

Migration from South Asia to the Gulf offers important insights into understanding the complex religious, political and economic worlds inhabited by Pakistanis. For the past five years Magnus Marsden has been visiting a group of men from Chitral, Pakistan's northernmost district, who have now made the painful decision to become labourers in the Gulf. Marsden's fascinating account reveals to us not only their motivations and experiences but also a snapshot of how men from contrasting socio-economic backgrounds are sharing their lives together in Dubai's all-male 'labour camps'.

Lords of a Dubai labour camp:

Pakistani migrants in the Gulf

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Earlier work on South Asian migrants in the Gulf has explored the 'cosmopolitan' identity formations made possible by transnational migration flows (Werbner 1999). More recently, South Asian migrant experiences have been shown to be richly permeated by experiences of discrimination, both by Gulf citizens and Western expatriates (Vera 2008). Other anthropologists argue that even if migrants do imagine emitting an "aura of a sophisticated man of the world" on their return home, then everyday life in the Gulf "appears as a self-contained microcosm in which people from many different places are held together yet stand apart, separated by class and ethnicity, and so absorbed by the work at hand that they become oblivious of the world around them". (Osella and Osella 2006).

Fewer ethnographic accounts exist, however, of the forms taken by sociality and subjectivity in the physical spaces in which most Pakistani labour migrants in the Gulf live - all-male 'labour camps' (see also Humphrey 2005). These labour camps, usually large, multi-story concrete buildings, flanked by trucks and cranes, and often in a world removed from the Gulf's notoriously wealthy downtown city centres, could easily be assumed to be the types of setting where labourers would think of and do little other than "working and saving" (Watkins 2003) in preparation for their return home.

Over the past five years I have been visiting men I knew during fieldwork in Chitral, Pakistan's northernmost district, who have made the painful decision to become labourers in the Gulf. These men do not constitute any ready-made class of 'migrant labourers'. They hail, rather, from contrasting socio-economic backgrounds.

Some of them are the sons of high status families who were once employed in respectable government jobs. They fell into serious debt due to rising costs, emerging especially from the expectation that their children should be educated in English-medium, fee paying schools, and their love of a 'life of luxury', an important way in which status, authority and 'full humanity' are displayed and embodied in this one-time princely kingdom. The option then was to migrate to the Gulf. Others Chitralis in Dubai's camps appear to better fit our expectations of 'labour migrants': men from remote and relatively poor Chitrali villages with only very rudimentary levels of formal education and much former experience as labourers in Pakistan's cities.

Such men from poor and isolated backgrounds and Chitral's new middle class of government and NGO employees do share kin and friendship ties. Yet as older forms of status distinction are grafted onto new economic differences in Chitral, the expectation that men should 'sit with their own' is an increasingly vital dimension of the evaluation of proper behaviour. In Dubai's labour camps, in contrast, Chitrali men live

cheek by jowl with people from socio-economic backgrounds very different from their own. What form, then, does everyday sociality take in these camps?

Lords of labour in Dubai

Farid is a Sunni man in his early forties who is married and has five children. An evening with Farid at home in Chitral Town was always memorable: evenings as his guests almost always involved music, poetry and apricot schnapps, often with his many political friends. Farid, himself was a dyed in the wool Pakistan People's



Under construction: the Burj Dubai, the world's tallest building. The actual height is a closely guarded secret and won't be revealed until construction is completed.

Party supporter, and he'd represented the Chitral's medical association union as its elected President. Farid's life in Chitral, according to his brother-in-law, however, had become "without rule" and Farid had eventually "lost control of himself". His small medical shop was crammed with excitable politicians calling for tea, the sight of which led even his most loyal customers to flee. The hospitality often involved fried chicken and bottles of apricot schnapps (*tara*). So, one day, Farid, now also facing considerable pressure from his wife, approached a friend who had promised him work in Dubai, and some days later he landed in the city.

Three months after his arrival, it was clear that Dubai life was painful for Farid. He suffered 'heart explosion' (*hardi phat*) for his family, and reminisced about his long gone 'life of luxury'. Importantly he also found spending his days with 'labourers' a drain. He respected these men, he told me, but complained of a lack of understanding with them: "you saw how I lived in Chitral, how could they ever understand?" Farid's anxieties were added to by the nature of his job: for two years he worked in the menial post of 'store man' in a Pakistani-owned demolition company. With time, however, and having discovered that Farid was a trained

paramedic, many labourers in the camp sought out his help for their personal ailments: prescribing the right medicine for a rash here and a case of impotence there, Farid was soon honourably referred to as "Doctor Sahib". At night, however, the Doctor slept in a crowded room with seven other Chitrali and Pukhtun labourers.

