

Our trip to Musaffah: Brokering in Daily Life in the UAE (part 1)

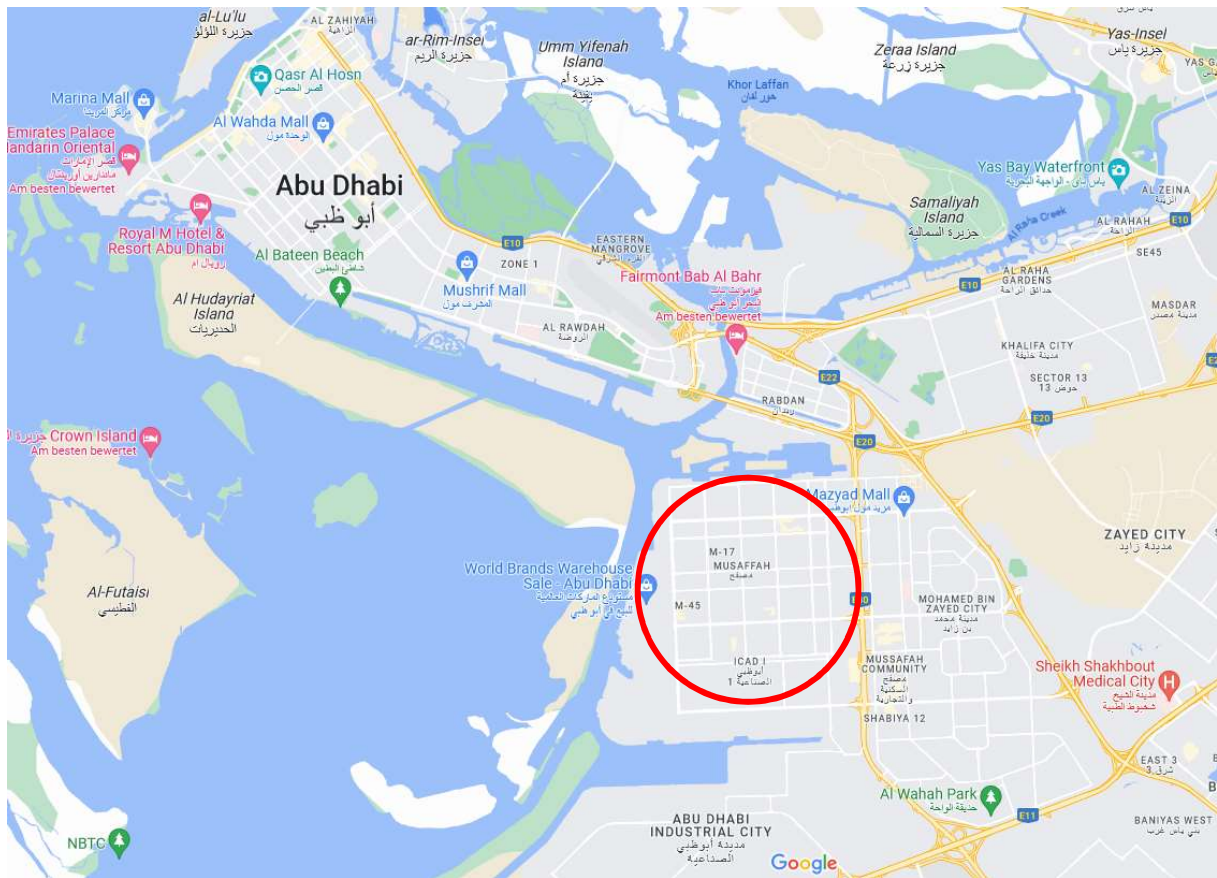


Fig. 1 Map Abu Dhabi and the location of the Musaffah industrial area, *Google Maps 2023*

One of the things I noted during our journey was how we arrived at our destination and the access to the place. We walked to Abu Dhabi's bus station from our hotel and met one of the research collaborators of Michaela and Jonathan, a nice guy named Suma, who volunteered to take us to where he lives and works. He escorted us to a nearby location, where we attempted to hail a cab to take us to the Musaffah industrial district. There we met a young Asian man who appeared to be from the Indian subcontinent. I thought he was a driver. When he saw our number, which required a bigger car than his, he immediately became a broker. This made me understand that in the UAE, brokers could be anybody and everyone. He quickly made a few phone calls and arranged for a bigger car to pick us up. Seeing how resourceful and adaptable people can be in the UAE was interesting. He changed his role to fit our needs. This was also something I saw throughout my extensive fieldwork in Sharjah. Almost every migrant worker is a potential broker, and practically every part of their daily lives involves some form of brokering. It is a broker community where the ability to broker is highly valued

and can lead to social and economic mobility, especially for migrant workers who often lack other forms of social or economic capital. However, this also means that exploitation and abuse are rampant in the brokering industry, making it a complex and problematic aspect of the transnational experience of many migrant workers. Nevertheless, the adaptability and resourcefulness of migrant workers in the UAE can be attributed to their need to survive and thrive in a foreign land. Their ability to take on different roles and act as brokers is also a testament to their resilience and determination to make a living. In my dissertation, I plan to expand on the concept of a broker community.

The car finally showed up after waiting for fifteen minutes. We began our adventure after the van arrived. Driving from Abu Dhabi to the southeast, to Mussafah, took around 30 minutes.

(field notes by Saleh Seid Adem, 08/02/2023)