inter-marriages, which connect “all members of the Emiratis’ ruling families without exception” (Al-Qassemi, 2012, p. 2), and they also serve to set boundaries against millions of migrants who work and live in the country. The strengthening of the tribal bonds is fundamental to spread a sense of security, belonging and cohesion in the face of a massive presence of migrants, and it also serves to wield power and authority.

One way in which the Emirati national identity is continually reconstituted and reshaped is through the adoption of specific marriage strategies (Dresch, 2005). Marriage is a political means that is regulated by rules and procedures. Marriage between inter-state ruling families is used to preserve and reinforce ties beyond national boundaries. Thus, members of a ruling family of an Emirate may marry members of another ruling family in the Arab Gulf.<sup>50</sup> Marriages between inter-state ruling families guarantee economic security and reinforce political ties between the families in the GCC countries (Al-Qassemi, 2012). However, marriage is also important far and beyond the ruling families. It has become a way to preserve privileges and advantages associated with UAE citizenship (see below). In order to reduce mixed marriages, represented by the choice of some Emirati men to marry foreign women (Al Awadhi, 2008), in 1992 the federal law (no. 47) established the ‘Marriage Fund’ (*ṣundūq al-zawāj*), which is aimed at increasing the marriage among Emiratis providing financial help for marriage costs (Dresch, 2005). Marriage has thus become an important tool to renegotiate national identity through the adoption of a political strategy based upon the encouragement of marriage among UAE nationals and on the reinforcement of tribal bonds. In her research on the importance of tribalism in modern times in the Arab Gulf area, Cooke (2014) argues that the choice of a potential partner is driven by the prestige and importance of tribal affiliation. Marriage thus reinforces boundaries between nationals and non-nationals and strengthens the historical tribal bonds

In 1972, the UAE adopted a federal law (n. 17) on citizenship (Dresch, 2005). According to this law, Emirati citizenship can be granted by law (*qānūn*), by affiliation or dependence (*tābi‘a*), and by naturalisation (*tajannus*). It can also be granted to a person “who has rendered honourable service to the state, irrespective of period of residency” (Gray,

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<sup>50</sup> The Bahraini king’s son, Shaykh Hussein bin Hamad, married a daughter of the ruler of Dubai (Shaykh Muhammad bin Rashid al Maktum) in 2009 (Al-Qassemi, 2012).

2015, p. 10). The new federal law (n. 10) of 1975 also established that a national woman does not lose her citizenship if she marries a foreign man “unless [she] adopts her husband's nationality” (Article 14). Moreover, a Presidential decree in 2011 established that children of Emirati women married to foreign men could acquire Emirati citizenship at the age of 18 (Gray, 2015). UAE citizenship entails having some rights and benefits granted, such as the residency, the right to open a business, and become a sponsor, and many other benefits in terms of free education, free house and/or land, free welfare, and a job in the public sector (Gray, 2015). Citizenship law has increasingly become more flexible since 1975. However, I argue that this growing flexibility is the result of the demographic imbalance, which means that foreigners outnumber nationals (Davidson, 2005). In order to reshape their national identity, the UAE authorities have adopted flexible rules, for example, Emirati women no longer lose their citizenship when they become married to a foreign man, as it happened in the past. The chosen mode of conducting collective affairs is permeated by the need to cope with perceived challenges posed to national identity (Parekh, 1995a). Thus, the adoption of a relatively flexible citizenship law is a way of reaffirming the difference between nationals and non-nationals. This point becomes clearer when considering that having an Emirati passport does not entail having all the benefits and rights of a ‘national’. In the UAE, in order to be considered a ‘national’ and having benefits and advantages ensured, it is not sufficient to be in possession of a passport. In order to be considered a ‘national’, s/he must have the *khulāṣat al-qayd*, that is the family book (Al Qassemi, 2010).<sup>51</sup> For instance, if one has citizenship granted by naturalisation, s/he is not considered a ‘national’. Thus, one will never enjoy the benefits and rights of a ‘pure’ Emirati national because a naturalized citizen possesses citizenship but not nationality. This means that the naturalized citizen is excluded from political rights and can lose citizenship if s/he commits a crime or for other specific reasons (Fargues & Brouwer 2012). A clear-cut separation between nationality and citizenship thus exists (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Nationality is both inclusive and boundary-making because all nationals are also citizens, and nationality creates a boundary between nationals and non-nationals/non-citizens. Citizenship is exclusionary and boundary-breaking because all citizens are not nationals, and citizenship breaks the boundaries between nationals and non-nationals. However, according to the citizenship law, non-nationals (e. g.

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<sup>51</sup> It is a sort of book in which are enlisted all members of a family beginning with the male head of family, and without this book one is considered as a stateless (*bidūn*) (Dresch, 2005).

non-Gulf Arabs, Asians, Westerners and Africans) can become citizens, but they will never become nationals.<sup>52</sup>

In the 1970s, the UAE adopted the sponsorship (*kafāla*) system in order to regulate migration to the country. Thus, a migrant worker who wishes to obtain a temporary work permit to be employed in the UAE needs a *kafīl* (sponsor). The sponsorship system is a mechanism to control migrant workers that enter and work in the country. It also affects the migrants' social behaviour because any illegal actions might compromise their sojourn in the country. Moreover, it also determines social interaction because it is a structure of dominance (Longva, 1997), in which the employer is primarily involved in the management of migration (Vora, 2010). The *kafāla* system has created a market where citizenship guarantees an income (Khalaf, 2014). However, in this market, migrant workers are not free to sell and compete in the market because the *kafāla* system does not allow a migrant worker to have residency and work visas without a national sponsor (local citizen or company) and s/he is not free to compete in the local labour market for jobs (Longva, 1997). At the individual level, through the *kafāla* system, the UAE authorities delegate to their nationals the functions of controlling and managing migration that are typically governed by local institutions (Longva, 1997). Thus, the *kafāla* system delegates to employers the right to control the entry of a migrant into the country (Dito, 2014). It is worth noting that the involvement of locals in the management of migration serves to spread a sense of security and cohesion among locals (Dresch, 2005) because they participate in the management of community affairs and it demarcates boundaries between nationals and non-nationals (see also chapter 5).

In conclusion, Parekh (1995a) contends that political identity refers to how a community manages its communal affairs, structures its relationships with 'others' and establishes rules and procedures in order to reshape its identity. This approach allows us to recognize that, for example, the involvement of nationals in the management of collective affairs, and rights and benefits deriving from being an Emirati national, serve to reshape

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<sup>52</sup> The acquisition of the UAE citizenship is very difficult. It can be granted to people with different procedures according to their national origins. Omani, Bahraini and Qatari can obtain citizenship if they have resided continuously in the country for three years; non-Gulf Arabs can obtain it if they have resided continuously in the country for at least seven years and other nationalities only if they have resided in the country for at least twenty years after the implementation of the Federal (citizenship) Law No. 17 of 1972. For non-Arab people, it is also required to be proficient in Arabic language (Zahra, 2015).

national identity. However, these measures also serve seemingly to limit the participation of millions of foreign workers in the Emirati context.

#### *4.3.2 The UAE beyond methodological nationalism*

As said in the previous section, the UAE have implemented measures, laws and created institutions in order to establish the federation. The UAE as a nation-state has become an ‘identity container’ (Glick Schiller, 2010), in which the nation is represented as a bounded and isolated social space. However, this perspective is reductionist and most importantly neglects the role of migrants as transnational actors, embedded in global markets and as actors living and spanning their lives within and beyond one single nation-state. This is why some scholars (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002; Chernilo, 2007; Glick Schiller, 2010) advocate the need to move beyond methodological nationalism, which is “an ideological orientation that approaches the study of social and historical processes as if they were contained within the borders of individual nation-states” (Glick Schiller, 2010, pp. 110-111). In this approach, nation-state borders are viewed as societal boundaries, thus nation-state and society are equated, and this leads to conceiving every single state as self-sufficient and also as a separate society in which the ‘others’ are viewed as *strangers* with distinctive and particular national norms and customs (Glick Schiller, 2010). For Hanieh (2015, p. 58), the adoption of the lens of methodological nationalism relies on the (unsustainable) idea of “nation-states as self-contained, enclosed set of social relations, separate from the wider region and world market”.

This approach, in relation to the UAE and the Gulf countries, has two major consequences, First, by conceiving the nation-state as the circumscribed and privileged social space to analyse and understand social phenomena, it risks losing the idea that flows of capital, labour migration and policy frameworks move beyond national borders; social phenomena are embedded in and move beyond the nation-state (Chernilo, 2007). For Hanieh (2015), in order to understand migration and the role of the Gulf countries, it is important to inscribe their development in a regional and global context. In this regard, neoliberal economic policies implemented by some financial institutions in the 1970s (e. g. the International Monetary Fund, IMF) created instability and uncertainties in some Middle

Eastern countries (e. g. Egypt), thus encouraging migration to the Gulf states, which supported financially some of these countries in order to alleviate their debt crisis.

Second, social phenomena are conceived of as including and binding to a specific nation-state. As Glick Schiller (2010) acknowledges, this approach leads to viewing migration as ‘threatening’ the national cohesion and stability. The nation-state is viewed as an automatized and perfect society in which a balance within its borders exists and enables it to prosper and flourish (Glick Schiller, 2010). This leads to conceiving of migrants and natives as two separated entities. It becomes evident among scholars of transnational migration and diaspora, who “have often bound their unit of study along the lines of national or ethnic identities” (Glick Schiller, 2010, p. 111) that migrants are viewed as a ‘threat’ to social stability and natives as sharing common norms and narratives. As I will discuss in chapter 8, these presumed ‘threat’ represented by migrants has led the UAE authorities to implement measures to reshape their cultural identity (Parekh, 1995)

The idea to move beyond methodological nationalism entails acknowledging that the UAE (and the other Gulf countries) is a peculiar nation-state in which political, economic and financial institutions are not only the products of national and local interests but also of regional and global markets. First, the UAE is formed of seven Emirates, which are governed by seven different rulers who belong to different families (Davidson, 2005). Second, the emirate-level decision making structure revolves around the role of the rulers’ courts, which “preside over local governments, most of which possess their own civil services, economic affairs departments, public works departments, finance departments, and in some cases even their own oil departments, civil aviation authorities, and internal security organizations” (Davidson, 2005, pp.198-199). Apart from foreign affairs, immigration and army, each Emirate has its own political and economic structures. As Davidson (2005) argues, the UAE is more a confederation than a federation because each Emirate wields power on many sectors. Third, one of the major challenges to the Emirati national identity is represented by the demographic imbalance, which has spread the “fear among some people that national society might evaporate” (Dresch, 2005, p. 156). I argue that in order to address this sense of insecurity, the UAE authorities have adopted strategies that appear to strengthen the boundaries between nationals and non-nationals (see chapter 8). Fourth, there are internal divisions in terms of citizenship status, as previously mentioned, which have institutionalized ethno-racial and gender hierarchies (see below).

All these elements serve to reinforce the idea of the UAE as a peculiar nation-state in which its socio-economic and financial development has necessarily required the massive recruitment of foreign workers. As Hanieh (2015, p. 63) points out, migration to the Gulf countries resulted from the neoliberal restructuring programmes that in some Middle Eastern countries started in the 1970s (e. g. Egypt and Jordan), which included “privatisation, labour market deregulation, opening up to foreign investment (FDI), increasing integration into global financial markets”. The role of the Gulf countries in this process was crucial because they provided financial support to those countries that suffered from the debt crisis. One of the consequences of the neoliberal restructuring programme was migration that resulted as the main means to survive in light of the economic crisis and recession that some Middle Eastern countries were suffering, and remittances represented the main tool through which some countries and families were able to survive (Glick Schiller, 2010; Hanieh, 2015).

In conclusion, moving beyond methodological nationalism and the ‘container approach’ to society in order to overcome the idea of the nation-state as self-sufficient allows us to see that what happens in state territories is not only a product of specific and distinctive state policies, but it is inevitably the result of globalization and the embeddedness that characterize our globalized world. Scholars who advocate the need to move beyond methodological nationalism, such as Chernilo (2007), Glick Schiller (2010) and Hanieh (2015) help us to understand the UAE and the other Gulf countries as entities embedded in the global market and economy (Hanieh, 2015).

#### **4.4 Dubai. The emergence of a modern city**

The area in which I carried out the field research was Dubai, and in this section, I discuss the importance and the emergence of Dubai from a port city to an international financial centre.

The fluidity, ethnic and cultural diversity, which characterized the *khalījī* community, also included elements of cohesion and unity. Dubai was a port city that developed by virtue of the seafaring activities (Heard-Bey, 2013), and its ethnic diversity did not undermine its development (Davidson, 2008a). Dubai became an important port city

during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries that also contributed to make it an international financial centre from the 1970s onwards (Davidson, 2008a).

In the nineteenth century, Dubai was one of the port cities of the Arab side of the Gulf where merchants, fishermen and traders settled down and where goods coming from South and Southeast Asia were shipped throughout the Gulf region and the Indian Ocean arena. In 1833, Dubai became independent from Abu Dhabi. Members of the Al-Bu Falasah tribe, which is a section of the Bani Yas tribal confederation (Heard-Bey, 2013), left Abu Dhabi when Shaykh Khalifa bin Shakhbut Al-Nuhayyan (who ruled from 1833 to 1845) suppressed a coup plotted by “a number of cousins, merchants, and other powerful Bani Yas men” (Davidson, 2008a, p. 13). Khalifa’s revenge “was so extensive that many of the perpetrators and their families had no option but to leave Abu Dhabi” (Davidson, 2009a, p. 13). Thus, members of the Al-Bu Falasah tribe led by Maktum bin Buti Al-Falasi and his uncle Ubaid bin Said Al-Falasi (and with other tribes) settled in Dubai, which was proclaimed independent from Abu Dhabi, and they started the new dynasty, the Al-Maktum. The first ruler of Dubai was Maktum bin Buti Al-Falasi (who ruled from 1833 to 1852) who shared his rulership with his uncle (Ubaid bin Said Al-Falasi) for three years (Davidson, 2008a, 2009a).

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Dubai’s local population was stratified and ethnically diverse. In the course of the years, many foreigners travelled and settled down in the sheikhdom and became part of Dubai’s social fabric (Kanna, 2011). Dubai’s population was composed mostly by local Arabs, Persians and Indians. This multi-cultural community resulted from the intense economic and commercial exchanges that occurred in the Indian Ocean arena (Davidson, 2008b). In 1902 in Persia, a new law introduced high dues on imports and exports on goods going through Persian ports to the Trucial States (Heard-Bey, 2013). This led the port of Lingah (Southeast Persia) to decline in its strategic and economic importance. Thus, goods from India were shipped straight to Dubai (Heard-Bey, 2013). Because of the decline of shipping, many Persian merchants were forced to leave their country and move to Dubai (Davidson, 2008a). They came especially from the Bastak district in Persia and even though they lived in Persia, they “belonged to various Arab tribes and were Sunni [see appendix B]” (Heard-Bey, 2013, p. 245). This convinced the ruler of Dubai, Said bin Maktum (who ruled from 1912 to 1958), to invite them to establish



permanently in the Emirate (Kanna, 2011). These new migrants were gifted an area on the Dubai Creek that still today is known as Bastakiyyah (Heard-Bey, 2013).

The recent presence of Indians in Dubai dates back to 1865 (Al-Sayegh, 1998), when they “first arrived as the representatives of British companies in India” (Davidson, 2008a, p. 89). In Dubai, the presence of Indian merchants was a consequence of the Indian government’s decision to “levy duties on precious metals, which led to India’s losing its position as Asia’s primary gold market” (Davidson, 2008a, p. 70). The formation of the Indian community in Dubai was the result of favourable elements, such as “trade routes, economic opportunities, local demands, religious tolerance and the policies of the local ruler” (Onley, 2014, p. 247).

Dubai was also a recipient of merchants from other sheikhdoms (Davidson, 2008a). In the 1920s, because of increasing taxes imposed by the ruler of Abu Dhabi, Shaykh Hamdan bin Zayed Al-Nuhayyan (who ruled from 1912 to 1922), many merchant families decided to move their activities and migrate to Dubai where the economic environment was more convenient than in Abu Dhabi (Davidson, 2009a). Indeed, many other merchant families left Abu Dhabi during the Shaykh Shakhbut bin Sultan Al-Nuhayyan’s reign (who ruled from 1928 to 1966) because of his reluctance to investing money, derived from oil concessions signed in the 1930s with the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), to develop the sheikhdom thus sharing the benefits with the local population (Davidson, 2009a).

The historical evolution of ethnic diversity existing in Dubai emphasize the agential capacity of some individuals to project their life in a new country, who through practical-evaluative capacity identify and respond to the changes occurring in external structures and are able to cope with them. The merchant families that moved to Dubai planned their migration project in light of the contingent socio-economic and legal restrictions that constrained their agency in their home countries but, at the same time, those restrictions enabled their agency to find new possibilities for action in a new country (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

In the twentieth century, the major economic activities in Dubai were pearl diving, fishing and trading. These niches of the labor market were occupied by locals because they were seen as prestigious jobs (Al-Sayegh, 1998). Indians were mainly employed in the banking sector, and in retail trading activities (Al-Sayegh, 1998; Onley, 2014) and Persians controlled the retail trade and food commerce (Al-Sayegh, 1998). The merchant class has

been important in Dubai's economy, and it has also played a key role in shaping Dubai's multi-cultural environment (Vora, 2013). The importance of the Indian and Iranian merchant class was directly proportional to the political influence that they wielded on rulers. For Al-Sayegh (1998, p. 90), the rulers "depended entirely on taxes imposed on the pearling fleets and on revenues provided by the customs houses to provide income for himself and the state treasury". Put differently, the rulers turned to the merchant class for financial assistance, thus increasing their dependence on this class. However, after the 1960s, when oil was discovered, the merchant class was no longer viewed as an ally because the ruler did not need their financial assistance (Al-Sayegh, 1998) and they were relegated to a dependent position (Kanna, 2011).

In the way in which the relationship between the Indian and Iranian merchant class and the rulers has changed after the 1960s, it is possible to see the rationale of the 'ruling bargain' (see above). Until the 1960s, the merchant class (mostly Persians and Indians) was viewed as a part of the social fabric because they helped the local rulers by providing them with financial assistance (Al-Sayegh, 1998). After the 1960s and 1970s, the economic development triggered by the oil economy convinced the local rulers to reduce their dependence on the merchant class thus limiting their power on the local economy. The local rulers decided to share the benefits of the oil economy with the local population by establishing boundaries between Emiratis and non-Emiratis (see below). Between the 1960s and 1980s, the oil economy and the development of other economic activities transformed the UAE society and foreigners became the majority in the population (see chapter 5). It follows that the demographic imbalance, which characterizes the UAE, is viewed as "a means of political stability" (Kanna, 2011, p. 61) because if "the national population had grown in tandem with the expatriate population or, more likely, if it had become larger due to dilution through mixed marriages, then the benefits provided by the allocative state would not have been at such high level" (Davidson, 2008a. p. 151).

After the formation of the UAE federation (1971), the local authorities adopted a specific citizenship law (no. 17 of 1972) to establish boundaries between Emiratis and non-Emiratis. The distinction between these two categories is important because the benefits and advantages deriving from being an Emirati national are remarkable (see above) and in order to have these benefits granted nationals have to be politically 'docile' and "keep their families 'pure' from foreign blood" (Davidson, 2008a, p. 152). In 1992, this aim was pursued

through the establishment of the ‘Marriage Fund’, which is a means for the authorities to control and preserve the ‘purity’ of the Emiratis by encouraging the marriage among Emirati nationals, and thus avoiding mixed marriages (Davidson, 2008a; Dresch, 2005). The ‘Marriage Fund’ is thus aimed at increasing the marriage among Emiratis by providing financial help for marriage costs. This reasoning is politically acceptable insofar as it is aimed at preserving the mutual interests of the two parties involved (the ruling families and Emirati nationals), but it is ‘anthropologically’ problematic insofar as the Gulf’s ethnic and cultural diversity (Izady, 2002) makes the discourse on ‘purity’ meaningless.

In his work, Abdulla (2006b) describes the evolution and the emergence of Dubai from the mid-1950s to the 2000s. In the 1950s, Dubai was a small village formed by palm-frond settlements (*barasti*), in which fishermen, merchants and traders were accommodated. In the course of a few decades, these *barasti* settlements were replaced by big villas, luxury hotels and compounds where entrepreneurs, foreign workers, and professionals are now accommodated. For Abdulla (2006b), Dubai has dramatically changed and evolved to become an international financial centre because it has been able to diversify its economy, and has created a positive and ‘open’ environment where people coming from different countries coexist and interact. Dubai has been able to flourish because its rulers have adopted a liberal perspective. In the words of Jamal, the Indian academically-oriented professional whom I interviewed

...it [Dubai] wanted to be a trading hub, and a trading hub meant that it had to have a very liberal *milieu*, it had to have a very liberal atmosphere, a liberal environment which attracted people from all over the world to come here. So its economic sense that is a common sense for Dubai, where they are willing to compromise a bit on culture, tradition, religion etc. to make sure that it is economically sustainable, they are able to sustain itself economically. That is more important than the other aspects. That does not mean that they are not kept in touch with their culture, tradition, religion etc. they are trying to reinforce all things about national identity at the UAE level not at the Dubai level... Dubai realized that for its own growth, for its own development it requires to provide a liberal *milieu*, a liberal space and that’s what it has done (Interview with Jamal, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014).

Jamal grasped the ‘essence’ of Dubai, namely its economic vocation to which is linked its survival and prosperity, and it is much more important than its religious and cultural identity. However, this economic-oriented policy has not undermined the discourse on local traditions, customs and culture (see chapter 8). This (neo-) liberal perspective has been promoted especially by the ruler of Dubai, Muhammad Al-Maktum (who has ruled since 2006), who considers himself as the “CEO of Dubai” (Kanna, 2010, p. 106). This

is why Abdulla (2006b) defines Dubai as a corporation (*sharkat*). This ‘economic’ outlook on Dubai has also implications for the role of religion in the city where the Islamic references are marginal (Davidson, 2007). This aspect has also been underscored by Jamal, who said

It has been deliberately attempted of not developing a culture that it is completely congruous with Islām. It is a modern worship of Islām that it is practised here generally, where accommodation, where a spirit of liberal values these things are more important than a strict adherence to Islamic principles (Interview with Jamal, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014).

The positive aspect of Dubai, as many of my interviewees both Emiratis and non-Emiratis underscored, is its multi-cultural context, where Islamic and non-Islamic elements coexist (see chapter 8).

Dubai has developed its economy by attracting foreign investments and its industry sector is primarily finalized to the production of goods that would be too expensive to import (Davidson, 2007). The diversification process, which started in the 1970s, has been very successful because it has integrated Dubai in the international market system (Davidson, 2007), but Dubai has also suffered the consequences of its participation in the international system, whose effects and consequences are mostly evident on South Asian blue-collar workers, who, during the 2008 economic crisis were squeezed by loans in order to survive in Dubai and re-pay the recruitment agencies (Buckley, 2012).

Dubai has historically been a very multi-cultural Emirate. Its population was stratified and ethnically different. Persians and Indians arrived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and they allowed Dubai to prosper. These foreign merchants were also supported by the local rulers who needed merchants’ financial assistance (Al-Sayegh, 1998). However, after the 1960s and 1970s, the merchant class was relegated in a dependent position and the local rulers decided to adopt specific tools (e. g. citizenship law) in order to have the support of the local population granted through benefits and advantages in exchange of Emiratis politically de-mobilized and ‘docile’ (Kanna, 2011).

#### *4.4.1. Neoliberalism in Dubai*

In order to fully understand the development and the emergence of Dubai as an international financial centre, it is also important to discuss the evolution of neoliberalism in the city. As said earlier, at the root of methodological nationalism, there is the idea that nation-states are equated with societal boundaries and they are conceived of as autonomous and isolated entities (Chernilo, 2007). However, as Glick Schiller (2010) acknowledges, the need to move beyond methodological nationalism has mostly been attempted through the adoption of the concept of global cities (Sassen, 1991), especially because it addresses the effect of neoliberal restructuring programmes. For Sassen (1991, p. 126), global cities have a key component that “gives them a specific role in the current phase of the world economy”, namely, they are sites where there has been a shift from a manufacturing to financial and service sectors. But more than that, global cities are strategic places not only for the global capital, “but also for the transnationalization of labor and the formation of translocal communities and identities” (Sassen, 2005, p. 38). Therefore, global cities represent sites that are dependent on migration of highly skilled professionals and on migrants who staff the service sector of the new economy (Glick Schiller, 2010). In this regard, Dubai can be viewed as a global city (Ali, 2010), which has become an international financial hub and characterized by a considerable presence of migrants, and in which its neoliberal policies have been implemented by the local authorities that have supported and ostensibly driven its development. Ali (2010, p. 9) acknowledges Dubai’s vocation to being global in its investment on infrastructures, in the creation of a relaxed taxing environment, in the massive presence of migrants and the diffusion of a consumer culture which “is largely rooted in the shopping malls, clubs and bars”.

In the last few years, neoliberalism has become a global yardstick in analyses of the evolution of markets, social relationships and class inequalities (Harvey, 2005; Navarro, 2007). The basic definition of neoliberalism relates to the idea that it is a practice that

proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey, 2005, p. 2).

For Steger and Roy (2010, p. 14), neoliberalism is a public policy characterized by the “D-L-P formula” which means deregulation of the economy, the liberalization of trade and the privatization of state-owned enterprises (Ganti, 2014).

The ‘neoliberalism turn’, as Harvey (2005, p. 12) defined it, has its origins in the 1970s crisis and events when ‘embedded liberalism’<sup>53</sup> “had delivered high rates of growth to at least the advanced capitalist countries after 1945”, but that positive and proactive thrust was exhausted, and new alternatives needed. In this context, neoliberalism had to dis-embed capital from the “web of social and political constraints” (Harvey, 2005, p. 11). In other words, state-led planning and state-owned enterprises, such as automobiles and coal, had to be dis-embedded. It follows that neoliberalism is linked to class power. This is evident in Britain, for example, where the links between the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, in 1979, and “the brash entrepreneurs and the nouveaux riches” (Harvey, 2005, p. 31) left the Conservative Party appalled because she went against the old traditional and aristocratic British classes (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal ideology had restored class power but not necessarily the economic power in the old classes. A new class of entrepreneurs and financial operators became the upper-class or the dominant class. This role wielded by this new class resulted from the shift away from production sector to the world of finance. This widened class inequalities because the dominant classes of entrepreneurs, new riches, managers and financial operators increased their wealth and political influence. This upper class is also dominated by people who work in different sectors and they have “privileged relationship to state power” (Harvey, 2005, p. 34).

In the 1970s, neoliberalism flourished because of the links between the financial and political power. This is evident in Dubai, where neoliberalism resulted from its specific economic, social and political context. After the formation of the UAE federation, in 1971 and the 1973 oil boom, Dubai diversified its economy because of the lack of huge oil reserves. The then ruler of Dubai (Rashid bin Said Al-Maktum, who ruled from 1958 to 1990), and especially his successors, started implementing and strengthening the service and financial sectors as two important leading areas in order to develop the Emirate. As Hvidt (2007a) argues, this development followed precise steps and stemmed from the particular context. Dubai’s development is government-led, which means that government and not the private sector, leads the local development because “Dubai’s private entrepreneurs are politically weak” (Hvidt, 2007a, p. 401). This state-led development resulted from the neo-patrimonial conception of the state, “which implies that the regime is organized around the

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<sup>53</sup> This expression means that “market processes and entrepreneurial and corporate activities were surrounded by a web of social and political constraints and regulatory environment that sometimes restrained...economic and industrial strategy” (Harvey, 2005, p. 11).

ruler as an individual, maintaining other members of the elite in a relationship of personal dependence on his grace and good favor” (Hvidt, 2007a, p. 400). This aspect is evident in the 1990s, when in Dubai the ruler and “important merchants, such as Al Futtaim and the Al Ghurair<sup>54</sup>, either founded or consolidated large holding corporations that would, in effect, control Dubai’s economic trajectory, public space, and public culture” (Kanna, 2010, p. 108).

In the 1970s and 1980s, Dubai emerged as a city-corporation (Abdulla, 2006b), where economic, social, political and cultural power were concentrated in the hands of a few people, namely members of the ruling family (Al-Maktum). They envisioned the end of the oil industry, and decided to diversify the local economy by developing projects aimed at strengthening the financial and real estate sectors. In this regard, between the 1990s and the 2000s, neoliberalism emerged as a political and economic ideology based on the assumption that the vision of Dubai as a city-corporation and the ruler of Dubai as ‘CEO of Dubai’ was an ‘unavoidable’ result of Dubai’s history reflected especially in the tribal social structure characterized by a hierarchical organization and paternalistic attitude towards members of the tribes (Kanna, 2010). Dubai represents the example of authoritarian neoliberalism, where the adoption and implementation of economic measures to increase and diversify local economy is led by an autocratic regime. As Kathiravelu (2016, p. 227) suggests,

Dubai as a case study demonstrates that neoliberalism functions through highly regulated practices...In Dubai the minority Emirati citizenry has generally been protected from the negative and marginalising effects of neoliberal restructuring, such as the increasing precarity and the lack of protections for labour and the diminished welfare state.

In Dubai, like in other Asian and Middle Eastern countries, there has been a top-down approach to neoliberalism; it is a state-led neoliberalism (Ong, 2006). Unlike the other contexts, such as Singapore (Jun Jie, 2014), in Dubai neoliberalism is constructed through the preservation and improvements of privileges and services for some Emiratis; at the same time, it tends to disempower the already marginalized and oppressed groups (Kathiravelu, 2016).

For Navarro (2007), neoliberal theory is different from neoliberal practice. Despite neoliberalism’s claims for a free-market economy, in practice especially in Western

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<sup>54</sup> Al-Futtaim and Al-Ghurair are old Arab merchant families of Dubai who have established the two most important financial groups in the UAE. Both groups were able to prosper because of their links with the Dubai ruling family (Davidson, 2008a).

countries “state interventionism and state public expenditures *increase* during the past 30 years” (Navarro, 2007, p. 49, original emphasis). In Dubai, this results from the presence of ‘flexible citizens’ (Kanna, 2011) who work for companies strictly related to the ruling family of Dubai. Moreover, the sponsorship system does not allow the foreign workers to ‘sell’ freely their skills in the local labour market because their residence in the country is linked to a specific local sponsor. Unlike the foreign workers, the ‘flexible citizens’ are members of the Dubai middle-class, they are mostly naturalized Emiratis with a migration background, and they are seen as a second-class citizen. But because they are able to manage the discourse on modernity and because of their education they are able to shift

between different scales and cultural worlds in constructing their identities. The ways that Dubai’s flexible citizens appropriate neoliberal discourses shows both how neoliberalism, rather than being monolithic, is inflected by local meanings, discourse, and histories, and how appropriations of neoliberalism mediate local ambiguities pertaining to social and gender identity (Kanna, 2010, pp. 101-102).

They are the “vanguard” (Kanna, 2010, p. 105) of neoliberalism in Dubai because they are capable to combine its instances (personal success and individualism) with an ethical vision, such as respect for family, traditional and local customs. For Kanna (2010), ‘flexible citizens’ have ‘adopted’ neoliberalism as ideology but inscribed within the local context in which the ruler (Shaykh Muhammad Al-Maktum) is viewed as a ‘father’, thus not challenging the patriarchal system of the UAE society (Rugh, 2016). They represent the ‘economic arm’ of the ruler but they do not challenge the political structure of the Emirate.

In conclusion, Dubai, as a global city with its financial and service sectors, has prospered in light of the adoption of neoliberal policies that have required, among others, the recruitment of highly skilled migrants and the implementation of free tax areas in order to attract financial industry and service transnational companies (Sassen, 1991). Neoliberalism in Dubai is entrenched with the political power and the new middle-class, which consists of naturalized citizens with a migration background. They represent the link between tradition and modernity, between neoliberalism as a free market ideology and the Emirati context.



#### 4.5 Emiratis versus non-Emiratis?

Having discussed the Gulf's ethnic diversity and the formation of the UAE, in this section I analyse the relationships between Emiratis and non-Emiratis in order to highlight that the distinction between these categories is not clear-cut.

In the UAE, the discovery of oil dramatically changed the relations between the rulers and the local population. In Dubai, during the pre-oil phase, the Indian and Persian merchants were granted access to the port by paying reduced dues and with the consent and support of the ruling family (Al-Maktum). They were viewed as part of the social fabric of Dubai and benefited from their position and ties with the ruling family (Kanna, 2011). Today the Indian and Iranian merchant class still forms elite in Dubai and is "in a privileged position vis-a-vis non-nationals" (Kanna, 2011, p. 61) (see below).

The formation of the UAE federation, with its borders, political and economic systems and bureaucratic apparatus challenged the relations between ethnic communities. Two events, the discovery of oil and the birth of the new polity, led to the establishment of boundaries among different ethnic communities. For example, the

relations between the Baloch and the Arabs [in the UAE] changed after the oil economy made the region one of the richest in the world. Previously, the Baloch were held in high esteem among the Arabs as chivalrous and gallant and regarded as equals, but since the oil boom there has been an increasing feeling of aversion and distrust toward them. For their part, the Baloch regard the Arabs as unreliable (Jahani, 2014, p. 283).

However, Cohen (1985) argues that although members of a community are ethnically different, this difference does not subvert the sense of belonging to a community, which is an aggregate of different elements, bodies, institutions, perceptions and meanings, and where people share symbols and dynamics. For Cohen (1985), the difference existing within a community relies on the meaning that individuals attribute to shared symbols and to the different roles that they exercise within the community (see chapter 7). The old 'Gulfies' community, which was held together by economic interests and intermarriages, was challenged by the two events but they did not *dismantle* the UAE social fabric.

