

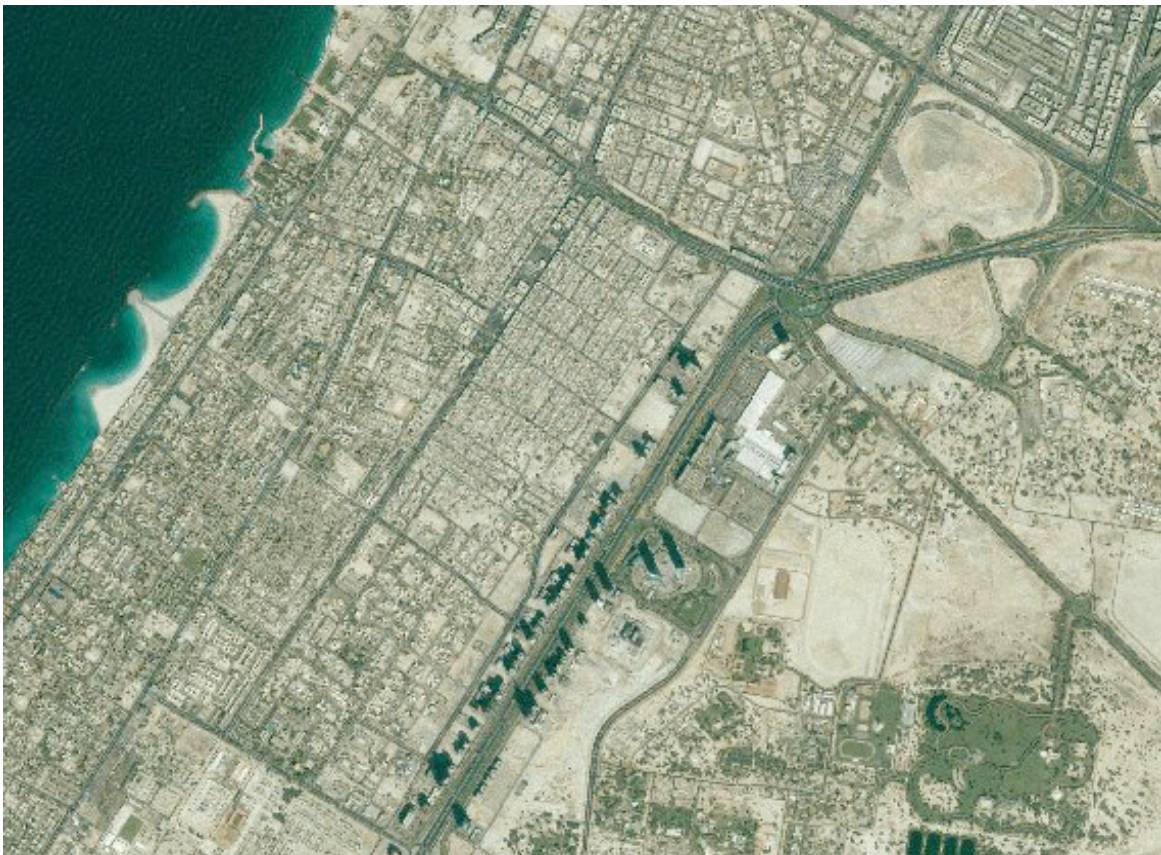
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Globalizing homosexual & male guest worker identities: The strategic role of Dubai’s Open Beach



abstract

Strategic relationships between identity formation processes associated with worker and immigrant organisations under globalization and the still illicit networks and spaces of homosexuality, especially in the Middle East, remain poorly described and analyzed. As one of the largest public spaces in the Middle East furtively dominated by males engaged in homosexuality, Dubai's Open Beach, at the north end of Jumeira, illustrates some early processes in identity formation, expression of minority sexualities, community development and political organization – under a particularly aggressive and despotic form of market-dominated globalization. The discussion in this paper centres on choice of methods to answer a broad and highly political question: *are the homosocial and homosexual spaces of Dubai's Open Beach contributing to labour activism* in adjacent neighbourhoods? In other words, can a homoerotic space also function as a conduit for broader notions of solidarity? If so, how can we begin to understand these processes, only part of which are site-specific, and forge linkages between this knowledge and activism and public policy? As a case study, Dubai's Open Beach also provides a site for examining some more generic questions of research on sexuality and space. First, what are today's diversifying 'uses' of chartings of so-called 'queer space' and what are some of the most important relationships between needs and goals for data and conclusions and research methodologies? Second, what are some post-orientalist theoretical approaches for when researchers want to study communities of Middle Eastern, South and Central Asian, and North African sexual minorities? And how can we avoid further 'orientalizing' multicultural communities in the Middle East especially in a time of heightened sectarian conflict? Third, how can communities of resistance form in contexts of "hyper-globalization" where markets appear to eclipse both the state and political apparatuses and where there is so much cultural diversity in labour forces and networks of sexual minorities that hierarchies of language, religion and ideology are undermined? In Dubai's multilingual environment, the author explores combining semi-structured interviews and cognitive mapping with other forms of knowledge. Interviews were in groups on the beach and in adjacent cafes and shopping malls. While this methodological approach biases the discussion towards the experiences of more privileged workers who have better access to English language education and ideologies of resistance, themes of migration, power, sexuality, identity, and both collective and individualized responses to the vagaries of globalization in the Middle East can still be identified. In exploring some of the relationships of homoeroticism and solidarity forming at Dubai's Open Beach, four bodies of knowledge are reviewed: Islamic and Arab homosexuality as described through Western theory; the portrayal of gay beaches in queer studies and cultural geography as sites of resistance (in the West); globalization theory as related to migrant workers and dynamic and sometimes volatile formation of collective identities; and expanded frameworks for understanding agency and activism in the formation of social movements. Through this work, more robust frameworks can be constructed for identification, description and monitoring of such rapidly expanding, non-western 'communities' of sexual minorities – leading to approaches that can better direct the benefits of research back to those studied.

Introduction

How important and strategic are certain public spaces in this age of intensified globalization and flows of information on sexual cultures and human rights? Dubai's Open Beach is one of the larger and more visible public sites in the Middle East² for homosexual males³ to meet and sometimes to have sex on-site – and its social fabric was largely formed through the current period of intensifying globalization. Cairo has a massive community of homosexual males but today is in a period of repression⁴ and Beirut supports most diverse social life (and a nascent political consciousness)⁵ but does not have the scale or the flamboyance of the collection of males on a weekend at Dubai's Open Beach. In contrast to Cairo and Beirut, Dubai is on the extreme edge of the Middle East and is on a unique cusp of Arab, Persian, South Asian and African cultures – and diasporas. Eighty per cent of Dubai's population are non-citizen guest workers and professionals sometimes allowing for a relative anonymity that for migrant Arabs in particular lowers worries about besmirching family honour.⁶ Dubai is also a major showcase of "the new highly privatised metropolis"⁷ that sometimes weakens extended family ties in favour of atomised consumption, smaller family and housing units, and less surveillance after long work days.

Dubai's position is particularly strategic for the expansion of globalising capital being on the cusp of both the Middle East and South Asia and between western, primarily neoliberal, notions of the globalization, public space, civil society and the state and far more retrogressive concepts of economic expansion, that too often are dismissed as medieval and undemocratic. The currency of these latter approaches to globalization, what Mike Davis optimistically asserted the rule of Dubai's monarch as "enlightened despotism"⁸, has held increasing value in economic development models in Asia even under supposedly democratic and socialistic governments.⁹ And certainly Dubai and its Open Beach represent a relatively tolerant and multicultural approach to public space (and homoerotic desires) in marked contrast to neighbouring Saudi Arabia¹⁰ (whose nationals flock here to avoid that country's religious police).

