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The Gulf Migrant-Spectre and its haunting(s) Representations of the spectral lives of Gulf Migrants in Temporary People (2017)

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The Gulf Migrant-Spectre and its haunting(s):

Representations of the spectral lives of Gulf Migrants in *Temporary People* (2017)

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A thesis submitted to the University of Leiden for the degree of

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Erasure and defacement concoct ghosts;

I don't want to haunt you, but I will

- Eve Tuck and C. Ree, *A Glossary of Haunting*, 643

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1. Introduction

Temporary. People.

Illegal. People.

Ephemeral. People.

Gone. People.

- Deepak Unnikrishnan, *Temporary People* (2017), 23-24

Temporary People (2017) by Deepak Unnikrishnan is a “novel” or in the author’s preference “a book” (Unnikrishnan, *The Punch*, 2017) that contains a collection of 28 texts, mostly speculative fiction in various forms (poetry, short stories, interview scripts, lists, sketches etc.) connected by its subject, which is central to this thesis: the Gulf Migrants of Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates's capital. The ‘Gulf’ is shorthand reference for these countries whose shorelines are defined by the Arabian Gulf: United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain, also known as the Gulf Cooperation Council. While each has their own history, a significant element in all countries is its majority “Gulf Migrant” population. They are legally rendered “guest workers” as they were brought in with the intent of a temporary labour force sponsored by the Kafala visa system to support the influx of urban development after oil was struck in the Early 1950s throughout the region, the fossil fuel contributing to a majority of their GDP (Refer to section 2.a).

Unlike migration to Europe and the remainder of the West, there are no avenues for citizenship or permanent residency. Due to their constant, vulnerable “temporary” status, Gulf Migrants are often subject to marginalisation and state control at multiple levels due to socio-political systems across the Gulf prioritizing the minority native citizen populations and are often erased from national narratives as they are considered a crisis of demographic imbalance (Refer to section 2.a). The UAE has the biggest disparity in population demographic which was recorded to be a total of 12.6 million in 2024, with Migrants making up 88.5% (11.6 Million), dwarfing the Emirati citizens at 11.5% (Global Media Insight). Despite the enforced temporariness, most of these migrants stay to work and be breadwinners for their families as many hail from

economically disadvantaged and/or war-ravaged areas of the world like South Asia, South East Asian, the Levant and the African continent, which makes it difficult for them to simply leave. Among Indians migrants who are the biggest demographic within the UAE, Malayalees from the south-west Indian state of Kerala make up a significant portion due to the “Gulf Boom” of the 80s (Refer to Section 2.a). Unnikrishnan himself is a second-generation Malayalee Gulf migrant from Abu Dhabi and wrote the book about “Temporary People” like his own family in an attempt to record these occulted histories of those who are absent through legal terms yet present in the everyday of the Gulf (Menon, 186-188).

Priya Menon, Professor of Literature at Troy University suggests the impossibility of permanency that Gulf Migrants face in these countries and the resultant perpetual transience “permeate their identification, culture production and sense of (un)belonging” (Menon, 186). We see this in the corpus of Gulf Migrant Literature, i.e. literary texts that have emerged from Gulf Migrants writing about their specific context since the 80’s across various languages, with the first salient but limited number of texts coming from Arabic and Malayalam (Refer to Daddak and section 2.c). *Temporary People* has become a seminal text within this body of literature for distinct reasons aside from its critical acclaim in the mid 2010s, which also spurred the rapid growth of Gulf Literature’s anglophone corpus, original and translations, spearheaded by writers who are second and third generation descendants of these migrants, Unnikrishnan being among the first. First, the book blends different genres of speculative fiction like surrealism and science fiction within experimental formats such as short stories, scripts, poetry. Rather than one linear plot, it is multiple narratives rendering a range of Gulf Migrants, primarily Malayalee, in terms of age, class, gender, sexuality and more. Each section has its own form, point of view, characters and plot with almost all of them centering Gulf Migrants in Abu Dhabi. Second, it is the first to be “anglophone”, the primary English body infused with Arabic, Malayalam, Hindi, Tagalog and other languages spoken by Gulf Migrants, opening a new linguistic terrain to represent the complexity of the Gulf Migrant experience. An example of this is “chapters” spelt as “chabters” to refer to the arabic accent repl’s effect on spoken English in the Gulf that changes the the English “p” with “b” as the letter p is not in Arabic (Unnikrishnan, *The Punch*, 2017). In doing so, Unnikrishnan opened up new possibilities of depicting and reimagining the Gulf and its Migrants (Daddak, 14) within Gulf Migrant Literature, which in itself is an important body of