The two events (the discovery of oil and the birth of the federation) created a division within the UAE society. In 1972, the adoption of the citizenship law (no. 17) established a separation between Emiratis and non-Emiratis. A process of identification and categorization of people on the grounds of their origins, ethnicity and nationality started. In my view, this dichotomy, however, is more complex than it might appear, and it relates to the concept of

‘purity’ and ‘authenticity’. The Gulf’s ethnic diversity has made it complicated to define who were ‘pure’ and ‘authentic’ Emiratis because of intermarriages and *mélange* occurred over the centuries in this area, especially along the coastal areas and port cities (Beeman, 2009).

Emiratis is a contested, stratified and multi-layered category that encompasses people from different ethnic origins. ‘Pure’ Emiratis are members of the ruling families and local Arabs who are able to trace their origins (Dresch, 2005) to the Al Bu Falasah tribe, a section of the Bani Yas confederation (Davidson, 2008a; Kanna, 2010). Apart from members of the ruling families, ‘pure’ Emiratis are considered those who hold the *khulāṣat al-qayd*, which is obviously possessed by the ruling families (Al Qassemi, 2010). One of my Emirati participants, who works in the public sector, before signing the work contract had to bring the book to the office so that authorities could verify her ‘nationality’. The definition of the category of ‘pure’ Emiratis is rather questionable because historically different waves of migration have taken place in the Trucial States; intermarriages have also ‘contaminated’ the ‘authenticity’ of the ‘pure’ Emiratis blood genealogy, and also because local tribes accepted by affiliation members of other tribes and ethnic groups (Heard-Bey, 2013).

People who have been granted citizenship are considered as ‘naturalized’ Emiratis. There are different types of naturalized citizens. Historically, there are Sunni Persians of the Iranian coast of the Gulf (‘*ajami*’), who migrated to the Trucial States at the beginning of the 1900s (Davidson, 2008a; Heard-Bey, 2013). There are also Baluchis, who have different origins, and their presence in the Trucial States at the beginning of the twentieth century amounted to about 1,400 (Jahani, 2014); in a few years the UAE authorities granted them citizenship in return for military service (Jahani, 2014). More recently, some non-Gulf Arabs who migrated to the UAE have also been granted citizenship. They share with locals a language, religion and cultural traits; however, they are not considered as ‘nationals’ (Ali, 2010). Lastly, we also have some members of the Indian elite, who have been naturalized because of their longstanding presence in the UAE, their language skills and their historical links with the country (Kanna, 2011; Vora, 2013). However, all these naturalized Emiratis are not considered as ‘nationals’ (Ali, 2010).

Emiratis is thus a multi-layered category, in which ‘pure’ Emiratis are granted benefits and advantages (free land/house, welfare services, free education) because they hold the family book, so they get citizenship (*muwāṭin*) and nationality (*jinsiya*), they are citizens

and ‘nationals’. Then, there are all other Emiratis, who are naturalized because of historical, economic and specific circumstances but are regarded as second-class citizens (Kanna, 2010). Naturalized Emiratis do not enjoy the same benefits and advantages of ‘pure’ Emiratis. Because they do not possess the family book, they are not “eligible for government benefits such free education, land grants, housing, direct cash payments and other welfare benefits, though they acquire UAE passport.” (Ali, 2010, p. 137). These second-class citizens, who represent the elite in the UAE, especially in Dubai, suffers social stigma attached to the lack of an Emirati background (Ali, 2010; Kanna, 2010). These Emiratis are ‘discriminated’ in relation to ‘pure’ Emiratis. They are considered citizens because they have an Emirati passport, but they have a ‘foreign’ background because they have been naturalized (Kanna, 2010). Naturalized Emiratis can see their status changed if they are considered to be posing a threat to state security, or if they commit criminal offenses; they are then “Emiratis on sufferance” (Dresch, 2005, p. 143). The category Emiratis is thus contested and embraces different ethnic groups, and as such, it reflects the historical ethnic diversity of the Gulf region.

The non-Emiratis category appears to be defined. All foreign workers<sup>55</sup>, regardless of the length of their stay in the country, are considered as contractual workers. As such, they are temporary and at a certain point they will have to leave the country. This category, however, is also contested and stratified. Vora (2013) has pointed out the importance of South Asians in ‘building up’ the UAE, and many long-residence Indians speak Arabic. The Indian elite (especially merchants), who has had historical links and longstanding economic and commercial relationships with the UAE, is considered as non-Emirati. But, in my view, they could be defined as ‘half-citizens’, which means that even though they could apply for citizenship they are not interested in it because they have some benefits and rights granted by the UAE authorities, such as acting as sponsor (Vora, 2010). Thus, all foreign workers, despite long-residence in the country, are always considered as non-Emiratis. This is the state of ‘permanent impermanence’ (Ali, 2010), and their children, even if they are born in the UAE, “are citizens of their father’s (or sometimes mother’s) country of passport, even if they themselves have never been there” (Ali, 2010, p. ix).

Non-Emiratis is a multi-layered category and it includes members of different nationalities and class. Ethnographic accounts have underscored the discrimination that

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<sup>55</sup> The GCC nationals have fewer restrictions on living and working in the country than other foreign workers.

South Asians feel as a consequence of their passport, the mistreatment in comparison to Westerners, who are sometimes less educated and less experienced, and such discrimination becomes evident in terms of salary (Kanna, 2010; Vora, 2013; Gardner, 2008). Non-Emiratis is a varied category and is reductive to limit it only to Westerners and Asians. During my fieldwork in Dubai (2014 and 2015), I saw many Africans working and living there. The presence of East Africans in this region is historically documented (Izady 2002) but the presence of Cameroonians and Ugandans is very recent (Malit & Oliver, 2014; Oliver & Malit, 2014).

The UAE authorities seem to not have ‘erased’ their multi-cultural past, which is still evident in Dubai (Vora, 2013). They tried to categorize and identify Emiratis and non-Emiratis through a citizenship law, which demarcated boundaries between nationals and non-nationals thus attributing benefits and advantages to the former and excluding the latter. As outlined above, the separation between these two categories is not clear-cut. Non-Emiratis, who have resided in the country for many years and even though they are not citizens, feel part of the UAE social fabric and they act as if they were Emiratis (‘half-citizens’) (Vora, 2010). The second generation of ‘naturalized’ Emiratis, who are defined by Kanna (2010) as ‘flexible citizens’ and who are able to enjoy the benefits of the free market economy of Dubai (see above), express their belonging to their family traditions and customs, and feel that they belong to the Emirati context (Ali, 2010), even though they feel second class citizens.

The discovery of oil and the formation of the UAE federation created boundaries among ethnic communities. In the UAE, boundaries are represented by the distinction between Emiratis and non-Emiratis, however, because these two categories are dynamic, contested and multi-layered the distinction is not sharp and defined, but sometimes they overlap. In my view, ethnographic accounts have failed in part to grasp the dynamic and contested nature of both categories and have discussed them as two distinct groups, thus stereotyping has become a pervasive way to perceive the ‘other’ (Vora, 2013).

#### *4.5.1 Nationality, gender and class*

As mentioned in the previous section, the UAE authorities place limitations on migrants in relation to their nationalities and class. This section attempts to emphasize the ethno-racial and gender hierarchies existing in the country.

The division of labour in the UAE, where nationals are employed in the public sector and foreigners in the private sector (Baldwin-Edwards, 2011), intensifies existing cultural, social and economic differences between nationals and foreigners. As Kathiravelu (2016) argues, such divisions create ethno-racial and gender hierarchies. For Vora (2013), these hierarchies are evident in local and transnational companies, which set their payment scales based on nationality rather than skills. Consequently, South Asian employees are paid less than Westerners, who are sometimes less qualified and experienced. The experiences of Ester, one of my participants, who had previously studied and worked in Pakistan and in the UK, are illustrative of such discriminatory practices. A few years ago, Ester got married and moved, first to Abu Dhabi, and then, also with her husband, to Dubai, where she now works for an international company. She said “they [Westerners] have very low experience, very low qualifications but just because of the passport and their nationalities, they are paid a lot higher” (Interview with Ester, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2015). Companies tend to recruit white Westerners because they provide them “a better ‘image’” (Vora, 2013, p. 124).

Indeed, ethno-racial hierarchies go hand in hand with gender hierarchies: “occupations in the UAE are often divided along the lines of gender and nationality as well, with companies actively recruiting employees from certain parts of the world for gendered occupations” (Vora, 2013, p. 78). In the Gulf region, the majority of migrant women are employed as domestic workers (Fernandez, 2014). This specific niche of the local labour market, as Gamburd (2009, p. 70) suggests, is not only gendered but also ethnically and religiously stratified: “In the UAE, for example, within the housemaid category, housemaids from the Philippines are paid more than those from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, and Bangladesh in that order. Racial, ethnic, religious, and national stereotypes predetermine wages”. Moreover, a married man can, as a husband, sponsor his wife and children, whereas women cannot act as sponsors unless they are employed in high ranked jobs. Unemployed foreign women thus depend on their fathers or husbands for residency (Vora, 2013). Fathers can sponsor their children: boys until the age of eighteen, or upon completion of a university

degree, and girls until they get married. In Dubai, discrimination thus runs along national, gender and class lines.

Despite the existence of ethno-racial and gender hierarchies, some migrant communities are targeted by a further discrimination, which relies on class. Pakistani professionals and all other middle-class workers are not discriminated against in terms of family reunification, nor are they residentially segregated within labour camps, as it happens to construction workers (see chapter 7). The Pakistani professionals share the same spaces and facilities with many nationalities including Westerners, Chinese, affluent Indians, Iranians as well as with nationals and naturalized Emiratis (see chapter 7). Low-wage migrants, however, especially construction workers, cannot apply for family reunification because they do not earn enough money; they live in labour camps, mostly with South Asians and, to a lesser extent, with East Asians and Africans, and their passports are sometimes withheld by employers/sponsors (see chapter 6). John, one of the Pakistani professionals I interviewed, said of discrimination that,

it is not evident, it is not blatant, but of course the feeling is always there, you know. If a white man goes, he will get more attention than you, unless you show, you present yourself as something different, that you are not a labourer you are an educated guy (Interview with John, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

John emphasized that some nationalities are targeted by discrimination and also underscored that it is class-based. This aspect has been underlined by Kanna (2011), who argues that, in order to understand the experience of South Asians in the Gulf region, it is necessary to separate nationality and class. South Asian working-class people are subject to constraints, limitations and discrimination which are not suffered by the South Asian elite and middle-class (Gardner, 2008). Vora (2013, p. 131), in discussing racial and class hierarchies among Indians in Dubai, underlines how the Indian middle-class “blamed migrants for the racism they experienced in their own lives, arguing that because uneducated and unskilled workers constitute the majority of South Asians in the Gulf, people assume all Indians are uneducated and unskilled”. Discrimination is thus embedded within a system of class differentiation in which the perception of the ‘other’ (e. g. Indians) is stereotyped. Ethno-racial and gender hierarchies affect the way in which Indians are perceived, viewed and stereotyped by others. Despite all being members of the Indian community, class determines how middle-class, working-class and élite Indians identify and consider themselves. Thus, class creates a

fracture within the Indian community as some of its members have benefits and advantages that others do not. For example, old Indian merchants might be viewed as ‘half-citizens’ because they “govern the day-to-day lives of migrant workers, thereby assuming responsibility for the migrants’ well-being” (Vora, 2010, p. 47). As said in chapter 3, class judgements have been observed in other contexts and have characterized the debate on migration and class (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010; Van Hear, 2014).

In conclusion, the UAE authorities have set limitations on migrants in relation to their nationality, gender and class. Some groups of migrants are targeted by discrimination, and some more than others. Vora (2013) and Kathiravelu (2015) have highlighted that discrimination is also ‘self-perpetuated’, meaning that migrants tend to perpetuate their own discrimination through co-ethnic exploitation. For example, within the Indian community, discrimination, prejudices and stereotypes tend to shape intra-community relations (Vora, 2013). Thus migrants, especially those on low-wages, are subject to discrimination both from within and outside the ethno-national community; they are targeted by a ‘multi-layered discrimination’.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have analysed the historical evolution and the formation of the *khalījī* community in order to illustrate its ethnic diversity, which is also evident in the current ethnic composition of the Gulf countries and in the formation of the UAE as a nation-state. By moving beyond methodological nationalism, I have argued that the UAE is trapped between the need to ‘safeguard’ its own national identity and the need to move beyond national boundaries in order to prosper and flourish. I have also discussed the evolution of Dubai and its development as an international financial hub that, through the lens of the concept of global city, allows grasping how the adoption of neoliberal policies has entailed the creation of a relaxed free taxing environment, and at the same time, the creation of institutionalized hierarchies.

After the formation of the UAE federation (1971), the local authorities implemented a citizenship law to create a division between Emiratis and non-Emiratis mainly based on the

grounds of nationality. However, it is not easy to draw a boundary between these categories because they are fluid and dynamic, and sometimes they overlap. There are 'half-citizens' who, regardless of citizenship, share some of the privileges granted to 'pure' Emiratis by local authorities because of their long residence in the country (Vora, 2010). Naturalized Emiratis, who 'feel' second-class citizens, are part of the elite especially in Dubai because they work in Emirati companies and combine the neoliberal ethos with the traditional and local customs (Kanna, 2011).

Despite the UAE authorities having tried to divide and distinguish two different categories (Emiratis and non-Emiratis), in practice this division seems blurred and contested. The enhancement of and references to the past in order to spread a sense of belonging among 'pure' Emiratis and to strengthen the UAE national identity intertwines with the presence of migrants (see also chapter 8). The UAE's history is embedded in the Gulf's ethnic diversity and in its multi-cultural 'nature'. 'Pure' Emiratis recognize the role of South Asians in 'building' the country, and some of them speak Hindi or Urdu as a legacy of their multi-cultural past, as some of my Emirati participants emphasized.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE PAKISTANI COMMUNITY IN THE UAE AND DUBAI

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Having discussed the extant literature on migration in the GCC countries (chapter 3) and the setting of my field research (chapter 4), in this chapter, I analyse the evolution of migration in the UAE. In detail, I examine the migration experience of Pakistanis in the country and I also introduce some elements and characteristics of the Pakistani community in Dubai (e. g. ethnic composition).

My argument is that migration from Pakistan has historical roots as well as structural and cultural shifts that frame and allow it. Migration has been articulated through contacts and relations between Pakistan and the UAE. I argue that the Pakistani community appears as cohesive but it is internally stratified and in which divisions also emerge; however, as I discuss throughout the thesis, this has not challenged their sense of belonging to ‘Pakistani-ness’. In addition, in light of gendered and racialized hierarchies existing in the UAE (Mahdavi, 2011), I contend that social interactions between Pakistanis and Emiratis did not appear to be ‘flawed’ by the issue of discrimination, which, instead, has been discussed by the extant literature on migration in the GCC countries (Gardner, 2010a; Vora, 2013, Kathiravelu, 2016) and I also perceived when I was in Dubai.

This chapter draws both on the extant literature on migration in the Arab Gulf region and my qualitative data collection. It is structured as follows. Before discussing the historical evolution of migration of Pakistanis to the UAE, I provide a general overview of the impact of migration on the federation. I then analyse the decision-making process and the historical links that has triggered the migration flow of Pakistanis to the UAE. The main characteristics of the Pakistani community are addressed in the following section, and lastly, I analyse the relationships between Pakistanis and Emiratis.

## 5.2 Oil, migration and globalization in the UAE

In this section, I discuss the main characteristics of migration and labour market in the UAE. Since its inception in 1971, the UAE has undergone a rapid economic and social development, which has dramatically changed the traditional social, economic and political structures (Davidson, 2005). However, the lack of skills among the local population and the scarcity of human resources available locally represented a problem for the UAE authorities and their development projects (Birks & Sinclair, 1980a).

Since the 1970s, the presence of foreign workers in the country has increased (Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1 Nationals and Non-nationals in the UAE (various years)**

	<b>Nationals</b>	<b>Non-nationals</b>	<b>Total</b>
1975	201,544	356,343	557,887
1980	290,544	751,555	1,042,099
1985	396,114	983,189	1,379,303
1995	587,330	1,823,711	2,411,041
2005	825,495	3,280,932	4,106,427
2010*	947,997*	7,316,073*	8,264,070*

\*Mid-year estimate

Source: GLMM <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-population-by-nationality-emirati-non-emirati-at-census-dates-1975-2005-and-2010-estimate/> [accessed 17 June 2015].

In 2005, South and Southeast Asians were at 87.1 percent and non-GCC Arabs were at 8.7 percent (ILO, 2009). In 2005, the national population, in terms of gender distribution, was quite homogeneous, but there was a large discrepancy between males and females in non-national population, which was characterized by the massive presence of males (Table 5.2).

**Table 5.2 Nationals and non-nationals by sex (2005)**

	Total
Nationals	825,495
Males	417,917
Females	407,578
Non-nationals	3,280,932
Males	2,388,235
Females	892,697

Source: Adaptation mine from the GLMM <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-population-by-nationality-emirati-non-emirati-sex-and-emirate-2005/> [accessed 17 June 2015].

There are three main aspects to underline. First, the oil economy changed the UAE society.<sup>56</sup> The traditional economic activities, such as pearl-diving, pastoralism and shipbuilding disappeared (Davidson, 2005). Foreign workers were recruited to establish the necessary infrastructures to deal with the new needs and aspirations of a modern society (Errichiello, 2012a). Implementing development projects and building basic infrastructures, such as schools and hospitals, entailed recruiting foreign workers; thus their presence became a marker of the UAE society, and Emiratis, as nationals (*muwātinūn*), perceived themselves as a distinct community and separate from migrants (*wāfidūn*) (Khalaf, 2005). Moreover, since the 1970s, in the UAE, cities have grown and changed rapidly. Khalaf (2006) argues that the multi-ethnic character of the Gulf cities, especially coastal cities such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai, relies on the residential segregation of foreign workers in which ethnicity, culture and salary determine the settlement of migrant communities in particular neighbourhoods.

Second, the presence of foreign workers in the UAE has been growing in the last few decades, and it has represented an issue for the UAE authorities, because nationals have numerically become a minority (Baldwin-Edwards 2011) in their country. One of the major concerns for the local authorities is the composition of foreign communities, which is varied and internally stratified (Gardner, 2008; Buckley, 2012; Vora 2013). According to some

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<sup>56</sup> In 1938, Shaykh Shakhbut bin Sultan Al-Nuhayyan, who ruled, in Abu Dhabi, from 1928 to 1966, signed a seventy-five year concession with the IPC. The oil was discovered in 1958 and the first oil tons were exported in 1962. In 1966, Shaykh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nuhayyan (who reigned from 1966 to 2004) deposed Shaykh Shakhbut, and the first development projects were implemented (Davidson 2009a). In the 1960s, oil was also discovered in Dubai and by 1969, three oil fields were underway, and it began to export oil (Davidson, 2008a).

estimates, in 2014, Indians numbered 2.6 million, Pakistanis 1.2 million, Bangladeshis 700,000 (in 2013) Filipinos 525,530, and UAE nationals 1.085 million (in 2015).<sup>57</sup> The demographic imbalance is thus evident which means that non-nationals outnumber nationals.

Third, since the 1990s, globalization has also accelerated modernization; it has mobilized human and material resources, and blurred national boundaries (Fox, Murtada-Sabbah & al-Mutawa, 2006). Flows of commodities, products, services and people have been promoted by the UAE because of the material benefits, which “far outweigh the detrimental aspects” (Abdulla, 2006a, p. 181). However, the rulers of the UAE have perceived political and cultural globalization as an unwanted intrusion and “as a menace to deeply held social values” (Abdulla, 2006a, p. 181). Globalization is seen by the UAE authorities as a positive force in terms of economic and commercial benefits, but political and cultural globalization is perceived as a threat to the stability of the monarchy and to national identity (Abdulla, 2006a). In the UAE, nationals have an ambivalent attitude towards globalization. On the one hand, they consider it as a positive force of change that has improved their lifestyle and has projected the UAE in the global economy (Khalaf, 2005). On the other hand, globalization is seen as a threat against local traditions and values, and the presence of many migrants from different cultures, religions and nationalities is seen as a danger for the Emirati culture and identity (Khalaf, 2002).

The oil economy, migration and globalization also affected the UAE labour market, which is segmented in light of dichotomies between nationals/migrant workers and public/private sector. The Emirati labour market, as in the other GCC countries, is characterised by a massive presence of nationals in the public sector and migrant workers in the private sector (Malit & Al Youha, 2013). To make the local population more self-sufficient, the UAE authorities have implemented “emiratization” (Davidson, 2005, p. 145) of the workforce by encouraging the participation of nationals in the private sector. Such a measure is seen both as a way to reduce the dependence on foreign workers, and as a “curb on the perceived erosion of cultural and religious identities” (Davidson, 2005, p. 145).

To sum up, the massive presence of migrant workers has led to a demographic imbalance whereby non-nationals represent the majority of the UAE population. The local

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<sup>57</sup> <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-estimates-of-population-residing-in-the-uae-by-country-of-citizenship-selected-countries-2014/> [accessed 16 June 2015].

labour market is characterized by a separation between the public and private sectors. Migrant workers are employed in the private sector and nationals in the public (Davidson, 2005). This is why the government has opted for a nationalization policy, which aims at curbing the presence of foreign workers. This policy has been implemented to deal with challenges posed to Emirati identity represented by the demographic imbalance and globalization, which are affecting national, cultural, political and religious aspects of the country (see chapter 8).

### 5.3 The sponsorship system

In the GCC countries, migration is shaped and determined by the sponsorship system (*kafāla*), which regulates migration and through which a migrant worker (*makfūl*) can enter and work legally in the GCC countries (Dito, 2014).

A migrant worker who wishes to obtain a temporary work permit to be employed in the GCC countries needs a *kafīl* (sponsor). The *kafīl*, who must be a GCC national or a local company, takes financial and legal responsibility for the migrant. This means that every migrant is tied to a local employer (Lori, 2012). As such, the sponsorship system creates an income for nationals and this inhibits their participation in the (private) labour market. Therefore, when the temporary migrant workers enter the GCC countries, the *kafīl* is responsible for them (Roper & Barria, 2014).

The system was established by the Arab Gulf authorities in the 1950s to protect the local unskilled and semi-skilled workforce because of the growing presence of foreign workers coming from other Arab countries (Kapiszewski, 2006; Baldwin-Edwards, 2011). The sponsorship system is based upon the exclusion of migrant workers from benefits and advantages of the rentier state<sup>58</sup> (Longva, 1997). Dito (2014) contends that exclusion was rooted in the tribal nature of the Gulf regimes, where the ruling families<sup>59</sup> conceived “the

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<sup>58</sup> In rentier states, “rulers disburse funds in order to build a cohesive, stable state, and buy themselves the political consent of their people” (Babar, 2014, p. 409).

<sup>59</sup> The ruling families of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait belong to “‘Anzas of central Arabia. The ‘Anaza tribe is amongst the largest and most ancient Arabian tribes. Its members can be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad’s companions and its descendants can be found across the Arabian Peninsula, as well as in non-Arab Iran and Turkey” (Al-Qassemi, 2012, p. 2). For the ruling families of the UAE, see chapter 4.

nation as a “natural” and ethnically “pure” community, as opposed to its liberal conceptualisation as a community based on equal rights and duties” (Longva 2005, p. 119). Migrants’ exclusion has to be framed within the context of wealth redistribution strategies, where the number of beneficiaries needed circumscribing (Dito, 2014). Therefore, exclusion is the essential requirement for maintaining wealth redistribution to the GCC nationals, which would become impossible if migrants were integrated as equals into the society (Dito, 2014).

Through the *kafāla* system, the Gulf countries delegate to their citizens the functions of controlling and managing migration that are typically governed by local institutions (Dito, 2014). This system plays a key role “in the rentier state redistribution policies, contributing towards reproducing and maintaining the existing socio-political power structures” (Dito, 2014, p. 82).

In conclusion, as Longva (1997) points out, the sponsorship system relies on the idea of dominance in which the relationship between the employer and the employees is regulated and framed within the context of power relationships. The employee’s agency is enabled and constrained by the employer’s status as a national who has privileges and advantages granted.

#### **5.4 Pakistanis in the UAE**

As outlined in chapter 3, the migration project relies on the capacity of knowledgeable agents to interact with structures and mobilize their resources to migrate. In this section, I discuss the presence of Pakistanis in the UAE; how their ‘migration project’ was driven by their social and cultural background where migration was perceived as an important experience of their life. I draw on my qualitative data collection. This section revolves around three sub-sections. First, the decision-making process and the importance of migration for Pakistanis; second, how the historical links between Pakistan and the UAE have fostered migration; and third, I discuss the characteristics of Pakistani migrants in the country.

#### 5.4.1 *The decision-making process*

The literature on international migration is mainly focused on two perspectives. The first emphasizes the causes that push people to migrate in which such a decision is made by individuals on the basis of economic reasons (functionalist/classical approaches) (Goss & Lindquist, 1995; O'Reilly, 2012b). The second focuses on the difference between societies (structural approaches) (Goss & Lindquist, 1995; O'Reilly, 2012b), which means that “migration movements are in large part the result of unequal ‘structural’ relationships” (Addleton, 1992, p. 16). However, the distinction between these two different approaches is not clear-cut (Addleton, 1992). Afsar (2016, p. 165), in her study on the Bangladeshi migrants in the GCC countries, argues that decision-making “is a multi-layered and multidimensional process in which the context and causes that prompted the decision to migrate and the strategies to overcome barriers in the implementation of the migration decision often work simultaneously”.

The decision to migrate is based on the coexistence of push and pull factors, it relies on a complex set of economic, social (and sometimes political) reasons. However, beyond the structural factors, migration is driven by a decision made by individuals which is entangled in socio-cultural and economic factors. As Osella and Osella (2000) argue, migration to the Gulf countries is part of the South Asian background or at least of some area of the region. In this regard, there is the existence of ‘culture of migration’ (Massey et al., 2008) thus meaning that migration is part of some individuals’ life. As said in chapter 3, the decision-making process is driven by habitus which is transmitted from practice to practice and it is a decision that occurs especially in times of crisis or difficulties (Elder-Vass, 2010). For Osella and Osella (2000, p. 120), Gulf migration strictly relates to “the male life-cycle ... migrating to the Gulf does not only spell an escape from unemployment but is also a move away from *payyan*-hood (young immature status) towards full adult status as a householder, defined by the combination of marriage, fatherhood and showing ability as a ‘provider’”.

Migration from Pakistan, and from the other South Asian countries, is considered as a ‘rite of passage’ (Osella & Osella, 2000) for some young Pakistani men, which means that international migration has become part of their everyday lives (see below). This is what Ballard (2003) defined as ‘migration fever’. Naseer, one of my participants, is a Pakistani man that migrated to the Arab Gulf region in 1979. He spent five years in Saudi Arabia

where he worked for an American oil company and then he was transferred by the company to Dubai. Now he is retired, and he still lives in Dubai where he has established his own company. He described migration to Dubai as a valued experience but with many problems and constraints. He said

...in our Asian countries if somebody says that I want to take you to Dubai for him is the end of the world. Some people I know in Pakistan they sell their land, they sell their animals, which is their only means of earning to come to Dubai and if they are not in the right place, they have to go back and they struggle actually. It is true that the life here is unmatched, it is one of the finest place to live but cost of living in Dubai is very very high (Interview with Naseer, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Naseer grasped the impact of the ‘migration fever’ on the households and the uncertainties of the migration experience that in some cases push people to change their migration project upon their arrival in Dubai. In the above quotation, the projective dimension of human agency emerges clearly, and the need to convert their capital in order to migrate. Migrants situated in a specific time and place (Stones, 2005) adopt strategies and mobilize their resources in order to migrate. Migration, at least in the South Asian context, is mostly a ‘family affair’. As Nichols (2008, p. 142) argues, the decision-making process is rarely an independent and individual act, but migration is adopted by the extended family in order to “earn, save, and remit as much as possible to the home”. Household is thus involved in the migration project, which sometimes entails mortgaging “themselves to the hilt to raise the necessary cash” (Ballard, 2003, p. 29).

There are two elements that I wish to underline. First, migration from the global South is viewed as a way to alleviate the poor economic conditions and trigger development (Castles & Miller, 2009). The migration-development nexus is, however, controversial.<sup>60</sup> Ballard (2003) illustrates the role played by remittances in fostering development in the country of origin. According to him, the debate on migration and development should be framed within the local and global context where the remittances are a useful tool to start development. But it has to be supported by the state or government because a remittances-driven development is not substantially a proper development especially when the government does not put in place actions to foster it. One of my participants, Jamal, who has

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<sup>60</sup> This nexus is still controversial because it is sometimes perceived as a loss of the most qualified people that is counterbalanced by remittances. It is sometimes perceived as a way to promote local, regional and national development through remittances. However, the discourse on migration-development nexus is full of gaps and risks being “unsettled and unresolved” (Castles & Miller, 2009, p. 58).



spent more than fifteen years in Dubai, described the nexus migration-development as a win-win situation. He said

I think it is a win-win situation on both sides. The market benefits, the country grows, the expatriates benefit through the money that they make out here, their home country grows in terms of remittances, most importantly families of the workers here benefit greatly because they are always economically upwardly mobile. So I think the number of cases where people who has suffered and not benefited because of the system here is very few compare to the number of people who have benefited. So overall, I think it is a win-win situation on both sides (Interview with Jamal 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014).

Jamal, as discussed in chapter 2, has a very well paid job in the Emirati government. During my field research, I met him several times and he always contended that the migration experience is positive for many migrants because it serves, to a certain extent, to alleviate their poor economic conditions, and he also argued that would-be migrants are aware of the working and living conditions before migrating to Dubai. His reasoning relies on the idea that it is better to have a job, with all the constraints and difficulties attached to this job, rather than being unemployed in the home country (from my field notes, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2014). However, in the above quotation, Jamal underestimates the uncertainties that derive from being a migrant, which demands the need to move to a new country and the separation from the family (on family issues see chapter 6). He tends to emphasize the economic advantages of migration but he clearly underestimates its social and emotional impacts on migrants' lives (e. g. separation, dislocation). Ahmad (1984) argued that migration from Pakistan to Dubai has also psychological consequences that led some migrants to suffer the so-called 'Dubai syndrome' derived from the harsh working and living conditions, isolation, separation and loneliness.

Second, in Pakistan and in other South Asian countries, migration is perceived as a 'rite of passage'. For example, Peter, one of my participants, arrived in Dubai in 2008, when he was nineteen years old. When his father died he had to find a job to support his family. He thus decided to move to Dubai where he has been able to get a good job as an accountant in a private company. He defined exactly the condition in which the poor young Pakistanis are embedded when they decide to migrate to Dubai, and anxiety and expectations that their families 'put on their shoulders'. He said

you leave your family and the impression in such class [blue-collar workers] is that once you move over there [Dubai] your life is set. I have met some people; they ask what do you do? And their answer is "I am in Dubai", the next answer nobody is going to ask: "what do you do

in Dubai?” They are just get satisfied: Oh!!! you are in Dubai so you are settled...When they move back obviously they are there for one month or 20 days or 30 days, they spend more than normal, because they spend for their families and to provide them with some comforts to give them a better life and enjoy as most as we are together. Other people perceive “oh wow, he is rich, he is making much”. They want to come to Dubai as well. They are looking like people that have made money. Even though the actual thing is that you are not making money, you are not making much into that but this sort of things actually make them believe that they are making much, and they even take loans to come over here (Interview with Peter, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Peter emphasized that migration, at least in Dubai, is perceived by other fellow townsmen and family as an experience that can change positively people’s life. This perception is reinforced and perpetuated by migrants upon their visits in the home villages because they buy things that most of them cannot afford (Osella & Osella, 2000). They tend to project the image of migration as a fruitful experience that can lead some benefits and advantages to the family (Gardner, 2010a; Afsar, 2016). Peter’s quote resembles the attitude that Osella and Osella (2000, p. 122, original emphasis) have recognized among Keralan migrants, who leave their

village as immature youths...visits home are opportunities to demonstrate not only financial, but also age and gender-related progress. Consumer goods accumulated in the parental home will eventually form part of the *gulfan*’s own household on marriage. Displays of substantial cash reassures onlookers that he is becoming a man of means, with resources to support a wife and children.

In Pakistan, and throughout the South Asian region, remittances and social prestige, which derive from being a migrant in the GCC countries, drive migration. Gardner (2010a) underscored the importance of being perceived by fellow townsmen and family as a successful migrant even though this might not be ‘true’ because the family back home has invested money in migration and they expect that their family member is successful and could remit as much money as possible back home.

#### 5.4.2 *The historical links*

In the UAE, the historical presence of Pakistanis relates to the presence of Baluchis, who are now naturalized Emiratis and mostly employed in the UAE police forces (Jahani, 2014). The presence of Baluchi families that originated from the region of Makran, in Pakistan, dates back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the Baluchi presence is attested in Oman (Jahani, 2014; Peterson, 2013). In the UAE, the number of Baluchis

increased when in the 1950s Oman sold the Makran protectorate to Pakistan and most of them migrated to the UAE to work as luggage porters but also in the military and police services (Davidson, 2008a; Jahani, 2014).

The links between the UAE and Pakistan have shaped over the centuries (Ahmed, 1984; Addleton, 1992), when many Indians, before the partition of 1947 that led to the formation of Pakistan, migrated to the Gulf region including the UAE (Onley, 2014). More recently, in 1971, the partition of the East Pakistan province, which led to the formation of Bangladesh, represented a turning point in the Pakistani policy. The then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (in charge from 1973 to 1977) “made a conscious decision to embrace Middle Eastern economic and cultural [and Islamic] connections” (Nichols, 2008, p. 143). Thus, in order to be recognized as a country linked to the Islamic world, Pakistan hosted the Islamic Summit Conference in Lahore in 1974 (Addleton, 1992). This was the occasion for Pakistan to accrue its credentials as representative of the Islamic world and its belonging to the Islamic ‘bloc’ (Addleton, 1992). This also entailed establishing relations with the Arab Gulf countries (e. g. Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE)

In 1971, when the UAE federation was created (see chapter 4), Pakistan was the first country that recognized the new polity in the region by establishing its embassy (Ahmed, 1984). The links became stronger in the 1980s when the airline company of Dubai, the Emirates Airline, was established. It happened with the support of the Pakistan International Airline, which trained the staff of the emerging company and the first flight of the Emirates was between Dubai and Karachi (Davidson, 2008a). This event led some Pakistanis to move and settle down in Dubai. One participant’s husband was brought up in Dubai where his father moved in the 1980s to work for the Emirates Airline (Interview with Leila, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015). Rita, one of my participants, moved to Dubai when she was very young because her father started working with the Emirates Airline. She studied in the USA and UK. After her graduation she got married with an Indian man who converted to Islām and moved to Oman. However, in 2012 they divorced, and she decided to return to Dubai, where she now works for an international company. Now her parents live in the USA. She moved to Dubai because her father

was a pilot at the Emirates Airline. He worked for the Pakistan International Airline and then he passed to the Emirates Airline. He did the first flight of the Emirates; he was part of the crew and the team that set up the Emirates. That is why we came here when I was ten (interview with Rita, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Rita's story illustrated how the links between Pakistan and the UAE, the economic and financial activities can also affect families thus pushing them to settle down in a new country.