In this volatile milieu, what is the broader significance of a beach where hundreds of men meet every day and have furtive sex in adjacent areas such as the warm waters of the Arabian Gulf? Could there be a vague relationship between assertion of cooperative desires and site-specific assertions of rights for workers and of nascent labour solidarity? Is this a site of resistance or of re-codification of homosexual oppression – or both sets of processes? The sexual cultures of the thousands of homosexual males who connect through the Open Beach often challenge many of the concepts that have emerged under queer theory. Few of these men identify as 'queer', 'gay' or 'bisexual' and give little thoughts to semantic arguments around terms such as 'men who have sex with men'. Most men are busy making money that they send back to often female-oriented and largely women-headed household. And the culture of the Open Beach is decidedly transnational and multicultural rather than centred on Arab experiences. Instead, the texture of the male homosexual scene in Dubai is rooted in Arab, Persian, and South

Asian trading cultures with a veneer of westernization from a century and a half of British domination. At times, the barely furtive nature of the homosexual social scene on the Open Beach could be likened to UK and North American gay beaches in the early Cold War and the new networks forged shortly after in the Sexual Revolution.¹¹ But these men often come from countries with traditions of indigenous homosexual traditions and a range of forms of repression (and *de facto* tolerance) along with contemporary resistance and activism. Many of the local male citizens of the United Arab Emirates, with nationals referred to as '*Emiratis*', engage in homosexuality and travel and interact in western (and eastern) gay and queer scenes. And Indian citizens are increasingly aware of campaigns and actions to confront homophobia and institutional hostility. HIV infections and care for people with AIDS are constant sources of worry. Legally recognized guest workers, including professionals such as university teachers, are regularly and forcibly tested for HIV and are swiftly ejected from the region if positive. And despite state efforts to censor media and block certain internet sites, the men on this beach have a growing level of access to information on sexuality, sex-positive cultures, human rights, and activism.

The Open Beach, termed because there it is a public beach with no charge for access (in contrast to most other public beaches in Dubai), has become a strategic site for a wide range of national and regional homosexual networks providing support extending well beyond the sexual to emotional, professional and political. Most of the men who meet there are guest workers in the United Arab Emirates employed on contracts that will be extended for only a few more years. While there is a large community of illegal immigrants blocks away in Satwa neighbourhood¹² of Dubai, the majority of the males who enjoy the Open Beach will be forced back to their own countries or will migrate elsewhere in the coming years. While homosexual acts remain illegal in the United Arab Emirates with a recent wave of repression around same-sex marriage and parties, the presence of so many males on the Open Beach, who are widely perceived as engaging in erotic contact with each other, is effectively tolerated because their labour is needed and remains cheap.

In September of 2005, Dubai saw its first labour demonstrations in decades and today labour organizing, though illegal, and solidarity is intensifying.¹³ Labour actions have extended to the neighbourhoods adjacent to the Open Beach. For some male guest workers, the Open Beach is an important place for comfort, relaxation and human contact. But has the Open Beach also become a site for exchange of information and perspectives related to labour solidarity and activism – as well as a place for homosexual expression?¹⁴ In this zone of hyper-globalization, where labour is utterly subservient to capital, is there a continuum between sites of homosexual pleasure and labour resistance? What is the role of pleasure in a service and tourist economy of hyper-globalization where health, attitude and satisfaction are important attributes for a worker – especially ones who serve in the homes of the wealthy? And in a contrasting example, what are the roles of sites of pleasure, albeit illegal ones, for construction workers with little time for sleep and recreation? These are the central questions of this discussion along that of the

best means of determining the most powerful combinations of research methods with which could be conducted an extended investigation. And what are the most powerful and viable research methods that delve into these questions in ways that respect and do not endanger such marginalized migrant workers?

This paper begins to explore the questions that were posed above through the following sections. Underlying these questions is recognition of a problem that warrants exploration: the role of public sites as locations of homoerotic pleasure and resistance, indeed the lines between labour and pleasure, are changing under new forms of hyper-globalization and configurations of service and information ecosystems. In this context, there are diversifying uses of and goals for mapping the spaces of both labour activism and sexual minorities. These new cartographies are coinciding with more avowedly multicultural perspectives on 'publicness' with more critical examinations of orientalism. I then explore the often contradictory and confounding demographic, cultural and political economic changes under this period of hyper-globalization – especially for his formerly marginal and impoverished corner of the Arabian Peninsula. In response to changes in Western perspectives on public space in the Middle East under both hyper-globalization and renewed examinations of the legacies and residual blinders of orientalism, I posit some principles and methods of New Materialism and studies of sexuality and space. I begin to explore New Materialism to the local political economy of homophobia under globalization in the Sheikhdome of Dubai, as part of the federal entity of the United Arab Emirates as part of the Gulf Cooperative Council countries (GCC) of the Arabian Gulf. Following this sketch of political economic context is a discussion of the uses and goals of mapping public spaces of resistance under hyper-globalization with a focus on minority sexualities and discounted labour. We can then consider critical research methods after cognitive mapping and imagine some activist cartographies for such research with implications for public policy, both local and international. Finally, I conclude with some points on the prospects for strategic public sites of sexual & labour resistance in this particularly undemocratic time of domination of the public space and the state under this phase of domination by global markets.

Problem statement:

Homosexual & queer sites as locations of resistance under globalization

“Once the city is imaged by capital solely as spectacle, it can then only be consumed passively, rather an actively created by the populace at large through political participation.” David Harvey¹⁵

As aspects of leisure and pleasure are further transformed into commodities in this phase of capitalism what will happen to the relatively public locales of homosexuality where it is still illegal? Are these sites of homosexual expression and resistance to homophobia becoming integrated, surreptitiously, into service economies? Or are places such as Dubai's Open Beach becoming the locales for new forms of resistance to capitalism?

despotism? The theoretical literature remains thin. Even a major theoretical discussion, the 2006 *The Politics of Public Space*¹⁶, barely mentions gender let alone sexual minorities. And while older discussions such as our 1997 anthology, *Queers in Space | Communities | Public Places | Sites of Resistance*¹⁷, begins to touch on global identities the profound changes from the kinds of hyper-globalization and rapid urbanization now seen in Dubai were not fathomed in the mid-1990s. So the rapid social change and new functions of public space, as seen today in Dubai, challenge contemporary social and urban theory.

Certainly, Dubai represents a new stage of urbanisation under globalisation that subsumes nation states: with massive changes to cities that are rapid, ruthless in the service of capital, and barely sustainable if at all.¹⁸ Yet Dubai, today, represents one of the few places in the Middle East where relatively open and sexually active homosexual males can live without being attacked. So while Dubai's Open Beach is at first about pleasures of sexual contact between males, and lots of it, this locale also represents survival and refuge in a region and complex of religious cultures that continue to be hostile. Problematic for models of resistance are those of accommodation. It might be argued that the relative freedom of the Open Beach, typically at dusk and a night, functions more as a concession and is a bit of safety-valve – with the official heteronormative social and political structure remaining unchallenged and somewhat re-enforced. What has shaken the elite of Dubai has been the sporadic labour activism of the last two years and any relationship that this might have with public space.

Diversifying uses of & goals for mapping the spaces of sexual minorities

There are very different goals in mapping and describing "strategic sites"¹⁹ such as Dubai's Open Beach. Some of those divergent uses of mapping may come to be at odds – with some conflict perhaps intensifying under globalization. There are certain places to make erotic gestures; to see and be seen and more. 'Maps' of beach depths and the tides are important for some forms of contact. And cognitive maps differ greatly between individual who swim and those who do not. Homosexual males, who cannot afford warnings or arrests have maps of police surveillance and places less prone to overt and undercover police presence. And there are places where women, lone or in groups, will go and congregate and other areas that most females, except for members of a few subcultures such as sex tourists from former republics of the Soviet Union, will avoid.

The police certainly have 'maps' of locations and suspected acts of homosexual behaviour on the Open Beach. Undercover police have been rumoured of having sex in the water at night and then arresting or 'warning' (usually putting a person's name in a data base which can make renewal of residence permits more difficult). Dubai Municipality and urban planning and design consultants, who are typically UK-based, have certainly been mapping this area and its patterns of use and to very fine-scales. Millions of dirhams have been spent in recent years to supposedly make the beach serve a

wider range of social groups and some of the underlying goals have been to keep the area from being dominated by so many semi-naked males.