texts because the unique context of Gulf Migration it engages with is unlike the typical logic of migration in the West, allowing us an idiosyncratic perspective on literary depictions of migration overall.

While all of these reasons are part of why *Temporary People* (2017) is the choice for the primary text this thesis chooses to engage with, the main reason is that Unnikrishnan's unique crafting of Gulf Migrant characters within the book depicts the inbetweenness the Gulf Migrants' "labouring lives" (Karunkuriyal, *Novel Form*, 201) due to their legal temporariness disallowing complete presence in Abu Dhabi—akin to ghosts/spectres. In his reading of the book, Scholar of Literature and Visual cultures Mohammed Shafeek Karunkuriyal notes:

Temporariness becomes the state of being which casts life in a double image, as if in a split-screen, like in the simultaneity of thinking and not thinking, being and not being, which lends the labouring life in the Gulf a ghostly nature

- Mohammed Shafeeq Karunkuriyal, *Migration, Borderland Subjectivity and the Novel Form: Reading Temporary People*, 201

The Gulf Migrant's 'ghostly nature' due to their transient status in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula as depicted in *Temporary People* is the subject of my MA thesis "The Gulf Migrant-Spectre and its haunting(s)". The Gulf Migrant experience being spectral in nature as Karunkuriyal suggests, is not merely a fleeting metaphorical usage of the word to this thesis. Unnikrishnan directly refers to Gulf Migrants to ghosts or generally figures of absence-presence in Abu Dhabi e.g the construction workers being "ghosts falling on your person" (Unnikrishnan, *Temporary People*, 3), "Ephemeral. People." as in the quote at the beginning of the introduction (23-24) or "Pravasi [malayalam word for migrant] always means absence" (186).

Menon, in her reading of *Temporary People* through the lens of Jaques Derrida's concept of Hauntology which meditates on persistent 'ghosts' or fragmented presences of the past (refer to section 2.b.i), proposes the idea of reading Gulf-migrants as "spectres" with the "ability to register an absence-presence through a spectral commingling of the spatial and temporal" due to their lack of legal belonging (Menon, pp.190). This thesis agrees with Menon's vein of thought

and wishes to extend it further by proposing the concept of the “Gulf Migrant-Spectre”: a spectre created through the process of “spectralising” by the political, social and legal systems of the UAE and wider Arabian Gulf (referred to as the haunting structure as explained further in section [2.b.ii](#)). The hyphenated term “Gulf Migrant-Spectre” that I come to as the name of the subject of my thesis, is an expansion of Menon’s “Gulf-Pravasi spectre”. The latter is specifically for the Malayalee spectral experience of migration so this thesis chooses to create the more general “Gulf Migrant-Spectre” as it allows for more flexibility for the multiple histories of migration in the Gulf and nuances within the more surreal or absurd imagery used by Unnikrishnan in *Temporary People*.