#### *5.4.3 Migration to the UAE from the 1960s*

Migration from Pakistan has been cultivated through contacts and relations between Pakistan and the UAE, emerging out of a complex set of social, political and economic circumstances in both countries (Addleton, 1992). In the UAE, the historical presence of Pakistanis relates to the presence of Baluchis, who are now naturalized Emiratis and mostly employed in the UAE police forces (Jahani, 2014).

In the 1960s, in the UAE “over 100 Pakistani families ... had come to work as shopkeepers, tailors, and barbers” (Davidson, 2008, p. 90). However, other Pakistanis migrated to work in the trading and fishery industries, the emerging oil industry and in the construction sector.<sup>61</sup> Most of these first Pakistani migrants went to the Gulf region and especially to the UAE to work in the construction sector and “formed relationships with local Arab sponsors and began to obtain visas for their male kin” (Watkins, 2003, p. 62).

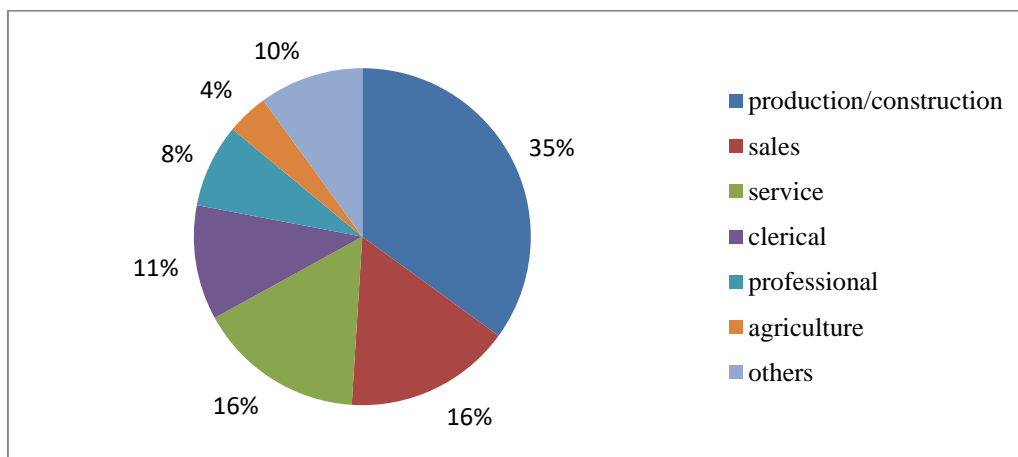
The economic boom in the 1970s pushed the UAE authorities to recruit foreign workers in order to implement their construction and development plans. South and East Asian countries (Arnold & Shah, 1984) became the first provider of foreign workers to the GCC countries which were in need of an unskilled and semi-skilled workforce to implement their projects (Tsakok, 1986). At the end of the 1960s, in Pakistan, many infrastructural projects that were often carried out by foreign construction companies and financed by international organizations were coming to an end (Nichols, 2008). These construction firms also moved to the Gulf region to implement infrastructural projects as a consequence of the mid-1970s oil boom and recruited experienced Pakistani workers. Migrants from Pakistan to the Gulf countries brought a wide range of skills (from unskilled to highly-skilled) (Addleton, 1992). Pakistanis worked in every economic sector, from construction to street cleaning to shop-keeping and from banking to the university sector. They were mostly men who migrated alone, leaving their wives and families at home, and who would send back remittances (Tsakok 1986).

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2015.

Currently, the presence of Pakistanis in the UAE is 1.2 million.<sup>62</sup> This number was disputed by Abdallah, who argued that Pakistanis in the country are “close to by 1.4, 1.5 million” (Interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015). In 2014, according to the data offered to me by Pakistani authorities in Dubai, there were 800,000 Pakistanis working in the country (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1 Pakistanis working in the UAE**



Source: Pakistani Consulate Dubai. Data collected by the author in November 2014.

Pakistanis are mostly employed in the production sector (35%), which relates to the construction sector, as Khalaf, the member of the Pakistani Consulate told me. Moreover, as observable in all GCC countries, the skills of Pakistani migrants have slightly changed over the last few decades, and there has been a lack of “a major shift towards more skilled [Pakistani] workers” (Arif, 2016, p. 270).

The presence of Pakistani women in the Emirati labour market has not been statistically analysed because most Pakistanis work in the construction sector, which is male-oriented. Moreover, since the 1970s, the Pakistani government has consciously restricted the migration of female domestic workers due to abuse and harassment, which has come to characterize this specific niche of the Gulf labour market (Breeding, 2012). These restrictions, imposed by the Pakistani authorities, also underline a structural problem which seeks to prevent women (and families) from leaving the country. By ensuring that they remain dependent on money sent home by family members working and living in the GCC countries, this serves to maintain their subordination. Between the 1970s and 1980s, it “was

<sup>62</sup> <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-estimates-of-population-residing-in-the-uae-by-country-of-citizenship-selected-countries-2014/> [accessed 16 June 2015].

only among the small Christian community that women – mainly nurses and teachers – were actively recruited for employment overseas” (Addleton, 1992, p. 86). However, these restrictions have now been partially removed and Pakistani “women must be at least 35 to work abroad as domestic workers” (Timothy & Sasikumar, 2012, p. 26). The few Pakistani women whom I interviewed were employed in the professional sector as a result of their high level of education. The majority of them migrate to the UAE as dependants (and in some cases with their children)<sup>63</sup> while just a few of them work as professionals, in the domestic sector and some work as housewives.

As outlined in chapter 3, unskilled and semi-skilled migrants arrived in the GCC countries through recruitment agencies (Breeding 2012). However, during my field research among Pakistani professionals (see chapter 6), I became aware that they migrated to Dubai by using alternative channels rather than recruitment agencies. For example, John, one of my participants, who worked in a bank in Pakistan, in the 1970s, was moved to a local branch in Qatar:

I was working in Pakistan in a bank, and I was moved to Doha in Qatar, at the end 1973...I worked there for two years, and then I worked in a French bank in Qatar, and I moved to the UAE in 1996 (Interview with John, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

John, in other conversations, underscored that he was keen to move to the Gulf region because he wanted to live abroad but close to his home country. His migration project was defined through the contacts and his networks that helped him to migrate; he mobilized his resources to migrate and he projected his life in a new country (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Two Pakistani women arrived in Dubai because they got married and their husbands were, in turn, brought up in the UAE. Leila got married when she was very young. She moved to Dubai in 2000, where her husband already lived and worked. She works in marketing and business development for a private company. She had never been abroad, and the UAE was the first foreign country that she had ever visited but she easily adapted to the new country and social status. She said

I got married at 21 and my husband was here, my husband was based here and my parents in-law were also based here. My father-in-law was an ex-pilot of Emirates Airlines, one of the first one here. He did the first flight for the Emirates (Interview with Leila, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

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<sup>63</sup> For family reunification, a sponsored foreign worker has to earn between 3,000 and 4,000 Dirhams per month (Zahra, 2015).

Ester, another Pakistani participant, studied in Pakistan and then in the UK, where she also worked. She decided to return to Pakistan, where she started working with different banks. In 2006, she got married and moved to Abu Dhabi, and in 2010 she moved with her husband to Dubai, where she now works for an international company. She said

I moved to the UAE in October 2006, and the visa for moving here was marriage. My husband was in Abu Dhabi... It was not for professional reason, it was not for a better life but just because I got married...[I spend my social life] with Pakistanis basically because we come from the same city, same culture, same religion, friends in common back home (Interview with Ester, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Ester's marriage was arranged by the families of the spouses. She got married with a Pakistani man, who was, in turn, an American citizen and his parents had lived for forty years in the UAE. For Ester as well as for Leila, marriage represented a chance to move to Dubai. The migration experience was not traumatic especially for Ester because she was used to living in different countries (US, Kuwait, Yemen and Central America), thus she was exposed to different 'ways of life' and she adapted easily to the different places.

Moreover, other Pakistani professionals used different channels to migrate. For example, some of them easily found a job through a friend already settled in the GCC countries; nonetheless others migrated when they were teenagers so they were brought up in Dubai and thus consider it as their 'home'. Ibrahim, one of my Pakistani participants, arrived in Dubai in 1973 and he started working as a chartered accountant. In the course of few years, he had good job positions in several Emirati and international companies. He has three children that now live between the USA and Dubai. He migrated because a friend of his, who lived in Dubai, needed his help. He

...was invited by a friend of mine in Dubai, and at that time, he was the editor of one company where he needed some help because I have been a senior mentor to him. It was in 1973 (Interview with Ibrahim, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

One of my participants, Muhammad moved to Dubai in 1975, when he was very young because his father was working in a local company. He studied in the UK and after graduation he returned to Dubai where he established his own company of chartered accountants. He said

I came here in 1975, as a young boy, I went to school in Dubai. In fact, I went to this school that was run by Italian missionaries, it was called St Mary's Catholic High School. I finished my schooling in Dubai and then I went to UK to do my mechanical engineering...I was born

in Pakistan and I came here when I was ten years old (Interview with Muhammad, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Ibrahim and Muhammad migrated to Dubai by adopting and using different channels and had different migration stories. Some of my participants migrated for economic reasons, such as better jobs and better economic conditions, while others were born in the Gulf region (Oman and Kuwait), and others migrated when they were very young and were brought up in the UAE. They mobilized their economic, symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987) (see chapter 6).

All the stories presented above resonate how their migration project relied on a combination of taking advantage of the socio-economic conditions in Dubai, their knowledge of the local rules and laws, their capacity to mobilize and use their contacts in order to migrate. Their choice was driven by habitus because migration was part of their background, but they reflexively made decision to migrate in light of practical and projective dimensions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

In conclusion, migration from Pakistan (and this is also valid in many other contexts and countries) is a ‘family affair’, where the households are involved in the decision-making process (see chapter 6). The relevance of the historical links between Pakistan and the UAE has shaped their relationships that still today rely on mutual respect and recognition. In the UAE, Pakistanis are employed in different sectors, it is a male-oriented migration; Pakistani women migrate as dependants and just a few of them are employed in jobs outside of the domestic sphere. Lastly, Pakistani professionals, because of their networks and social status, use different channels to migrate in comparison to unskilled and semi-skilled migrants who rely on recruitment agencies to migrate (Breeding, 2012; Gardner, 2012).

### **5.5 The Pakistani community in Dubai**

In this section, I discuss some of the characteristics existing within the Pakistani community in Dubai. It draws on my observations, field notes and interviews.

In 1947, when Pakistan was created, the leaders of the new polity, such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah (who ruled Pakistan from August 1947 to September 1948) and



leader of the Muslim League (ML), had to cope with the problem of identifying elements that could spread a sense of belonging (nationhood) among people of different ethnic backgrounds and languages. Pakistan is ethnically and linguistically complex. Each ethnic and linguistic group,

identified by cultural markers, often claim they are a “people” or a “nation”. Some seek independence and want to form an ethnically or linguistically homogeneous state; some seek greater autonomy within a state or province, and others move back and forth between these two goals or remain ambiguous (Cohen, 2004, p. 201).

Political leaders thought that Islām and Urdu language could be useful in spreading a sense of unity and cohesion in spite of the ethnic and linguistic differences, thus contributing towards ‘establishing’ Pakistani national identity (Khory, 1995). Since the beginning, and due to the demography of the country (Cohen, 2004), the growing ethnic nationalism has hindered “government efforts to consolidate a singular religious-based national identity that could transcend local loyalties” (Qaiser, 2015, p. 106). The common Islamic religion is invoked “to inspire a sense of unity, over the years this narrative has eroded and cleavages between ethnic groups have grown” (Qaiser, 2015, p. 114). The unequal distribution of resources, the military regimes and the different Islamic sects and schools of thought have contributed towards a growing ethnic nationalism, which could only be overcome “if all provinces believe that they are equally valued by center” (Qaiser, 2015, p. 114)

As said above, Pakistani national identity is contested because of the ethnic, linguistic and religious fragmentation existing in Pakistan itself (Cohen, 2004). During the field research, instead of focusing on defining what Pakistani identity is, or who is a Pakistani, I asked my participants what and with whom they belonged to a group or a community, and in which way they defined their sense of belonging. My participants used different elements (music, passport, food) to articulate their ‘Pakistani-ness’ (see chapter 6). The fragmentation existing in Pakistan was also reflected within the Pakistani community in Dubai, where I found people of different ethnic origins and religious sects. I talked with Sindhis, Punjabis, a Baluchi, some *Mohajirs*, and with people who were born in the GCC countries. Some of the interviewees came from wealthy families, such as Omar, who is a member of a very rich Pakistani family that supported and helped him to migrate. Some of them were Sunni Muslims, one was a Shi’ite Muslim and one participant defined himself as atheist but with an Islamic background. However, they all used their ethnic identity only to

underline their geographical origins. Some of my participants said: “I am from Baluchistan from a town, which is not very big” (Interview with Peter, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015). Another participant said: “I am a Punjabi but we [his family] have lived in Karachi [Sindh region] most of our lives” (Interview with Leila, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015), and another one said: “I was born in 1941. In 1947 due to Partition, my parents and me moved to Pakistan, in Karachi where I grew up” (Interview with Ibrahim, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

My participants expressed their ‘Pakistani-ness’ in different ways and their sense of belonging was forged at the same time by ‘preserving’ their background and feeling part of the Emirati context (see chapter 6). However, ethnic and regional fragmentations superficially emerged during my fieldwork in Dubai. For my participants, ethnic and regional elements were only ‘re-activated’ when they returned for holiday to Pakistan, but in Dubai their ethnicity was subsumed under the ‘label’ ‘Pakistani-ness’ (see chapter 6). It is thus evident that they expressed their belonging by overlapping ethnic and regional elements but identified as part of their ‘Pakistani-ness’. Yuval-Davis (2011) defines this overlapping of different elements as multi-layered belonging expressed and articulated differently in light of the specific location (Anthias, 2015). When I asked my Pakistani participants to define how and in which way they expressed their ‘Pakistani-ness’, they always identified some elements as part of their national background (e.g. Pakistani music, Pakistani food, not Punjabi food or Sindhi music), and their belonging was never explicitly defined in terms of ethnicity or regionalism.

The Pakistani community in Dubai appears to be united and cohesive. The fragmentation and separateness that one can find in Pakistan seems to not exist in Dubai. However, during my field research, I observed that there was a division within the community mostly based on different ‘community engagement’ *exhibited* by some Pakistanis (see chapter 7). At the institutional level, as mentioned in chapter 2, I talked with Khalaf, the member of the Pakistani Consulate, in November 2014, and he projected the image of a cohesive community, where even construction workers, with all the difficulties that they have to face, are happy to migrate to Dubai because they can have a job and facilities that they will never have in Pakistan. This image was contested by Abdallah, who said that the members of the Pakistani authority in Dubai are detached from the reality and they try to hide the real working and living conditions of Pakistanis. Paradoxically, when I asked Abdallah to talk about the division within the Pakistani community he tended to

project the image of a cohesive community (see chapter 2). Still, an image of the Pakistani community, detached from the reality characterized by internal differences and divisions based on class, gender, and different ‘community engagement’ *manifested* by some Pakistani participants and that is perceived by other Pakistanis as a symptom of detachment and indifference towards the whole community (see chapter 7).

The UAE and Pakistan are both Islamic countries, and when I asked my participants if religion could represent a channel that could facilitate dialogue and ‘integration’, they replied that Islām was not an inclusive element between Pakistanis and Emiratis. Religion emerged as an important aspect of my participants’ private life (in the home), but when it came to be articulated in the public sphere, I was informed that it did not represent a way to facilitate interactions between the two communities because socio-cultural and economic factors (e. g. ethnicity, nationality and profit-making) seem to drive the relationships between different communities (Kathiravelu, 2016). Therefore, religion does not change the hierarchical social structure and does not affect power relationships. For example, John said

...religion, I think is not a big factor in having relationships with Emiratis or with the other communities...It is a myth that religion binds us together...Religion does not really come to play at all (Interview with John, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

John emphasized how belonging to the *umma* was not important. Pakistani professionals articulated their relationships with Emiratis mostly on sociocultural and economic levels. However, the sharing of the religious space within a *masjid* during the daily five prayers is the only contact that some of my participants had with ‘others’. For example, Ismail said

...Yeah, I mean my main contact is when I go to the mosque, we see a lot of people there...you see them [Emiratis] in a coffee shops, there is no direct meeting because we are worlds apart, because of barriers in terms of language, although most of them speak English (Interview with Ismail, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

Ismail underscored how relationships with Emirati Muslims and other Muslims were articulated through their contacts during the daily five prayers; their relationships were limited and did not exceed the religious sphere. For some participants, the religious dimension could be ‘lived’ easily in Dubai because it is an Islamic city where they could find a prayer room (*muṣallá*) or a mosque and licit food. For other participants, such as John, the religious component was not important in his life. Although Islām might be considered as a marker of Pakistani national identity (Khory, 1995), in in-depth interviews with my

participants religion emerged only as one aspect of their private life.<sup>64</sup> In her book, Ahmad (2017) underscores that conversion to the Islamic religion by South Asian domestic workers in Kuwait did not erase the asymmetrical power relationships between the employer and employee and it did not subvert the hierarchical social structure. In describing the experience of one of her participants (Mary/Maryam), Ahmad (2017, p. 141) points out that the Islamic conversion does not

eclipse other bases of asymmetrical difference shaping her relationship with her employer most notably differences based on kinship, ethnonationalism, and citizenship. By virtue of her becoming Muslim, Mary/Maryam was not considered to be part of the family or to be more Kuwaiti. Rather, her Islamic conversion constituted another set of connections, and another modality of belonging.

As Ahmad (2017) emphasized, religion does not eclipse the asymmetrical power relationships but, as it happened among my participants, it represents another way to express belonging. There is an overlapping of different levels, socio-cultural, economic and religious, and the latter is not viewed as of primary importance on the articulation of relationships between Pakistanis and Emiratis. Kinship, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship represent the main sources of identification and categorization and they tend to articulate interactions between communities (Khalaf & Alkobaisi, 1999; Rugh, 2016; Ahmad, 2017).

The religious dimension of all Muslims, Emiratis and non-Emiratis, is formally controlled and monitored by the UAE religious authorities through the General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments (GAIAE), which manage “and supervise mosques”.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the religious authorities release a state-oriented Friday sermon (*khutba*) that has to be read and spread to all mosques throughout the country.

## 5.6 Pakistanis and Emiratis<sup>66</sup>

Vora (2013) in her ethnographic research among Indian middle-class in Dubai underscores that neoliberalism has created a split between Indians and Emiratis because the

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<sup>64</sup> My research did not focus on the religious dimension.

<sup>65</sup>GAIAE. Goals, Principles and Responsibilities.

<https://www.awqaf.gov.ae/About.aspx?Lang=EN&SectionID=12&RefID=860> [accessed 07 January 2017].

<sup>66</sup> This section discusses the relationships between Pakistanis and Emiratis by focusing on my Pakistani and Emirati participants' perspective.

arrival of many Western companies has created a competitive labour market, in which not the education and experience but the passport makes the difference, and it is the only means that can guarantee a good job and salary.

As I discuss in this section, in my research among Pakistani professionals (see also chapter 6), when I asked questions about relations with Emiratis, and if they feel discriminated against because of their nationality, some of them argued that discrimination was not an issue. Ester, for example, said

...I have colleagues who are Emiratis and excellent relationships, I do not have any problems and they do not give you any problems, they do not create problems and they try to resolve problems. But, naturally there is a sort of boundary and you cannot cross it, which is a cultural thing. Sometimes when I meet an Emirati, I do not know whether or not I have to shake his hands, again it is a cultural thing and I have to wait for his hands because you will never know if you could offend him by that. And then also when you talk with them you have to be a little bit conscious, especially if he is a customer because you cannot ask everything directly that can be offended. So there are certain things that you have to be conscious about (Interview with Ester, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Ester illustrated how her relationships with Emiratis were affected by intersection of diverse elements, such as gender and cultural differences. Moreover, location and space also play an important role in articulating and developing relationships with Emiratis. The extant literature on migration in the GCC countries emphasizes that discrimination is a problem for many South Asian migrants (Gardner, 2010a; Vora, 2013). However, some Pakistanis whom I interviewed said that they had not been discriminated against. For example, Peter, who moved to Dubai in 2008, during the economic crisis, said

I have worked with English company, I worked with Indians, I worked with Iranians, I worked with quite many nationalities I have never felt that I have been or any discrimination in relation to my nationality or country of origin (Interview with Peter, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Other Pakistani participants argued that they have been discriminated against. For example, some of them explained that they feel discriminated against in comparison to Westerners, “they have very low experience, very low qualifications but just because of the passport and their nationalities; they are paid a lot higher” (Interview with Ester, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2015). Nonetheless, Ismail, the British-Pakistani participant, regarded himself as a very lucky person because of his passport. He said

I have realized the value of the British passport... I feel very very privileged to be honest with you. It is made me even more grateful to God, because I have not done anything to have that

privilege, I do have just because of being born in comparison to somebody who is born in a small village in Pakistan, who works sixteen or twelve hours a day. I feel incredibly privileged because I have realized that I have been given a lot of things without doing anything to have these privileges (Interview with Ismail, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

Ismail underscored the importance of his British passport and all the benefits attached to it. He also recognized that he did not do anything to deserve that passport. In my view, Ismail implicitly emphasized the existence of ethno-racial hierarchies that can affect people's life in the country.

Based upon my own experience in Dubai, I would argue that you feel that discrimination is around you. As a white man, I was not discriminated against and as I walked in some shops and restaurants, I realized that, even though some South Asians wearing their traditional dress were in line before me, the shop assistant first approached me. It is worth noting that people who work in shops and restaurants are not Emiratis but Asians.

The sense of non-discrimination was expressed by some Emiratis whom I interviewed. Helen, a young Emirati woman, said

my opinion is that these people [South Asians] have built and are building our country, what could we do? What would Dubai be without them? Really, that is the truth because we are such a small population... So, we need these people coming to the country so can they can take these jobs and we can take others, higher jobs in the workforce, in the government (Interview with Helen 31<sup>st</sup> October 2015).

Helen underlined the prominent role of South Asians in 'building' the country. At the same time, she argued the importance of recruiting foreigners for menial jobs so that Emiratis can be employed in prestigious jobs. Some of them are educated and they look for high-status jobs in the public sector that still attracts young Emiratis. However, not all Emiratis are educated and rich and some of them are not keen to complete their education with a university degree even though it is free. Thus, it happens, as I observed during my fieldwork, that young Emiratis, maybe coming from poor Emirates such as Ajman or Fujairah (MERI, 2015), decided to move to Dubai because there are more chances to find a job even in customer service. The importance of South Asians in 'building' the UAE was expressed by Kate, a young Emirati woman, who said

As I would say the majority of the young generation typically even I would say the middle generation, we are fine; they do not bother us because there is the idea that without these people we won't have what Dubai is today, we need other people to be health provider, as

educators, as construction workers and so on. So 900.000 people of Emirati we are not enough people to build this our country. So we are fine because they are working here (Interview with Kate, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

Similarly to Helen, Kate recalled the prominent role played by migrants in ‘building’ the country and how their presence was necessary to develop a modern country and it has become an inescapable characteristic of the UAE society. Lisa, another young Emirati woman, had an ambivalent attitude toward foreign workers and their presence within the UAE society. She said

I think it has both positive and negative effects on us. A positive effect, I interact with many many nationalities and I have no problems and coming getting with many nationalities, Japanese, Chinese, Pakistani, Indians, Europeans, Americans, we all interact with them. We know their culture, how they do things, we have studied with them, we have studied with them. But, the negative side might be because it slowly you can see the Emirati society is changing to be able to tolerate all nationalities. For example, let’s say the dress code, we are more conservative but a lot of people here from different nationalities, it is ok for them to wear like short things, but it might be not accepted in our society. Some people do accept it, but a lot of people as well do not accept it. It is usually the talk of the house, when a lot of people are gathered they talk, for example, of the dress code...As well in the workplace, we have a lot of competition between us, Emiratis, and other nationalities. They usually even prefer not Emiratis, they think [other nationalities] are more professional in some way (Interview with Lisa, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Lisa expressed a perceived sense of ‘inferiority’ stemming from being considered inadequate to be employed as a ‘professional’. Indian and Pakistani professionals along with Westerners are considered more qualified than Emiratis (Vora, 2013). As noted in chapter 4, this has led Kanna (2011) to argue that in order to understand the experience of South Asians in the Arab Gulf region it is necessary to separate nationality and class. Put differently, South Asian working-class is subject to constraints, limitations and discrimination which are not suffered by the South Asian elite and middle-class (Gardner, 2008).

In my research, relations with Emiratis and Pakistani professionals’ perception of discrimination are in part determined by their passport, nationality, skin colour or class. Pakistani professionals’ assumption is that they are foreign workers, and as such, they are subject to limitations and constraints because the Emirati society is shaped in such a way that a foreign worker has to be treated as a *Gastarbeiter*, however, they never hide that the passport makes the difference (see chapters 6 and 7). They do not have any expectations, in terms of citizenship, and are aware of these limitations and of the working and living conditions before migrating to the UAE. However, the existence of ethno-racial hierarchies

is undeniable in which Westerners enjoy more privileges than Asians (Vora, 2014). Nevertheless, Pakistani professionals regard this ‘discrepancy’ as a consequence of neoliberalism which has fostered the free market and competition. Even Pakistani professionals are enjoying the benefits of this market ‘ideology’, in which companies, especially Western companies, are free to treat their employees as they wish, and are free to determine the salaries that have to be paid (from my own observations and field notes).

In my research, discrimination did not emerge as an issue for my Pakistani participants. Some of them experienced and perceived discrimination but, as they emphasized, it was not a real issue in their relationships with Emiratis. Their perception of discrimination was articulated as a *normal attitude*, and ostensibly accepted as a matter-of-fact in light of the assumption that it is a ‘rule of the country’ to decide how to manage their internal affairs<sup>67</sup>; as temporary migrants, they cannot subvert the hierarchical social structure (see chapter 7).

## 5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the role and impact of the oil economy and globalization on the UAE society. Moreover, I have also focused on Pakistanis and I have underscored how migration is affected by the specific social, cultural and economic context where it is viewed as a ‘rite of passage’ for young Pakistanis. I have also introduced some elements and characteristics of the Pakistani community in Dubai as it emerged from my field research. It appeared to be a united community but also characterized by internal divisions. Their divisions were not expressed in terms of their ethnic and regional belonging but in terms of different stances in relation to the Pakistani community in the Emirati context, as I explain more in detail in chapter 7.

Lastly, I have addressed the issue of relationships between Pakistanis and Emiratis where the latter recognized the role played by South Asians, and then Pakistanis, in ‘building’ the country. And when I investigated the issue of discrimination, my Pakistani

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<sup>67</sup> Pakistani participants *accepted* the perceived discrimination being aware that they could not change the way in which the internal affairs were managed by the local authorities. It would be an unwanted and *dangerous* intrusion in the UAE’s internal affairs. If the UAE authorities wanted to deal with discrimination, they would implement rules to cope with this issue.



participants underscored how it was not a problem insofar as it is the local authorities' prerogative to decide how to manage their internal affairs. They seem to accept their inferior status and the inequality that comes with such status; at the same time, Pakistani professionals (and other migrants) through their class-based benefits and advantages, contribute to the 'naturalization' of ethno-racial and gender hierarchies (Vora & Koch, 2015).

**CHAPTER SIX**  
**MIGRATION AND ‘FLEXIBLE BELONGING’.**  
**PAKISTANI PROFESSIONALS IN DUBAI**

**6.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I presented a preliminary analysis of the Pakistani community in the UAE and Dubai and I argued that, although ethnically stratified, it is ostensibly a united and cohesive community, but, during my field research, divisions also emerged. This chapter aims to delve into the internal dynamics of the community by describing Pakistani professionals as a class and discussing how they construct belonging in the Emirati context. By drawing upon the example of low-wage migrants in the UAE and Dubai, especially of construction workers, as it emerged from the extant literature, and the findings of my own field research on professionals, I argue that both classes of workers build belonging in the Emirates but in different ways.

Belonging is situational, contextual and temporal. Anthias (2013) affirms the need to adopt a translocational positionality approach to understand how belonging is constructed (see chapter 3). People build belonging because of shared values, but more than that it is constructed because individuals are located in a specific space, place and locale, and translocational positionality allows understanding that lives are “located across multiple but also fractured and interrelated social spaces of different types” (Anthias, 2013, p. 17).

My argument revolves around Anthias’ (2015) approach and I further develop it by arguing that belonging is also flexible, which means that people belong, at the same time, to different spaces, places and locales. ‘Flexible belonging’ means that social relations are shaped by fluctuations between ‘preserving’ ‘Pakistani-ness’ and feeling part of the Emirati context. As Anthias (2015) argues, we need to look at ‘diversity’ by overcoming a nation-based approach and adopt a transnational lens that enables us to catch that belonging is not fixed. As such, I argue that ‘flexible belonging’ allows grasping the transnational and translocational dynamics as well as understanding that people mobilize resources, recover past, heritage, tastes and family background in order to affirm their belonging. The notion of ‘flexible belonging’ allows acknowledging that to be a Pakistani in Dubai is different from

being a Pakistani in Pakistan, where specific characteristics and elements used in order to assert belonging may or may not be adopted or 're-activated' in the Emirati context.

Understanding how 'flexible belonging' is articulated and why Pakistani professionals feel that they belong to the Emirati context entails discussing the decision to migrate to Dubai, their lifestyle, if temporariness affects their lives and the strategies that they plan to adopt upon leaving the country. 'Flexible belonging' allows acknowledging that a lack of recognition and a formal membership (such as citizenship) do not impede Pakistani professionals (and low-wage migrants) from constructing their belonging.

The chapter, which draws on my qualitative data collection and in part on the extant literature on migration in the GCC countries, is structured as follows. After defining Pakistani professionals, I introduce the concept of 'flexible belonging' which relies on Anthias' approach, as discussed in chapter 3. Before addressing how 'flexible belonging' is built in 'lived practice', I introduce the concept of 'Pakistani-ness' and how it is defined by my participants. After discussing these aspects, I analyse the decision to migrate to Dubai, lifestyle, temporariness and transnational and local connections, which are important aspects of 'flexible belonging'.

## **6.2 The Pakistani professionals**

The migration of Pakistanis to the UAE is characterized by the presence of unskilled, semi-skilled and highly-skilled migrants (see chapters 3 and 5). These terms categorize people according to their skills; however, they are not able to grasp the dynamics and the process of identification that I observed during my fieldwork (see chapter 2). This section focuses on identifying Pakistani professionals by underscoring some of their peculiarities and characteristics.

The Pakistani professionals in Dubai consists of people working in different sectors, and this composition emerged clearly during my field research within the PAD, which is an umbrella organization formed by several wings (see chapter 7). Some of these wings are: the MW, the Engineering Wing (EW), the Journalist Wing and the PPW.<sup>68</sup> Pakistanis working

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<sup>68</sup> The PPW was established in 1987 by a group of Pakistani professionals based in Dubai and Sharjah (an emirate not too far away from Dubai). <http://www.ppwDubai.com/about-us/> [accessed 14 October 2016].

as bankers, doctors, journalists and engineers might be considered as professionals, and what differentiates one individual or group from another is how they mobilize one or more types of capital (see chapter 3). For example, a Pakistan doctor could use his/her cultural capital (skills and competencies) to help irregular migrants that cannot afford to go to a hospital (see chapter 2). A banker or an executive could use his/her social capital to help a Pakistani migrant to find a job in his/her company.

As Oliver and O'Reilly (2010) emphasize, habitus, capital and field are three elements that we need to consider when discussing class identities and lifestyle. As discussed in chapter 3, habitus (used both in the singular and plural form) is the dispositions, tendencies, tastes, way of thinking and doing things, prejudices and expectations “and ways of seeing the world that we each, individually and in groups, acquire as we travel through life” (O'Reilly, 2012b, p. 18). The field, concretely Dubai, is a “set of circumstances within which an agent is currently living, experiencing and acting” (O'Reilly, 2012b, p. 18), and each field has its own rules, power relations and structures. Lastly, capital, as mentioned in chapter 3, might be seen as a resource.

The combination of these three elements pushed me to acknowledge that Pakistani professionals are a category of workers that has a distinct lifestyle, socio-economic background, tastes and dispositions. As I discuss below, *comparing* the different lifestyle of Pakistani professionals and low-wage migrants allows acknowledging how they used their resources and that both classes of workers articulated differently their relations with the field. Habitus, field and capital identify a group and serve to distinguish it from other groups.