Four years later Farid is happier. Above all, he has found employment with a different construction company, which employs him as an 'on site' nurse.



Pakistani workers in Dubai.

His living conditions have also transformed. He has paid off the large bank loan, which led him to Dubai. His room in the camp is now his own, and tastefully decorated with Chitrali embroidery, equipped with air conditioning, a television, DVD player, gas cooker and a fridge, and shared with only two Chitralis who help him with his guests, washing, and often also bring him food. In the evenings he sits on his 'veranda', in reality the camp's roof, often with a vodka and Sprite, and watches the labourers below. Given that Farid lives in a labour camp located in Dubai's industrial sector - al Qus - it is striking that he talks of living an enchanted life, and embodies the behaviour of a Chitrali lord (*lal*) sitting on a verandah (*mukhen*) overlooking the amusing if somewhat distasteful behaviour of the "simple" (*sadah*) labourers beneath.

The Doctor's capacity to live in luxury causes tensions between him and other Chitralis in the camp. According to Sohail - the Chitrali in charge of the camp's laundry, and one of Farid's former roommates - until New Year's Eve, 2007, five Chitralis once lived happily together in the Doctor's room. That evening, however, the Doctor told them that they should organise a party in their room and contribute ten dirhams for rum. Sohail's elder brother, who had recently come

from Chitral and had recently been refused a place in the room on the grounds that the Doctor needed the spare bed to host his guests made Sohail pull out of the party, leaving the Doctor with the burden of buying liquor for the New Year: "your children at home in Chitral are chaffing from the cold", he told Sohail, "and you are buying alcohol, you should be ashamed!"

The Doctor had, indeed, quickly become a well known part of Chitrali migrant life in the city. He'd organised Chitrali musical programmes in the city parks that saw

Chitrali labourers - including bearded Hajjis - gathering to listen and dance to Chitrali music in Dubai's beachside parks. Most recently, the Doctor Sahib had 'motivated' the wealthier of Chitralis in Dubai to pool together sufficient funds, and pay for Chitral's most famed singer to make a 'tour' of the UAE. The concerts were a success. The singer, indeed, stayed in Dubai for six weeks, mostly sleeping in the Doctor's room. Those days, according to Sohail, were "hectic" (*kitigin*): Chitrali guests came from all around, even from distant Abu Dhabi. And on one night the Doctor and his friends staged the music proceedings on the veranda, a decision that saw Sohail blamed by the Punjabi 'camp superintendent' for disturbing the peace.

It was not only the Doctor's love of music and *mahfils* (semi-formal social gatherings) that had begun to disturb the feelings of his roommates. He had not let his interest in politics slip either. From his labour camp room, Farid has also become an active member of the Pakistan People's Party, Dubai wing. In the locked briefcase underneath his bed he keeps newspaper cuttings, which named him as a participant in PPP meetings, and he showed his guests photos him meeting Benazir when she was still alive. Other Chitrali labourers in the camp find Farid's political life in

Dubai rather obscure: "here we are labouring and earning money to send home", said one, "and Doctor Sahib is spending his money on attending meetings and crying over a woman who has done nothing for any of us".

Conclusion

At one level, the Dubai which Farid and his fellow camp dwellers inhabit appears to be remarkably similar to what the Osella's have described as a "self-contained microcosm" where people from "many different places are held together yet stand apart, separated by class and ethnicity". Yet Farid's microcosm is richly shaped by creative personal initiatives on his part, as well as being informed by a dynamic range of complex social relationships that cut across what for he and his fellow Dubai Chitralis are critically important boundaries of class, status and religious difference.

At another level, Farid's changing experiences of Dubai also points toward the complex forms of sociality and subjectivity that arise in such neo-liberal spaces as Dubai's labour camps. These camps are usually thought of as alienating and as devoid of nurturing forms of sociality, which are a valued dimension of life in Chitral (Marsden 2005). Farid and others like him, however, claim to derive pleasure from camp life. In the most unlikely of circumstances, Farid cultivates and tenaciously promotes a luxurious way of Chitrali aristocratic living. Others, like Sohail, see Gulf life as offering very different possibilities for their personal development. When they return home, they talk of being eager to get back to Dubai and resume control over their own lives.