The thesis will substantiate this claim of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre’s existence through close readings of specific archetypes, motifs and characters within *Temporary People*’s “chapters” through “Spectropolitics” organised as case studies of each. Conceived by scholars Esther Peeren and María del Pilar Blanco as an evolution of Derrida’s hauntology, “Spectropolitics” is the use of the spectral metaphor as a way to meditate on present-day globalisation and adjacent socio-political structures such as those in the UAE that produce disfranchised spectral subjects such as the Gulf Migrant-Spectre (Blanco and Peeren, 93). Spectropolitics also accounts for studying the spectre beyond the western nexus, which is a fallacy in Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* (1993) as pointed out by literary critic Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak (refer to section 2.b.) Our spectropolitical analysis will be supported by secondary texts on Gulf Migration, including other literary analyses of *Temporary People*. However this thesis feels that most spectral analysis like Menon, ends at the conceiving of the spectral subjects within literary texts but it stagnates them after, a gap this thesis wishes to argue against. Scholars C.Ree and Eve Tuck suggest in *A Glossary of Haunting* that haunting by the spectre is not passive but rather an act continually done by the spectral presence in response to being spectralising: “for ghosts, the haunting is the resolving, it is not what needs to be resolved.” (Tuck, 642). Using this, this thesis also wish to propose a new reading of the Gulf-Migrant-Spectre within *Temporary People* : that they are not passive and their actions are a part of actively haunting back the (haunting) structures of the UAE (refer to section 2.b.ii) as a way of contest the temporariness enforced upon them and their resultant spectrality by said structures.

The thesis recognises the potential unfamiliarity with many of the elements central to the argument so section 2, the Literature review is dedicated to familiarising readers with the UAE, the corpus and the methodology. It first begins with the necessary historicization of the UAE, its migrant population and its structural violence against migrants in section 2.a. This allows us a base that the theoretical framework (section 2.b) can refer to so we can conceive a methodology that combines Derrida's hauntology, Blanco and Peeren's Spectropolitics, and Tuck and Ree's ideas of haunting (back) that is relevant to the context of Unnikrishnan's book. Then we will go through the history of the Gulf Migrant Literature corpus that *Temporary People* is considered a part of and consider its potential spectres that precede the book since its beginnings in Petrofiction (Ghosh). Overall we are considering Gulf Migrant literature as a whole body that counters Gulf state narratives that silence the Gulf Migrant and other marginalised groups. Once the necessary contextualisation has been foregrounded in our literature, it allows us to fully delve into our analytical portion, which is split into three case studies looking at different representations of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre and its haunting(s). The reason this thesis uses "case studies" is that it allows us a deep dive into specific subsets of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre this thesis has conceived to organise its arguments. Our first case study will be exploring the construction worker/labourer archetype, who is a significant spectral figure in the real life Gulf and its imagined versions in the fiction of *Temporary People*. The second considers imagery of the non-human and the inanimate as Unnikrishnan's methods of crafting renderings of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre or representing their spectralising through the speculative. Our third and final case study is a character study on Anna, the central character of the short story "Birds" (Unnikrishnan, 9-22) which considers the intersection of gender and migrancy within Anna's spectral presence in Abu Dhabi in contrast to the other two case studies have a leaning toward male representations. Within these case studies, we consider desire, spatial and temporal intermingling, the spectral 'body' and more as not just what defines the Gulf Migrant-Spectre but also how it enacts haunting back the UAE.

2. Literature Review

a. The 88.5% Temporary People of the UAE - historical context

“He who has no identity does not exist in the present, and has no place in the future.”

- His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, Founding Father and First President of the United Arab Emirates, in reference to creating the Ministry of Culture to prioritise and protect an Emirati-centric national identity. (Ibish, 10)

Unnikrishnan names his book *Temporary People* and due to the UAE’s migrants legally rendered “temporary” such as his own family of Malayalee migrants from Abu Dhabi, which is essential context to the novel. Before the analysis, we first have to contextualise the UAE’s history and present day in relation to its (Malayalee) migrant population and the socio-political systems in place that render them temporary and therefore spectral, as argued in this thesis later on.