Although members of different wings, Pakistani doctors, journalists, engineers, bankers or executives share the same social space, and share, at least partially, the same lifestyle, experiences, tastes and dispositions. However, a definition of Pakistani professionals was provided by John (see chapter 2), a member of the PPW, who, in order to identify people who have been, are or aspire to become member of this wing, said

... we are a small number of professionals from every area, we are bankers, we have people from insurance, we have legal lawyers, we have doctors, engineers, we have different people. So it is a group which is organized to bring professionals together, to network, to meet each other, we are all from a foreign country, so it is a good platform to meet. We organize events, like the last Friday we had an event on legal issues in UAE related to wills and inheritance (Interview with John 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

John emphasized that, although the presence of the MW and EW, doctors and engineers are members of the PPW. The definition of professionals is thus dynamic, fluid and contested. To define the Pakistani professional group is a complex task; however, I choose to define it as a group of people, such as bankers, journalists, doctors, engineers, executives and employees who are able to mobilize, convert and transfer one, two or more types of capital (see the above examples) and enjoy the benefits and advantages of living in Dubai, characterized by a neoliberal market (see chapter 4), where competitiveness, individualism and accumulation are tied up with communitarism, philanthropy and support for their fellow nationals.

Moreover, their lifestyle is also a marker of their social status and class. Pakistani professionals' everyday life is characterized, for example, by participating in events and activities that revolve around their networks and contacts. Some of these events are organized by the PPW and were described by John. He said

there is a difference in your background, in your thinking, in your mind-set, in your education, in your position, in your status, and for professionals we needed... like we have professionals, you know, coming and going all the time in this place. We have people who live here for five years with family, for two years, for ten years, for twenty years. There is always a constant movement in migration. So we said it would be a good platform to have a group, a wing or an association where professionals can meet and interact with each other and share your cultural identity and reinforce that. So it is a good thing to have that (Interview with John, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

The need to safeguard the interests of the Pakistani professional group is evident in the quote above. John also noted that “we [PPW] work to encourage the links and improve the contacts within the community, within our group of people and even outside even with other communities” (Interview, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

The presence of the PPW can, seemingly, make it easier to identify professional as a category. But, as John underscored and the different wings existing in the PAD indicate, it is difficult to categorize Pakistani professionals only by looking at their job. Hence, my definition of the Pakistani professional group is contextual and dynamic, thus suggesting that it is a category of persons consisting of “salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations” (Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, 1979, p. 12). This definition is, in my view, able to grasp the dynamism, characteristics and multifaceted nature of Pakistani professionals in Dubai.

### **6.3 'Flexible belonging'. Pakistani professionals and social interactions**

In light of the Emirati context and the findings of my field research, Anthias' (2015) approach allows emphasizing the role and importance of different locales and how the construction of belonging among Pakistani professionals in Dubai is affected by translocational and transnational dynamics. Adopting her approach means emphasising the relation between self and society (May, 2011), between agency and structure (Youkhana, 2015).

As outlined in chapter 3, for Anthias (2015), belonging is constructed in everyday experiences and practices, it is more than shared values and it relates to locations. Belonging is emotional and affective ties; it is boundary-making and boundary-breaking. People belong 'to' a group but people belong 'with' 'others' in everyday life to different locales and situations, and through a translocational lens it is possible to treat "lives as being located across multiple but also fragmented and interrelated social spaces of different types" (Anthias, 2015, p. 15). Anthias (2012, pp. 107-108) reconciles the local and global because of her theoretical approach, which is based upon "intersections between a number of different social structures and processes, including transnational ones". Her approach allows grasping the situational, contextual and contradictory nature of belonging, as it also emerged from my participants' narratives.

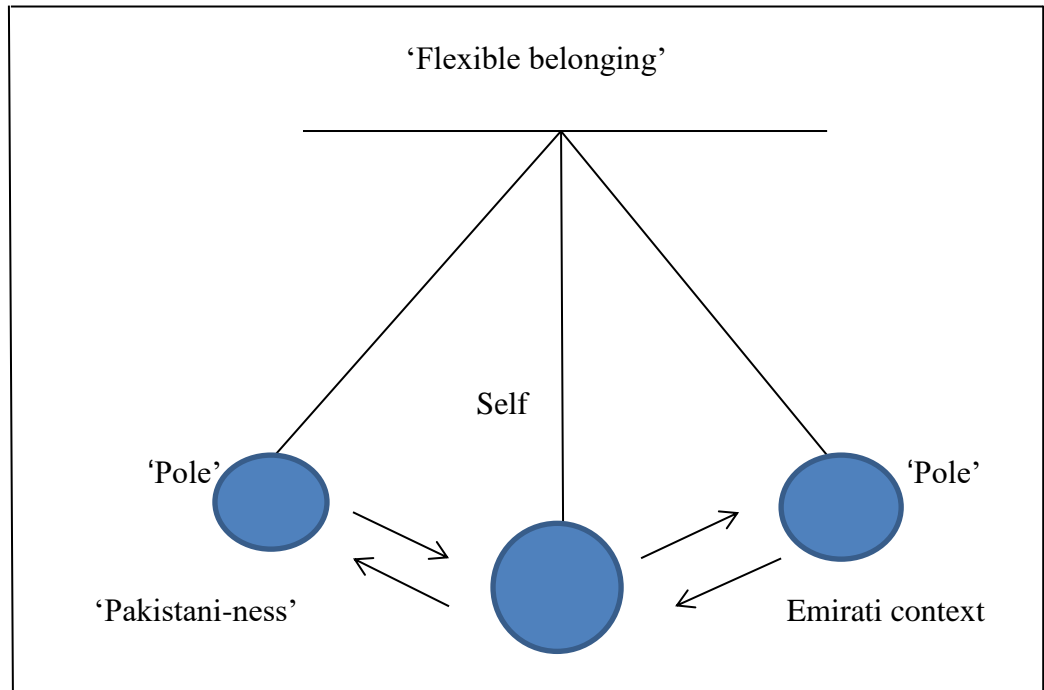
Anthias' (2013) focus on locations is suitable to the Emirati context because the separation between nationals and non-nationals (see chapter 8) requires a situational and contextual notion of belonging. In other words, it means that there is a shift from a nation-based approach to a transnational and translocational perspective (Anthias, 2013), her approach moves beyond methodological nationalism (see chapter 4). The importance of place, location and context emerged from the stories of my participants. They emphasized that the forms of capital they mobilized, and their decision-making processes were aimed at migrating to Dubai because of its multi-cultural *milieu*, geographical proximity, and in some cases, some of them were brought up in Dubai so they had a strong emotional attachment to the emirate (locale, field). Thus, they felt 'included' in Dubai in light of their personal stories, emotional ties and the presence of family members in the city. At the same time, they felt 'excluded' because of the discrimination that some of them experienced but this did not challenge their belonging to the local context. Some participants described their life in Dubai as being completely assimilated because they spent more than thirty years in the UAE and

“you cannot live anywhere else” (Interview with Naseer, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2015). Another participant also said: “...I have been here for forty years and I am part of this society...I mean everywhere you have been for forty years, it is your home” (Interview with Muhammad, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2015). Consequently, belonging is not only *determined* by inclusion and/or exclusion, but it is also experience, and it is constructed in relation to locations. It is not only a formal membership such as citizenship and/or a specific political project such as integration or assimilation that *determines* belonging.

In relation to Pakistani professionals and their positionality within the Emirati context, the notion of belonging as boundary-making (belong ‘to’) and boundary-breaking (belong ‘with’) moves beyond the social locations that Yuval-Davis (2011) identifies as ethnicity, age, gender and class. This happens because of the specific context, where boundaries are crossed every day as migrants interact in the workplace and everyday life with other nationalities including Emiratis. This allows us to acknowledge the need to focus on locations and adopt “a transnational lens [that] enables us to see that fixity of belonging is not possible” (Anthias, 2013, p. 15). In my view, belonging is thus fluid, dynamic, situational (May, 2011) and flexible.

I want to suggest that this reasoning elicits the notion of ‘flexible belonging’, which is characterized by fluctuations between ‘Pakistani-ness’ and the Emirati context, which is inclusive of Emiratis as well as other nationalities, groups and social categories. ‘Flexible belonging’ means that social interactions are shaped by fluctuations between ‘preserving’ ‘Pakistani-ness’ and feeling part of the Emirati context. ‘Flexible belonging’ is like a pendulum that swings between two ‘poles’ (Figure 5.1). The first ‘pole’ is ‘Pakistani-ness’ that is a ‘stable feature’ of my Pakistani participants’ life, but it changes over time and is articulated in different ways and with different meanings according to the context, which is the second ‘pole’. The context is a variable because it can change, it can be the Emirati context (or other contexts) where one can construct belonging in a specific locale, place, space or social category.

**Figure 6.1 ‘Flexible belonging’ and the two ‘poles’**



Source: elaboration of the author

The basic idea of ‘flexible belonging’ is that Pakistani professionals construct belonging by activating and articulating aspects and elements of their ‘Pakistani-ness’ in relation to the context. This notion seems to embed Pakistani professionals and Emiratis within a social structure in which both groups interact as equal. However, this notion does not erase the ethno-class and gender hierarchies, discrimination and separateness that take place in the UAE (see chapter 5). ‘Flexible belonging’ is based on the relation between self and society, which means emphasizing the role of and understanding the self as an active and participatory agent in society (May, 2011). This reasoning relies on the assumption that “*to understand them [individual and society] it is necessary to give up thinking in terms of single, isolated substances and to start thinking in terms of relationships and functions*” (Elias, 2010, p. 23, original emphasis).

‘Flexible belonging’ relies on Anthias’ approach but it moves beyond by emphasizing the dynamism and fluidity that in her approach appear to be ‘softened’, and to a certain extent, she does not focus too much on explaining how belonging is constructed: the elements, characteristics, practices and experiences adopted, lived, embodied and activated (or ‘re-activated’) to construct belonging. Moreover, as said above, for Anthias (2015, p. 179), access “to material resources is central in belonging inasmuch as it an



important part of living with a sense of safety and participation”. ‘Flexible belonging’ goes beyond by arguing that economic gains and formal membership do not necessarily *determine* “a greater sense of belonging to society than those who are excluded or involved in casual work” (Anthias, 2015, p. 179) for two reasons. First, it would seem that it is possible to ‘measure’ to what extent an individual belongs to a group or a society. Second, it would be misleading insofar as belonging appears to be a class-based concept. People feel that they belong despite their jobs, exclusion and temporariness.

‘Flexible belonging’ means that Pakistani professionals expressed belonging ‘to’ their ethno-national community because of their shared values, characteristics and social relations. At the same time, they expressed belonging ‘with’ the Emirati context where they enjoyed the benefits and advantages of their social status and interacted with different nationalities, people and categories in everyday life. ‘Flexible belonging’ moves within and beyond ethno-national community boundaries. It signifies that Pakistani professionals were emotionally attached to their ‘Pakistani-ness’ as well to the Emirati context. The notion of ‘flexible belonging’ is thus primarily based on the idea that one belongs to a group or an ethno-national community because s/he identifies herself/himself as a member of that group since s/he shares culture, values, language, customs and traditions with ‘others’ that are interpreted and articulated in light of the context in which one spends everyday life.

‘Flexible belonging’ is constructed through connections and relationships between people and society. It is built in a relational process between self and society but, more than that, the flexibility of belonging allows grasping its multidimensional nature because people feel, experience and embody *differently* belonging (May, 2011; Anthias, 2015).

### 6.3.1 ‘Flexible belonging’ and ‘Pakistani-ness’

Before discussing why and how Pakistani professionals feel part of the Emirati context, I argue that it is important to understand how they identified themselves as Pakistanis. Belonging is expressed through a process of identification (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000)<sup>69</sup> which means that it can be adaptable and negotiated from time to time in reason of

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<sup>69</sup> However, throughout the thesis, I use the term identity when it refers to collective identity, such as Pakistani (national) identity or Emirati (national) identity.

the space, place and social category. In this section, I discuss how Pakistani professionals articulated their 'Pakistani-ness'. Some of them expressed their belonging by underlining, for example, that they wore traditional dress, or listened to Pakistani music and singers, or watched Pakistani movies. Other participants underlined how the religious dimension goes hand in hand with a 'Pakistani way of life'. Abdallah, for example, said how the passport was important for him and was an expression of his 'Pakistani-ness'. He said

I preserve my passport, despite staying in South Africa [where he lived before moving to Dubai] for so long, I still keep my own passport and I am very proud of it. I have travelled all over the world with it and never had any problems with it. It remains my identity and I am proud of it (Interview with Abdallah, 8th November 2015).

In the UAE, Pakistani professionals identified themselves as Pakistanis by adopting and enhancing different aspects (music, singers, religion, movies, dress, food); 'Pakistani-ness' was intended in different ways. But more than that, all Pakistani professionals expressed a strong attachment to their country. For example, the celebration of the Pakistan Independence Day on 14<sup>th</sup> August is considered by the Pakistani community in Dubai as one of the most significant events to celebrate. 'Pakistani-ness' is a dynamic concept that changes, modifies and evolves in light of the emotional and affective ties, personal stories and the context; it is never predetermined and it cannot be ascribed. Rita, one of my participants said

I think because I grow up in Dubai I struggled with this [Pakistani] identity... I wanted to go to pubs, bars with my friends, but my parents said "no, we do not do that, it is not in our culture, your sisters do not go out", and I could not wear certain clothes. And I would not fight against it. So identity is something I really struggled, but now this is my Asian life, I am a very comfortably Pakistani and I am very proud of my Pakistani identity now, and I would do anything for my country (Interview with Rita, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Rita's story encapsulates how belonging is contextual, situational and flexible. She was a young Pakistani who moved to Dubai when she was five years old. She was exposed to diverse cultures and values and she struggled to define her 'Pakistani-ness'. Belonging was addressed in terms of experiences, everyday practices and emotions. She constructed belonging by comparing her life with that of 'others' and she struggled to escape from the attributions 'chosen' and applied to her by her family: a Muslim Pakistani woman. As Anthias (2013, p. 8) argues, belonging is also "about attributions designated by others formally or informally, some of which might not tally with your lived experiences".

Belonging is contextual and flexible. To be a Pakistani in the UAE is different from being a Pakistani in the United Kingdom (UK). Ismail, who is a British-Pakistani, underlined how his 'Pakistani-ness' is determined by the religious dimension and he constructed his sense of belonging to the Emirati context by sharing everyday life, rhythms and moments with other Muslims regardless of their nationality.<sup>70</sup> He also underscored how belonging swings between his Pakistani heritage and English background. But he also emphasized that Dubai is the place where his religious identity along with his 'Pakistani-ness' are currently fuelled. He said

...[in Dubai] I also feel comfortable because as a Muslim. For example, wherever I go, for us even a smile or to greet somebody with *as-salām*, which is peace, is an act of worship...so it feeds my soul a little bit...I have a couple of friends who work in the same school they are Pakistanis they were brought up in the North-West of England. I am quite close to them simply because we are all, not just the fact that we are all Pakistanis, but also the fact that we were born and raised in the North-West, so we have a similar kind of sense of humour, an outlook of life...we grown up in a similar environment...I am Pakistani by blood, but born and raised in England, it is going to be diluted anyway; it is going to be a mix of the two. So, my own identity, I am a Pakistani in terms of the fact that my family is Pakistani, you know follow certain customs or dress, in terms of everyday life when I speak to my friends we converse in English, you know we try to hold on certain values, which English people have as well, but of course you have more in common with people who have more in common with you...For me, as I am also gaining more knowledge of my religion, I am also gaining a sense of the fact that this religion [Islām] is designed to actually override any nationalistic kind of ideology (Interview with Ismail, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

The above quotation encapsulates how the discourse on 'Pakistani-ness' is articulated in different ways, such as the role played by religion in forging Ismail's 'way of life'. His 'Pakistani-ness' also manifested itself because he identified himself within a relational web, such as kinship. Ismail identified himself and categorized Pakistanis with 'Pakistani blood'. In his words, the biological ('Pakistani blood') and cultural dimensions are blended together. However, as Malešević (2004, p. 5) has put it, categorization risks essentializing and reducing collectivity to a group of people that "do not necessarily have anything in common. Such an attitude essentializes and reduces cultural, political and value diversity of an individual to a single clear-cut label such as 'Asian'". Categorizing entails labelling groups and individuals, and it risks 'flattening' them without recognizing the existence of "sub-groupings and particular ways of being a Muslim, Pakistani and Asian" (Malešević, 2004, p. 5). Ismail felt a sense of discomfort because his sense of belonging was negotiated in light

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<sup>70</sup> This also happens in Western countries. During my field research in the Islamic associations in Italy and the UK, I saw Muslims of different nationalities perform their religious duties together (Errichiello, 2007, 2012b).

of the British context; the tension between his ‘Pakistani-ness’ and the place where he raised underscores the situational and contextual nature of belonging. The overlapping of different elements, blood, heritage, dress, customs and religion that are mixed and blend with a Western lifestyle is evident. In Dubai he re-discovered his Islamic identity as well as his ‘Pakistani-ness’ that in England were weakened because of the contacts and interactions with a context and a lifestyle that did not fit entirely with him. However, Ismail tends to mix together biological and cultural dimensions; it seems that he tends to essentialize the sense of belonging; this perspective does not unpack the complexities and diversity existing within a group and /or a community in which different categories intersect (e. g. ethnicity, gender and class).

In Dubai, my Pakistani participants’ ethnic identity, such as Punjabi, Sindhi, or Baluchi was used to describe their geographical origins (see chapter 5), and when it came to define their ‘Pakistani-ness’ they moved beyond regionalism and ethnicity in such a way to identify those elements that they considered important and peculiar in relation to their personal stories, background and their life in Dubai. However, those elements could also be linked to their regional and ethnic origins, but my participants identified those elements as peculiar of their ‘Pakistani-ness’ and not as characterizing, for example, ‘Baluchi-ness’.

### *6.3.2 ‘Flexible belonging’ in ‘lived practice’*

As I outlined above, among Pakistani professionals, belonging is flexible because it swings between ‘preserving’ ‘Pakistani-ness’ and the Emirati context. In this section, I discuss how it works in ‘practice’. Belonging is flexible because one belongs ‘to’ the Pakistani community in light of the common values, culture, religion, customs and heritage. But at the same time, one belongs ‘with’ other people to the Emirati context because they share everyday life and experiences with other individuals. Belonging is flexible because to be a Pakistani in Dubai is different from being a Pakistani in Pakistan. The following anecdote can help to illustrate this aspect. Leila, one of my participants, said

...When I go to his [brother] house, it reminds me our childhood, when I see his kids I see myself. I see myself in his kids. I give you a very small example. Last time that we were all together we had no electricity for about 18 hours. My daughter, the young brother, he is civilian also, he is a businessman and he lives in Karachi, his kids extremely spoiled, they did not sleep for all night, I could not sleep, my young brother could not sleep, my older brother and his kids slept, they did not feel it. Extremely adaptable, they took the shorts off and they slept all

night. Got up in the morning they could understand why all of us were so cranky. My older brother was extremely upset with me when I said I could not sleep at night. He said “you should remember where you come from this is how we brought up with”... I stayed with him for three nights and it was freezing and cold...He did not let me know that his house had only cold water, he showers with cold water, and he said “you have done it before why it is a problem now” and I said “I am not used it anymore” and he said “are you sure?” and I showered with cold water ... I shamed of myself (Interview with Leila, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

This story encapsulates how belonging is flexible and contextual. During the interview, as a Pakistani in Dubai, Leila underlined that she was proud of her roots, heritage, family background and religious identity. At the same time, she also highlighted a strong attachment to the Emirati context where she had lots of friends from all different nationalities and she enjoyed her lifestyle in Dubai that was characterized by gatherings with friends, cousins and social events. When she went to Pakistan, she felt a sense of discomfort, she felt like an alien in her country. However, belonging to the Pakistani context was ‘re-activated’ through a symbolic act (to have a shower with cold water) which was done in order to take her past and heritage back so that she could feel that she still belonged to that space and locale, then her past and experiences were still important to *determine* her belonging. The symbolic act was something that she would never do in the UAE where she is now accustomed to a different lifestyle and her ‘Pakistani-ness’ emerged in different ways and with a different meaning. To be a Pakistani in Dubai means sharing experiences and everyday life with other fellow nationals and individuals, and it also means adopting a different lifestyle which results from the context. To be a Pakistani in Pakistan, for my participant, means reaffirming a different lifestyle, re-adapting to a different context, and as such, belonging is experienced and embodied in a different way according to the specific context. But more than that, in Pakistan, ethnicity and regionalism are ‘re-activated’ because they serve to build a sense of belonging and this happens by ‘recovering’ family background, heritage, past and customs, whereas, in the UAE, regionalism and ethnic identity are subsumed under the ‘label’ ‘Pakistani-ness’. As Leila emphasized, there was tension between her lifestyle in Dubai and her past in Pakistan. This tension seems to be overcome through a process of “contextualization of social experience” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 994, original emphasis). In other words, the existing tension between past and present is due to the different lifestyle that she had to cope with while travelling back in Pakistan, but she was able to contextualize and ‘recall’ her past experiences to deal with the current situation. It is not easy to switch between different contexts and situations, and Leila blamed herself, but

she was also able to take back her background and contextualize her social experience; she engaged with different environments, and after blaming herself, she was able to deal with a different structural environment by looking at the past in order to respond “to the problems posed by challenging situations” (Morawska, 2007, p. 12).

Leila also underscored the importance to ‘preserve’ her ‘Pakistani-ness’, especially for her daughter, and she also emphasized that she felt ‘at home’ in Dubai. She said

...I travel back [Pakistan] often in order to maintain connections with her [daughter] roots, so she has to know, where she comes from. She speaks Urdu... fluently... she has to know the language and where she comes from...I do have Emirati friends...my husband has got good and close Emirati friends who come over and they treat us as part of a big family... I am saying the Emiratis who are known to us, once you know them, you are part of them (Interview with Leila, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

This is one of the examples of ‘flexible belonging’ that is constructed through shared values, customs and culture with other fellow nationals as well as experiences and practices of everyday life in Dubai.

‘Flexible belonging’ is more than material resources and legal status, even though they might contribute to construct belonging. It is flexible because it allows people to ‘activate’ and/or ‘recover’ heritage, past, customs and experiences in light of the context, space and locale.

#### **6.4 ‘Flexible belonging’ and the decision-making process**

The notion of ‘flexible belonging’ relies on the relation between self and society and in order to understand Pakistani professionals’ belonging it is important to unpack why they decided to migrate to Dubai.

Dubai is a city that in the last decades has attracted interests from many scholars (Buckley, 2012; Vora, 2013). They have discussed the role played by migrants in developing the emirate, but when it comes to discussing the everyday life of migrants and trying to understand the reasons that led them to choose to migrate to Dubai, scholars have tended to overlook the complexity of reasons that push them to move to the emirate, apart from economic reasons (Kathiravelu, 2016; Gardner, 2010a; Vora, 2013). However, there are

other motives that push people to migrate to Dubai, such as the structural violence in the home country (Gardner, 2010a), drug abuse, alcoholism or marital discord, as Afsar (2016) suggests. In some of the stories told in Mahdavi's (2011) book, the decision-making process was also driven by love affairs. In this section, I discuss the decision to migrate of Pakistani professionals in order to underscore that their decision was linked to different elements, such as job opportunities and good salaries. But it was also articulated on different levels: emotional, personal and practical.

During my fieldwork, I asked my participants to explain what they thought of Dubai and through their life stories I have been able to interpret the different reasons that pushed them to migrate to the Emirate. Dubai is a city where different cultures, religions and languages coexist (Vora, 2013). The intersection of all these elements is one of the reasons that pushed some Pakistani professionals to migrate. John, for example, said

Dubai is not an Islamic city in that sense. Dubai is more of a cosmopolitan city, with the best of East and the best of West. You see you can have many issues in Dubai but you do not feel you are away from home. Dubai attracts you because you have freedom, you have that liberty. You have an Indian market in Deira or Bur Dubai and you know you feel you are like in a part of India or Pakistan. Dubai in that sense, the peace the security is excellent. You know in that way it is a very wonderful place. But Dubai is not an easy city, in the sense that it is an expensive city, it is very expensive...[in Dubai] we do preserve our Pakistani identity, we do it all time. There are different groups of people who promote cultural activities, who promote many kinds of things, which... also projects the image of your country that you have culture, we brought up different seminars, exhibitions, shows, so we have all these projects to show we have our culture and we relate our culture and identity (Interview with John, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

John emphasized how the globalized nature of Dubai is one of the reasons that pushed him and other people to settle in the city. It is where East and West coexist; different religions and cultures live peacefully together. But Dubai is also a place where there are issues such as the traffic of a big city; modernity and globalization have also brought with them issues such as drugs, alcoholism and disease, such as HIV/AIDS (Abdulla, 2006a).<sup>71</sup> But more than that, Dubai is geographically close to Pakistan and India, so one can travel back and forth very easily and cheaply. At the same time, John also underscored the importance of and the need to maintain his roots, the links with his 'Pakistani-ness', which is a resource (Bourdieu, 1987) that he tended to 'preserve'.

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<sup>71</sup> However, I would argue that the spreading of these issues in the UAE does not result from globalization.

Dubai as a port city was exposed to exchanges with other cultures, contacts with people from different countries with different religions and languages (see chapter 4). Leila said

...I feel it is a very good blend for us at least. As Muslims, it is like you can get everything without any problems, as *halāl* food and so on and we have got no issue for those things, you know. You have got a great exposure to East and West, you have the opportunity to meet people from all over the world... I fast, I pray, I do all these things but I do because it gives me satisfaction not because of anything else. There are days I do not pray at all also...all those things...we get together, obviously with the family, I have a lot of family here also, cousins, my daughter is extremely close to everyone and I make sure that she is (Interview with Leila 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

In the above quotation, Leila described the attractiveness of Dubai which resulted from its past history where different cultures blended together. For a Muslim, Dubai has the facilities and entertainments of a modern and global city, and at the same time it allows Muslims to go to a restaurant without worrying if the food is licit. Leila was very proud of her 'Pakistani-ness' and family background, and she emphasized the importance, for her daughter, to know her roots and her own language which is a symbolic and cultural capital that makes her proud of her origins. In Dubai, one can feel at 'home' because of its multi-cultural *milieu*. John and Leila articulated the notion of 'flexible belonging' as Pakistani professionals who feel that they belong to Pakistan, but who at the same time build their sense of belonging by living and sharing experiences with other people in Dubai. 'Flexible belonging' allows constructing an 'in-group' identity because people share spaces, tastes, moments, rhythms and everyday life with other ethnic, national and cultural groups (Khalaf & Alkobaisi, 1999).

The multi-cultural nature of Dubai resulted from its geographical position; the proximity to the Indian sub-continent has opened the door to the arrival of many migrants because

... Dubai...is very close to Pakistan so it is very easy to go there. You know we have ten flights a day to Karachi from here. So it is very easy, it is one and half to two hours' flight. Today in fact, the newspapers are celebrating 30 years of the Emirates starting the operation and the first flight was to Karachi. It is very convenient for us because we are very close to our family and friends in Pakistan... we have still a lot of family and friends there. So I do go, I visit Pakistan three or four times a year for family and personal reasons (Interview with Muhammad, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2015).



The physical position represents one of the reasons that drove my Pakistani participants' choice to move to Dubai. Muhammad emphasized how the geographic proximity serves to 'preserve' the links with his roots and family members in the home country.

It would, however, be misleading to overlook the role played by religion in driving and shaping Pakistanis' everyday life. Dubai tends to 'preserve' its Islamic identity at least in the presence of many mosques disseminated throughout the city. Religion can also trigger the decision to migrate to Dubai. As mentioned in chapter 5, the religious dimension is part of their private sphere and they are aware that belonging to the *umma* does not subvert the hierarchical social structure and asymmetrical power relationships existing in the UAE (Ahmad, 2017). Abdallah said

It [Dubai] was close to home and culturally and religious more acceptable... obvious from the religious point of view it was more acceptable to be in Dubai than in anywhere and it was close to home, my parents are getting old so they needed me close... I think you feel more close to your religion and culture here, we have a big expats population of Pakistanis here. So to be honest you do not feel to be out of Pakistan here. We consider the UAE as a second home; we have very strong relations with the UAE from the very day of independence. Pakistan was the first country to recognize the UAE (Interview with Abdallah 8<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

There is thus an intersection between at least three different components. The religious dimension, the geographical proximity and 'flexible belonging' which is constructed by overlapping 'Pakistani-ness' (belonging 'to') with the need to share spaces, locales and everyday life with other people (belonging 'with'). Religion led Ismail to argue that, in Dubai, he 're-discovered' his Islamic identity. He said

I think Dubai is whatever you want it to be. I think Dubai has two parallel worlds. One is that it is proud of their religion that shows in the provisions that they have, beautiful mosques, malls in which you have prayer rooms. It does not come secondary, you know, we went to a zoo in the early part of this year, and there is a mosque in the zoo. They cater to somebody who wants to practice their religion and they are proud to help you allow outside that, and it is prominent in that sense. In the other sense, I also feel they do not stop anybody else from practicing their religion, they respect that at least from what I have seen... there is church here and this kind of things. So this is a place where people flowed from all different walks of life, from different religion. I think if there was any restriction, they would not have come. I think Dubai is can be whatever you want it to be as long as you are not creating any problems for the society at large (Interview with Ismail 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

Religion plays an important role in the decision-making process. Dubai is a place where 'diversity' is articulated and blending with a Western lifestyle resulting from globalization (Abdulla, 2006a).

Unpacking the reasons that pushed Pakistani professionals to migrate means understanding that their decision-making process (for which they mobilize their social, cultural and economic capital) is driven by the desire to construct belonging in a different locale; nonetheless they continue maintaining the links with their culture, language and heritage. These stories and experiences encapsulate how the discourse on belonging is framed within a transnational and translocal lens; it is transnational because it is forged between the country of origin, destination and, in some cases, beyond; it is translocational in the sense that belonging is constructed by moving between different spaces, places and contexts. Unfolding Pakistani professionals' decisions to migrate allows acknowledging that 'flexible belonging' relies on the constant and dynamic relation between self and society, between human agency and structure, and the construction of belonging fluctuates between 'preserving' 'Pakistani-ness' and feeling part of the local context of Dubai.

### **6.5 Lifestyle and 'flexible belonging'**

As outlined above, habitus is the way in which people tend to view the world influenced by the context (field), tastes, dispositions, background, experiences and habits. In this section, I argue that the sense of belonging for low-wage migrants, especially of construction workers and Pakistani professionals is felt and experienced differently because it is shaped by the way in which both classes of workers lead their lives, their different tastes, dispositions (habitus), experiences, practices, and the presence of family members in Dubai.

As mentioned earlier, Anthias (2013) argues that economic, material resources and formal membership could strengthen belonging to a specific context thus suggesting that belonging could be viewed as a class-based concept. In the UAE, material resources and juridical membership could not necessarily *determine* belonging. Obviously, they can, to a certain extent, facilitate the migration experience and allow dealing with the complexities and constraints of migration in the UAE characterized by temporariness and discrimination, as some of my participants imparted. Despite discrimination, Pakistani professionals feel that they belong to this place where they have spent many years, where some of them were brought up, where their children were born and where they also established companies. In the Emirati context, belonging is thus characterized by fluidity and flexibility because

Pakistani professionals' life is necessarily articulated, in light of the multi-cultural *milieu*, through social interactions developed, at the same time, both with people of the same ethno-national community (belonging 'to') and with individuals of different nationalities with whom they share everyday life, experiences and practices (belonging 'with') (Anthias, 2015). Similarly, low-wage migrants, such as construction workers, who have a different lifestyle in comparison to professional migrants, articulate their belonging to the Emirati context but in different ways.

Construction workers express their belonging 'to' their 'Pakistani-ness' (this is valid for all nationalities) because in the labour camps, where they live, they

create and display some ownership over everyday space...through putting up pictures of family, religious deities or inspirational figures...[they tend] to personalise space with significant objects expresses a desire to maintain a sense of self through links with their past and families back home (Kathiravelu, 2016, p. 152).<sup>72</sup>

But they also construct belonging 'with' other individuals because they live, work, share experiences, constraints and practices in everyday life (Khalaf & Alkobaisi, 1999). This is where belonging crosses boundaries of ethnic identity (Anthias, 2013).

Construction workers share spaces, struggles and practices with fellow nationals and other migrants. Belonging is forged in relation to their 'Pakistani-ness' and the context in which they live. During my field research, I observed that construction workers of different nationalities prayed together, they shared spaces, rhythms, gestures and words (in Arabic) and this also serves to construct belonging. In their own spaces, places and social categories, they articulate their belonging by sharing moments, experiences and struggles with other people. This is what Kathiravelu (2016) defines as homosociality, which is a form of socialization that serves to spread a sense of unity and cohesion among construction workers.<sup>73</sup> It means that male migrants share their everyday life with other men in the labour camps sleeping, washing and eating within the tight spaces of the labour camps and "articulate such intimacy as a normal part of the migrant experience" (Kathiravelu, 2016, p.

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<sup>72</sup> This quote does not refer explicitly to Pakistani construction workers. However, it is important because it illustrates how construction workers of different nationalities use the space in the labour camps to build belonging.

<sup>73</sup> This term can also be applied to taxi drivers. During my research, I talked with many of them that lived in Sharjah. They told me that they were accommodated in flats provided by the taxi company with a small kitchen, one bathroom and one big bedroom with six beds. Twelve taxi drivers were accommodated in each flat and they slept 'on shift' which means that while six taxi drivers were at work the other six could sleep and vice-versa.

157). They ‘preserve’ their past, customs and traditions and they also share spaces and places with other people.

I use the example of low-wage migrants, especially of construction workers, to illustrate differences in belonging. Such differences are useful to explain why and how Pakistani professionals feel part of the Emirati context, and how this happens *differently* from low-wage migrants. This is where ‘flexible belonging’ allows understanding that it would be misrepresentative to emphasize the significance of class hierarchies and social status in order to build a sense of belonging. It emphasizes migrants’ agency, and it underscores the importance of the relation between structure and agency in migration studies in order to better understand how social interactions develop.