The shifting configurations of networks defined by ethnicity, language, and class can be mapped though in Dubai these communities and interactions are quite fluid. Still there are fairly predictable places where Pakistani men regularly picnic on weekends and where *Emirati* males cruise from and invite men into their automobiles. Mapping the decolonisation processes in communities with non-European sexual minorities²⁰ remains important work in much of the world. As a former protectorate, the United Arab Emirates maintained a local ruling class (though capital and business direction often came through Bombay²¹). Even within Emirati communities, there are dynamics that play out in the area between individuals primarily of Arab and Persian origins, and what languages that they speak at home, and mixed-race Emiratis with African and Balochi heritages. Dynamics with spatial dimensions for public space and neighbourhoods, related to descendants of slaves with covert forms of slavery existing in Dubai into the mid-Twentieth Centuries, can sometimes be detected. But the needs for such information on the status of the different ethnic castes from the imperial period are increasingly conflated with reconstructing historical narratives with contemporary implications often poorly explored.

More problematic is the confirmation and mapping of the exchanges and transfers of ideas – such as on human rights and solidarity. So in terms of knowledge production on sexuality and space, there is already a lot of mapping of homosexuality on Dubai's Open Beach. But information is associated with divergent purposes – related to contested futures under the complex processes associated with this phase of globalisation in the Middle East and South Asia.

Homosexuality after orientalism

“Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is a veridic discourse about the Orient[.]”

Edward Said²²

It would be a bit didactic to re-work Said and argue that, “orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over [homosexual bodies of] the Orient than it is a veridic discourse about [the diversity of homosexualities in] the Orient[.] But aspects of such an analogy are correct – and would extend to blinders in western ideologies of sexual liberation including gay liberation, lesbian feminism, and queer theory. Until recent decades, various forms of orientalist narratives dominated most ‘modern’ discussions of homosexuality and space in the Middle East. So it is worthwhile to revisit the Western conflation of the Middle East's spotty tolerance of homosexuality

and the region's political weakness and recent domination by Europe (and the United States).

Much of the West's modern notions of both homophobia and Middle Eastern culture, not to mention Islam, was codified at the height of imperialism in the late Victorian period. Orientalism and Victorian homophobia both found the Middle East a strategic geopolitical location where the West, Christianity, and modernism could demonstrate its superiority. Sir Richard Burton's celebrated orientalist conceit, in his 1884 introduction to his lurid edition of *One Hundred and One Nights* (that claimed to be uncensored except for the erasure of homosexuality)²³ illustrates how tightly notions of the superiority of Western culture and heteronormativity and have been tied to imperial power.

"The general tone of *The Nights* is high and pure. The devotional fervour often rises to the boiling-point of fanaticism. The pathos is sweet, deep and genuine; tender, simple and true, utterly unlike much of our modern tinsel. Its life, strong, splendid and multitudinous, is everywhere flavoured with that unaffected pessimism and constitutional melancholy which strike deepest root under the brightest skies and which sigh in the face of heaven."²⁴

Burton was writing nearly four decades after Britain had acquired its own corner of the Arabian Nights as a Protectorate, the Trucial States, centred around the small ports of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, that became the United Arab Emirates in 1971. Soon after publication of *One Hundred and One Nights*, Burton even posited a Middle Eastern sphere of homosexuality, the Sotadic Zone in the latitudes of 30° and 43° degrees North.²⁵ In the subsequent century of Western contradictory avoidance of and fascination with Middle Eastern homosexuality, extending to Foucault and Boswell²⁶, no alternative to that orientalist prism (linking homosexuality, pathos and political weakness) was successfully constructed.²⁷

One branch in a broader tree of discourses on Middle Eastern sexualities after Said is embodied in Joseph Massad's 2007 *Desiring Arabs*.²⁸ While poorly researched and substantiated and a particularly extreme example of positing literary narratives to contemporary communities of sexualities, the critiques embodied in *Desiring Arabs* cannot be ignored. Massad correctly describes the mis-adaption of Western notions of sodomy and homosexuality to more nuanced and diverse, Middle Eastern sexual cultures²⁹ and begins to explore the damage these imperial projects have engendered. And Massad correctly relates this reduction of sexual cultures to currents of gay sexual tourism in the Middle East, not to mention gay essentialism, in the 20th Century.³⁰ And Massad begins one of a number of lines of thinking around the hypocrisy of the imposing of Western notions of human rights when Western actors are directly involved in undermining earlier, Middle Eastern social contracts effectively put many more populations for more at risk (including as related to their individual pursuits of survival,

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safety, cultural expression, and privacy).³¹ *Desiring Arab's* most important contribution is the confirmation that Arab literature, in the Middle Ages, saw "important debates on sex and desire did exist, but rarely on their own."³²

In contrast to the introductory chapters of *Desiring Arabs*, the chapter "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World"³³ robs the rich array of Arab and other Middle Eastern sexual subcultures at any agency in its ongoing use and adaptation of 'Western' notions and networks of minority and dissident sexualities. Again, Massad correctly identifies the perniciousness of "Western interventionist trends"³⁴ but shows no field work into his assertion of so-called "the Gay International" and a "missionary task."³⁵ Certainly there is sloppiness and opportunism of which Massad may not be entirely immune. But to attack the entire "human rights community in general"³⁶ is to conflate many agendas, movements, and agendas not altogether differently from how Massad describes a rather dated project in the West where,

"It is precisely this perceived instability in the desires of Arab and Moslem men that the Gay International seeks to stabilize, as their polymorphousness confounds gay (and straight) sexual epistemology."³⁷

Through this assertion Massad avoids two decades of developments in critical theory in gender and sexuality and neatly conflates current, global interest in human rights activism around sexuality, in the Middle East that emerged after the advent of queer theory, with the latent essentialism of figures such as Jeffrey Weeks.³⁸ Massad clumsily begins to ask a very important question about whether or not 'homophobia' is stable, and can be essentialized, or whether it is relative to other inequities and violence in particular political economies of domination but largely veers away from any discussion of how to answer that for contemporary Arab culture.³⁹ Massad then fixates on what he calls the Western "campaign to incite discourse on homosexuality in Arab countries"⁴⁰ and incorrectly indulges in dismissing the extent of the embodied in the violence embodied in the 2001 Queen Boat police raids and subsequent trials claiming erroneously that, "It is not same-sex sexual practices that are being repressed by the Egyptian police but rather the sociopolitical identification of these practices with the Western identity of gay men and the publicness that these gay-identified men seek."⁴¹ which was utterly contrary to the prosecution's public arguments at the trials. Massad goes on to argue that the Western interest in the Queen Boat trials was somehow attacking the richness of Middle Eastern sexual cultures because

p. 188 referring to Cairo in 2001

"By inciting discourse about homosexuals where none existed before, the Gay International is in fact heterosexualizing a world that is being forced to be fixed by a Western binary."⁴² What is particularly offensive for a discussion of the sexual cultures of the Arabian Gulf is Massad's reproduction of chauvinist, and effective racist, stereotypes that have been constructed by often 'whiter' parts of the Middle East of the so-called

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"deviant sexual desires of the Gulf Arabs."⁴³ Finally, Massad leaves us with a new binary of Western versus Arab, rather than a supposed binary of heterosexual and homosexual that was jettisoned in the West decades back, when he state, "It is at these rarer moments when the imposition and seduction of Western norms fail that the possibility of different conceptions of desires, politics, and subjectivities emerge."⁴⁴ So with rich Middle Eastern subcultures, that have been interacting and adapting Western and South Asian sexual experiences for a very long time, so reduced in the analysis of a contemporary Arab theoretician, based in New York City, we can ask ourselves, what kinds of information and theory is needed to fathom the diversity of homosocial and sometimes homosexual experiences and networks are forming, adapting, and evolving on Dubai's Open Beach. Certainly, empirical data can quickly begin to call into question analyses based in literature most of which has never reflected the experiences of Gulf Arabs.