The UAE is politically structured as a constitutional federation, comprising seven Emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah) each ruled as monarchies by Emirati ruling families with the Al Nahyan Family’s Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan as ruler of Abu Dhabi and president of the nation. As stated earlier in the introduction, migrants make up around 88.5% of the UAE’s 12.6 million population in comparison to Emiratis, the native citizen population who are the remaining 11.5%. An important historical reason that explains these demographics is the discovery of oil at the Umm Shaif field of Abu Dhabi in the 1950s when it was still part of the Trucial states under British rule. When Barrels began being sold in 1962 (Emirati Times), came a large influx of money that the then Ruler of Abu Dhabi and the first President of the UAE Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan used to begin developing the region’s infrastructure on all fronts. The other emirates followed suit and eventually signed truces and gained independence from the British, uniting to form the United Arab Emirates in 1971. This unique dynamic where citizens are a minority within their own country is central to their socio-political and legal systems that enable them to consolidate a large part of the wealth and land, while holding positions within government, military, and cultural organisations. Hence, Emirati citizens are privileged socially, legally and economically above migrants who are marginalized within the very same systems. This is because the UAE prioritizes a national identity through stringent narrative control of their origin story, cultural expression and criteria for citizenship not just as a nation-building strategy but also as a barrier for excluding migrants from the nation. Scholar and Journalist Hussein Ibish in

his article on UAE's evolving national security strategy, notes "The weakness of so many national identities – and the concomitant strength of regional, ethnic, religious, and other subnational identities" (Ibish, 10) is a security concern not just to the UAE's political stability and security but also its economic and social stability, especially with the native Emirati citizens.

The key system the UAE government uses to mitigate these "crisis of demographic imbalance" (Daddak, 2) is the visa system migrants are brought into the country through known as the 'Kafala system; its notoriety studied, reported on and critiqued for its controlling and exploitative natures. The system is essentially contractual labour with roots prior to UAE's formation that ties the employee to the employer (Kafeel) through temporary work visas with no avenues to citizenship or permanent residence. Aside from exceptional cases, migrants, legally labelled 'guest workers', are required to return to their country of origin if they don't have a job that legally sponsored their work visa, when they are of retirement age or unable to labour due to various reasons, e.g. disability. Only migrants of a certain salary level can sponsor spouses and children and so a large number of migrants are 'bachelor' men leaving behind families in their country of origin to be breadwinners in the UAE, creating the skewed gender ratio of 63.8% men to 36.2% women (Global Media Insight). It also allows for implicit segregation that keeps migrants and citizens apart.

Another set of important statistics to consider is that Indians are the largest demographic of migrants in the UAE, recorded to be 37.96% of the 88.5% in 2024 ([globalmediainsight.com](https://www.globalmediainsight.com)). In order to control revolts against unfair labour practices, political tensions and long term settlement and assimilation from hiring Arabs from neighbouring regions through the Kafala system (Ilias, 70-71), migration policies in the UAE shifted to prefer South Asia, South East Asia and Africa. In response, Indians both documented and undocumented (refer to Illias) came in to fill the labour gap. Malayalees make a majority within the overall Indian population in the UAE. While trade connections between Kerala and the Arabian Gulf existed since the sixth century BCE, the late 1950s was the start of the "Gulf Boom", the phenomenon of large-scale migration of Malayalees to the Gulf due to the stagnant economy and high unemployment post independence from the British and the rise of communism (refer to Ilias). Even today in 2025, the UAE is still a popular destination for Malayalees to migrate to. Scholars such as M.H Illias, Mohammed

Shafeeq Karunkuriyal and Priya Menon, who are referenced through this thesis, work on documenting and researching this two-way connection between UAE and Kerala through the history, literature and new media it has generated. An example of such literary work is Malayalee author Benyamin's *Goat Days* (2012) that is considered an important text in Gulf Migrant Literature, the scope of which we will review in section 2.c.