**Table 6.1 Characteristics of migrants<sup>74</sup>**

<b>Unskilled/semi-skilled Pakistani migrants</b>	<b>Pakistani Professionals</b>
Villages/Towns	Urban areas
Migration background	Migration background
Borrow money	No need to borrow money
Mostly men	Men and women
Bachelor	Bachelor/Married couple
Regularly send money back home to repay debt	Occasionally send money back money
Fixed-term contract	Permanent contract/residence visa renewed
Cannot change employer (modified by law)	Cannot change employer (modified by law)
Passports are withheld	Passports are not withheld
Salaries not paid (on time)	Salaries paid (on time)
Most of them return home	Stable or new migration project

Source: elaboration of the author

Table 6.1 illustrates some of the characteristics of different occupational groups among Pakistani migrants. The individual migration project of these different groups relies on different dynamics and characteristics. For unskilled and semi-skilled migrants, the probable lack of previous contacts in the receiving country push them to seek agents in order to be helped finding a local sponsor and preparing all documents required to migrate to the GCC countries (Breeding, 2012; Gardner, 2012). This is done by borrowing money from moneylenders or mortgaging their few assets. For Pakistani professionals, there is no need

<sup>74</sup> The characteristics listed in the table are based upon the relevant literature on unskilled and semi-skilled South Asian migrants in the GCC countries (Kathiravelu, 2016), whereas the characteristics of Pakistani professionals in Dubai resulted from my research.

to turn to agents because their networks, contacts and their migration background, in some cases, facilitate migration. It is easier for them to move without experiencing the ‘debt bondage’ as it happens for the unskilled and semi-skilled migrants (Kathiravelu, 2016). As mentioned in chapter 5, the channels through which Pakistani professionals arrived in Dubai entailed mobilizing and using their different forms of capital. These two classes of workers mobilize and use their capital (cultural, symbolic and social) in different ways. For example, low-wage migrants use their assets to obtain economic capital that allows them to migrate. Some other migrants use their symbolic capital to help would-be migrants get a job in Dubai (Osella & Osella, 2009), while Pakistani professionals mobilize their social, economic and cultural capital to move and to get better economic positions and jobs in Dubai. The type of capital possessed by would-be migrants determines the route and dynamic of the migration project (Van Hear, 2014); however, as Mahdavi (2011) suggests, some migrants are not able to capitalize their resources in light of racialized and gendered hierarchies existing in the UAE.

There are other evident differences between the two classes of workers, but I wish to focus on how lifestyle affects the migration experience. As one of my participants, a Pakistani professional woman, claimed, construction workers seem to be spending no more than three to six years in Dubai,<sup>75</sup> whereas professionals tend to spend many years, they invest money and they bring up their children in the Emirate. Low-wage migrants are mostly men and bachelors whereas professionals often have a family-based settlement. This also affects the construction of belonging insofar as the presence of children requires interacting with the local context. The flexibility of belonging results from dynamic practices which necessarily involve a change in the relation between self and society (May, 2011). As Gardner (2011) argues, migration has an impact on the families both in the receiving and sending countries. Low-wage migrants are forced to migrate alone and leave their families back home where they can survive through remittances (Gardner, 2011). The Indian and Pakistani middle-class migrants because earn enough money can sponsor their family members. Thus, they tend to reconstitute their families in the receiving countries. However, there is a disruption within the household; as Vora (2008) points out, in the Gulf countries, because of the visa regulation, most migrant families are nuclear and patriarchal, whereas in the home countries “extended families are the predominant familial form” (Gardner, 2011,

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<sup>75</sup> During my research, I talked with a Pakistani taxi driver who has lived in Dubai for more than twenty years.

p. 17). Some members of the Pakistani middle-class professionals I interviewed negotiated different family structures. For example, Katie lives alone but she has many cousins living in Dubai; John lives with his wife and their children live abroad; Naseer lives with his wife, his married son and niece, they live all together, whereas his married daughter lives with her husband's family; Mahmud, a Pakistani self-employed man, lives in Dubai with his son while his wife lives in the USA where their daughter is currently studying. It is evident that family is reconstructed in the Gulf countries in light of the migrants' different migration project (Gardner, 2011).

Lifestyle determines the way in which professionals tend to articulate their belonging and social relations with the local context. Rahman, one of my Pakistani participants, underlined how his lifestyle is expressed through contacts, social gatherings and events that, as emerged in the literature, one cannot find among low-wage migrants. He was thirty-eight years old when I met him in November 2015. He works in Abu Dhabi for a Western company, but he lives in Dubai with his mother and youngest brother. He is single, and he has spent few years in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, where he worked in the banking sector. He has produced some documentaries on the condition of construction workers and the contradictions in the UAE society. He is a member of a group of filmmakers in Dubai. Because of his job, Rahman has a high standard of life and he lives in a big 'gated space' (see chapter 7). I asked him to describe his lifestyle and he said

It is an interesting lifestyle, there is a lot to do. You know my residence itself has a spa and clubs around, you have also most opportunities...to explore the desert, you know there is a great beach, there is also outside the city where you can go and stay in a resort in the desert. There is also a lot of interesting people now increasingly in Dubai. So in Abu Dhabi and Dubai I am connected with some filmmakers who will be experimenting with films, different topics, there is a comedy club close to our area where expats, Westerners and South Asians gather. So there are lots of people now that are organizing which I think probably 15 years ago would not present in Dubai at all. It was a very dry environment just to make money, but now there is a more creative people actually experimenting with ideas (Interview with Rahman, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015)

Leisure activities and social events, described by Rahman and which require economic capital, are mostly a prerogative of professionals. During my field research, the only leisure activity that I observed among low-wage migrants was a walk with friends and fellow nationals in a shopping mall, or a walk along the Dubai Creek on Friday afternoon or Saturdays. Nevertheless, as my own research was not directly focused on low-wage migrants, it is possible that they also participated in more informal social gatherings, like

eating a meal together or going to the mosque or a church. However, different tastes, behaviours (*habitus*) and lifestyles seem to not inhibit the contacts between the low-wage Pakistani migrants and professionals. For example, John said

...they [Pakistani low-wage migrants] are from different mind-set; they do not have education at all. So they are accepted, we coexist, that's not the problem. The gardener in my house is Pakistani, and we treat him well, no discrimination against him...we treat him well (Interview with John, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

John emphasized how different tastes, dispositions and habits determine the difference between classes. But he also underscored that such differences did not hamper social relations. However, it is evident that the relation is limited to employer-employee. In other words, even though their good relationship is based on their common ethno-national origins, the asymmetrical power relationships cannot be erased, and this is mostly evident especially in social gatherings and events where class differentiation relies on creating a fracture between the public sphere, in which Pakistani domestic workers or gardeners are relegated in a subordinated position, and the private sphere where the relation employer-employee seems to be attenuated.

The multi-cultural nature of Dubai stems from the everyday life of different people who live side by side, such as in middle-class enclaves (see chapter 7), go to the same workplaces, schools, spaces and share the same interests, way of acting, tastes, dispositions (*habitus*), experiences and practices (Anthias, 2015). Despite temporariness (see below) and uncertainties of the migration experience, some of my Pakistani participants consider Dubai as a 'home' because, as mentioned earlier, they were brought up in the emirate and even if they go to study in the USA or UK they prefer to return to Dubai as they feel that they belong to the Emirati context. However, as noted, low-wage migrants construct their belonging to the Emirati context in a different way and in different places, spaces and locales. Lifestyle affects how belonging is constructed but not the construction of a sense of belonging.

## **6.6 Temporariness among Pakistani professionals**

Pakistani professionals' life is articulated through contacts and interactions with other fellow nationals, migrants and Emiratis. Apart from Emiratis, all migrants in the UAE

are considered as temporary migrants including children of foreign workers who were born in the GCC countries (Naufal & Genc, 2012). Temporariness entails leaving the country when the work contract expires. In this section, I explain if and to what extent Pakistani professionals' life is influenced by temporariness, which is tied up with 'flexible belonging' insofar as the former does not inhibit the latter. Put differently, Pakistani professionals' temporary status has not impeded the construction of belonging and it has not inhibited any chance to interact with the Emirati context, thus suggesting that social interactions with other fellow nationals, nationalities and Emiratis in the workplaces and, in some cases, also in leisure activities have taken place.

In their ethnographic accounts, both Kanna (2011) and Vora (2013) have emphasized that temporariness affects migrants' daily lives and to a certain extent the discourse on temporariness is entrenched with that on inclusion and social interactions with Emiratis. Vora (2013) argues that migrants find a way to construct their sense of belonging in light of temporariness. Vora's (2013, p. 89) informants emphasize that their temporary status has not impeded to construct a sense of belonging, "Dubai as a whole was a site of belonging even as it included several spaces of nonbelonging" (see chapter 3).

During our conversations, the recognition of their temporary status was one of the main elements that my participants underlined. Zia, for example, said

...the one thing that I have always put in my mind is that this is not my country. One day I have to leave this country. It is very very clear to me. Whatever policy they pursue, they put in this place, I take it as is their right, whatever they want to do (Interview with Zia, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Zia was aware that the UAE was not *his* country; he is one of my participants who, although being born in Kuwait and having spent many years in Dubai, has never had any contacts with Emiratis.<sup>76</sup> However, this has not impeded interactions with the local context and with other people (especially Pakistanis and Westerners, because he worked in a Western company). He recognized the role of local authorities to define who belongs and who does not belong (see chapters 4 and 8), because, in a certain way, there "exist...hierarchies of belonging, and not everyone is allowed to belong (May, 2011, p. 368).

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<sup>76</sup> He has never had any Emirati friend, but he was 'forced' to have contacts with Emiratis at least when he had to renew his residence permit (*iqāma*).



The discourse on temporariness is entrenched with the local policy and labour market as well as the respect that Pakistani participants manifested for the ‘law of the land’. Ester underscored how temporariness affects all migrants and, suddenly, if one loses the job, s/he risks losing everything. She said

...You have to be mentally prepared to move to this country. I have seen most Pakistanis they come here, they have no assets in Pakistan and suddenly when they lose everything, they say “Oh my god, we have to return to Pakistan, we do not have a house (Interview with Ester, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Ester underscored that the individual’s migration project should rely on the idea to have always an alternative in case the migration experience is not successful. Temporariness affects how Pakistani professionals behave and their interactions with the local context. Katie, one of my participants, was twenty-eight years old when I met her in November 2015. She was born in Oman where her father worked in banking sector. After a while she returned to Pakistan where she spent five years. When her father started working in a bank in Dubai, she moved to the UAE. She graduated in a prestigious Pakistani University while her parents lived in the Emirate. She is single and works for an international company in Dubai. Her parents are now settled in Pakistan. She lives on her own in a ‘gated space’ (see chapter 7) in Dubai. She said

...My dad has never actually settled down here because he was always in the stream of mind that we could back anytime. So, we never settled down, you know we had things...in storage because he did not want to use...I am going into this mind-set as well, I do not know how long I will be here, I do not want to buy this painting for my house, I do not want to do this (Interview with Katie, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2015).

Katie clearly emphasized that temporariness can bring to lead a life ‘in-between’ and she inherited this behaviour from her father. But more than that, temporariness represents the ‘sword of Damocles’ on my participants’ life; hence, the need to project strategies and mobilize symbolic, social, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987) to deal with temporariness. As Ahmad (2017, p. 66) suggests, in relation to migrant domestic workers, temporariness “reflect their being in a liminal position between their family households and work households...Their temporariness ensures their pivotal role in the dual production and reproduction of citizens, families, households, and ethnonational forms in both South Asia and the Gulf”.

Ismail also underlined how temporariness is an issue recognized by all people who consciously decide to migrate to Dubai. He said

I met somebody here once, when I first came. I think he has a construction company and I think he has lived here for about thirty years. He said 'I still feel like a visitor', you know, because it is a transient place, you know, you feel like you are just passing through because there is no opportunity for anybody to become resident or this kind of thing, which again, I think, at the end of the day that is...it is a privilege of the people who rule that is their right to decide what they want. I do not think anybody can be grown up in a gorgeous place for having a policy that it does not matter how long you live there, you know, you cannot become a resident. You make your own decision to come based on that; nobody forces you to come (Interview with Ismail, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

Ismail emphasized how temporariness was closely entrenched with power relations and the role of the ruling elite to decide their own policy and rules. These rules serve to categorize and identify people on the grounds of their ethnicity and nationality (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Pakistani professionals articulated their everyday life always bearing in mind their temporary status and this pushed them also to plan strategies upon leaving the country. For example, Katie said

...a lot of my friends and family are also in this frame of mind where they think we need something more permanent now because we are now at that point that we have seen that our fathers worked here and they had to go back. So we are realizing ok, this is not permanent we need to think of some options. My sister, for example, has applied for a Canadian immigration; I have some friends who recently moved to Australia, to Canada. Everyone is thinking of permanent place" (Interview with Katie, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2015).

Among the young generation the issue of temporariness and the need to find a new place to move when leaving the country has become a constant thought because of the experience of their fathers and mothers who had to leave the country after many years spent in Dubai.

Low-wage migrants as well as Pakistani professionals are temporary migrants; however, temporariness affects them in different ways. Low-wage migrants, as mentioned earlier, have a different lifestyle and their migration project is mostly aimed to return to their home country (Table 6.1). For professionals, temporariness is also an issue insofar as their permanence in the country is affected by instability and uncertainties. This is the idea expressed by Ester, who said

Construction workers live on day-to-day basis, but people like in my category they have been here for 20 years, 30 years or more, at least they have built a house and buy an apartment in Pakistan because, or wherever you want, there has to be a forth and back plan, most people do

not have it. Dubai lures you, attracts you, the glitter, the glamour, people who come here they do not want to leave (Interview with Ester, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Social class articulates how people organize their everyday life, which, in turn, affects how people plan their future, how and to what extent they interact with the local context. People mobilize different forms of capital to articulate their belonging and to deal with temporariness. Rita also underlined how her life was affected by temporariness when she lost her job. She said

Last year I lost my job in Microsoft because of cutting down... When I lost my job here, I lost my Emirates ID card and when I did not have an ID card I could not rent a car, then I had to be on another visa, a visit visa. All complications come in, everything becomes difficult. It is so scaring; I had to move in another country three times to get my visit visa renewed as a Pakistani (Interview with Rita, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Rita underscored how her everyday life was related to the need to have a job, because unemployment entails leaving the country in one month. This happens regardless of how many years one has spent in Dubai and how many family members live with you in the emirate. However, Rita's story exemplifies how temporariness only superficially touched my participants' life. Her story encapsulates the links between temporariness and 'flexible belonging'. She was born in Pakistan but she moved to Dubai when she was a child; she has spent more than twenty years in the city. These elements shed light on the existence of a sense of belonging which is constructed over the years; it is not challenged by temporariness. When she lost her job she could migrate to the USA, where her parents live now. But she decided to remain in Dubai because she considers it as a 'home', her daughter went to the local school and her ex-husband was in Dubai. Rita's story is significant because temporariness has not affected the construction of belonging to her 'Pakistani-ness' and with the Emirati context, as mentioned earlier.

Temporariness might inhibit any social contact and interactions between migrants and the Emirati context. However, it did not constrain everyday life and contacts with other migrants. Belonging is constructed beyond legal status, formal membership and material resources; it is constructed beyond the rules and structures of the field. Pakistani professionals are affected by temporariness but it has not impeded them from feeling that they belong to the Emirati context. The notion of 'flexible belonging' emphasizes the dynamic relationship between 'Pakistani-ness' and the Emirati context, between self and society (Ahmad, 2017).

## 6.7 Transnational and local connections

Temporariness is a ‘permanent’ status because all foreign workers are considered as temporary migrants and to obtain citizenship is nearly impossible (see chapter 4). Pakistani professionals are very aware of their temporary status, they try to find and adopt strategies in order to deal with temporariness. In this section, I discuss some of these strategies which serve to demonstrate that belonging is flexible because Pakistani professionals can build transnational and local connections to deal with temporariness. In other words, they can construct (or ‘re-construct’) their belonging in a different context.

Gardner (2008, p. 74) used the term ‘strategic transnationalism’ to argue that the Indian elite in Bahrain rely on “historic networks forged in the colonial and postcolonial era, and transnational networks that connect them to multiple continents”. It means that when they have to leave the country they will use their transnational connections to find a way to settle down in a different country. Pakistani professionals, to a certain extent, tend to adopt the same strategy. They tend to create transnational networks through their family members (children, or brothers or sisters) already settled in Western countries to migrate upon leaving Dubai. However, these transnational networks are also developed to facilitate a return to Pakistan. Some of my participants expressed a strong attachment to their country of origin and have already decided to return to Pakistan, where they have bought a house. For example, Zia said

...I have my own house [in Pakistan]... I have no intention to go to any other country. I will feel much more relaxed and happy if I go to Pakistan rather than if I go and settle in Canada because, for example, my son is a Canadian residence holder now so he intends to call us to settle there, but I have no intention of going and spending the rest of my life there. I would rather be in Pakistan than in any other place (Interview with Zia, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Zia emphasized his emotional and affective ties with his home country. As noted above, he is one of my participants who has never had any contacts with Emiratis and he is the only participants that sent money back home to help his sister who is a widow. This emotional attachment to his home country has not hampered him to buy a house in Dubai. Other participants underlined the wish to return to their home country. For example, Naseer said

...I have my own house, I have a plot... since I was born there actually [in Pakistan] and I have too much love for my country and I am positive actually that I will be happy there, this regards of the shortcomings [shortages] we have there, it is not an issue, it is my own country, I do not have to renew my residence, I do not have to ask for a visa, I do not have to ask for a

local sponsor there. And I feel proud of that actually (Interview with Naseer, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

But I also talked with people who do not want to return to Pakistan. One of my participants said “I will move maybe not to Pakistan but maybe Canada or maybe America, we have our family there” (Interview with John, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014). This is a very common practice, namely to join family members already settled in another country. One of my participants, who has children both in the USA and in the UK is likely to move to a Western country instead of returning to Pakistan.

‘Flexible belonging’ allows building transnational and translocal networks that can facilitate the process of re-settlement. For Pakistani professionals, this process can be easy as well as traumatic. It is easy because they have capital to move and they can use their networks to negotiate relocation elsewhere. But it is also traumatic, especially for Pakistani women that have to return to Pakistan. Katie’s mother, for example, had problems to re-adapt to the ‘Pakistani lifestyle’; she said

...All of their friends are here [Dubai] as well, you know, they used to live in Business Bay in Executive Tower before [rich area, in the ‘city-centre’], so she had her community there, neighbours and they used to go walking. All of friends for 20 years here. So she is finding a bit difficult and then just small things like grocery shopping you do not get a lot of stuff there [Islamabad] (Interview with Katie, 1<sup>st</sup> November, 2015).

Katie underscored that her mother was accustomed to a specific lifestyle in Dubai, but when she returned to Pakistan she had to ‘re-adapt’ to the local environment. Katie’s quotation illustrates the flexibility of belonging, thus suggesting that belonging is negotiated in light of the context, locale and place in which one lives.

From my data, I have identified different approaches. Some Pakistani men, who got married, want to return to their home country; however, their wives do not want to return because Pakistan is considered, by some Pakistani women, as not a safe country. Ester said

The main thing that I like about the UAE is the security aspect, the safety. Women are very safe in this country. I can walk on the street even at 2.00 am and nobody can come and snatch my bag, or my mobile or even coming and give me an attack because the system is such that women are protected. Same thing is not in Pakistan, it is in large city like Karachi, in any city women are not safe...Even when I go and visit Pakistan I am have this conscious, I am always looking around, I am not talking on my mobile too much in the public area because I have no idea who comes and snatches my bag and phone (Interview with Ester, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Ester emphasized how the issue of safety and security affected her life and how she interacted with the local context. Some Pakistani men want to move to a Western country where they want to join their family members. Some Pakistani women whom I interviewed are ‘forced’ to return to Pakistan because they do not have any other alternative. The above quotation is relevant because the issue of safety has also been raised by Pakistani men when they talked about the difficulties for their wives to re-settle in Pakistan.

In spite of temporariness, some foreign workers have found a strategy to remain ‘permanently’ in the UAE. They have found local connections or intermediaries that can help them to overcome the issue of temporariness. This is what in Arabic is defined as *wāṣṭa*, which means ‘intermediary’. But more than that, *wāṣṭa* means “influence possessed by an individual” (Gardner 2010a, p. 154). In that sense, it is something that is used by people to indicate power, but, as Bristol-Rhys (2010b, p. 111) argues, people that have power “do not need someone who act on their behalf or to approach a powerful person with their petition”. The notion of *wāṣṭa* is important to understand some of the strategies adopted by some Pakistani professionals to remain in the UAE. They created local connections, which entailed developing contacts and networks with Emiratis in order to negotiate and find a loophole to stay *permanently* in the country. This strategy relates, for example, to the establishment of companies. According to the sponsorship system (see chapter 5), in order to establish a company foreign workers need a local sponsor who owns 51 percent of the company. This strategy has been adopted by one of my participants (Naseer) who also said that if it fails, he will return to Pakistan. Suleyman, for example, has also created connections with some Emiratis and he has found a loophole to let his retired parents live in the country. Every year he renews their residence permit by declaring that he is the only son and that his parents are too old and nobody in Pakistan can look after them. In this way his parents, who do not want to leave the UAE, can live in Dubai *permanently*, unless the local authorities decide to not renew the residence permit.<sup>77</sup>

Migration, temporariness and ‘flexible belonging’ are closely interrelated and intersect with class and social status. Transnational and local connections are used by Pakistani professionals to deal with temporariness and to define their migration project. As such, these strategies are class-based. For low-wage migrants, the adoption of these

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<sup>77</sup> Due to the sensitivity of this topic, my participants asked me to not record with my tape-recorder their sentences. I took notes of these strategies in my field notes.

strategies is rather impossible. Temporariness affects all foreign workers but, as argued, in different ways.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have defined Pakistani professionals as a category that encompasses not only the members of the PPW but also people of other group of workers (journalists, engineers and doctors). In relation to Pakistani professionals, I have introduced the notion of ‘flexible belonging’, which relies on Anthias’ (2006, 2015) work. Belonging is flexible because people belong at the same time to different categories and locales. It is flexible because it swings between belonging to a specific ethnic and/or national community with which people share values, customs, culture, religion and language (‘Pakistani-ness’), and the context in which people live. As such, Pakistani professionals interact with fellow nationals with whom they share religion, culture, or language as well as with individuals of other nationalities with whom they share experiences, practices, lifestyle, tastes and everyday life. Belonging is then flexible because it fluctuates between ethnic and national community and the local context. In Dubai, which is a multi-cultural and globalized field, my Pakistani participants felt at ‘home’ because of their lifestyle, tastes, dispositions, habits, experiences and personal stories, nevertheless they did not forget their heritage, culture, language, customs and traditions (‘Pakistani-ness’).

To sum up, ‘flexible belonging’ is contextual, temporal and situational. People construct belonging because of the specific context, locale and situation (Anthias, 2015); it is determined by situations, experiences, personal stories, background and affective and emotional ties. If it was not so, in the Emirati context, where it is nearly impossible to obtain citizenship, where there is a lack of any policy aimed at integrating migrants and characterized by discrimination, it would not make sense to talk of belonging and we could not understand, for example, why Pakistani professionals whom I interviewed expressed such a strong emotional attachment to Dubai. ‘Flexible belonging’ means sharing experiences, affective ties, emotions, practices in everyday life. In this sense, material resources and economic gains do not *determine* but can facilitate the construction of a sense

of belonging. 'Flexible belonging' is relational, it is constructed in relation to someone and/or something to which one feels that one belongs because of sharing experiences, practices, tastes and moments. It is a boundary-making as well as a boundary-breaking concept (Anthias, 2015). 'Flexible belonging' allows grasping the complexities of the interrelationships between self and society.



**CHAPTER SEVEN**  
**RECOGNITION AND ‘GATED SPACES’.**  
**THE PAKISTAN ASSOCIATION DUBAI.**

**7.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Pakistani professionals constructed belonging and that they felt part of the Emirati context in light of their personal stories and background. In this chapter, I examine the role and importance of the PAD (Picture 7.1), the only Pakistani association in Dubai, for the Pakistanis; it is a place of identification and belonging.

The extant literature on migration in the GCC countries has largely ignored the role of migrant associations. My argument is that the PAD epitomizes the role and dynamics of migrant organizations in Western countries (and in other contexts as well) but I discuss issues that the literature on these organizations has mostly neglected, such as class hierarchies, divisions and their dynamics in a non-Western country. Apart from Chung’s (2005) research among Koreans in Los Angeles, the extant literature on migrant organizations in Western countries does not consider ethno-class hierarchies, conflicts and inter-migrant associations’ relations (Sardinha, 2009). This chapter draws on my observations, field notes and in-depth interviews with Abdallah, the key member of the PAD (see chapter 2); it also relies on the existing literature on migrant associations.

The relevance of this chapter for my thesis relates to its contribution to the literature on structure and agency in migration studies. As mentioned in chapter 3, migrants ‘bring’ with them their national identity, which is partially reconstructed in migration context through the establishment of migrant associations. These organizations embody migrants’ agential capacity to act in a specific time-place in order to preserve and safeguard their customs and traditions. At the same time, they underscore migrants’ knowledge of local rules and laws that underpin the formation of these associations. Migrant associations represent the capacity of migrants to act and project their life in a new place and their knowledge of structures that regulate their everyday life in that context.

The chapter is divided in two parts. In the first part, I utilize a top-down perspective in which the positionality of the PAD in relation to the Emirati context is addressed. In the

second part, I apply a bottom-up perspective in which I discuss the PAD as a ‘gated space’, which are spaces, sometimes not literally gated, where people feel a sense of belonging based on a common lifestyle, practices, experiences and a common ethno-national and cultural identity. This perspective also permits to acknowledge that belonging is constructed by making and breaking boundaries among communities, groups and spaces (see chapter 6).

**Picture 7.1 Façade of the PAD**



The chapter is structured as follows. I discuss the importance of migrant associations by unfolding their internal characteristics and complexities. The role and dynamics of the PAD is discussed in the following section, the analysis of which is based on the observations, interviews with Abdallah and conversations I had with participants during fieldwork in Dubai (see chapter 2). I then discuss the positionality of the PAD in relation to the Emirati context and I argue that recognition (in Fraser’s understanding, see chapter 3) should be replaced by gratitude manifested by local authorities by gifting a piece of land to the Pakistani community for their contribution to the development of Dubai. The concept of ‘gated space’ in relation to the GCC countries, which represents the theoretical framework of the second part of the chapter, is addressed in the following section. I then expand this concept to the PAD which is an open ‘gated space’ where Pakistanis and other nationalities interact. Lastly, I address the relationships within the PAD where class inequalities and divisions emerged.

## **7.2 Migrant associations. Characteristics and dynamics**

Migrant associations express a sense of belonging and identification (Fortier, 2006). Throughout the GCC countries, there are several migrant organizations and/or clubs (Gardner, 2010a), and I argue that it is essential to assess their role for migrants. In this section, I discuss their dynamics and complexities to unfold their importance to the migrant communities and their positionality within the host society.

My argument is framed on the assumption that it is not the number of migrants that determines the number of associations, and it is not the cultural difference with the host society that defines their formation, but their establishment is a matter of positionality which means that the context and the characteristics of the migrant populations are key factors to understanding their role and dynamics.

Migrant associations have a relational nature which means that they are formed in relation to the needs of the members of the group, but one cannot ignore their relations with the receiving country because they ‘serve’ to assess to what extent migrants are integrated and participate into the host society. They are defined in different ways according to the perspective that one adopts. For example, Moya (2005, p. 834) defines them as secondary associations that exist “between the primary links of kinship and the equally non-voluntary arrangements of tertiary institutions like the state”. For Sardinha (2009, p. 76), a migrant association is “an organisation formed by individuals who consciously define themselves as members of an ethno-cultural group (based, for example, on such variables as country of origin, a common heritage, language, religion, consciousness of kind, etc.) within a larger context”.

Migrant associations embody a group’s identity, heritage, culture and values (Sardinha, 2009). Their formation is stimulated by the idea that they are the result of cultural difference with the host society and this difference pushes migrant groups to mobilize resources in order to guarantee support for their fellow nationals and promote their cultural identity (Breton, 1964; Rex, 1973, 1987). As Moya (2005) argues, Breton’s (1964, p. 204) statement: “The more different the people of a certain ethnicity are from the members of the native community, the easier it will be for them to develop their own institutions”, is misleading insofar as where migrants are “culturally different from members of the host society have not set up more organisations than culturally similar immigrants have” (Sardinha, 2009, p. 78). For example, in Brazil, the Portuguese and Japanese migrants have

the same number of associations (Moya, 2005). Additionally, Schrover and Vermeulen (2005) argue that it is not the quantity of migrants that determines the numbers of migrant associations. In other words, the number of migrants settled in a specific area does not determine the presence of migrant associations, but their formation and development is influenced by other factors, such as the characteristics of the migrant population, labour market participation, social and cultural relations with the host society (Schrover & Vermeulen, 2005).

Migrant associations have a dynamic and fluid nature; they evolve as the migration evolves. They respond to the needs and exigencies of the migrant groups but their role and importance change in relation to the context especially where discrimination is very common (Layton-Henry, 1990). Migrant associations also play a transnational role because they tend to maintain links between the country of origin and settlement. They are “*transnational social spaces* that function as transmitters of integration and identity options within a transnational social field” (Sardinha, 2009, p. 86, original emphasis).

Migrant associations have a double role. On the one hand, they tend to preserve migrants’ identity and culture; on the other hand, they can encourage the involvement of migrants in the host society (Layton-Henry, 1990). Moreover, their structure and activities evolves and change over time and they can also play a political role especially when migrant groups are discriminated.

### **7.3 The Pakistan Association Dubai**

Thus far very few studies have been undertaken on the importance and role of migrant associations to the foreign communities in the Arab Gulf region. Gardner (2010a, p. 100), who focused on the Indian associations and clubs, argues that they are “the primary social foundation for foreign workers’ participation in the complex public sphere of contemporary Bahrain”. For Gardner (2010a), the presence of Indian associations and clubs in the public sphere serves to display the division between nationals and non-nationals (see chapter 3). These associations and clubs are not agents of change but a public manifestation of ‘India-ness’. Gardner’s (2010a) contribution is relevant, but my purpose is, however, to

delve into the complexities and dynamics of the PAD by arguing that it is not detached from the Emirati context but it forms part of it; it is the only place officially recognized by Dubai authorities as a pure expression of ‘Pakistani-ness’. In this section, I examine the history, dynamics and activities of the association, which are aimed at involving, helping and supporting the Pakistani community. Discussing in detail these aspects will contribute to make clear that the PAD is an inclusive organization that, ostensibly, is united and cohesive, but, as I discuss in the next sections, divisions also exist. This and the following sections draw on my qualitative data collection.

I define the PAD as an umbrella and voluntary migrant association formed by some Pakistani migrants and whose internal and external affairs are managed by the Board of Trustees (BOT), which is formed by Pakistani doctors and businessmen. It is officially recognized and licensed by the Community Development Authority (CDA) of Dubai as the only Pakistani association of the Emirate. It does not receive any economic support neither from the UAE authorities nor from the Pakistani government.

The origin of the PAD can be traced back to 1963, when a Pakistani doctor, in a small office in Deira, on the east bank of the Dubai Creek, decided to establish a place where all Pakistanis could interact and discuss “their problems as an expat community” (Interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015). In 1973, the then ruler of Dubai Shaykh Rashid bin Said Al-Maktum (who ruled from 1958 to 1990), gifted a piece of land to the Pakistani community in Oud Metha, on the west bank of the Dubai Creek. In 1984, the current building of the association was constructed with the support and contribution of the entire Pakistani community, from taxi drivers to businessmen (Picture 7.2).

**Picture 7.2 The main building of the PAD**



The Pakistan Auditorium is the newest building, having been inaugurated in September 2015. It cost about 8 million dirhams and was built with the help and contribution of the whole Pakistani community in the UAE (Picture 7.3).<sup>78</sup> The association extends on a big land area and it consists of one main building and the big auditorium.

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<sup>78</sup> Monthly Newsletter Archive of the PAD. See, <http://pad.ae/pakistan-auditorium-inauguration-ceremony/> [accessed 12 May 2016].

**Picture 7.3 Pakistan Auditorium in the PAD**



In the PAD, there is also a football pitch and cricket training facilities. There is a small prayer room that can accommodate only Pakistani Muslim men for the daily five prayers (Picture 7.4).

**Picture 7.4 The prayer room within the PAD**



There are also bathrooms (for men and women) where Muslims do the ritual ablutions to perform the prayers, as prescribed by religious texts. However, on Fridays, during the collective prayer, Pakistani Muslims go to a local big mosque situated in the same area and very close to the association. This mosque is also known locally as a ‘Pakistani mosque’, as some of my participants told me (Picture 7.5).



Picture 7.5 The so-called ‘Pakistani mosque’



The PAD provides services and facilities to permit Pakistani Muslims to fulfil their religious duties. In her research on Pakistani associations in Britain, Joly (1987, p. 72) argues that these organizations have been formed to “deal with different aspects of Pakistani people’s everyday life”. The Islamic identity of these associations is enhanced because Islām is an all-encompassing religion governing every aspects of Muslims’ life.

The PAD works in collaboration with the Emirati authorities in order to deliver all services and organize religious activities that must conform to the religious view of the local authorities. The religious aspects of Muslims, Emiratis and non-Emiratis, are *monitored* by the UAE religious authorities through the GAIAE (see chapter 5).

The PAD is a non-profit organization and

...it is purely funded by the community itself and that is the uniqueness of this association that the community basically gets together, generates funds, generates activities, and looks for solutions. We have a very little staff, which are paid, as the office men and the accountant. Otherwise, we are all professionals, we work during the day and we come here in the afternoon or in the evening and spend some time volunteering doing some social works. So that is the basic structure of the association itself (Interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Abdallah emphasized how the voluntary participation seems to reinforce belonging and cohesion of the community.