So if we strip away the Western conceits (and insecurities) in learning about Middle Eastern homosexualities, two contemporary blinders, that are legacies of orientalism, become evident. The first 'reality' that is often obscured is that both the Middle East and Islamic societies (two geo-cultural spheres that are only vaguely and partially overlapping) have a diversity of sexual cultures and cultural interpretations of sexuality – many of which are represented in the United Arab Emirates. Such attempts at understanding Dubai's Open Beach in terms of a supposedly homogenous pan-Arabism or some naive kind of pan-Islamicism contrast with renewed localism in parts of the Middle East. One example is in the nuanced differences between and convergence of Arabic, Persian-Arabic, and Baluchi (South Asian) cultures of eastern Iran and western Pakistan. All three cultural complexes (and respective languages) have been represented in the Dubai area and other parts of the Oman Peninsula for at least a millennium. And while there has been ongoing cultural fusion, differences in sexual cultures continue. For example the *khanith* is the male-born 'third gender' documented in Sohar, Oman (an area with strong linguistic, cultural and political links to Persia), about 100 kilometres from Dubai on the Indian Ocean. *Khaniths* were men who had sex with men, remained identifiably male with some modifications in dress (but who did not try to look like women), and who could represent themselves in court as men.⁴⁵ Theirs could be a temporary identity before heterosexual marriage or a mode of living that married men might take up later in life.⁴⁶ And there are probably two million Arabs in Oman and the United Arab Emirates, living within a day's drive of Dubai's Open Beach, who have some knowledge of this sexual culture though for many the term today would be discounted as part of dying traditions. Another homosexual culture, only hundred kilometres from Sohar and Dubai, are part of indigenous Baluchi populations linked to what is today the south-western coast of Pakistan. We can contrast the *khanith* identity to the Balochi, South Asian *hijra*⁴⁷ which is a far more static identity often associated with transsexuality and even physical modification.

The second blinder about Middle Eastern homosexuality, that remains a legacy of orientalism that distorts understandings of sexuality and space, is the lack of nuanced understanding of the tensions between Islam and secular Arab culture (and language) –

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and to a less extent with minority languages and cultures in the region. The almost schizophrenic divide in language between Arab secular traditions and the Holy Quran and Sharia law, that has been so central to the formation of the last millennium of Middle Eastern culture (and cultural dilemmas), remains poorly understood by outside researchers. Dubai's Open Beach could be interested by local historians as part of a thousand year tradition of secular public spaces – especially as outlets for males. While traditional Arab culture was by no means 'queer-friendly', under tribal law what a man did sexually in his own home (or at night on a poorly-lit beach) was considered his own business and not under the purview of religion or the state. Out of this tension arose some cultural contradictions that Western sex researchers have barely fathomed. Embodied in the fissures between older secular and tribal Arabia and the Quranic phraseology is a discourse on an almost endemic male homosexuality.⁴⁸ In her 1997 crucial essay, "Male love and Islamic law in Arabic Spain," Louis Crompton described a 'legal-lyrical schizophrenia' of homosexuality.⁴⁹ She went on to note that,

"In the literature of Sufi mysticism, rapturous love poems ostensibly addressed to male lovers become a common way of symbolizing love with the divine. So Islam paradoxically forbade, allowed, and exploited homoerotic desire, providing striking similarities with Judaism and Christianity in the sphere of law, yet fostered a radically different literary, social and affective atmosphere."⁵⁰

In the same anthology, Murray argued for Islam's often queer conflation of "mystical ecstasy and lust."⁵¹ In that 1997 essay, Crompton went on to discuss the major theoretical bridge between Islamic Spain and Renaissance Europe (increasingly argued to be the seminal work for Western dialectics and historical materialism), Ibn Kaldoun's *The Muqaddimah*.⁵² Crompton outlined the contradiction and the tension, the nuances of which have been poorly appreciated by western scholars, between Kaldoun's hostility to homosexuality earlier in this narrative⁵³ and the tolerance, and the celebration at some points, of homoerotic poetry in closing.⁵⁴ If we were to filter these tensions through seminal Western works on homosexuality and culture such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 1990 *Epistemology of the Closet*⁵⁵, it would be easy to relegate these contradictions between religious and secular experience as part of a uniform and arid culture of repression of homosexuality (which is partially true) rather than constituting a rich landscape that at least sometimes affords and nurtures spaces of homosexuality. And so far, I have never seen anyone at Dubai's Open Beach carrying and reading a Holy Quran..

The queerness of hyper-globalization

"Dubai, which is part of the United Arab Emirates, represents turbo-charged free-market capitalism at its purest – sometimes crass, often over-the-top, and always in motion. Home to more than 1.2 million people, more than 80% of whom are resident aliens, Dubai is as much a

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multicultural melting pot as New York City was in its late 19th century heyday. And like New York then, Dubai teems with winners and losers, the rich and not-so-rich, and immigrants who often find that life in the glittering metropolis is cold, hard and unfair. But the government maintains order, spends billions on infrastructure and is dedicated to establishing the city-state as a global capital of, well, capital...In Dubai, no one cares what you believe or to which god you pray. The only criterion for success and social acceptance is the almighty dollar. It is hyper-capitalism in attitude and practice..."

Zachary Karabell, The Wall Street Journal, 2007⁵⁶

As one of the largest and most recently constituted public spaces in the Middle East furiously dominated by males engaged in homosexuality, Dubai's Open Beach illustrates some tentative processes of identity formation, expression of minority sexualities, community development and political organization – under a particularly aggressive and despotic form of market-dominated globalization. It would be rhetorical to suggest that hyper-globalization 'queers' individuals. But it is fair to say that under this extremely market-based management of labour where far more men than women are brought in as foreign workers, where both the state and religion have been subsumed by capital, the typical social regulatory mechanisms that have pressured males towards heterosexuality and forming nuclear families have not been well functioning (especially when male guest workers are supporting female-headed households back home). There are two explanations that can help us understand how Dubai's frenetic mode of growth, as a result of economic globalization, have fostered new opportunities for homosexual contact and even solidarity on one of its only truly public city beaches (other municipal-owned beaches are gated, heavily monitored and require admission charges prohibitive to labourers). The first explanation is simple: the Open Beach is being left to marginalised elements of society as a kind of escape valve – perhaps to appear more tolerant. In this framework, the police 'shut down' the homosexuality if there was enough political will within Dubai Municipality. But this explanation is problematic given that adjacent residential real estate values are some of the most expensive in the region, if not the world. But this analysis does not extend to the site-specific texture of homosexual transactions on the Open Beach.

A second, more cultural explanation centres on the opportunities that arise in inter-cultural contexts with large numbers of highly mobile (and vulnerable) single males. A workplace solidarity emerges that responds to the hyper-exploitation and emotional vagaries of the migrant worker and then fuses with consumer culture. In this analysis, the tolerance of the police around the Open Beach is more from the scale and the nuance of the homosexuality on the Open Beach: a sort of 'so many proto-Sodomites, such little time' approach to arresting workers. Arrests lead to deportation and there continues to be a labour shortage in Dubai at a time when many more healthy manual labourers and handsome service workers are needed. So again, the typical Arab truncation from acts

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and identities around homosexuality suggests to some authorities that these workers are having sex together more as a response to the vagaries of Dubai's super-exploited work environments.

The exceptionally cheap labour that has built Dubai has been based on social inequities and geopolitical conflicts unleashed in the imperial expansions and convulsions over the last two centuries. The nationalities and ethnicities of the guest workers reflect the extent of the marginalisation processes in the region as related to certain areas, social groups and cultures. Thus, Pakistani and Afghan Pathans who are economic refugees from areas of conflict and domination are paid the least and often do the most dangerous work in construction. 'White' Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians, often refugees from conflict zones, often occupy service jobs. Marginally paid Bangladeshis often engage in housework. Well-educated Indian citizens from southern states such as Karnataka, many of whom are Christians, comprise a class of book-keepers and low-level managers. Well-educated Filipinas often combine two eight-hour shifts in a day working at one of the hundreds of Starbucks cafes and then selling cars on commission. Post-secondary education is dominated by Canada and British teachers with comparably qualified Arabs typically receiving lower salaries.