Due to this visa system alongside denied legal and political agency, the abuse of migrant workers at all levels runs rampant, with racism (stemming from discrimination by nation of origin), intense surveillance and limited freedom of speech while enabling exploitation under threat of severe consequences such as deportation to suppress dissent— a violence that suppresses the agency and voice of the migrant and negates its presence politically. Low-paid, working class migrant workers often endure extremely harsh working conditions and passport confiscation, especially those with jobs such as construction or sanitisation that require handling the region's high temperatures or domestic work where a high number of women often endure abuse under their employers. It is reported that approximately 10,000 migrant workers from South and South East Asia die each year in the Gulf region writ large, many with unexplained causes (Vital Signs). Migrant women are far more vulnerable as they are also subject to not just the marginalization as a migrant in the UAE's structure but also the patriarchy embedded in at both the socio-political level in the UAE and in the personal level as a majority have their visas sponsored by migrant male partners, whose visa status will also inadvertently affect their own. These women can also be subject to exploitation and abuse under male employers who sponsor their visas, with domestic workers being the most affected as the men that hire them and their families often treat them as property, exerting extreme control over their lives (Begum).

In general, millions of gulf migrants, now including those who are second and third generation, live in the UAE with the same temporary and vulnerable status (Menon, 186) even with amendments to the visa process such as the Golden Visa which is only accessible to a select few who can afford it or are considered worthy of it. The migrant's temporary majority status, legal ties to countries of origin and reasons for migration chalked up to just economic gain and narratives of this life being 'their choice' are used by the UAE government to justify their marginalisation and turn a blind eye to the exploitation and even enable it for their benefit. Both

citizens and migrants of the wealthier upper classes perpetuate and take advantage of the social hierarchy for their own gain e.g immigrant business men sponsoring, hiring and underpaying working class migrants (Vora and Koch, *Everyday Inclusions*, 543-547, cited by Daddak, 3). This conglomeration of both the Emirati ruling classes with the upperclass citizens and migrants form what political economist Adam Hanieh calls the “proto-class” of Gulf capitalism today (Hanieh, 9).

A critical takeaway from this section is that the context of the Gulf Migrant(-spectre)’s nationality, class and gender within the socio-politics of the UAE are important nuances to consider when reading the corpus of Gulf Migrant Literature (refer to section 2.c), especially our primary text *Temporary People*. These aspects should be incorporated with the logic of our theoretical framework of spectropolitics to allow for a thorough close reading of the book later in Section 3. The systems of the UAE that we have detailed here is what we would label as the ‘haunting structure’ (section 2.b) is built by the ruling classes of the UAE and sustained by this proto-class and citizens, who are the ‘non-spectral’ within this thesis, explained further in section 2.b “The Spectropolitics of the Gulf - a theoretical framework for the close reading of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre.”

b. The Spectropolitics of the Gulf - a theoretical framework for the close reading of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre

The ‘Gulf Migrant-Spectre’ subject, the crux of this thesis’s analysis of *Temporary People* (2017) is multi-dimensional: it constitutes both the “Gulf Migrant” from the UAE and the ‘spectre’ it is made into by the UAE’s socio-political structures. As mentioned in the introduction, the hyphenated term I come to is an expansion on Menon’s “Gulf-Pravasi spectre” in Unnikrishnan’s writing of the Gulf’s occulted histories (Menon, 187). Hence, our theoretical framework would have to be able to handle all these aspects. Hauntology and its evolving scholarship that began from its inception in *Spectres of Marx* (1994), will be the basis of our framework that will be used here to bring forth, analyse and make visible the ‘Gulf Migrant-Spectre’, its creation and its haunting(s) in our analysis.

So what is Hauntology really? A play on ‘ontology’, Hauntology is a neologism French-Algerian philosopher Jaques Derrida created when writing *Spectres of Marx* (1994) to name the study of the “non-being” i.e the presence of “ghosts” or “spectres” that traverse time and what haunts is not exactly absent but neither a present “being”, of an “other”. Scholar Ester Peeren sums up Hauntology as “a conceptual meditation on Spectrality as a deconstructive force that disturbs traditional notions of temporality and history, by collapsing the borders between past, present and future: ‘Time is out of joint’ – and that transforms ontology into hauntology.” (Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 11). Hauntology allows us to philosophically inquire about the socio-political conditions and implications of the subject we are applying the metaphor of spectrality onto, which in this case, would be the Gulf Migrant within the specific spatial context of the Gulf states.