The PAD is an umbrella organization formed by several wings, such as the PPW, the Ladies Wing (LW), the MW and the Pakistan Youth Forum (PYF). Thus, “all these are meant to actually represent different segments of the community as we have the youth group that represents the youth. So what PAD does is to provide a legal platform, an umbrella to this system of organizations or wings” (Interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015). The basic idea of the PAD was “to develop this as a hub for the community to socialize, and where they can do whatever activities they plan under the legal framework” (Interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015). The PAD is a male-oriented association and women, who are excluded from the BOT, are involved in the so-called female-oriented activities such as teaching Islām and the home-country language, and other activities that are delivered to other women or children (Nyhagen Predelli, 2008). The PYF is run by young Pakistanis who were born and raised in the UAE. They are considered as migrants by the local authorities and their permanence in the country is temporary.<sup>79</sup> The presence of different wings in part reflects the fragmentation of the Pakistani community, which is varied and stratified in light of different ethnic composition, languages, religions, age, gender and classes.

As emerged from my observations in the association and interviews with my key informant (see chapter 2), the PAD aims to support all different groups of the Pakistani community. It takes over the role of providing welfare services for the marginalized groups, such as irregular migrants. In the UAE (as in the other GCC countries), it is easy to become irregular (e.g. by overstaying or running away from the local sponsor) and this status pushes people to become isolated or to live as a marginalized group, because if the UAE authorities find people living in the country in an irregular status they are deported (Shah, 2009). The status of irregularity is destabilizing especially when they have children that are considered as irregular even before being born. It thus emerges that within the PAD belonging is not determined by social status or class, the association is a place where all Pakistanis can feel ‘at home’ regardless of their juridical status (regular/irregular). Initiatives are also undertaken in relation to Pakistani prisoners. Through an agreement with the Dubai

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<sup>79</sup> In the GCC countries, children “are allowed to stay with the parents under the father’s (or mother’s, if employed) sponsorship. In case of male children who reach 21 years of age, the father can no longer act as the sponsor to obtain a residence permit...A male child can remain in the country if he is a student or is employed, in which case his employer is the sponsor. Female children can remain under the sponsorship of the father until they are married” (Shah, 2009, p. 8).

authorities, the PAD is provided with a list of Pakistani prisoners with minor offences, and through money raised within the Pakistani community, fines are paid and a flight ticket to Pakistan is bought so that they can leave the country (Interview with Abdallah, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015). This aspect is important because it means that the PAD has been able to build a network with the local authorities and that the sense of belonging is constructed by including and supporting also the marginalized individuals (irregular and prisoners).

During my field research, I realized that in the area called Oud Metha there were some national organizations identified as ‘clubs’, such as the Indian Club, the Jordanian Club and the Egyptian Club. I then realized that the Pakistani association was the only one in that area. I asked Abdallah his idea about the division between different national clubs and the PAD. He said

Indians have a club and have an association. I think by definition the difference between a club and an association is [that] a club has got very exclusive membership, it can choose who it wants to have as a member and it is limited to a specific number of people. And association is, broadly speaking, open for the all community, it has got more members of the community, you can have labourers, you can have blue-collar workers, and white-collar workers as members of the same association, which you do not probably see in any club. In a club, you have people who can actually afford a certain amount and use facilities of that club, and clubs usually do not do welfare activities outside the club boundary. I think association is a much broader platform, which connects different segments of the community, and the dimensions and the scope of the activities are a lot more than any specific club (Interview with Abdallah, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

I will develop this aspect below, but this distinction is important as it reflects class inequalities and the positionality of different groups within the migrant community.

The PAD in order to respond to the needs of the community acts on two different levels. In terms of internal relations, it delivers services, provides support and organizes activities that can contribute to the welfare of the whole community. In terms of external relations, it responds to the needs of the Pakistani community by building a network and trusting relationships with the UAE authorities (and other migrant associations) in order to support especially the marginalized Pakistani migrants.

#### **7.4 The PAD in context. From recognition to gratitude?**

As mentioned in chapter 3, Fraser (1995, 2001) views recognition as a matter of justice which means that the role and importance of all groups in social interaction must be recognized in reason of the contribution for the stability and development of society. Moreover, non-recognition is a matter of cultural injustice and it is the result of a social structure based on ethno-racial hierarchies in which some members of the society are not granted the same benefits and advantages of the dominant group (Fraser, 2001). In this section, I discuss the positionality of the PAD in relation to the overall Emirati context. In Dubai, which is an Emirate characterized by the presence of different nationalities and ethno-racial hierarchies (Vora, 2013), the PAD seems to embody the stability and cohesion of the Pakistani community, and I argue that the positionality of the association should be framed within the concept of gratitude (see below).

In my view, in order to understand the shift from recognition to gratitude, it is important to analyse the historical dynamics of migration in Dubai. The contribution of the migrants in the development of the Emirate and the country has been discussed in chapter 4 where I argued that before the discovery of oil, in the 1960s, the formation of the UAE federation (1971) and the citizenship law of 1972, the different migrant groups (Iranians and Indians) were active members of the society, part of the social fabric also through intermarriages (Izady, 2002), and were ‘integrated’ within the local social structure. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the rulers of Dubai have recognized migrants’ contribution to the development of the Emirate by attributing benefits, advantages and also gifting pieces of land (Kanna, 2011). For example, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Iranian merchants in Dubai were naturalized and the then ruler, Shaykh Said bin Maktum, gifted a piece of land where they settled down (Bastakiyya) (see chapter 4). The Indian Club was established in the 1960s on a piece of land gifted to the Indian community by the ruler of Dubai, Shaykh Rashid Bin Said Al-Maktum. Thus, it was a way to recognize their social status within the Emirate and the prominent role and contribution of the Iranian and Indian merchants to the development of Dubai. In the 1970s, the formation of the UAE federation and the oil boom, with the arrival of many migrants from South and East Asian countries (see chapter 3), the ruler of Dubai decided to gift a piece of land to the Pakistani community as a sign of gratitude for their support and contribution to the growth of the

Emirate and because it was the first country that recognized the new political entity (Ahmed, 1984).

Before the 1970s, migrants were active members of the society, part of the social fabric and wielded a real political power thus contributing to the development and stability of Dubai. After the discovery of oil, the formation of the UAE federation and the oil boom migrants became functional to the development of the country and to the needs and exigencies of the local population thus contributing to the welfare of locals and improvements of the Emirate, but deprived of any political role (Al-Sayegh, 1998). The formation of the UAE federation entailed the implementation of rules, laws and institutional bodies that fostered the development of a modern country, which was mainly based on the so-called ‘ruling bargain’ (see chapter 4). In particular, benefits and advantages were only granted to ‘pure’ Emiratis who were considered those who were able to demonstrate their long-standing residence in the country before the discovery of oil. For example, Shaykh Rashid Bin Said Al-Maktum presumably said “Those who were with us when we were poor should be with us now we are rich” (cited in Dresch, 2005, p. 141).

This leads me to argue that recognition was a clear policy pursued in Dubai before the advent of oil because Iranians and Indians were active members of the society and they had privileges, advantages and political role especially the merchant class (Al-Sayegh, 1998). In my view, after the creation of the new political entity and the oil boom, recognition was replaced by gratitude (*imtinān*)<sup>80</sup> for the contribution of Pakistanis, along with other migrants, in the development of Dubai. They did not enjoy advantages and benefits (as happened with Indians and Iranians) and did not have any political role. This is evident in the current ethno-racial hierarchies in Dubai where “an Emirati, if he is honest, he will say for us first is white, from America, Europe, number two Arabs within the region [GCC], third Indians, fourth maybe Filipinos and Pakistanis together” (Interview with Ibrahim, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2015). The rationale for the politics of gratitude is the lack of recognition of Pakistanis (and other migrants) as full members “of society, capable of participating on a par with” Emiratis (Fraser, 2001, p. 24). Put differently, recognition and gratitude reflect the different role played by migrants in the history of Dubai.

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<sup>80</sup> The root of the word *imtinān* is *m-n-n* which means “to gift, to give, be courteous and to be benevolent towards someone”.

The PAD is an example of gratitude from the UAE authorities towards Pakistanis for their support and historical links. Despite the lack of full recognition of Pakistanis as active members of the UAE society (I am adopting Fraser's understanding of recognition), it is indisputable the role played by the PAD in supporting migrants, especially low-wage migrants, and in encouraging the dialogue with the local authorities that becomes evident through the participation of members of the Al-Maktum, the ruling family of Dubai, in events organized by the PAD.<sup>81</sup>

By applying the approach of Honneth (1992) and Taylor (1994) (the identity model, see chapter 3), in my view, the positionality of the PAD in relation to the Emirati context relies on recognition of ethno-national, cultural and religious aspects of the Pakistani community of Dubai. In other words, by gifting the piece of land, the Dubai authorities recognized the PAD as a place where 'Pakistani-ness' could be 'preserved'.

By applying Fraser's (2001) approach (the status model), in my view, there is misrecognition because group members, such as Pakistanis or Filipinos, are inhibited from participating as a peer with Emiratis in social life. During my field research, I discovered that some Pakistani professionals felt that they were socially subordinated (see the above quotation of Ibrahim) and the existence of gendered and racialized hierarchies was also acknowledged. However, my participants accepted the Emirati hierarchical social structure because they were aware that they could not change it. This is where my concept of gratitude comes into play. In detail, the participation of members of the ruling family of Dubai (Al-Maktum) in events organized by the PAD is symbolically a gesture of appreciation towards the Pakistani community but it does not erase the ethno-racial hierarchies and it does not modify the Emirati social structure. Pakistani professionals whom I interviewed perceived themselves as guests; they knew that they could not change the Emirati social structure and they could not subvert the ethno-racial hierarchies. When they migrate they implicitly accept the rules of the country, thus respecting and following those rules, customs and social norms means being and feeling part of the country. Abdallah said

...if you talk to the local government, to the Emiratis they would say that it is like a guest, and a host policy where we are guests, they look after us, and you have to respect the law of the land. So, if I go to someone's house I have to respect their traditions, and their culture, and

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<sup>81</sup> In specific circumstances and to celebrate events some local authorities are invited in the PAD. <http://pad.ae/> [accessed 12 June 2016].

their rules, and their regulations. So, if I like it, then I will be the guest, if I do not like I am not forced to be here (Interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Abdallah emphasized that some Pakistanis consider themselves as guests and they have to respect the ‘law of the land’. In his words, the impossibility to act in such a way to change the social structure and the legal norms and rules emerged clearly. They are aware that they cannot change their status but they articulate their belonging and relationships with the context on a cultural level (Parekh, 2008). The impossibility to change the local social structure has also been underlined by Leila, who said

I cannot change things here ... if I want to change something I should be able to do in Pakistan.... We are not in that kind of system to make a difference. I am not in that kind of system that I would make a difference back home in my country” (Interview with Leila, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

As Leila acknowledged, Pakistanis cannot subvert the ethno-racial hierarchies but they feel that they belong to the Emirati context (see chapter 6). Put differently, they (and all migrant communities) cannot change the political, legal and social norms of the country, but they can enhance and strengthen the links with the country on a social and cultural level by creating a space of sociocultural interaction between the local authorities and the Pakistani community, within the PAD, thus perceiving themselves and feeling part of the Emirati context. It is thus evident that recognition is not pursued by the local authorities, whereas mis-recognition seems to drive social interactions within the UAE. In this regard, the PAD embodies the sense of gratitude that the local authorities have expressed to the Pakistani community for their contribution to the development of the Emirate. Recognition is an anthropological attribute which requires treating all humans as equals (Fraser, 2001, Parekh, 2006); however, in the UAE, the exclusionary and discriminatory policies and practices conspire against this perspective. As said above, when migrants were necessary to drive the development and provide financial assistance they were considered as peers in social life, but when structural changes occurred, exclusion, discrimination and separateness started driving the UAE policies and practices.

Recognition is a concept based on reciprocity because, in both models (identity and status models), the reciprocal recognition is a *conditio sine qua non* individuals and groups are able to define themselves and their social status in society. Thus, there is a hierarchy and a dominant group. Gratitude also implies reciprocity insofar as subjects express their

appreciation for support and help granted by individuals or groups and it entails a formal act of appreciation (through donations, rewards, or participation in events) for individual or group's support and help. However, this sign of appreciation does not subvert rules, procedures and mechanisms of institutionalised cultural patterns; it does not modify the ethno-racial hierarchies and the *status quo* of the society as a whole.

In conclusion, the positionality of the PAD within the Emirati context is the expression of the gratitude by the then ruler of Dubai for the contribution of the Pakistani community. Importantly, however, the ethno-racial hierarchies and the institutionalized cultural patterns do not change because of this gesture. Recognition implies at a certain point a change in the social structure in order to overcome the misrecognition by accommodating the needs and reduce the inequalities thus “recognizing and positively valorizing cultural diversity” (Fraser, 1995, p. 73); gratitude does not involve any change, it is only a gesture of appreciation that does not subvert the social structure. It is a personal, subjective and emotional gesture towards the community.

### **7.5 The concept of ‘gated space’ in the GCC countries**

As outlined above, I argue that the PAD can be seen as a ‘gated space’, which is an inclusive and open space where social interactions within and outside the Pakistani community occur and ethno-class hierarchies and divisions exist. It is thus worth explaining the importance and characteristics of ‘gated spaces’ in the GCC countries.

Neoliberalism has engendered material effects (Ganti, 2014) visible in urban environments where the distinction between private and public has blurred (Hvidt, 2007b)<sup>82</sup> and people's everyday life is under scrutiny by the improvements in information technology (IT) and ‘constrained’ by the creation of private spaces for affluent people. The privatization of urban landscape is thus embedded in neoliberalism that has led to the creation of gated communities in the USA, China, Latin America and Arab Gulf countries (Glasze, Webster

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<sup>82</sup> In neo-patrimonial states, “the centralized ownership structure [is combined] with an extreme concentration of power placed in the hands of a relatively small group of trusted persons” (Hvidt, 2007b, p. 571). In Dubai, there is not a ‘strong’ differentiation between government and private-business affairs.



& Frantz, 2006), which have become a marker of consumerism, class distinction and free-trade ideology (Kanna, 2011). A gated community (or ‘gated space’) is

a residential development surrounded by walls, fences, or earth banks covered with bush and shrubs, with secured entrance. ... The houses, streets, sidewalks, and other amenities are physically enclosed by these barriers, and entrance gates operated by a guards, key, or electronic identity card. Inside the development there is often a neighbourhood watch organization or professional security personnel who patrol on foot or by automobile (Low, 2006, cited in Kathiravelu 2016, p. 139).

Since the 1990s, the growing privatization of urban areas has been one of the most debated and controversial issues because it relates to “social questions about private versus public organisation of civic goods and services, the right to a secure environment versus the right to access, communal versus individual consumption, inclusion versus exclusion, heterogeneity versus homogeneity and efficiency versus equity” (Glasze, Webster & Frantz, 2006, p. 1). There has been a growing privatisation of the public space, and the spreading of gated enclaves where a specific group of people can enjoy services, facilities and amenities.

In the GCC countries, the concept of ‘gated space’ has mostly been used in relation to the Western compounds in Saudi Arabia, where Westerners are accommodated, and it has also been used to identify middle-class enclaves and labour camps in Dubai. The middle-class enclaves represent, to a certain extent, places where the residential segregation between nationals and migrants (Khalaf, 2006) appear to be mitigated because Emiratis and non-Emiratis share the same facilities and amenities. In her research among low-wage migrants in Dubai, Kathiravelu (2016) explores the ‘gatedness’ as a strategy to include and exclude, to distinguish desirables from undesirables. By comparing gated enclaves of the middle-class and labour camps in Dubai, she argues that they can be seen as two specific forms of ‘gatedness’ with two different rationales. Gated enclaves are places where the middle-class live ‘segregated’ in a space circumscribed by gates, walls or bushes, but open because they can get in and out without any restrictions, they enjoy the benefits of their social status, and lastly, they are places where the persistent ethno-racial hierarchies, very common in the workplace or outside the walls of the gated enclaves, appears to be attenuated: Westerners, affluent Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, Emiratis and other communities live together and share the same space, facilities and amenities. As Glasze and Alkhayyal (2002)<sup>83</sup> argue, gated

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<sup>83</sup> The authors also consider the role of ‘gated spaces’ in Lebanon where the “wealthy clientele finds an environment in which to realize a lifestyle which follows images of Western globalized models” (Glasze & Alkhayyal, 2002, p. 334).

housing estates in Saudi Arabia embody the physical separation between Saudis and Westerners, and between a traditional and Islamic lifestyle and a Western lifestyle characterized by free movement of women and consumption of alcohol and other elements prohibited outside these spaces. In Dubai, gated enclaves are symbols of prestige; they are a symbol of belonging where the ethno-racial hierarchies are subsumed by social status, privileges and Western consumerism (Kathiravelu, 2016).<sup>84</sup>

However, these gated enclaves, sometimes not literally gated, are places where class distinction is embedded in the discourse of everyday life. In 2014, I lived in one of these gated enclaves, where privatisation and securitization were two important elements. To get in and out of the compound, every car had to pass through a gate whose access was limited by barriers that could be opened only by asking permission from the South Asian security guards. I lived in Mirdiff, in the gated enclave of Shorooq, where I was impressed by how everyday life was organized inside it. From my field notes (27<sup>th</sup> October 2014)

This is my first day in Dubai. I live in Shorooq, which along with Al-Ghoroob, form the two biggest compounds of this residential area [Mirdiff, in the outskirts of Dubai]. My accommodation is in a flat at the end of the main road that the night before I did in taxi. This morning I have decided to visit the Mirdiff City Centre and I walked through the compound to get to my destination. By walking I have realized how big this space is, many and many houses, villas, flats and even a big desert area that push the sand on the car of residents that in the morning African men, who get here with bucket full of water on their bicycles, clean under a really hot sun just in the early morning. In this compound, this is the word used by taxi drivers and my housemate to identify this place, I have seen many Westerners, Emiratis, Arabs, and South Asians. My idea is that this is a place where nationalities, because of the residential structure and the shared facilities and spaces, are mixed, and ethno-racial hierarchies between Westerners, Indians, non-Gulf Arabs and Emiratis seem to disappear. However, they are evident in other forms and places. Apart from the clothes and skin colour, it is rather impossible to distinguish Emiratis from Westerners, or other nationalities. My compound is a gated place where the middle-class has established boundaries with the working-class who has free access only because they serve the needs of the residents. They enter because they work as security guards, gardeners, cooks, drivers, taxi-drivers, domestic workers or in maintenance of the roads and buildings. It is a place where among affluent people ethno-racial hierarchies seem to 'disappear' but where class division exists.

However, these are places where the 'inclusion' of low-wage migrants is necessary because they serve the needs of affluent residents and their social interactions rely, among others, on ethno-class hierarchies.

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<sup>84</sup> The lack of research and studies on class inequalities within Westerners and Chinese communities make it complicated to assess the presence of unskilled and semi-skilled Westerners and Chinese in these gated enclaves. However, during my field research I observed Westerners employed as waiters/waitresses or in sales.

In contrast to the gated enclaves, which are the results of neoliberal logic of privatisation and securitisation of the public space, Kathiravelu (2016) underscores how the labour camps also represent ‘gated spaces’. The labour camp represents a gated community where people (South and East Asians, and sometimes Africans) are accommodated and sometimes divided on the grounds of their nationality or ethnic group (Gardner, 2010b), but where there is no difference in terms of social status. They share the same space and ‘enjoy’ the same constraints and difficulties of living in a ‘gated space’ where it is rather difficult to go out. For a researcher, it is not easy to enter these camps, and for the people accommodated in these places, it is not easy to go out because they are situated in the outskirts of Dubai (known as ‘Sonapur’) except when they are transferred by buses to the work sites. In the gated enclaves where residents and workers were, to a certain extent, urged to interact with each other and women and children feel safe (Kathiravelu, 2016), labour camps are places where any kind of relationship between people accommodated in the camps and the ‘others’ (non-residents in the camps) does not exist (Gardner, 2010a). These are places where exclusion is a rule because access is not allowed to everybody and where the interactions are restricted on the grounds of class and nationality.

In Dubai, both enclaves and labour camps are ‘gated spaces’ where there is, to a certain extent, a connection among different nationalities, but gated enclaves include Westerners and many other nationalities, whereas labour camps include mostly South and East Asians. These ‘gated spaces’ could be viewed as inclusive or exclusive but their borders are porous because people can go in and out, and social interactions are determined by gender, class, ‘race’ and ethno-nationality.

### **7.6 The PAD as an open ‘gated space’**

As outlined above, middle-class enclaves and labour camps are conceived of as ‘gated spaces’ whose borders are porous and where ethno-class hierarchies take place (Kathiravelu, 2016). In this section, I discuss the PAD as an inclusive and open space where support and help for low-wage migrants have become one of the main duties of the organization along with the need to affirm and ‘preserve’ ‘Pakistani-ness’.

My aim is to extend the concept of ‘gated spaces’ to the PAD, thus suggesting that it is a space where the common ethno-national and cultural identity represent inclusive components aimed to guarantee cohesion within the community. At the same time, the PAD, as the other migrant associations, is also an open ‘gated space’ because, as it happens in middle-class enclaves and labour camps, interactions and contacts within and outside these spaces occur on a daily basis and in specific circumstances. For example, welfare activities in support of low-wage migrants regardless of their ‘race’, nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion and culture, especially in the labour camps, are a private affair and are managed by the PAD, other migrant associations and NGOs (Buckley, 2013; Kathiravelu, 2016). Considering the PAD as a ‘gated space’ allows understanding how relationships within and outside the migrant associations and communities are developed. This approach, in other words, allows catching its positionality in relation to the whole Pakistani community and acknowledging that belonging is constructed by making and breaking boundaries among communities, groups and spaces (Anthias, 2015). Thus, the PAD as a ‘gated space’ is physically limited by its walls but it is an open space because the welfare activities move beyond its borders.

Migrant associations are places where cultural, religious and national identity tends to be affirmed. They are ‘gated spaces’ where everyday life is articulated by contacts and relationships based on the common ethno-national and cultural identity (Sardinha, 2009). However, as I discuss below, social status is also important in shaping relationships within the same migrant community. The PAD is embedded in a web of connections where all Pakistanis regardless of age, gender, class and religion can feel a sense of belonging. Put differently, the PAD is a ‘gated space’ where all Pakistanis (men, women and children) are included and nobody is excluded. It is an open space where the sense of belonging is constructed on the grounds of a common cultural and national identity and the need to cope with precariousness, complexities and difficulties of everyday life in Dubai. The positionality of the PAD in relation to the whole community (and the Emirati context) was described by Abdallah, who said

...the [Pakistani] community has increased over the years and as I said we have different segments of the community starting from the labourers, so we have blue-collar, we have middle-class and then we have an upper class. So, the association’s challenges are how to bring everyone together as a community and that’s what we do, to create harmony between all the segments... We obviously feel, as a community, that we have a major stake and role to play in this part of the world. I believe that Dubai or UAE itself, is a good example of a global

village where you have different cultures, diverse cultures getting together that blend in such a harmony that you do not see anywhere else in the world. People come from different backgrounds; different cultures and they live together in harmony without any conflict, which I think is very unique in this age (Interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Abdallah emphasized the inclusive role of the PAD, where different classes interact on a daily basis. It is also important to acknowledge that marginalised migrants who live in the labour camps cannot socialize in these organizations/clubs because they are settled down in closed spaces where it is difficult to go out and get to these places. The provision of welfare services and charity are at work in these places, thus bringing those marginalized groups to participate in particular events within the PAD's walls. However, these organizations and clubs do not represent a place for socialization for all Pakistani groups: some people are excluded, and some are included.

The PAD articulates relationships with its members in terms of social cohesion, inclusion and equality. This idea was emphasized by Abdallah, who said

The labourer wing we have, which works on that segment, but they all come to blend in this association itself. We have activities, which are purely designed for labourers. Labourers, who come and are part of the activities, sport activities to get them together. We have certain national activities that actually run by the white-collar workers, labourers, and at the same table, we have the businessmen and investors seated with them having a meal together. So, the role of the association is to blend the community together. We do diverse activities in the labour camps itself. We do medical camps every year, we go to the labour camps, we are actually the only community that does this with the collaboration of the Dubai government, especially on the Labour Day we do that. The first of May we go the labour camps, we have partner hospitals with us, we have six, seven premium hospitals in the town who are partners with us. So we take the medical teams to the labour camps, we do free medical checks, free health advice, we do certain activities, competitions with gifts, and we have meals for them. So all that creates, or at least bridges the gap between us and the labourers (Interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

The PAD is an agent in the public sphere and is a space where ethno-racial hierarchies seem not to exist. As an agent in the public sphere, it has relationships with other migrant organizations and its activities are embedded in a series of events in which some of these organizations are also involved. Abdallah, as a member of the BOT of the PAD, described the collaboration between the association, other migrant organizations and local authorities to support construction workers in the labour camps regardless of their nationality, age and religion. He said

we had the Kerala association, and this happened through the CDA...so various associations or groups, which are registered with the CDA were invited, even we had the Norwegian club

members with us, I think we also had a few Italians also, then we had the Kerala association, they had some people that joined us. So, it is a sort of an open invitation. We would like to have more associations or clubs joining us in this activity, which I think gives a better image of communities getting together for a common scope, especially going to labour camps where you have Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, and Filipinos. So we do not have a distinction who's who and they are all for one category, which is blue-collar workers. So I think it is nice to have different clubs joining together in one activity (Interview with Abdallah, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

The cross-national solidarity is an element of inclusion and social cohesion because migrants support each other regardless of class, nationality and religion. The PAD, as the other migrant associations, is an open 'gated space' because it is inclusive of other (migrant) communities; in spite of its walls, it articulates belonging by interacting within and outside of the Pakistani community.

### **7.7 Ethno-class hierarchies and 'community engagement' within the PAD**

The PAD is an open 'gated space' where, like in the other 'gated spaces', ethno-class hierarchies and divisions take place. In this section, I discuss how these hierarchies are articulated and the divisions existing within the PAD.

The PAD represents a place where 'Pakistani-ness' is 'preserved'. One of the PAD's aim is to create a space for social interactions, and belonging is fuelled by sharing and contributing to activities and events that tend to address the needs of the community, also involving other nationalities. Moreover, the religious dimension is one of the main aspects of the PAD's activities. 'Pakistani-ness' is built by 'preserving' heritage, past, practices, affective and emotional ties to Pakistan's national and cultural history as well as to the religious dimension. It is undeniable that Pakistani national identity is contested because of the ethnic and linguistic (and religious) fragmentation that exists in Pakistan (see chapter 5). If, in Pakistan, the fragmentation has led to ethnic conflicts and an increasing ethno-nationalism (Cohen, 2004), in Dubai, the Pakistani community appears to be more united and cohesive than it might seem in the home country.

However, divisions within the community exist. I have identified two main divisions. First, the PAD is a 'gated space' where borders are porous and where everybody, as said above, can find support and help. But it is also a place where ethno-class hierarchies take

place. To illustrate this aspect, it is important to unpack the class inequalities existing within other migrant communities. For example, within the whole Indian community, the presence of other Indian organizations especially formed on the grounds of regional and religious belonging goes hand in hand with the presence of the Indian Club that was founded in the 1960s.<sup>85</sup> The Pakistani community has only an association; it does not have a club. The difference between association and club is not only semantic but substantially important in terms of exclusion/inclusion. The Indian Club's membership fees are very expensive;<sup>86</sup> the club is very exclusive, and as such, it is only for the most affluent Indian migrants. It is a place where the low-wage Indian migrants are excluded. However, it can be assumed that in the Indian Club, as in the other clubs, class divisions exist because gardeners, security guards, cooks and so on are mostly Indians who are employed in menial jobs. In contrast, the PAD represents the only Pakistani organization in Dubai where there is a strong commitment to create a united and inclusive community. But, there are also class divisions within the Pakistani community, as I explain below. The sole existence of the Indian Club (of the Iranian Club or of the Egyptian Club) is a symptom of class inequalities that exist within the migrant communities in Dubai. It cannot be concluded, however, that class inequalities within the Indian community have not been addressed by the Indian Club through specific initiatives in support of low-wage Indian migrants, and this would have to be investigated in further research about the Indian as well as other migrant communities in Dubai.

In the Indian community, class inequalities are thus evident. The PAD is committed to project the image of a cohesive community. However, class inequalities exist within the Pakistani group but the PAD seems to overcome this aspect by involving some affluent Pakistanis in activities to support the low-wage Pakistani migrants. For example, the PAD takes over the role of 'enculturating' especially the Pakistani taxi drivers. This process has been described by Abdallah.

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<sup>85</sup> There are several Indian organizations, such as the Dubai Kerala Muslim Cultural Center and Indian Association Club, which was established on a piece of land gifted by the then ruler of Dubai. For a list of associations and clubs in Dubai, see <https://www.cda.gov.ae/en/SocialRegulatoryAndLicensing/LicensingSocialClubs/Pages/default.aspx> [accessed 29 August 2016].

<sup>86</sup> To become a regular member, it costs between 18.000 and 19.000 dirhams, depends on the family members and one must have the Indian nationality. See <http://www.indiaclubdubai.com/html/home.asp> [accessed 28 July 2016]. In the last few weeks, the page with the details on membership fees has been removed.

We [PAD] have language courses in the association, especially English which we designed for taxi drivers, we teach them basic words about English, manners, how to deal with their customers, how to dress, how to remain clean, personal hygiene, hand hygiene. All those things which are important because we believe that any Pakistani even if he is a labourer, he is an ambassador of his country. If he interacts out then his action reflects the community, reflects the country, and I think it is important especially living in this part of the world, you interact with so many people on a daily basis. I believe that it is very important for even a labourer, to learn certain rules of the country. Lots of people, out of ignorance actually, break the rules here, they just do not know what the rules are, and sometimes it is a language barrier, they just cannot communicate properly and sometimes they do not know their rights themselves, what the basic rights they have in this part of the world. So, I think it is very important when we actually reach out to them, educate them, tell them “this is your right”, “this is how to behave, this is the law you have to respect”, “you are a guest in this country and you have to respect the law of the land”. So, we design most of the activities in that fashion (Interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

The existence of different social classes within the PAD is thus evident. The need to teach how to behave to the low-wage migrants serves to project the image of a community that cares for their labourers. However, the role of ‘enculturating’ is a prerogative of the highly-skilled Pakistani migrants. Abdallah emphasized the need to learn the ‘rules of the country’ because this is a way to feel part of the context; at the same time it is also important that Pakistani taxi-drivers spread a ‘positive and ‘good’ image of the Pakistani community because they interact every day with different nationalities. The PAD with this kind of activity has invested each single Pakistani with the role of representative and ‘spokesperson’ for the community; hence the need to ‘enculturate’ them so that they cannot *harm* the image of the entire Pakistani community in Dubai.

Despite the involvement of all segments of the Pakistani community in activities and events, in the PAD as well as in the other ‘gated spaces’ (the Indian Club), class inequalities are perpetuated because unskilled and semi-skilled Pakistanis manage the everyday life of the organization whereas highly-skilled Pakistanis are mostly employed in managing the ‘institutional’ aspects such as organizing and managing courses, workshops and contacts with the local authorities. For example, during participant observation in the PAD, I realized that there were a few unskilled Pakistanis who did not speak English (thus inhibiting, to a certain extent, any contacts outside of its walls) and were employed to manage the daily affairs of the association (e. g., cleaning and surveillance). Moreover, the BOT of the PAD is formed by professionals (doctors and businessmen).

These class inequalities reflect a second division based on social commitment within the Pakistani community, which means that some Pakistanis are more or less engaged with



the activities and events organized by the PAD than others. At the beginning, I thought that ‘community engagement’ was linked to a different way to conceive of Pakistani identity especially on ethnic and regional basis. But in conversations with my participants, I acknowledged that ethnicity and regionalism were not important insofar as they defined their ‘Pakistani-ness’ as devoid of any ethnic and/or regional dimension (see chapter 6). This was also acknowledged by John, the key informant of the Pakistani professional group (see chapter 2), when he replied to my emails in which I asked to explain the division that I recognized when I was carrying out my field research in Dubai.<sup>87</sup> He wrote

In Dubai ethnic dimension is not important as all Pakistanis consider themselves as Pakistanis first and do not pay importance to their ethnicity. Yes, there is more of a political divide which is based on their political inclination and not in ethnicity...Pakistanis in Dubai are very politically conscious and have their political learnings (emails received by John, 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2016).