The fragmentation of Dubai's work force, combined with the utter marginalisation of its labourers and service workers, has, in turn, generated alienation both culturally and in the bodies of women and men. Transplanted to Dubai, the 'erotic alienations'⁵⁷ of guest workers can be transmuted into a kind of sexual citizenship that provides far more benefits than those of holding a passport of the many repressive and dysfunctional states of the region. But what are the key processes of hyper-globalization at work in Dubai and how could they 'queer' workers or at least marginalize and atomise them at the expense of the typical family structures back in their countries of origin? A number of hyper-globalization processes are relevant here. Shadid argued that,

"The Dubai model boils down to a self-consciously corporate approach to government: aspeed in decisions possible under an authoritarian system..."⁵⁸

The same journalist provides another clue to how hyper-globalization can provide space, cracks in the edifice of heteronormativity, for homosexual contact.

"At the heart of what Dubai and its globalization are creating, two cities overlap. One is a dystopic, even soulless vision of the future, where notions of civil society, individual rights and identity are subsumed in the logic of capital. The other is a rare triumph of the private sector in an Arab city that provides a model of prosperity and a force for integration, reversing decades of disappointment and defeat."⁵⁹

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So if in the Dubai 'dream', some homosexuality is detected, even in public space, such supposed problems are over-shadowed by the city's exceptional prosperity.

Certainly the almost religious fury for the market, a kind of mercantile fundamentalism, combined with the decline of the regulatory apparatuses of the state could suggest to many that homosexuality was less of a subject for repression. And police forces in Dubai are sensitive about not being too brutal with sexual minorities so as to avert scandals that could put off tourists. Another side of this hyper-globalization is a kind of new feudalism where there are few constraints on individuals who control large amounts of capital along with virtually total surveillance of guest workers in an almost indentured relationship to the corporations who recruit them. And the hundreds of thousands of labourers from remote rural areas in the region often did not have the education and religious instruction to fully realize that their desires (and acts) are illegal. And their employers typically will not pay to provide them with such cultural orientation to the Gulf. So far the one day a week when most workers are not working ten to twelve hour days, there can be a relative degree a freedom without the constant surveillance of most workplaces (surveillance that is intensifying as labour activism grows).

Perhaps the most important 'queering' factor in Dubai's style of hyper-globalization is the reticence to allow foreign women to work in the United Arab Emirates – except for very specific service and professional jobs (including in the city-state's massive female prostitution industry). Both labourers and service workers live in worlds of male solidarity with few opportunities to meet women. And few men can afford female prostitutes when they'd like them. And the small number of female guest workers is due to a policy that is *not* consistent with the country's obsession with globalization. Non-Arab women workers and professional, especially in families, are discouraged from coming to the country for fear of the formation of a class of immigrants who one day might demand citizenship.

But is Dubai's style of hyper-globalization actually undermining heteronormative social structures and nurturing homoerotic networks? Or is it just that urban development has been so chaotic that strategies and resources of homophobic repression have not been sufficient allocated? Relevant literature is thin though Binnie proposed a notion of "transnational urbanism"⁶⁰ that might suggest that Dubai would attract certain sex-positive subcultures. Altman argued that, "Increasingly the institutions and ideologies which link sex and politics are themselves being globalized, as concerns around gender, sexuality, and the body play a central role in the construction of international political, social, and economic regimes."⁶¹ And with Dubai almost obsessed with acquiring cosmopolitanism, at almost any cost, a few thousand men on a beach at dusk might have more positive symbolic impact for a supposedly liberalizing metropolis than the unhappiness generated by a few religious zealots who might stumble upon some public sex.

But there are few signs of the formation of a Western 'queer' identity at the Open Beach. More often, any homosexual identity that might be forming is stripped of theory and ideology and limited to acts, images and commodities. Altman argued for "the globalization of sexual identities"⁶² extending to new forms of what in the West we might call 'closeted' identities defined more by class, consumerism, culture and religion. So if there is globalization of sexual identities, there is also globalization of a lack of obvious identification in favour of new forms of clandestine hook-ups and subterfuge – particularly in the chaos of hyper-globalization. And such identifications can involve ones stripped down to acts and locales over more totalized notions of individual expression or collective liberation. Binnie's 2004 note on sexual minority identities for Indonesians and Filipinos⁶³ infers that if there is not a cultural and political framework for 'coming out', there is not really a closet (unless one argued it was an entire nation state or national culture). And more interestingly for the Middle East, those 'Western' dichotomies ('coming out' or 'being in the closet') may have functioned to obscure understandings of more nuanced and relatively 'silent' identities (and respective networks). In the context of the United Arab Emirates, local citizenship (no matter how schizophrenic between being married and closeted and attending extended Arab homosexual weekends) has its privileges. Similarly, migrants of more powerful and wealthier allies, typically from Europe and North America (who unlike the United Arab Emirates are not pinned between two of the most homophobic and repressive countries on earth), are even in better positions to take risks and expressing their homosexuality in more extended ways. These Western forms of sexual identity contrast markedly with the experiences of the many men from impoverished and dysfunctional states such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka where working twelve hours a day, six days a week, what little intimacy and sexual satisfaction they achieve is short and furtive – and where one brush with a police officer could have disastrous financial impacts for their extended family back home.

As for the rapidly tourism in the United Arab Emirates, much of it passes through Dubai and near the Open Beach. While institutional homophobia is well-entrenched, Dubai is marketing itself so aggressively that a growing number of its visitors appear to be gay men. However, so far there are no 'gay ski weekend' packages or any other kinds of overt marketing. Tourism in the United Arab Emirates is centred on citizens of more functional and developed countries that often provide higher levels of protection to their citizens sometimes including against homophobia. So arrests of nationals from Europe and North America would be risky in terms of generating unwelcome media coverage. In deed, Dubai represents a soft fence to queer mobility: with sexual minorities from more privileged classes of certain western countries with extensive human rights protections able to travel with little worry and fear of violence than nationals from other parts of the Middle East and Asia.

Towards a New Materialism:

Theory & methods for studies of sexuality and space

“[T]he lost geography of the public sphere comes with a concurrent loss of politics[.]” Neil Smith and Setha Low⁶⁴

If we accept Low and Smith's enigmatic statement on the often disparate discourses of the public sphere and public space, what would be a body of theory, approaches and research methods that could reconstruct a 'lost geography'? And if we revisit Marx's adage that religion is the "opiate of the masses", there is an inference of one substance that is even sweeter and more addictive (and not coincidentally a substitute for empirical research): ideology. So for efforts to understand the social interactions and the human-environmental relationships on Dubai's Open Beach there is some utility in recreating the lost geography of the public sphere in public space that is cognizant of ideologies but that is grounded on critical forms of empirical research and analysis. Part of this materialist turn is in response to weaker scholarship in human geography and environmental studies that conflate theory with facile research with limited data sets. One term for these constellations of more empirically-based theory and research methods is "New Materialism." Such approaches are particularly relevant to efforts to understanding the relationships of homosexuality, globalization and urban open space at Dubai's Open Beach.

New Materialist theory includes the following tenets. Theory is based on observable relationships that are not entirely unique and that can be reconfirmed in the same or related locales. All social-environmental relationships exist within contexts of political economies that warrant careful consideration in research design. In contrast to more didactic interpretations of Hegel and historical materialism in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century, New Materialism recognizes significant inter-relationships between political economy and ideas. New Materialism delves back before Hegel as with earlier recognition of historical developments and dialectics such as to the work of Ibn Kaldoun and his ambiguous relationship to homosexual desire and homophobia. So in contrast to early Marxism, New Materialism recognizes that culture and ideas do have social, material and environmental impacts that are only partially 'managed' by political economies. This has direct implications for studies of sexual minorities and globalization. For example, Dennis Altman has argued that, "The present period is one which has to be understood as marking an enormous expansion of the reach of capitalism, both in terms of geography and in terms of everyday life, but without thereby assuming that everything is reducible to economic power."⁶⁵ And in Dubai's globalizing service economy, desire, no matter how marginalized by the state-religion, can have direct impacts that are only partially managed by the market and local governments.