In his book, Derrida uses deconstruction on to meditate on the relevance of Karl Marx’s ideologies post the fall of the Berlin wall, the collapse of the USSR and the beginning of the “New World Order” with Francis Fukuyama’s declaration that we have reached “the end of History” as Capitalism triumphed. His work in "*Spectres of Marx*" is considered the catalyst of what is called the “Spectral Turn” of the 1990s, where conceptual spectrality began to be used more as a critical theory across various disciplines in the humanities. (Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader*, 2). Around the same time, we have Terry Castle writing of the cultural invisibilizing of Lesbians in the *The Apparitional Lesbian* (1993) as “ghosting” and Anthony Vidler thinking of the spatial aspects of haunting with *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992). Following that train, we have Cathy Caruth talking of trauma as “being possessed” or haunted by an image or event of the past in trauma studies and Mark Fisher’s notion of lost futures in *Media Studies* (10-11). Derrida, in conceptualizing this alternate ontology, offered a singular theory based on the metaphor of ghosts that can encompass a flexibility in interpretation to think heuristically on seemingly ambiguous aspects of life like absence, loss, possession, marginalisation, the past’s entanglement into the present across multiple terrains and applications beyond its context of deconstructing Marx’s ideologies which we see in the examples above. Hauntology begins as a concept but has since developed to a discipline with multiple scopes of application. Hence, due to its multidisciplinary applications, Hauntology allows for a flexible theoretical framework, especially in the context of migration which in itself intersects with

various disciplines. While we won't refer directly to all these examples within this thesis, much of the spectral aspects will be also visible in our close reading of *Temporary People*.

While theories of hauntology and later spectropolitics that we use in this thesis are conceptually applied sociologically and politically with our analysis of our primary literary text, its central elements come from literary tropes of the ghost. Ghosts have been an important part of the history of literature that predate Hauntology as a concept, "haunting human culture and imagination" across various mythologies and folklores, with the contemporary western ghosts concretised in gothic literature of the late nineteenth century (Blanco and Peeren, 2). Derrida in fact conceives *Spectres of Marx* by playing off Marx's own use of gothic tropes and deconstructs the Ghost of Hamlet's father within the play *Hamlet* by Shakespeare as a segway to introducing hauntology. This thesis is operating at the conjecture of multiple disciplines to do justice to *Temporary People* and the Gulf Migrants(-Spectres) it features. It should also be noted that a marxist lens is not part of our theoretical framework because it is focused on the Gulf Migrant body's legal (non-)existence that makes them spectral, which then shows up in their cultural production, even if labour is part of the equation.

This section will focus on reviewing relevant theories about the 'spectre' within hauntology and the theorists behind them. Alongside that, we will also consider how Hauntology can be used to think on migrants of the UAE, its socio-politics and associated concepts about them such as (un)belonging, place, memory, temporality, erasure, displacement and marginalisation, using Priya Menon's arguments in her article "Pravasi Really Means Absence: Gulf-Pravasis as Spectral Figures in Deepak Unnikrishnan's *Temporary People*" as a jumping point. This compound yet nuanced methodology is required to deconstruct, analyse and prove how the Gulf Migrant is made spectral and their response from Unnikrishnan's fiction later in this paper. Aside from Derrida, we will also engage with writing that expands on the use of the spectral for contemporary times by theorists Esther Peeren and María del Pilar Blanco. We will end at Eve Tuck and C.Ree's article *A Glossary of Haunting* and thinking about the Gulf Migrant-Spectre's agency.

i. Derrida's Spectres in Gulf Migration and Spivak ghostwriting its fallacies

Priya Menon's key reference in her argument for the intersectional reading of Gulf Migrants as Spectral Figures in her analysis of *Temporary People* (2017) is Derrida's descriptions of the spectre. Menon asserts that the Gulf Migrants, the "Gulf-Pravisis" Unnikrishnan features in his writing "demonstrates the topographies of a spectre demarcated by Derrida" through his storytelling choices. (Menon, 196)