John emphasized the importance of ‘unity within diversity’ and he considered the division within the Pakistani community as related to different political stances. The division became evident in the PAD where, during my field research (see chapter 2), Bushra expressed anger and dissatisfaction with some members of the Pakistani community blaming lack of interest in the difficulties that some of their members suffered every day. Her anger and discontent were directed mainly towards some members of the PPW (see chapter 6) because they were detached from the activities of the association. As John said to me, some members of the PAD have “a feeling of envy because they consider us [members of the PPW] to be elitist” (Interview 8<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

During my field research, in the PAD I never saw any Pakistani professionals that I had interviewed. This pushed me to acknowledge that the division was mainly based on the existence of different interests at stake and especially on the negative image projected outside by the PAD that could undermine the credibility of Pakistani professionals and their businesses. The division takes place between two groups: the PAD and PPW. The latter is viewed as an elitist group, and the former has been defined by one of my participants as a “fundamentalist association” (from my field notes, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2014), because of their religious engagement, and a “big politicized” (Interview with Naseer, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2015)

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<sup>87</sup> During the analysis and writing up phases, I realized that I needed to ask further questions on the internal division. Thus, I decided to email John to get explanations on this aspect because he was the first person that raised this point (see chapter 2).

association linked to the Pakistani government, even though, as noted in chapter 2, Abdallah criticized what Khalaf, the member of the Pakistani Consulate told me about the ‘happy life’ of Pakistani construction workers in the labour camps. This internal ‘conflict’ was partially explained by John, who said

[there is] a feeling of envy because they [PAD] consider us [PPW] to be elitist...they have politics, they have two or three different groups, they have very acrimonious elections every three years...there is a lot of bickering between different groups...We do not want a fighting...they were fighting in the media, in the newspapers giving, making accusations against each other. So I called them [members of the PAD], I spoke to them, and I said “look why are people doing this? It is a matter of the community, keep it inside the community, you do not have to call the newspapers, ...I am saying that as Pakistanis, as a community if we have any issue, keep it within the community; you should not spread it outside”...We escape from this, we do not want to get at all in riffraff...This is the difference between us. Now the association want to build this big hall for events. They started this project seven years ago, they did not have money, they came to us about four years back and said: “please, help us”. We said, “look, we will help you but keep this hall as a community hall, with an independent board to manage that. So it does not become political that you want to use it only for your purpose”. They said “yes”...and then they disappeared. Two years back, they again came back, and said: “please help us, our work stopped because we did not have money. And we know that you, people [PPW], have credibility, and network to raise millions for us. We need seven million dirhams”. We said “ok but please let’s keep this independent, no riffraff...no fighting”... Then we raised three millions...So the credibility is what they lacked and it was what we have and they are envious of that. We can raise millions because of the network we have and because people trust us. The people who support us know that we are people of integrity, people who are working for good causes, we do not have any politics, we do not have any agenda, we stir from national politics, we do not encourage any political involvement of people (Interview with John, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

John identified the ‘conflict’ within the community as a matter of power relations between the different groups to manage the interests and affairs of the PAD. This ‘conflict’, which he attached to a specific group, was never attached to an explicit person, but it became visible outside of the PAD’s walls. For John, this was a symptom of weakness that should have remained within the community. The rationale of John’s reasoning relies on the prestige and credibility of the community, especially of the PPW, which is a wing of the PAD that is actively involved in activities to raise money and that gathers together affluent and wealthy Pakistani migrants. The PPW possesses and mobilizes its symbolic and economic capital to help the whole Pakistani community (see below). Disclosing outside the internal divisions means ridiculing and compromising the credibility of the entire community. This intra-community division was acknowledged by some of my participants. But for Abdallah, who talked to me as an authoritative and authorized spokesperson of the PAD, the community was united and cohesive; ‘conflicts’ might happen but they do not undermine the unity of

the entire Pakistani community. For example, John said that the Auditorium (see above) was built through money raised by the PPW among its members and contacts, whereas Abdallah, the key informant of the PAD said: “It was all from the community, not a single penny was taken from any other group, or association, or government and I can tell you that the community is so vibrant and ready to help” (Interview, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2015). Abdallah emphasized the cohesion and support of the entire community but he did not recognize the considerable contribution given by the PPW. He did not mention that members of the PAD, after starting the construction of the building and having realized that they could not complete the work, turned to the PPW and its wealthy supporters in order to obtain further funding.

The different perspectives between Abdallah and John might be interpreted as two different ways of conceiving of the Pakistani community of Dubai. The former, in my view, seems to not want to set boundaries between the different wings within the whole Pakistani community (or maybe he wants to conceal to a foreign researcher the existing divisions); the latter seems to want to demarcate and highlight boundaries between the two groups.<sup>88</sup>

As mentioned earlier, in the PAD I never met any Pakistani professionals that I had interviewed; my first impression of the PPW, which took shape in the process of interviewing some Pakistan professionals who are members of the wing, was that of an elitist group detached from the everyday life of the poor and ‘needy’ Pakistanis. However, this impression revealed to be false when I asked John if activities for the poor Pakistanis were also a prerogative of the PPW. He said

...we do lots of social work for them...we support poor Pakistani families who are not able to pay the school fees. So in the last seven years approximately we have raised about 10 million dirhams and supported five hundred children for the school fees...What happens is that lots of the Pakistanis are poor, they have low salaries but many children. And it happens many times that they decide to send the sons to school, and not the daughters because they cannot pay the fees, so we say no. Send the daughters...we pay fees directly to the school. So we do such social work, then we help out people at times have health issues, they do not have insurance, they need treatments, we have Pakistanis with serious problems, so we help them. We also help people who come looking for employment or they lose their job, or need to find a job because we have good ties and we can help out (Interview with John, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

John emphasized how the PPW is socially engaged with the Pakistani community. To a certain extent, he underlined the social commitment of the professional wing that Bushra,

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<sup>88</sup> This aspect should need further research.

during our conversation in the PAD had omitted to describe when she manifested her disappointment for the lack of interest and engagement showed by some members of the community (see above).

The PAD is a place that, to a certain extent, tends to perpetuate class inequalities, and this results, for example, from the labour division within the association where unskilled and semi-skilled fellow nationals are employed in everyday affairs and highly-skilled individuals are employed in managerial and other higher-ranking roles. An intra-community division is evident between the PAD and the PPW, which is the most economically influential Pakistani group in Dubai. However, both groups mobilize their resources to support their 'needy' fellow nationals. This is where the Pakistani community expresses its unity in spite of their internal divisions, which do not undermine the sense of belonging because the PAD is an aggregate of different wings, classes, groups, social categories that construct their belonging primarily on the grounds of shared values, customs, culture, language, religion and symbols (Cohen 1985).

## **7.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have addressed the role and importance of migrant associations in the GCC countries. By discussing the politics of recognition, I have unfolded the positionality of the PAD in relation to the Emirati context and ethno-class hierarchies. In detail, I have discussed the role of the PAD in a broader perspective to articulate its embeddedness in the history of Dubai where the presence of migrants was recognized, at the beginning of the twentieth century, by the local rulers because of their political and economic contribution to the development and stability of the Emirate. However, in the 1970s, recognition has given way to gratitude which means that the local rulers appreciated the support of the Pakistani community by gifting a piece of land but this did not entail erasing the hierarchical social structure (top-down perspective).

I have also discussed the PAD as a 'gated space', which leads immediately to the idea of a space limited by physical elements (such as walls, bushes, gates). But more than that, 'gated space' should be conceived of as a metaphor, especially in relation to the PAD

and migrant associations, which are places that can be exclusive or inclusive and where class inequalities are still persistent (see the dichotomy between association and club), but they are also places in which unity and cohesion is granted primarily on the grounds of ethno-national and cultural identity. The PAD is physically a 'gated space' but, at the same time, it is metaphorically an open space where cross-national solidarity and the involvement of different organizations in events and activities to help and support poor migrants are examples of its fluidity, dynamism and of the porosity of its borders (bottom-up perspective).

**CHAPTER EIGHT**  
**MIGRATION, BELONGING AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE UAE**

**8.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapters, I have analysed the presence of foreigners (chapter 3) in the setting of my field research (chapter 4), I have then discussed in detail the presence of Pakistanis and especially professionals in Dubai by underscoring how belonging is constructed (chapters 5 and 6) and the role and divisions within the PAD (chapter 7). In this chapter, I analyse the impact of migration on the Emirati identity, which intertwines with the presence of migrants because they also contribute towards shaping the Emirati national identity (*al-hawiyya al-waṭaniyya al-imārāṭiyya*).

This chapter unfolds strategies adopted by the UAE to cope with perceived challenges posed by migration and globalization to national identity. My aim is to analyse the process of construction<sup>89</sup> of the Emirati identity in light of the changes occurring within the country by examining the cultural dynamics that drive this process. Moreover, I move beyond the dichotomy between Emiratis and non-Emiratis by arguing the need to ‘include’ non-Emiratis in the discourse on the Emirati national identity.

My argument is that the construction of the Emirati identity seems to identify and categorize individuals in two groups: Emiratis and non-Emiratis. It also serves to strengthen the role and position of certain (tribal) groups, and rulers, who embody the stability, cohesion, and represent both the political and cultural identity of the country. The construction of the Emirati national identity is profoundly rooted in the past history and collective memory of the UAE. Interestingly, the Emirati national identity adapts and responds to changes taking place in the UAE society. I define this process as ‘nationalization’ (*tawḥīn*), thus suggesting that the construction of the Emirati national identity occurs by reinterpreting the past and recovering cultural heritage (*turāth*), traditions, customs and collective memory. Moreover, Dubai has reshaped and prioritized specific elements of its history and heritage (e. g. pre-Islamic history, and the links with the ancient

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<sup>89</sup> I use the verb construct (and the word construction) with the same meaning used by Parekh (1994). He uses this word in relation to the need of constructing national identity not *ex novo* but by recovering the past, reinterpreting the past and adapting it to the present needs of society.

civilizations) in order to deal with challenges posed by internal and external factors. Dubai tends to emphasize specific aspects because they also contribute towards reshaping the Emirati national identity. Nevertheless, as discussed in the chapter 6, Pakistani professionals feel that they belong to the Emirati context. Thus, I argue that they also contribute, through civic engagement, towards shaping and enhancing the Emirati national identity as well as developing their belonging to the local context.

The chapter draws on the extant literature on migration in the GCC countries, the concept of national identity and on my qualitative data collection. It is structured as follows. Based upon Parekh's approach on national identity (see chapter 3), I discuss the concept of the nationalization of culture. Migration has led to a demographic imbalance, and globalization has challenged the discourse on the Emirati national identity, I address these issues by examining some elements (e. g. camel racing and traditional dress) aimed at 'identifying' who belongs and who does not belong, and strategies adopted to deal with the perceived challenges to national identity. I also analyse the role of Emirati women in reshaping the discourse on Emirati identity. I discuss the historical revival as an element enhanced by the Emirate of Dubai in order to reshape its emirate-level identity. Lastly, I discuss how Pakistani professionals contribute towards shaping the discourse on the Emirati national identity

## **8.2 The nationalization of culture**

As said in chapter 3, for Parekh (1995a), national boundaries are weakened by globalization and the traditional system of values and norms is experiencing intense changes. However, when a society has undergone profound changes, it finds a way to reconstitute itself by emphasizing some aspects of its character, past, memory and by developing new tendencies and starts a process of self-creation (Parekh, 1995a). In this section, I discuss some sociocultural aspects that have been enhanced in order to spread a sense of security and stability among the local population in light of the changes occurring in the UAE.

The traditional Arab and Islamic identity of the UAE is perceived in 'danger' because of the growing presence of foreigners, globalization and the increasing influence of Western culture (Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, ECSSR, 2009). Social,

economic, political and cultural transformations induced by the oil economy and globalization have led the UAE authorities to opt for cultural revival as a strategy designed to reinterpret their history and traditional way of life in light of such transformations (Khalaf, 2000). Cultural revival relates to the concept of the nationalization of culture (Löfgren, 1989), which is a process whereby the language, traditions, history, myths, values, customs and norms are internalized by members of a society, and they become part of the collective memory. It is a process in which a boundary is established between those who belong and those who do not belong. All elements that represent a shared way of life or a shared culture are revitalized and reinterpreted in time of ‘crisis’, when members of a society feel a sense of insecurity, a detachment from their country, and their boundaries are blurred by factors such as globalization or migration. The nationalization of culture is firmly related to the political discourse. For example, Davidson (2008b) and Khalaf (2008), argue that in the UAE, the rulers take over the discourse on national identity, thus legitimating their leadership and using cultural and symbolic elements to assert their political role. Cultural revival aims at reconstituting cultural identity as well as political identity. The rulers act “as both patrons-cum-guardians of national heritage as well as state modernisers” (Khalaf 2008, p. 41). The rapid changes occurring in the UAE in the last forty years have engendered the urge to reinterpret and exhibit the past. This process has occurred by establishing museums and heritage villages, encouraging the use of the traditional dress and reproducing old traditions such as camel racing.

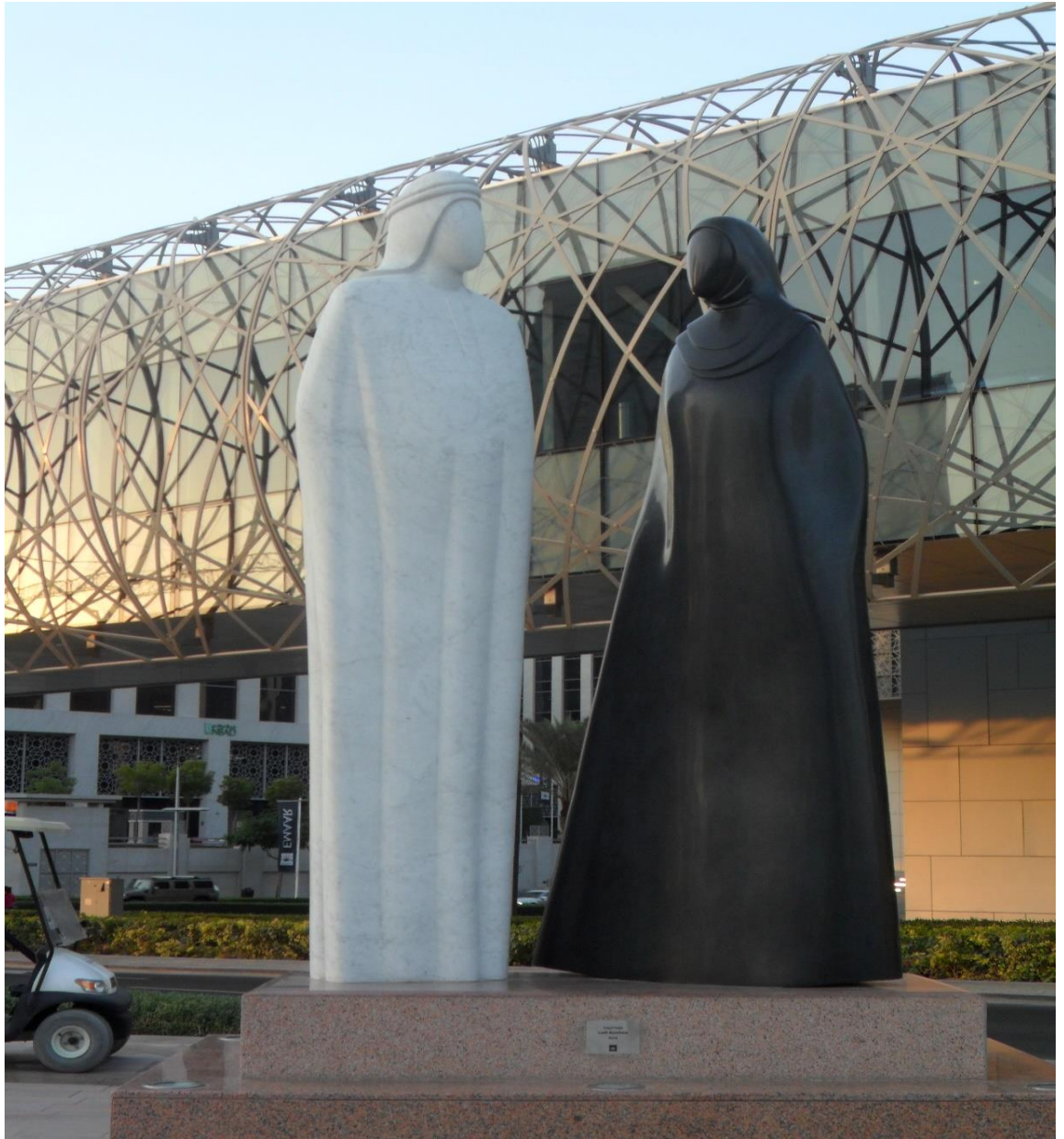
In the UAE, museums and heritage villages serve to produce and anchor Emirati cultural identity to a historical background in order to display its ‘authentic’ (*asāla*) image devoid of the elements of the colonial past (Cooke, 2014). Museums and heritage villages serve to instill pride among locals in their culture. They tend to describe the history from ancient times to the formation of the nation (Cooke, 2014). Museums represent a collective memory of the past and they become a place where such a memory is ‘stored’ (Khalaf, 2002). For Emiratis, heritage villages embody a lively exhibition to capture and experience their past. For Khalaf (2002, p. 28), heritage villages represent a nostalgic discourse in which local actors perform their past, and it is performed “primarily for themselves, and secondly for tourists”. Museums and heritage villages encapsulate the educational discourse because they tend to educate young generations about the cultural lifestyle of their ancestors (Khalaf, 2002). Young generations are not aware of their history and traditional way of life before



oil. For nationals, museums and heritage villages are important because they tell young generations who they are and where they come from (Bristol-Rhys, 2010b). Heritage villages display a cultural discourse because they sometimes become open theater where nationals tell stories of their past (Khalaf, 2002). Moreover, these villages also generate a political discourse because they celebrate national events and the image of the ruling families is enhanced through poetry (Khalaf, 2002), which tends to represent the past, the feats of the ruling families, benevolence and the paternalistic role of the rulers.

The Emirati cultural identity is blending with growing influence of Western lifestyle and materialistic culture. Dress code has become a way to mark boundaries between nationals and non-nationals. For Khalaf (2005), when different ethnic groups interact in a social context, it is necessary to distinguish one group from another, to establish boundaries so that differences among different ethnic groups become visible. Emirati dress becomes a marker of Emirati cultural identity, and as such, it articulates the discourse on national identity on different levels. Emirati dress encapsulates the historical, Islamic, socio-political and cultural discourses (Khalaf, 2005). Dress code is perceived as a means that establishes boundaries and regulates how nationals and non-nationals “should behave towards each other in different context as well as their mutual expectations and obligations” (Parekh, 1995a, p. 258). Dress (the white *kandūra* for men and black *'abāya* for women) has become a marker of Emirati cultural identity as well as a marker of ethnic belonging, and it also serves to uniform all Emiratis with no distinctions in terms of class or tribal affiliation (however, differences are evident in terms of style and quality, Khalaf, 2005) (Picture 8.1).

**Picture 8.1 The Emirati dress. Statues in Shaykh Muhammad Bin Rashid Blvd**



It has become a way to embody Emirati identity. Kate, one Emirati woman whom I interviewed, said

Identity here [UAE], you could say the young generation are very proud of who they are and where they come from. I think being a minority this pushes us to want to be different and to show how we are the local population. That's why you find, for instance, many young Emiratis still wearing the local dress even in the government it has become like a common uniform. So we can preserve it (Interview with Kate, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

Kate emphasized the role that the traditional dress played for the youth, especially in a context where nationals are a minority in their own country and it sets boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’; it is a way to affirm their belonging and ‘preserve’ Emirati identity.

Camel racing is an expression of cultural revival, which is widespread throughout the GCC countries (Picture 8.2). It represents a sense of continuity with the past because the oil economy has swept away the traditional way of life based on pastoralism and agriculture; it is a link between tradition and modernity (Khalaf, 1999). Thus, camel racing embodies traditions and “values for the political enculturation of young generations” (Khalaf, 2000, p. 258). It has also shifted symbolically from the economic realm to the cultural one, even though the economic realm is still alive and well (Khalaf, 1999). It serves to spread a sense of security and belonging in spite of a growing process of integration of the UAE market into the global economy. Camel racing is a way to express Emirati cultural identity profoundly rooted in local traditions and customs. Moreover, the participation of the ruling families in some important events of camel racing over the year underlines the political discourse that links cultural identity and political identity (Khalaf, 2000).

**Picture 8.2 Image of Camel racing exhibited in a metro station**



Cultural revival is the recovery of ‘authentic’ culture (Eriksen, 2010). Museums and heritage villages, dress code and camel racing (and other traditional sports such as falconry) represent the ‘authentic’ cultural identity rooted profoundly in the local traditions. By reinterpreting and displaying the past, the Emirati authorities are trying to cope with the detachment and sense of insecurity perceived by UAE nationals. By recovering the past and encouraging the use of the traditional dress in public, they exhibit their ‘authentic’ culture and differentiate themselves from foreigners. In the UAE, the nationalization of culture, however, is a way to restore the past (cultural identity) as well as a way to legitimate the role of the ruler (political identity) and his paternalistic role within the UAE society (Khalaf, 1992).

### **8.3 Women and Emirati identity**

The changes occurred in the UAE in the last years have led the authorities to question the importance and depth of such changes and their impact on people’s life. In the UAE, everyone speaks “of change as a fact of life” (Longva, 1997, p. 190). Public discourses and people’s narratives are permeated by the notion of change, by how the UAE society was before oil was discovered and how it has changed afterwards. Parekh (1995a) argues that when changes occur slowly people have time to assimilate and adapt.

However, in the UAE, such changes have been rapid and profound; they have severely affected social relations and structures (Parekh, 1995a). This is why nationals feel a sense of detachment from their country, they fear that their identity, values, practices, beliefs might ‘dissolve’ (Dresch, 2005). This anxiety is a common narrative in women’s stories from the older generation (Bristol-Rhys, 2010b). In this context of rapid and profound changes, a cultural and social vacuum has been created because old familiar and tribal bonds have lost their importance (at least partly). The UAE has become a society where people

are divided now; we [Emiratis] are not, as I think we used to be, just families, clans and tribe; now we are classes of people. There is the ruling family; there are the very rich that are attached to them, less rich but still rich; then I guess what you would call upper middleclass; and then we have lower class people (interview cited in Bristol-Rhys, 2010, pp. 75-76).

During my field research, I asked my Emirati participants the importance of the Emirati national identity. They expressed a strong emotional attachment to their traditions and

customs, but, at the same time, they also expressed the ‘fear of erosion’ of their own identity. Lisa, for example, said

I think it is really important to preserve our identity. It is not like holding on to the past, but we should take the past and develop it rather than erasing it or removing it at all or forgetting everything. I think it is really, really important, I think we should save the language. I studied all in English, in school in University and now I am a bit struggling with the language. I know a lot of people who cannot express themselves [in Arabic] they just can express themselves in English; you know have half and half. Some of them only know Arabic and some of them only know English, but for my experience I know English, because you read only English books you watch only English channels and music it is all in English. So you get attached to the West world and to the English perspective or thinking and stuff like that (Interview with Lisa, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Lisa emphasized the risk of being ‘uprooted’; the Arabic language, which might viewed as a resource and a marker of their national identity, risks disappearing because of the spreading of English in everyday life.

In the state-building process, women play a key role because they are seen as “housemakers and the primary educators of children” (Carvahlo Pinto, 2012, p. 23). In traditional society, women are considered a repository of old traditions, customs, beliefs, practices and family values (Carvahlo Pinto, 2012). In the Arab Gulf area, women have improved their status within society (see chapter 3), however, their role and expectations are still limited by religious and cultural norms (Krause, 2009). In the UAE, women are considered “mothers of the nation” (Krause 2009, p. 26) and they represent the backbone of the UAE society. Women’s role and their position are based upon a family structure, in which the “head of state, typically seen as the nation’s ‘father’, leads his ‘children’ to prosperity and the good life within the national ‘family’ that transcends private and public” (Krause, 2009, p. 25) sphere. Thus, the UAE nation is seen as a family, and in this context, women are seen as mothers whose aim is to maintain the traditional family structure and values (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Dresch, 2005). This is one way in which the UAE authorities pursue the construction of the Emirati identity.

In the UAE, women are active members of civil society and they exercise their role through government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGO), which are mostly created by Shaykh’s wives and daughters (Krause, 2009). Through these organizations, led by a Shaykha (who is a wife or daughter of a Shaykh) but supported financially by her husband(s) or father, a Shaykha “is expected to act in a way that is in line with the support of her husband’s or father’s political and economic interests” (Krause 2009,

p. 28). These organizations serve to the Shaykh to underline the duties that Emirati women have towards their nation and they have to sacrifice themselves for the nation's welfare (Krause 2009). However, in order to enhance the role of women, as 'mothers of the nation', it is also important to provide them with adequate education; as such, women can contribute culturally to create a solid and united nation. It entails developing women's skills and abilities in the face of threaten posed by migration and globalization. In this sense, the state-directed organizations are subordinate to the political and economic interests of the nation (Krause, 2009).

Apart from the encouragement of using traditional dress by the UAE authorities both for men and women (Emiratis, men and women, working in the public sector are required by law to wear the traditional dress), it is evident that there is a gender-based task, that is the process of construction of national identity involves men and women but from different perspectives (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Emirati men address political, and to a lesser extent also cultural, issues in terms of their participation in the management of collective affairs, whereas women are politically disempowered but culturally empowered because as 'mothers of the nation' they embody and reinterpret old traditions and customs.

#### **8.4 The emirate-level identity. The case of Dubai**

Having discussed the measures adopted at the national level to spread a sense of security among Emiratis, in this section, I focus on the strategies adopted by the Emirate of Dubai in order to preserve its identity. As of 1971, when the UAE federation was created, it was soon clear that each Emirate had its autonomy (Van der Meulen, 1997; Davidson, 2005).

The Emirate of Dubai has reinterpreted the local history in light of the changes occurring in the country. Between 2012 and 2013, Dubai population was estimated 2,213,845 (nationals and non-nationals).<sup>90</sup> Dubai is the second largest Emirate in terms of land size; it occupies 4 percent of the country (Van der Meulen, 1997). Before the discovery of oil, in 1966 (Rugh, 2007), the major economic activities in Dubai were pearl diving, fishing and trading. The merchant class has been important in the Emirate's economy thus

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<sup>90</sup> <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-dubai-estimates-of-total-population-by-sex-and-age-groups-at-various-dates-1993-2000-2005-2012-2013/> [accessed 09 November 2016].

contributing towards rendering Dubai a multi-cultural Emirate (Vora, 2013). The presence of merchants from the Indian Ocean and Persia and trade with the African continent has occurred during the pre-oil economy and are not a result of the oil economy (Vora, 2013). The traditional activities, such as camel racing and falconry, have been revitalized as elements of old and ‘authentic’ local traditions, and the “prehistory of the UAE is now written as far back as five thousand years” (Vora, 2013, p. 55). As Vora (2013) argues, the past is reinterpreted but devoid of all those elements and symbols that may reconcile the Emirate's multi-cultural and colonial past with the present situation.

In 1999, the Sheikh Muhammad bin Rashid Al-Maktum Centre for Cultural Understanding (Picture 8.3) was opened with the aim of “familiarizing expatriates with various facets of local culture” (Lawson & al-Naboodah, 2008, p. 16).

**Picture 8.3 The Centre for Cultural Understanding**



The building has a main structure, where there are offices, a kitchen and the *majlis*, which is a receiving area for visitors and it is a very common area in traditional Arab houses, where,

upon my visits to the Centre, I spent some time drinking Arab coffee and eating local pastries (Picture 8.4).

**Picture 8.4** The *majlis* within the Centre



The Centre is a sort of ‘oasis’ in the Al Fahidi area in Bastakiya district, in Bur Dubai, on the western side of the Dubai Creek. I visited the Centre and the few traditional buildings, surrounding the main building, restored with the aim to display Dubai’s history and traditional way of life.

I participated in two tours in the area close to the Centre and the Creek, and the guides illustrated how locals lived before oil was discovered, and the key role played by the Creek in everyday life of the locals. During the tours, the guides never mentioned the multi-cultural past, the links with the Indian sub-continent, they illustrated how people lived, what they did and how their life changed since then. The Centre displays the old traditional way of life where fishing and pearl diving were the mainly economic activities, and people left their homes and embarked on their ships along the Creek to go fishing (Al-Sayegh, 1998). I



walked around the area of Al Fahidi and, in a certain way, I saw how people lived in the past especially their traditional houses. However, all buildings that we visited near the Centre have been renovated and restored in order to, I would say, remind locals where they come from, who they are in spite of the huge wealth and luxury life that some of them live today (Picture 8.5).

**Picture 8.5 A view of Al Fahidi, near the Centre for Cultural Understanding**



During these tours, I realized that this area has been restored primarily for locals and secondary for tourists. In the construction of national identity, all Emiratis are included, and the UAE government encourages the participation of all nationals in the nation-building process (Findlow, 2005). The guides said that some schools go visiting the Centre in order to teach young generation of Emiratis and foreign children local traditions and customs. In my view, this Centre is useful in the strategy of restoring the past, recover the old ‘authentic’ traditions.

When I left the metro station of Al Fahidi, I walked along Al-Mankhool Road (to get to the Centre) and looking around I realized that most shops, restaurants and a few hotels are run by South Asians and Persians (my personal observations). This Centre is situated in an urbanized area where most people are foreign workers with a low income (Picture 8.6).

**Picture 8.6 A view of Al-Mankhool Road**



The Centre is located in a multi-cultural area of Dubai, near the Creek where in the past seafaring activities and commercial exchanges took place. It serves to create a blending and inclusion between Emiratis and non-Emiratis. Its aim is to involve foreigners (tourists and migrant workers) in their activities to show who they (nationals) are and that they are like everybody. Kate, who worked in the Centre, said to me

This center is very important for Emirati identity because what it does, it helps clear the idea of Emiratis from the expats perspective, so we help them fix understandings, tell them the reason why we do these things and help them understand look we are just people like everybody else. If you want to have an Emirati friend, you have to come and look for us because we are too small, we do not have too many people to find, especially the young generation, the ones that speak English (Interview with Kate, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

Kate underscored that the Centre has the role of ‘enculturating’ foreigners on local traditions and history thus contributing towards facilitating interactions between Emiratis and non-Emiratis.

It seems that Dubai authorities have adopted a strategy aimed at reinterpreting their past and old traditions but devoid of all those elements that might represent a link with the Asian and African world. They have ‘swept away’ their multi-cultural history in order to affirm their ‘authentic’ roots in the Arab and Islamic world. However, in this strategy, the Islamic references are also marginal. For instance, the consuming of alcohol is allowed in international hotels (Davidson, 2007). During my field research, for example, I never listened to the *adhān*, which is the call to prayer, by loudspeakers on mosques. In this regard, Jamal said

It has been deliberately attempted of not developing a culture that it is completely congruous with Islām. It is a modern worship of Islām that it is practised here generally, where accommodation, where a spirit of liberal values these things are more important than a strict adherence to Islamic principles. At the end of the day, they have given you the choice to practise your religion for the Muslims as such, and given equal space for other religions to coexist with Islām. You have some churches here, two Hindu temples (Interview with Jamal, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014).

Jamal underlined that Dubai has, in a certain way, de-emphasized its Islamic identity, and its open-minded and liberal *milieu* has been important to its economic growth and development. Moreover, the existence of Christian Orthodox church, the Catholic church in Oud Metha and the Hindu Temple on the west bank of the Dubai Creek, are examples of the coexistence of different religions in the Emirate. As mentioned in chapter 7, their coexistence does not entail being recognized as peers in social life. In other words, their presence is *tolerated* but it does not erase the hierarchical social structure.

Dubai is a multi-cultural Emirate where foreign workers represent about 90 percent of the total population (Al Awad, 2008). Because of its economic strategies and activities, Dubai is a liberal *milieu* where economic needs and religious principles are accommodated. However, because of the presence of many foreign workers, local authorities have revitalized local history and traditions but ‘neglecting’ those elements of Dubai’s multi-cultural past. Even in terms of Islamic rules Dubai is more liberal (Davidson, 2007) than Abu Dhabi and Sharjah. These aspects are evident in the *mélange* between tradition and modernity (Picture 8.7).

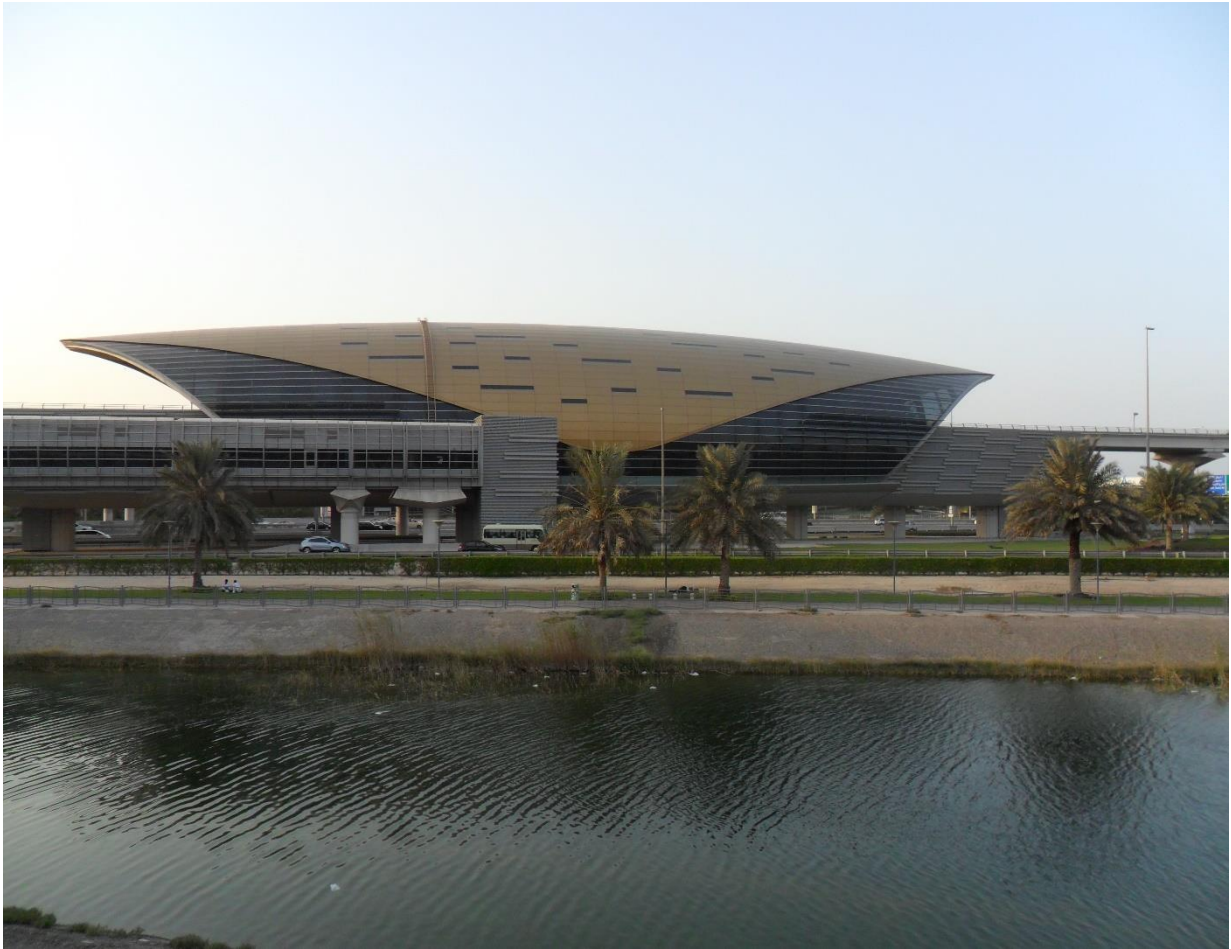
**Picture 8.7 Image of traditional life before oil exhibited in a metro station**



In my field notes, I wrote

In Dubai, modernity is fused with tradition (Picture 8.8). I have been impressed by the astonishing modernity of Dubai metro stations, but when I have walked inside I have realized that in some stations the past is still alive and well because it is displayed on the walls where the traditional way of life is ‘frozen’ in some pictures but revitalized by exhibiting it (4<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

**Picture 8.8** The external *façade* of the metro station of Dubai Mall



It can be argued that the decision of Dubai authorities to reinterpret their past and local traditions but ‘diluting’ its multi-cultural nature and even creating a liberal environment in terms of Islamic principles, reflect two main choices. First, it serves to create a liberal economic *milieu* in order to attract investments and investors from non-Islamic countries as well.