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New Materialism also recognizes that the social roles of urban environmental planning and design are expanding and also are not fully subsumed and managed by capital and political power. Rather than being determined through politics and economics, the power relationships the underlay and that are reproduced in planning and design are become partially autonomous spheres of power within local and regional political economies.

New Materialism delves further into the residual blinders and biases of the post-colonial worlds, extending well beyond critiques of Eurocentric notions of knowledge, power, research and analysis. Recognizing a richer set of political economic and cultural dynamics at play in most locations, New Materialism eschews simplistic and didactic notions such as Huntington's of a 'clash of civilizations' (of 'East' and 'West') and recognizes complex transactions, exchanges and competition between a range of cultures unevenly localized and linked under diverse and indefinite processes of globalisation. And New Materialism is more cognizant of political economies of knowledge production and respective motivations, benefits and costs of exchanges of information. New Materialist research designs for better understanding the interactions of social groups and public space, that are typically mediated by a political economy with planning and design spheres, are grounded in observable relationships (rather than relying on informant narratives or even cognitive maps). New Materialist approaches to research on human and environmental relationships include concerns for specific acts and points of physical space. Models of ecological relationships and sustainability (and lack of sustainability) are directly relevant to research designs.

Local political economies of homophobia under globalization

“[T]he meaning of the new public spaces depended in large measure upon the private interests (such as landowners, developers, construction interests and workers, commerce of all kinds) they supported.”

David Harvey on Paris under the Second Empire⁶⁶

One of the simplest notions of the present phase of globalization is the decline of the nation state in favour of the domination of capital and capitalists. In this framework, multiculturalism, transnational relationships, and the reassertion of the local, are dismissed as minor and probably fleeting bi-products of a total process where human relationships are reduced to those defined through market transactions. And certainly in the Gulf, where a majority of the population reside through work visas, this reduction of globalization has currency. But if there is globalization, there are also nation states, and no matter how powerful is capital, there is always a disharmony between political and economic interests.

The state is not disappearing under the current epoch of globalization. In countries such as the United Arab Emirates, the two major levels of government, federal and local, are just 'going into the closet' – at least for appearances sake on the international stage.

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Binnie argued that the recent work on sexual citizenship "has been significant in re-focusing critical attention on the state."⁶⁷ But in periods of relatively rapid and spectacular forms of globalization, what processes and relationships constitute 'the state'? The state can be a remarkably uneven set of linkages, controls and transfers of wealth as can be highlighted by the United Arab Emirates. So to understand the dynamics at work on Dubai's Open Beach, a number of only overlapping political economies must be described especially:

1. Dubai Municipality;
2. the Sheikdom of Dubai and its relationship to the federal government of the United Arab Emirates;
3. the United Arab Emirates as one of six nations in the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) as well as broader organisations such as the Arab League; and
4. the United Arab Emirates as signatory to certain international conventions, such as the World Trade Organization, and not a signatory to other agreements such as the International Labour Organisation's agreement on tolerance for collective bargaining

Without diverging into local history and politics, much of the dynamics within and between these levels of political economy have direct impacts on the form of the Open Beach and what can take place there. The following are some of the most important levels of political economy that warrants exploration in fully understanding the dynamics at Dubai's Open Beach:

1. demographics especially related to gender, ethnicity and migrants;
2. traditional culture and custom along with cultural dynamics and cultural institutions;
3. history of the state (and colonialism);
4. legal history;
5. shifting patterns of ownership and flows of capital;
6. power, state-craft and attempts at power-sharing; and
7. dynamics of urban environmental planning and design.

In one example of the kinds of studies that are necessary, legal history becomes important here. Most of the GCC countries, including the United Arab Emirates and Oman, have laws criminalizing homosexuality that were only established by the British in the second half of the Nineteenth Century. In 1956, penalties in the Gulf were lessened to ten years maximum and these laws are still in place in the United Arab Emirates.⁶⁸ Consequently, penalties in nearby Oman have been considerably lessened. What complicates the legal situation for Dubai, and which effectively provides windows for tolerance, is the

unevenness of the application of Quranic or Sharia law both within the United Arab Emirates confederation and within the legal code of relatively liberal Dubai. For example, the Sheikdom of Dubai's courts are one of two local governments in the country that do not have relationships to the federal Supreme Court of the United Arab Emirates (which has a constitution that enshrines some human rights) making legal decisions for the Open Beach as particularly idiosyncratic (and largely irrelevant to the rest of the country and the GCC).

Similarly gender dynamics have a huge and still under-explored set of implications on Dubai's public space. And while the United Arab Emirates generates an image of liberalism in the Arabian Peninsula women are often afforded fewer rights than even in neighbouring and arch-conservative Saudi.

The political economy of homophobia in the United Arab Emirates has been dominated by a series of arrests at a number of group-same-sex weddings in 2004 and 2005. Arrests were in sheikhdoms adjacent to Dubai.⁶⁹ What was so exceptional about these arrests is that they become international news and both federal and local levels of government responded to the attention by first trying to hide the repression (and the viciousness of the attacks on these men) and then to rationalize more supposedly acceptable punishment.⁷⁰ So any increased level of repression on the Open Beach, leading to arrests, would further fuel international attention on the human rights in the United Arab Emirates and the continued oppression of women, workers, and sexual minorities.

While the examples above only represent a small portion of the dimension of political economy that warrant exploration in trying to understanding what is going on around Dubai's Open Beach, another mode of investigation can focus on the texture of the urban space. Five different neighbourhoods, reflecting divergent political economies and responses to globalization, exist adjacent to or near the Open Beach. I argue that the Open Beach exists in a kind of fissure between poorly integrated globalization processes – with lapses and gaps in decision-making (especially by the municipality) that have not been fully identified by local decision-makers.

1. The Open Beach is part of '**Jumeira**', and more specifically the northern end of Jumeira Beach, which is now one of the most expensive neighbourhoods in the region and in the world. Here we see old nationalist money and spectacular economies of both power and leisure. But sometimes denizens of this neighbourhood are vulnerable to globalization processes such as when inflated housing values push them out.
2. Several blocks behind Jumeirah is the old working-class Arab village of **Satwa**. Today, Satwa is a combination of slum (often for illegal migrants), low income housing and some new villas.

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3. On the other side of Satwa, and less than a kilometre from the Open Beach, are the spectacular towers of **Sheik Zayed Road** and the Gulf's most important financial district, the so-called aspiring 'capital of capital'.
4. Directly north of the Open Beach is the original site and current headquarters of **The Port of Dubai**. Here, an industrial working class once formed and has been aggressively controlled through decades of government repression.
5. Directly south of the Open Beach is the new centre of Dubai, the glittering strip of new and massive hotels that stretches for ten kilometres along **Jumeira Beach**.

The Open Beach 'services' all five of these areas, especially their poor workers, in different ways

Mapping spaces of resistance under hyper-globalization: Minority sexualities & discounted labour

If we want to explore new relationships between capital, labour, economic diversification and multiculturalism under globalization, the Open Beach can be considered a laboratory for broader questions of alienated labour and sexuality. My initial question about whether there is any relationship between the homosexual solidarity and growing labour activism can be expanded. Are the homosocial and homosexual spaces of Dubai's Open Beach contributing to a broader trope of resistance? So far, local labour resistance (that is certainly not yet extending to proposals for collective bargaining) has been spontaneous with only one above-ground organisation calling for the United Arab Emirates to conform to International Labour Organizations standards, London-based Mafiwasta⁷¹

How can we map collective experiences of intimate acts, resistance and solidarity? While homosexuality can be a form of resistance to homophobia, how does it relate to labour solidarity – especially when hundreds of thousands of men live, work and sleep together? And how could these relationships be mapped? Clearly the links between homosexuality and labour solidarity are less about the mechanics of the body and more about shared purposes. And many of these workers come from the same villages, choose to be recruited together, choose to live and to return home together. And while Dubai may provide a model for the revitalization of capitalism through extreme forms of domination of labour, there has been little thought to long-term viability in terms of the need to retain workers (individuals who increasingly torn between their jobs, comrades and glamour of Dubai and returning to the poverty of their families and villages).