Complex interactions, thus, are taking place between very different and apparently contradictory standards of self-management and presentation, and in the most unexpected of places – Dubai's concrete and apparently dehumanising all-male labour camps.

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Pakistan's legal system has long been associated with human rights violations. In particular, the controversial Zina Ordinance¹, which made sexual intercourse outside marriage a criminal offence. The most pernicious result of this law has been the risk for 'double jeopardy' of rape victims. A woman pressing rape charges risked being convicted of adultery if the suspect was acquitted. The infamous case of Safia Bibi, is the most distressing example of this scenario. Yet, as Martin Lau reveals, there have been gradual improvements in the legal position of Pakistan's women in recent years.

The quiet evolution:

Islam and women's rights in Pakistan



Photograph courtesy of Kristoffel Lieten.

MARTIN LAU

Safia Bibi was a blind, unmarried, girl, whose pregnancy was visible proof of sexual intercourse. She accused her employer, a landlord in rural Sindh, of having raped her. At the trial, her employer was acquitted, but the court proceeded to sentence her to imprisonment. On the basis of being pregnant and unmarried, and her charge of rape unproven, she was guilty of unlawful sexual

intercourse. Following international protests, Safia Bibi was eventually acquitted by the court of appeal. However, the rule of evidence that the pregnancy of an unmarried woman was admissible evidence in an accusation of Zina, was left undisturbed. The Zina Ordinance also led to the imprisonment of large numbers of women who had been rejected by their husbands without having been validly divorced. On re-marriage, the former husbands brought accusations of adultery against them, claiming that there

had been no divorce, and that therefore their 'wives' were committing adultery. In addition, the issue of so-called honour crimes - women murdered because for allegedly dishonouring their families through immoral conduct, and forced marriages² - has further tarnished the reputation of Pakistan's legal system in relation to the rights of women. Mention must also be made of Muslim family law as applied by Pakistani courts, which discriminates against women in many areas, such as inheritance rights and divorce.

Perhaps surprisingly, the democracy which followed the lifting of martial law and the subsequent death of Zia ul Haq in 1988, increased, rather than decreased, the role of Islam in the legal system. In the decade preceding General Musharraf's regime - 1988 until 1998 - the two ruling parties, led by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, failed to improve the legal position of women. They lacked the will but also the parliamentary majorities required to reverse the current of Islamisation. This, however, tells only half of the story, it omits the important role Pakistan's courts have played in controlling the fate of Islamic law.

The Federal Shariat Court

Most important in determining the position of Islamic law in the legal system was the Federal Shariat Court (FSC). Created, in 1980, to act as the court of appeal in all cases involving the Hudood Ordinances³, the court was given added jurisdiction, namely the power to invalidate laws deemed to be contrary to Islam, as laid down in the two main sources of Islamic law, namely the Qur'an and the Sunnah.⁴ Any member of the public could approach the FSC and lodge a complaint that a particular law violated Islam and should therefore be struck down. Moreover, the new court could also examine statutes '*suo moto*', meaning that it could move itself and review a statute. This new jurisdiction was unprecedented in the legal history of Pakistan, and no other country had given its courts such wide powers.

Until the creation of the FSC, only the four high courts and the Supreme Court of Pakistan had the power to invalidate laws, and then only on the grounds that they violated the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights. Some restrictions were imposed on the types of law which the FSC could examine, but overall the effects of the rulings of the Federal Shariat Court on the legal system have been profound.

Most visible is the court's impact in the area of criminal law, where the government was forced to pass the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 1997 in order to bring the law on murder and assault in line with Islamic law. As a result, the heirs of a murder victim now have the right to determine the fate of the murderer. They have three options: Firstly, to demand that the murderer is punished; secondly, to agree that he pays a sum of money as compensation, in return for which he escapes punishment; and lastly, to pardon him. A recent PhD thesis concluded that on average eight out of ten convicted murderers avoided imprisonment, or indeed the death penalty, because they were able to pay monetary compensation to the victim's family.⁵ Whilst the