Second, it serves to create an ideological and cultural boundary between who belongs and who does not belong. If Dubai authorities had instead chosen to enhance multi-cultural past and Islamic identity, they would have spread a sense of belonging and cohesion between many Muslim foreign workers (Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis, Arabs, Indonesians and many others) and locals. This would have meant involving most foreign workers in the collective memory, in the history of the Emirate and of the country. Instead, migrants have to perceive their presence as temporary, and their status is “of permanent impermanence” (Ali 2010, p. 162). Perhaps, this would also have undermined the authority of the ruling elite.

However, if strategically the exclusion of its multi-cultural elements could play a positive role in cementing the Emirati national identity, foreign workers are an integral part of Dubai and the Emirati society and, as Pakistani professionals told me, they feel that they belong to the Emirati context regardless of a formal membership (see chapter 6). During my field research, I observed that the prehistoric past and heritage are recovered as autochthonous elements and expression of the Emirati ‘authenticity’. One such example is the Crossroads of Civilizations Museum where it is clearly displayed and exhibited the variety of civilizations that have historically contributed to the growth and the diversity of the entire Gulf region.<sup>91</sup> This strategy aimed at ‘creating’ local and national histories in which autochthonous elements were considered as more prominent and important than the recent and multi-cultural past in which, to a certain extent, some foreign workers might identify themselves.

Every society contains internal diversity (Parekh, 1995a), and this might lead to an overt or covert conflict, or people might coexist peacefully. In the case of the UAE, this internal diversity, represented, amongst others, by the seven Emirates with their characteristics and peculiarities, does not ‘compromise’ the discourse on the Emirati national identity.<sup>92</sup> The seven Emirates share some features, elements, a collective memory, past and history, which render the coexistence ‘possible’ and contribute towards creating ‘internal stability’ embodied by the presence of the ruler (Davidson, 2005). A ruler wields power only when he is able to mobilize patrimonial networks, personal, cultural, religious, and ideological resources (Davidson 2005). The ruler represents and defends the interests of his Emirate and those of the federation.<sup>93</sup> He takes over the discourse on political and cultural identity (Khalaf, 2002). He proposes initiatives, and establishes (with other institutional bodies) rules in order to manage collective affairs (political role). He also acts as a ‘guardian’

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<sup>91</sup> This is how the Museum is described: “Ancient peoples in the past, without International Law, without Diplomatic missions, without schools to teach foreign languages and without international platforms to bring the world together; could exchange goods, even when all come from different ethnic backgrounds, beliefs and religion” <http://www.themuseum.ae/story> [accessed 17 November 2016].

<sup>92</sup> I am not saying that there is no opposition and discontent among Emiratis, but, the UAE is an autocratic regime in which there is a “subtle controls placed on almost civil society organizations, religious groups, media organizations, and workers’ associations” (Davidson, 2005, p. 70). Thus, there is little leeway to oppose openly to the authorities.

<sup>93</sup> The rulers of the seven Emirates are members of the Supreme Council of Rulers (SCR), which elects the President of the federation. Because of the institutional apparatus, at the top of the decision-making structure there is the President of the federation, who is always a member of the Al-Nuhayyan ruling family of Abu Dhabi that is “the largest contributor to both the federal budget and the UAE’s GDP” (Davidson, 2005, p. 189). The six emirates sometimes, in order to ‘survive’, need economic support of Abu Dhabi. Thus, they support federal policy and safeguard the emirate-level interests.

of old traditions, and customs (cultural role). He manages the cultural discourse by participating in some events (e.g. camel racing), promoting initiatives (e.g. poetry contests), and investing in cultural activities and organizations (e.g. the Centre for Cultural Understanding in Dubai) aimed at enhancing cultural identity.

### **8.5 Civic engagement and belonging among Pakistani professionals in Dubai**

Despite the construction of a sense of belonging by the UAE authorities, which aimed to distinguish Emiratis from non-Emiratis and the nationalization of culture, the discourse on the Emirati national identity cannot prescind from the presence of migrants. Expressions, such as ‘nationalism for nationals’ (Koch, 2015) and ‘citizenship as belonging’ (Koch, 2015), serve to grasp the internal dynamics within a nation-state. However, they limit the idea of belonging to individuals who share a legal status, culture, ideas and practices thus excluding the ‘others’ (Koch, 2015). In this section, I discuss how the discourse on the Emirati national identity is entangled in the presence of Pakistanis (but it also relates to other foreigners) in the country.

Before discussing the link between migrants and the Emirati national identity, it is important to define the concept of nationalism (Özkirimli 2010). Primordialists argue that nationalism derives from primordial ‘givens’ (e. g. place of birth, kinship) (Geertz, 1993); as such, they “provide a basis for an easy ‘affinity’ with other peoples from the same background” (Brass, 1991, cited in Hutchinson & Smith, 1994, p. 83). For primordialists, nations were inherent in the human condition and they were viewed “as forms of extended kinship and as such were ubiquitous and coeval with the family” (Smith 2009, p. 8). Modernists argue that nationalism and nations are modern phenomena that reflect economic, social and political changes. For modernists (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 2008), nationalism postulated the existence of a community with a shared culture, where the loyalty of citizens was primarily directed towards the state and its institutional apparatus. Ethno-symbolists emphasize the crucial role of ethnic symbolism (language, religion, kinship) and the role of ethnic ties as “basis and point of departure for the creation of many nations” (Smith 2009, p. 27). As such, nationalism relies on symbols, traditions and customs, thus suggesting its predominant cultural dimension (Smith, 2009). Since the 1990s, ‘new’ approaches, such as

the reproduction of nationalism in everyday life (Billig 1995) and feminist approaches (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989), have adopted an interdisciplinary perspective, and new methodological approaches in order to explain the complexities and dynamics of nations and nationalism. These ‘new’ approaches have tried “to rectify the elitism of mainstream theories by bringing macro-level and micro-level analyses together” (Özkirimli 2010, p. 170), or by combining a top-down perspective with a bottom-up perspective. For Parekh (1995b, p. 37), nationalism is a theory that explains how a state is constituted and it is “also a theory of the nature, boundary, functions, rationale and the proper basis of the authority and the unity of the state”. It should be understood as a “specific manner of conceptualising and constituting the state and relating its members” (Parekh, 1995b, p. 42). In other words, nationalism tends to spread a sense of belonging among people who share a common culture, language, past, history and heritage within a nation, which is defined by Anderson (2006) as an ‘imagined community’, thus suggesting, as Yuval-Davis (2011, p. 84) contends, that the nation “resides in the minds of the people who view themselves or specified others as belonging or not belonging to that nation”. Some scholars focus on historical and political aspects (Parekh, 1995b; Gellner, 2008) and others on cultural dimension (Geertz, 1993; Smith, 2009) of nationalism. The different approaches underscore the need to set boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘included’ and ‘excluded’, and they emphasize that nationalism is an ideology (theory or approach) aimed at constructing stability and cohesion among people who share the same elements (e. g. culture, religion, language, customs).

However, nationalism in the Emirati context seems to rely on a different assumption. In other words, despite the UAE efforts to implement laws and adopt measures in order to categorize and distinguish Emiratis from non-Emiratis, the discourse on the Emirati national identity cannot be detached from the reality, namely the presence of millions of migrant workers who have resided in the country for ages. The point is if migrant workers contribute towards shaping the discourse on the Emirati national identity. In spite of the division between Emiratis and non-Emiratis and the exclusion in terms of lack of political participation and advantages deriving from being an Emirati national, Pakistani professionals, as it emerged throughout my thesis, expressed a strong emotional attachment to the country, they felt that they belonged even though they were not citizens. As I have been arguing, understanding how their sense of belonging is constructed entails discussing the relationships between Pakistanis and Emiratis, and acknowledging that the separation



between Emiratis and non-Emiratis is a ‘false’, contested and multi-layered insofar as Pakistani professionals in their everyday life, practices and experiences also contribute towards shaping the discourse on national identity.

It then follows that the construction of the Emirati identity cannot disregard the presence, role and links with the migrant communities, such as Pakistanis. In the discourse on national identity, one cannot neglect the presence of foreign workers. Pakistani professionals, for example, participate actively in events to celebrate the UAE National Day (2<sup>nd</sup> December) because they feel part of the context and they consider Dubai as a ‘home’ (see below). This means that the Emirati national identity cannot be framed upon an exclusion-centred narrative but it should be shaped by an inclusion-centred narrative. As Vora and Koch (2015) suggest, most of the narrative on migration in the GCC countries relies on the citizen/non-citizen dichotomy; they argue that this approach, amongst others, de-emphasizes the significant role of non-nationals in the management of migration, especially when they act as sponsors (e.g., the old Indian merchant class, Vora, 2010), and the co-ethnic exploitation (Kathiravelu, 2016). As argued in chapter 5, looking at the migration experiences and practices (e.g., a migrant who acts as a sponsor, co-ethnic exploitation and the role of migrant brokers and middlemen) entails recognizing that migrants appear ‘included’ in forms of governance in which nationals are also involved (Vora & Koch, 2015; Kathiravelu, 2016). For Pakistani professionals, as mentioned in chapter 6, belonging is constructed by feeling part of the context because they share with ‘others’ experiences and practices (Anthias, 2015). At the same time, Emiratis reshape the discourse on national identity by ‘including’ Pakistani professionals (and other foreign workers) because they share with them the everyday life (see chapter 7). Kate, one of my Emirati participants, emphasized the links with the South Asian countries as part of the old generation’s everyday life. She said

...If you think like my grandfather, my grandfather generation I would say the south Asians, like Indians they were always mix with us, they were the best traders. The best friends, things like that. Then there was problem because so many were coming in at once, the Emiratis became close to themselves, very protective, because they were all strangers we do not know who they are. Now it is becoming that the young generation are opening themselves and ok let’s try to make a volunteer group, do project where we have different nationalities (Interview with Kate, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

In the above quotation, Kate underscored how the historical links with the South Asian countries have been important in the recent history of the UAE. At the same time, Kate also

highlighted the ‘fear of erosion’ which was embodied in the physical presence of millions of migrants (e. g. Indians) in the country. However, the Emirati youth are now ‘accustomed’ to their presence; migrants are still part of their everyday life and they are involved in projects and activities by Emirati youth. This sense of cohesiveness does not erase the hierarchical social structure. As said in chapter 7, migrants and Emiratis do not interact *as equals* but exclusionary policies (e. g. second class citizen status) and practices (e. g. discrimination on nationality, gender and class) serve to reinforce the divisions.

Both Emiratis and Pakistanis construct their sense of belonging by sharing experiences and practices in workplaces and in other locales. For Pakistanis and other foreign communities, this means cultural and economic ‘inclusion’ in light of a formal ‘exclusion’ based on the impossibility to obtain the Emirati citizenship. Abdallah, who is a member of the PAD (see chapter 7), underlined the importance of links and feeling part of the Emirati context. He said

...We [Pakistanis] do a solidarity walk every year for the UAE national day, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, which is again first of this kind, unique solidarity activity, which is done by the Pakistani community only...[it] is again a gesture as a community towards UAE that we are part of the society and we celebrate the national day (Interview with Abdallah, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

This quote is relevant because Abdallah emphasized the involvement of the entire Pakistani community in the local context by organizing and participating in events that are symbolically, politically and culturally important to the host society. This is the expression of belonging ‘with’ the Emirati context in terms of engagement with the local *milieu* (Anthias, 2013).

Civic engagement, through the solidarity walk organized by the PAD and ‘Emirati nationalism’ *displayed* by Pakistani professionals during the celebration of the UAE National Day or during the Flag Day (3<sup>rd</sup> November) by wearing hats and t-shirts with Emirati symbols and by exhibiting the Emirati flag (Picture 8.9), are elements that contribute towards involving and enhancing the links between Emiratis and Pakistanis.

**Picture 8.9** Pakistan Education Academy adorned with Emirati flags for the Flag Day



But more than that, civic engagement and the ‘Emirati nationalism’ *exhibited* by Pakistani professionals means that the ties between the two communities are, at least symbolically, strong, that the separation existing at juridical level seems to not affect the sense of belonging that my participants exhibited and explained to me during my field research. Moreover, as outlined in chapter 6, the participation of Pakistanis in these events contributes towards constructing their belonging to the Emirati context. The adoption of an inclusion-centred narrative proposed by Vora and Koch (2015), and discussed in this section, seems to erase the inequalities existing and ‘institutionalized’ by the UAE authorities (e. g. sponsorship system). However, the lack of rights, discrimination and divisions in terms of citizenship status conspire against this inclusive approach. The discourse on the Emirati national identity is reshaped and revitalized by recovering the past, history and dealing with the current sociocultural and economic *milieu* in which foreigners represent the driving force of the UAE economy and society; however, they are not *equally* treated.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has unfolded the process of construction of the Emirati national identity in light of the changes taking place within the UAE society. Social transformations driven by the oil economy, migration and globalization have dramatically affected the traditional system of values and life. These changes have been so rapid and deep that some people have perceived a strong sense of detachment from their country (Dresch, 2005). It has thus appeared necessary, for the UAE government, to reshape and reinterpret the past in order to spread cohesion and stability among Emiratis (Khalaf, 2002, 2005).

National identity has a dynamic, fluid, multi-layered, stratified and adaptable nature (Parekh, 1995a). The construction of the Emirati national identity is from time to time reconstituted because members of a society re-examine and reflect on it in light of new circumstances, challenges and needs of their society (Parekh, 1994, 2008). Thus, the Emirate of Dubai, even though has a strong Islamic background, has reconstituted its character by de-emphasizing its Islamic identity in order to deal with demands of the global labour market. In Dubai, the reinterpretation of history, devoid of its multi-cultural nature (Vora, 2013), contributes to the construction of the Emirati national identity because it creates cohesion and belonging by recovering the prehistoric origins of the coastal area.

The nationalization of culture can contribute towards creating and spreading a sense of cohesion and belonging among locals; nonetheless, I have also argued that it would be misleading to overlook the role played by foreign workers through civic engagement in shaping the narrative on the Emirati national identity. Pakistani professionals feel that they belong to the Emirati context and their participation in public events serve to reinforce their sense of belonging to the country. However, this inclusive approach does not serve to erase the exclusionary policies and practices that took place in the country.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSION

In the thesis, I have discussed migration and its links to belonging, class, national identity and recognition in the UAE and Dubai by focusing on the Pakistani community, and especially on Pakistani professionals. As has been recently suggested (Vora & Koch, 2015), it would be misleading to think of nationals and migrants in Dubai, and in the GCC countries, as two dis-embedded and entirely separated groups. Migrants and nationals can be seen as two dynamic and reciprocal categories: there are nationals because there are migrants and vice versa. Throughout the thesis, I have been arguing the need to explore and analyse migration in the UAE and Dubai by adopting an inclusive approach that takes into account the historical evolution and the contemporary socio-political dynamics of the Arab Gulf region. However, as I have been remarking in the thesis, this approach does not subvert or erase the hierarchical social structure existing in the UAE (and in the other GCC countries). The inferior social status, the lack of rights, and discrimination that characterize migrants' life in the UAE are subject to criticisms in Western countries (HRW, 2006). At the core of the relationships between Emiratis and non-Emiratis there is a hierarchical social structure in which benefits and advantages have been granted to some Emiratis in light of their nationality. Moreover, citizenship can be granted only due to specific events and circumstances, as we have seen (see chapter 4); however, being an Emirati citizen does not necessarily entail being recognized as full member of the Emirati society. Recognition is thus not granted equally to all human beings, everyone is not treated as equals. In the UAE context, racism and discrimination seem to represent a driving force of the political-economy and cultural dimension through which social relationships and interactions between Emiratis and non-Emiratis are framed. In this context, "the political-economic structure...generates 'race'-specific modes of exploitation, marginalization and deprivation" (Fraser, 1995, p. 80). From a cultural perspective, racism and discrimination seem to be framed on the grounds of a supposed Emirati purity of blood genealogy, which, as I have argued, is not anthropologically sustainable (see chapter 4). This has generated cultural racism, which is defined by Fraser as "the pervasive devaluation and disparagement of things" (Fraser (1995, p. 81) coded as 'different'. In the UAE, cultural racism is evident in forms of exclusion,

marginalization, depreciation and de-evaluation of skills and competences of those who are non-Emiratis. However, cultural racism does not affect all non-Emiratis equally, as some nationalities, as I have been arguing throughout the thesis, are more targeted by racism and discrimination than others. Thus, for example, white Westerners are in a privileged position and enjoy more benefits and advantages than Indians or Pakistanis. As Fraser (1995, p. 81) argues, racism and discrimination “are injustices of recognition”. Thus, misrecognition seems to be a crucial element of the relationships between Emiratis and non-Emiratis. The inclusion-centred narrative does not erase these forms of injustices and the form of ‘institutionalized’ racism embedded in structures and everyday practices, and migrants have to deal with discrimination and racism in their everyday lives. However, we cannot neglect that migrants keep on travelling to and settling in the GCC countries, even though they are fully aware of the working and living conditions that they will encounter upon migration (Gardner, 2012; Buckley, 2012); neglecting this reality would entail a risk of underestimating the practical-evaluative and projective dimensions of migrants’ agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) and their capacity to make choices. The inclusion-centred narrative is a way of looking at migrants’ agency as empowering individuals who, to a certain extent and in light of their specific social status and class, are able to cope with the difficulties and uncertainties that their migration project entails.

In the thesis, I have discussed and explored the evolution and dynamics of the presence of Pakistani professionals in Dubai. As such, the thesis contributes to a deep knowledge of migration in the Arab Gulf countries in several ways (see chapter 1). First, by focusing on Pakistanis it introduces new subjectivities and stories in understanding migration in the Gulf region. As noted throughout the thesis, Pakistanis are sometimes subsumed under the label ‘South Asian’ (Gardner, 2010a; Vora, 2013), thus overlooking that they have a specific migration pattern that differs from that of Indians, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans. These differences are mostly evident when considering the history of migration and the socio-economic dynamics in this region. For example, the old Indian merchant class migrated to the Gulf region at the beginning of the twentieth century, while Bangladeshis migrated in the 1990s after the oil crisis of the mid-1980s (Owen, 1985; Birks, Seccombe & Sinclair, 1986; Abella, 1995). Sri Lankans also arrived in the 1990s and theirs was mostly a female-dominated migration (Gamburd, 2009). The Pakistani community, which migrated to the UAE in the 1960s, is mostly based on a male-oriented migration; it is ethnically and

religiously stratified, as well as stratified in terms of class and social status. Thus, the thesis responds to the need to include and explore new subjectivities and stories to better understand migration in the GCC countries. For example, the establishment of the Emirates Airline, which exemplifies the links between international migration and international relations (Weiner, 1985), led some Pakistani migrants to migrate and settle down in Dubai, thus reinforcing the links between Pakistan and the UAE (Davidson, 2005).

Second, the risk of homogenisation has been highlighted throughout the thesis, and as noted previously, there is a need to introduce new subjectivities and stories in order to fully understand the wide range of experiences and difficulties that migrants have to cope with in the GCC countries. The risk of homogenisation has been evident in previous studies which have mostly focused on the dichotomy between nationals and non-nationals, thus identifying two distinct categories that were often 'flattened' without emphasizing the differences that exist within some of them, apart from a few studies that have focused on Indian merchants, middle-class and construction workers (Gardner, 2010a; Buckley, 2012; Vora, 2013). By focusing on Pakistani professionals, I have introduced new subjectivities which highlight a different perspective. For example, the issue of discrimination is important, and although it has been addressed by scholars who have emphasized the ethno-racial and gender hierarchies existing in this region (Vora, 2013, Gardner, 2010a, Kathiravelu, 2016), my study provides a further contribution by emphasising how Pakistani professionals confirm as well as contest narratives of discrimination. While some of my Pakistani participants felt discriminated against, others emphasized that they did not perceive the hierarchical social structure as discriminatory, and they considered it a prerogative of the local authorities to define how to manage their own internal affairs. Obviously, this perspective is embedded in the Pakistani professionals' life who experienced their migration differently from that of unskilled and semi-skilled migrants. They have found a different way to create a "set of connections, and another modality of belonging" (Ahmad, 2017, p. 141). Through the lens of the inclusion-centred narrative (Vora & Koch, 2015), I have illustrated that the Pakistani professionals felt differently 'included' and expressed their own modality of belonging. The hierarchical social structure existing in this country is perpetuated via a management of internal affairs (e. g., the sponsorship system) in which nationality drives the political and socio-economic decision-making process. The Pakistani professionals can feel 'integrated' but they are not treated as complete *equals*.

Third, the debate on structure and agency has hitherto represented a stumbling block in migration studies (Bakewell, 2010) and I have addressed this debate by focusing on the ‘duality of structure’ approach (Goss & Lindquist, 1995; Morawska, 2001). By adopting the duality of structure perspective, I have introduced and discussed the notion of ‘migration project’ as a fruitful tool to bring structure and agency to the core of migration studies. The notion of migration project fits with the historical-sociological evolution of migration in the Arab Gulf countries (Errichiello, 2012), and especially with temporariness (Ali, 2010), which is one of the most recent issues debated in migration studies (Dauvergne & Marsden, 2014; Vosko, Preston, & Latham, 2014). As argued throughout the thesis, the migration project does not have an inherent determinacy; on the contrary, it relies on migrants’ agency (reflexivity and ‘projectivity’) to adapt and respond to the changes occurring in a specific time-place, and to their knowledge of structure (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Morawska, 2001). As such, the migration project is class-based because, as it has been acknowledged, migration is undertaken by those who are able to mobilize resources (Van Hear, 2014). It is obviously undertaken by highly-skilled migrants, but also by unskilled and semi-skilled migrants. The individual stories told by Mahdavi (2011, 2016) and Ahmad (2017) illustrate how domestic workers were able to change their migration project, to adapt to new circumstances and events that took place in the migration context. For example, the conversion to the Islamic religion by South Asian domestic workers emphasizes migrants’ agency to interact with local structure and the need to change their migration project, because some of them could decide to live *permanently* in Kuwait (Ahmad, 2017). I argue that the establishment of migrant associations is also illustrative of migrants’ agency and their knowledge of structures. Migrant associations demonstrate the capacity migrants have to deal with local rules and laws, and the needs migrants have to embed their migration experience within a place that embodies their sense of identification and belonging. The notion of migration project thus contributes to the debate on structure and agency in migration studies by emphasizing that migrants should not be perceived as disempowered individuals, but as agents who are able to deal with the instability and precariousness that the migration experience entails. The inclusion-centred narrative requires a recognition of migrants’ interaction with the local context. In other words, this narrative emphasizes migrants’ agency to interact with structure; however, their agency is constrained and enabled by the hierarchical social structure existing in Dubai. As Vora and Koch (2015) suggest, in



the Arab Gulf region, migrants and nationals do not appear as two different categories but as *simultaneously and differently* inclusive and exclusive.

To conclude, an individual's migration is a project that is shaped over time and space by competing demands, in a 'dance' in which some are more powerful than others to take the steps and choose the direction.<sup>94</sup> The Pakistani community, which appears as united, is at the same time divided, but I have realized that those divisions have not challenged the community's cohesiveness. In my view, intra-group 'conflicts' could be seen as normal within a huge migrant community. The internal ethnic and religious diversity of the Pakistani community has not undermined their collective cohesion and sense of belonging, which was expressed and manifested in different ways and with different meanings. In light of the Pakistani professional migrants' emotional and affective attachment to the UAE, I would argue that the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them', nationals and non-nationals is misleading and that, in spite of the lack of any official policy aimed at integrating migrants, Emiratis and non-Emiratis seem to coexist peacefully. As Pakistani professionals explained to me, they feel that they belong to the UAE. However, they are not *equally* treated, and they are not in a position to fundamentally undermine or subvert the hierarchical social structure. In other words, their agency is always enabled and constrained by structure.

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<sup>94</sup> I wish to thank Karen O'Reilly for raising this point.

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## APPENDIX A<sup>95</sup>

### Leaflet<sup>96</sup>

\* Will you tell someone what I say?

Everything that you say will be kept confidential. All information provided and recorded will be stored safely and securely. Access to the data is restricted to the interviewer and PhD thesis supervisors. When I write up my thesis, I will protect your anonymity and confidentiality.

My supervisors are:

Prof. Karen O'Reilly

K.OReilly(at)lboro.ac.uk

Dr. Line Nyhagen

L.Nyhagen(at)lboro.ac.uk

\* Will anyone reading the book or articles be able to recognise me?

No, because I will not use your name (unless you choose for me to use your real name).

\* How can I get in touch?

You can call me (Gennaro Errichiello)  
on  
+44 (0)7799098454 (UK number)

You can email me:  
G.Errichiello(at)lboro.ac.uk

You can also write to me at  
Department of Social Sciences,  
Loughborough University,  
Loughborough, UK. LE11 3TU



I hope to hear from you soon

Thank you for all your help.



Loughborough  
University

South Asians in the Arab Gulf  
States.

A Study of Migration and Identity in  
the UAE



An invitation to take part in a research  
project about migration and identity in  
Dubai

<sup>95</sup> The leaflet had a different page orientation, but it has been adapted as long as possible to the format of the thesis.

<sup>96</sup> The leaflet was prepared before undertaking my first field trip. At the beginning I decided to focus on South Asian migrants in the GCC countries because I could not predict if and how many Pakistanis I would have been able to interview.

#### Who I am...

My name is Gennaro Errichiello. I am a PhD student in Social Sciences at Loughborough University (UK). I am a social science researcher interested in investigating migration, identity and ethnic relations in the Arab Gulf region, and in particular in Dubai.

#### What are the aims of my research?

This research is mainly focused on the issues of identity and migration in Dubai. Through conversations and information provided by different people and stakeholders, my research aims at:

- Studying migrants' lives in Dubai
- Examining the impact of migrants on Dubai society

#### Who is organising and funding the study?

This research is funded as a scholarship (PhD) from the Graduate School at Loughborough University.

#### How can I help?

I am hoping to involve Professional migrants of different ages and backgrounds in the research project. I would like to talk to you about your way of life, what motivated you to move, what your work and social life are like. I would like to hear about your communities and networks, how you keep in contact with people close to you. I will also examine the impact of migration on Dubai society.

I will have an interview guide, which is a list of topic areas I would like to cover during the interview. You can add or remove topics if you wish – indeed I encourage you to do so.

#### Do I have to say yes to talk to you?

No. It is your choice whether or not you take part. I would like this to be a positive experience for you and so you can change your mind at any time by telling me. No one will ask why.

#### Where and when will we meet?

It could be your house or any other place where you usually spend time, like in a cafe or other public place, wherever you feel most comfortable. You can also choose a good time to meet and can decide how often and how long we talk.

#### Who will be there?

I will interview you but if you wish someone else to join us, such as a friend, that is fine with me.

## APPENDIX B

### Glossary

*‘abāya*, it is worn by Emirati women and it is a black ankle-length cloak and a long black scarf to cover hair (*shayla*)

*adhān*, the call for prayer which is done by a *mu’adhdhin*

*‘ajami*, non-Arabs or Persians

*Allāh*, the Arabic word for God

*arkān al-Islām*, the five pillars of Islām

*asāla*, authenticity

*barasti*, palm-frond settlements

*bidūn*, stateless

*burqa’*, kind of veil worn by women with two holes for the eyes, made of a fabric that falls from the center of the forehead and covers her face. The corners further down the *burqa’* are attached to the two sides of the bandage that covers the head thus creating the effect of a mask

*dāws*, traditional boats

*ḥadīth* (plural *‘ahādīth*), saying. It indicates all sayings of the prophet Muhammad. It is one of the sources of the Islamic religion and studied by *‘ulamā’*

*hajj*, pilgrimage to Mecca. It is the fifth pillar of Islām. It is the pilgrimage that every good Muslim must undertake to Mecca at least once in his/her life

*al-hawiyya al-waṭaniyya al-imārātiyya*, Emirati national identity

*al-Imārāt al-‘Arabiyya al-Muttaḥida*, United Arab Emirates

*imtinān*, gratitude

*iqāma*, residence permit

*Islām*, literally "submission (to God)", the name of the religion of Muslims. It is characterized by five pillars (*arkān*), which are *shahāda*, *ṣalāt*, *zakāt*, *sawm* (*siyām*), *ḥajj*

*Ismā‘īlī*, members of the *Ismā‘īliyya*, a *shī‘a* sect

*jinsiya*, citizenship

*kafāla*, sponsorship system

*kafīl*, sponsor

*kandūra*, it is worn by Emirati men and it is a loose ankle-length robe, and usually white  
*khadim al-ḥaramāni*, "Custodian of the two holy places" of Mecca and Medina. Honorific  
title given to the Kings of Saudi Arabia

*khādimāt*, domestic workers

*khalījī*, related to the Gulf

*khulāṣat al-qayd*, sort of family book

*khuṭba*, Friday sermon

*madrasa*, Islamic religious school

*majlis*, meeting place; common room in a traditional Arab house

*makfūl*, the person who is sponsored

*mashyakhat* (in English sheikhdom), is the geographical area, a place, or a polity dominated  
by a *shaykh* and his family

*masjid*, mosque

*mohajirs*, migrants and their descendants that migrated from India to establish in Pakistan  
after partition in 1947. This Urdu word has its roots in Arabic, where it is spelled  
*muhājirūn*, who are those migrated with the Prophet Muḥammad from Mecca to  
Medina where the Islamic community (*umma*) was formed in 622 A.D.

*mu'adhdhin*, the person who pronounces the *adhān*

*al-mujtama'a al-khalījī*, community of the 'Gulfies'

*muṣallá*, the prayer room

*muwāṭin*, nationality

*muwātinūn*, nationals

*qānūn*, law

*Qur'ān*, the Holy book of the Islamic religion

*Ramaḍān*, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar dedicated to fast (*sawm*)

*as-salām (alaykum)*, the peace be with you, it is a form of greeting used by Muslims

*ṣalāt al-jum'a*, the collective prayer that must be made in common in the mosque every  
Friday

*ṣalāt*, prayer. It is the second pillar of Islām. It is performed five times a day: at dawn (*ṣalāt  
al-ṣubḥ* or *al-fajr*); at noon (*ṣalāt az-zuhr*); afternoon (*ṣalāt al- 'aṣr*); sunset (*ṣalāt al-  
maghrib*); evening (*ṣalāt al- 'ishā'*)

*sawm* (*siyām*), fasting during *Ramadan*. It is the fourth pillar of Islām

*shahāda*, an expression of faith in the Oneness of God and that Muhammad received and delivered God's final revelation to humanity. It is the first pillar of Islām

*sharī'a*, the principles and practices of Islamic belief

*sharkat*, corporation

*shaykh*, (*shuyūkh*), honorific title given to the ruler of a tribe

*shyikha*, wife or daughter of a *shaykh*

*Shī'a*, party, faction, group of Muslims who consider 'Alī (cousin of the Prophet Muhammad) and his heirs the only legitimate successors of the Prophet. It is divided into various sects, each of which is identified with one of the different lines of 'Alī's descendants

*ṣundūq al-zawāj*, marriage fund

*Sunna*, tradition. The path of the Prophet, which becomes for all believers the authoritative example of the Islamic life. *Sunni* Muslims are those who follow the path of the Prophet and differentiate from *Shī'a*

*tābi'a*, affiliation or dependence

*tajannus*, naturalisation

*tawḥīd*, nationalization

*turāth*, heritage

'*ulamā'* (singular '*ālim*), religious scholars

*umma*, the universal community of believers

*wāḥidūn*, migrants

*wāṣṭa*, intermediary

*akāt*, almsgiving. It is the third pillar of Islām



## APPENDIX C

### List of participants, dates of the interviews and nationality

In the table, I have included all participants whom I interviewed and with whom I had conversations during my fieldwork in Dubai. However, I could not include the tens of waiters/waitresses and taxi drivers that have also contributed with their words, thoughts and stories to the thesis.

**Table C.1 List of participants**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Date of interview/conversation</b>	<b>Nationality</b>
Jamal	28/10/2014 conversation 03/11/2014 interview 26/10/2015 conversation	Indian
John	29/10/2014 conversation 06/11/2014 interview 21/10/2015 conversation 08/11/2015 interview	Pakistani
Khalaf	05/11/2014 conversation	Pakistani
Kate	06/11/2014 interview	Emirati
Ismail	07/11/2014 interview	British Pakistani
Hussein	07/11/2014 interview	Jordanian
Ester	13/10/2015 interview	Pakistani
Leila	14/10/2015 interview	Pakistani
Peter	15/10/2015 interview	Pakistani
Ali	15/10/2015 interview	Pakistani
Mahmud	16/10/2015 interview	Pakistani
Ibrahim	18/10/2015 interview	Pakistani
Zia	19/10/2015 interview	Pakistani
Omar	19/10/2015 interview	Pakistani
Abdallah	19/10/2015 interview 05/11/2015 interview 08/11/2015 interview	Pakistani
Naseer	24/10/2015 interview	Pakistani
Muhammad	25/10/2015 interview	Pakistani
Lisa	26/10/2015 interview	Emirati
Rita	27/10/2015 interview	Pakistani
Helen	31/10/2015 interview	Emirati
Katie	01/11/2015 interview	Pakistani
Rahman	02/11/2015 interview	Pakistani
Rashid	03/11/2015 conversation	Pakistani
Bushra	05/11/2015 conversation	Pakistani
Suleyman	09/11/2015 interview	Pakistani