Critical research methods after cognitive mapping

The latter part of the discussion in this paper centres on ways to choose research methods as part of designing a way to answer a broad and highly political question: are the homosocial and homosexual spaces of Dubai's Open Beach contributing to labour

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activism in adjacent neighbourhoods? In other words, can a homoerotic space also function as a conduit for broader notions of solidarity? If so, how can we begin to understand these processes, only part of which are site-specific, and forge linkages between this knowledge and activism and public policy? But even with this small cluster of rhetorical questions, a range of divergent goals and potential uses of data and conclusions become apparent.

Research goals, and related programmes and agendas, can be very different depending on institutional affiliations, citizenships and funding sources. What are the power relationships behind such divergent forms of social mapping? What are the respective social design and engineering agendas? Who conducts the research? Who provides the information? Who pays for the information and who benefits? What are the economic and legal dimensions of research projects on legally marginalized migrants in countries intent on minimizing its human rights abuses? And various scholarly cultures with differing standards and interpretations of human-subject protocols come into play, and rightly so.

As the standards are raised in making credible conclusions in research on human communities and their environments, the necessity to involve more disciplines, measures and data sets is increasing. Research programmes invariably require multicultural teams. Finer scaled maps are increasingly valuable with potentials for misuse. But in this multicultural and globalizing scholarly world of sexuality and space, modes of data collection have improved less than become more pliable in the service of certain daunting questions. The following are some of the most important forms of inquiry needed to understanding such relationships between certain social groups and sites in a rapidly changing and volatile political economy and migrant social milieu.

Demographic information is some of the most useful but is often the most difficult to obtain. In Dubai, with two official languages, Arabic and English, most workers speak only one of these poorly with a sector of labourers who speak neither. Thus obtaining basic demographic information through interviews is problematic. Obtaining any credible data sets on communities of origin, names, ages, family situations, and employers is impossible. Epidemiological research, related to a particular site like the Open Beach, is problematic. Relating information on individuals to health data is virtually impossible and the Dubai Local Government does keep some of this information and uses it regularly as a basis for deporting workers (especially if they test positive for tuberculosis or HIV).

Semi-structured interviews that are used to construct broader social narratives⁷² might be a useful tool if conducted in strict anonymity and if larger numbers of informants consulted and their information compared. While there are oral history practices employed in Dubai⁷³, there is little knowledge or tolerance of these methods for transgressive sexualities. Language becomes a huge issue. Long-term residents, if they were compelled to speak about themselves which is unlikely, will speak in Arabic though typically will use English terms and phrases especially in describing largely western

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concepts such as stable sexual identities. The rare, long-term resident non-citizen may have a lot to say but they are sure to be relatively privileged. Few groups may want to provide graphic representation of their cognitive maps.

Participant-observation, involving a diverse team, may yield some crucial data on acts, sites and social groups. But it is difficult to find out much information about some individuals except through their body characteristics and language. Secondary information from ethnographies, government reports and the wealth of maps and remote sensing is very important. Similarly useful are environmental assessments, political economic profiles, and legal scholarship and case law. Data collection methods adapted from both the geographies of migrants and of tourism is relevant.

Towards activist cartographies & better cognizance of implications for public policy

There are almost too many activist uses of spatial and social data on Dubai's Open Beach – involving various risks to the men who enjoy it. Consequently, it is necessary, ethically, to query the potential uses of this information for 'activism'. Whose activism? What are the goals of the activism? Who is at risk from the research and the activism? What kinds of protections and long-term prospects are available to field researchers? Few Arab-speaking scholars, based in the Middle East, could risk being associated with such an initiative.

Today in Dubai, there are divergent uses of sex-positive information on furtive sites and most of it, if transmitted carelessly, could be made available and used by the police and immigration authorities. And urban planners and designers continue to misuse data from studies such as those embarked upon here to create oversimplified guidelines on social groups, activities and needs. Even such liberal and well-meaning design initiatives, still often generated by firms based in foreign cities such London, can be easily appropriated by local authorities to imagine futures even more draconian and unjust than today.

Conclusions:

The prospects of strategic public sites for sexual & labour resistance under hyper-globalization

Dubai's Open Beach continues to afford homosexual expression because it is an environment in which it is difficult to conduct research on social relationships. Even with strong sets of empirical data over time, conclusions on social groups, extent of sexual expression, locations of acts, and exchange of ideas will be difficult to make. If this were not the case, and there was a consensus with local authorities about the extensive homosexuality, the beach would be more heavily policed and altered to minimize opportunities for intimate contact. However, such 'homophobic' interventions may well be in the works.

Cairo has its numbers and repression. Beirut has its night-life. But as a public place in a privatizing country, Dubai's Open Beach represents a historic meeting point, and arena

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perhaps, for Middle East male homosexual cultures – and attempts to tolerate them in the context of trans-Arab religious, political and legal institutions. Over the last three decades, this space formed in part in opposition to and in part in symbiosis with contradiction processes of state formation and a particular virulent and aggressive form of globalization. Within the cracks in this contradiction between the state and the market place, between the 'national' (in the uneasy confederation that is the United Arab Emirates), shifting currents of tolerance and repression have resulted in a particularly diverse, rich and active set of cultures of homosexuality. And it would be a mistake to assume that dialogues for tolerance, extending to sexual expression, have not already been initiated in the region.⁷⁴ The question is whether or not this phase of the domination of nation states by capital, in formerly marginal parts of the Middle East such as Dubai, secular discourses of tolerance and human rights can be re-established. In a curious way, the men of the Open Beach can teach us a great deal.

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Notes

¹ This is the first draft of this discussion though I began the initial phase of the field work in Satwa in 2003. I was residing in the country and teaching in a graduate programme where most of the students were government officials. Some of my students alerted me to the extent of the knowledge of these furtive places, hostilities towards foreign migrants and sexual minorities, and the quandaries that officials in Dubai have been experiencing while being instructed to liberalize under globalization and the rapid expansion of tourism.

² For a sketch of the typical repression of homosexual males in much of the Middle East, see Negar Azimi's 2006 *New York Times* essay 'Prisoners of sex' (December 3, 2006).

³ While some males who enjoy Dubai's Open Beach may engage in some homosexual acts throughout their lives and some may have some kind of local or global identification around aspects of these sexualities, the focus on interviews and information gathering for the research in this presentation was not on identification of the richness of eroticized identities and sexual cultures. There would have been too much personal data to consider while the focus in my research was in the role of respective homosocial

network in self-protection from neoliberal practices that put them at risk and impoverished them – in the context of Dubai Municipality decisions about this strategic beach.

⁴ Whitaker, Brian. 2006. *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press. See pages 48 to 53.

⁵ *ibid.*, See pages 41 to 48.

⁶ *ibid.*, See pages 17 to 31.

⁷ Smith, Neil and Setha Low. 2006. Introduction: The imperatives of public space. in *The Politics of Public Space*. Low, Setha and Neil Smith (eds.). New York: Routledge. 1 – 16. See page 9.

⁸ Mike Davis. 2005. Sinister paradise: Does the road to the future end at Dubai? *TomDispatch.com*
<http://www.tomdispatch.com/index.mhtml?pid=5807>

⁹ One example of this repressive current in globalisation strategies is illustrated by the March 2007 conflict around the town of Nandigram in West Bengal and the continued assertion of the increased powers of Indian states in establishing Special Economic Zones (for largely private corporations).

¹⁰ Labi, Nadya. 2007. The kingdom in the closet. *The Atlantic* (May 2007): 70 – 82.

¹¹ Ingram, G. B. 2001. Redesigning Wreck: Beach meets forest as location of male homoerotic culture & placemaking in Pacific Canada. in *In a Queer Country: Gay and lesbian studies in the Canadian Context*. Terry Goldie (ed.). Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press. 188 – 208.

¹² Ingram, G. B. & Michael Habib. 2004. Re-ordering & after: Editing ecosystems & history in the restoration of heritage landscapes under globalization. in 2004-2005 Series of the *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Working Paper Series* 160 (International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments / University of California Berkeley College of Environmental Design).

¹³ Fattah, Hassan M. 2005. Workers' protest spurs Arab Emirates to act. *New York Times* (September 25, 2005); Fattah, Hassan M. 2006. In Dubai, an outcry from Asians for workplace rights. *New York Times* (March 26, 2006)

¹⁴ This question of linkage and overlap between sites of resistance against repression of sexuality and locales for labour solidarity and organizing was explored for my own neighbourhood in Vancouver, Canada in Ingram, G. B. 2003. Returning to the scene of the crime: Uses of trial narratives of consensual male homosexuality for urban research, with examples from Twentieth-Century British Columbia. *GLQ (Gay and Lesbian Quarterly)* (New York) 10(1): 77 - 110.

¹⁵ David Harvey. 2006. The political economy of public space. in *The Politics of Public Space*. Low, Setha and Neil Smith (eds.). New York: Routledge. 17 – 34. See page 21.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Ingram, G. B., A.-M. Bouthillette and Y. Retter (eds.). 1997. *Queers in Space: Communities | Public Places | Sites of Resistance*. Seattle: Bay Press.

¹⁸ Mylius, Andrew. 2005. Dubai today: The most unsustainable place on the planet? *New Civil Engineer* (21 April, 2005): 18 – 19. www.nceplus.co.uk

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¹⁹ Ingram, G. B. 1997. 'Open' space as strategic queer sites. in *Queers in Space: Communities | Public Places | Sites of Resistance*. 95 - 125.

²⁰ Ingram, G. B. 2000. Mapping decolonisation in male homoerotic space in Pacific Canada. in *De-Centring Sexualities: Representation and Politics Beyond the Metropolis*. Richard Phillips, Diane Watt and David Shuttleton (eds.). London: Routledge. 217 – 238.

²¹ Al-Sayegh, Fatma. 1998. Merchants' role in a changing society: The case of Dubai, 1900 – 90. *Middle Eastern Studies* 34(1): 87 - 102. See pages 88 and 93.

²² Edward Said. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon. p. 6.

²³ Massad noted the elimination of the story of Abu Nuwas and the three youths in the 1937 edition of *A Thousand and One Nights* (Joseph A. Massad 2007. *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pages 72 – 73).

²⁴ Burton, Richard F. 2004 (c 1884). Preface. *The Arabian Nights: Tales From A Thousand and One Nights*. Richard F. Burton (trans.). New York: The Modern Library. xxv – xli. The passage quoted is on p. xxxiv.

²⁵ Whitaker, Brian. 2006. *Unspeakable Love*. See pages 67 and 68.

²⁶ Schmitt, Arno. A critique of John Boswell's writing on Muslim gays. 1992. in *Sexuality and Erotism Among Males in Moslem Societies*. Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer (eds.). New York: The Hawthorn Press. 169 – 178.

²⁷ Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer. 1992. Preface in *Sexuality and Erotism Among Males in Moslem Societies*. Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer (eds.). New York: The Hawthorn Press. xiii – xiv.

²⁸ Joseph A. Massad 2007. *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²⁹ *ibid.*, See pages 30 – 31.

³⁰ *ibid.*, See page 38.

³¹ *ibid.*, See pages 38 – 40.

³² *ibid.*, See pages 52, 102.

³³ *ibid.*, See pages 160 – 190.

³⁴ *ibid.*, See page 160.

³⁵ *ibid.*, See page 161.

³⁶ *ibid.*, See page 160.

³⁷ *ibid.*, See page 164.

³⁸ *ibid.*, See page 165.

³⁹ *ibid.*, See page 173.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, See pages 168 - 169.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, See page 183.

⁴² *ibid.*, See page 188.

⁴³ *ibid.*, See p. 348

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, See page 418.

⁴⁵ Murray, Stephen O. 1997. The Sohari *Khanith*. in *Islamic Sexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (eds.). New York: New York University Press. 244 – 255. See page 246.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pages 246 to 250.

⁴⁷ Naqvi, Nauman and Hasan Mujtaba. 1997. Two Baluchi *Buggas*, a Sindhi *Zenana*, and the status of *Hijras* in contemporary Pakistan. in *Islamic Sexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (eds.). New York: New York University Press. 262 – 266.

⁴⁸ Pellat, Charles. 1992. *Liwat*. in *Sexuality and Erotism Among Males in Moslem Societies*. Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer (eds.). New York: The Hawthorn Press. 151 – 167.

⁴⁹ Crompton, Louis. 1997. Male love and Islamic law in Arabic Spain. in *Islamic Sexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (eds.). New York: New York University Press. 142 – 157. See page 155.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, See page 156.

⁵¹ Murray, Stephen O. 1997. Corporealizing Medieval Persian and Turkish tropes. in *Islamic Sexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (eds.). New York: New York University Press. 132 – 141. See page 133.

⁵² Kaldoun, Ibn. 1967. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Franz Rosenthal (trans.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁵³ *ibid.*, See pages 295 and 296.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, See pages 344 to 371.

⁵⁵ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1990. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

⁵⁶ Karabell, Zachary. 2007. City of Dreams. *The Wall Street Journal* (17 March, 2007): A9.

⁵⁷ Ingram, G. B. 1997. Marginality and the landscapes of erotic alien(n)ations. in *Queers in Space: Communities | Public Places | Sites of Resistance*. 27 - 52.

⁵⁸ Shadid, Anthony. 2006. The towering dream of Dubai. *Washington Post* (April 30, 2006): A1.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Binnie, Jon. 2004. *The Globalization of Sexuality*. London: Sage. See pages 122 to 144.

⁶¹ Altman, Dennis. 2001. *Global Sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. See page 9.

⁶² *ibid* See pages 86 to 105.

⁶³ Binnie, Jon. 2004. *The Globalization of Sexuality*. See pages 79 to 81.

⁶⁴ Smith, Neil and Setha Low. 2006. Introduction: The imperatives of public space. in *The Politics of Public Space*. Low, Setha and Neil Smith (eds.). New York: Routledge. 1 – 16. See page 7.

⁶⁵ Altman, Dennis. 2001. *Global Sex*. See page 36.

⁶⁶ David Harvey. 2006. The political economy of public space. in *The Politics of Public Space*. Low, Setha and Neil Smith (eds.). New York: Routledge. 17 – 34. See page 21.

⁶⁷ Binnie, Jon. 2004. *The Globalization of Sexuality*. See page 2.

⁶⁸ Sofer, Jehoeda. 1992. Sodomy in the law of Muslim states. in *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies*. Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer (eds.). New York: The Hawthorn Press. 131 – 139. See pages 133, 144 and 145.

⁶⁹ Krane, Jim. 2005. Dozens arrested in mass Emirates gay wedding. *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 26 November, 2005.

⁷⁰ GulfNews.com. 2005. UAE ministry denies reports of hormone treatments for 'gay wedding' suspects. *GulfNews.com* (November 30, 2005).

⁷¹ www.mafiwasta.com

⁷² Plummer, Kenneth. 1995. *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change, and Social Worlds*. New York: Routledge.

⁷³ *ibid*.

⁷⁴ Sen's recent essays on Indian cultural history repeatedly visit the pluralism and public dialogue established Mughal emperor, Akbar, a Moslem, in the late Sixteenth Century and his *rahi aqi* (The path of reason). (Sen, Amartya. 2005. *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*. New Delhi: Penguin. See pages 18 – 19, 25, 39, 32, 287 – 289.)