The main reference Menon uses in her article is this quote:

The specter, as its name indicates, is the frequency of a certain visibility. But the visibility of the invisible. And visibility, by its essence, is not seen, which is why it remains *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond the phenomenon or beyond being. The specter is also, among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects—on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see. (Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 125, cited by Menon, 186)

We see here that Derrida describes the spectre as an invisible frequency that is unseen and beyond the ontological 'being' which in some sense, is a projection made onto blank space. Menon suggests that the frequency of Gulf migrants created from their "perpetual transience" and "the impossibility of their permanence" is the same as this invisible frequency due to omission from the narrative of the countries through repeated replacement or repatriation within the Gulf's systems. Our mission is to then "hear those frequencies of migration" (Karunkuriyal 2021) that have been rendered through fiction by Unnikrishnan. This frequency can be cataloged through the spectral tenets of Hauntology Unnikrishnan employs throughout *Temporary People* (2017) according to Menon. The tenets as first marked by Derrida are: resurrection, contamination, the apparition of the inapparent, omnipresence, (Menon, 196) temporality, the disjunction of time (191) and repetition (187). Other considerations from Derrida that can be relevant but not considered by Menon is the idea of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre as "revenant (invoking what was)" and "arrivant (what will come)" (Blanco and Peeren, 13) depending on context. For example, The Gulf Migrant-Spectre is a revenant of their country of origin in the

Gulf but an arrivant as well to the Gulf and their eventual spectrality. These will be explored further in the context of the book within the case studies in Section 3.

While Peeren argues Derrida's Spectre can be exteriorized as “the guest, foreigner or immigrant” (Peeren, 11), Derrida himself only talks about immigrants as part of the ten plagues that make up the “New World Order”. His idea of Plague No.2 talks of the exclusion of homeless people from democratic processes of the state and the next part after is: “the expulsion or deportation of so many exiles, stateless persons, and immigrants from a so-called national territory already herald a new experience of frontiers and identity—whether national or civil” (Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 101). To Derrida, this is one of the general conditions unfolding within nation-states around the 1990s, which is highly relevant to the UAE and wider Arabian Gulf. The Migrant, the Stateless person and the Exile are figures that complicate the idea of borders, of nation-states and national identity and are a result of war and exploitation within today’s globalised economy. The UAE’s policy of making migrants temporary through visas and withholding citizenship was a response to mitigate said political complexities and uphold their capitalist class system where unions nor workers rights exist (refer to *Capitalism and Class*, Hanieh and section 2.a). Derrida might not have considered the possibility of the nuances of capitalism and labour in the UAE, if Marx’s Spectres haunt it or that its migrants being perceived through the Hauntology he writes about. Looking at it from the perspective of reading Gulf migrants using only Derrida’s work as the theoretical framework, the gaps coming up required to be addressed.

Literary theorist and critic Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak in her article *Ghostwriting* (1995) admits that to her, Derrida’s takes on “ghostliness” is the best part but points out his lack of foresight in relation to the kind of ‘others’ that specters could apply. Spivak's idea of the subaltern that she writes of in her seminal work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) is central to her critique of Derrida (Refer to Spivak, 1988). The Gulf Migrant makes for a perfect example of Spivak’s definition of the Subaltern: a dispossessed/marginalised person who is low in the socio-political chain of command and is denied access to dominant structures, therefore rendering them silent. What is meant by silence here is that Gulf Migrant cannot represent itself politically in the region due to the Monarchies in charge as it is not legally a citizen and then is further silenced due to surveillance and limits to freedom of speech.

Spivak's gripes with Derrida are multifold but we shall deal with the ones relevant to our thesis. First is that he does not consider women at all in "*Spectres of Marx*" particularly subaltern women and she notes "in the current global conjuncture, woman is the dubiously felicitous out-of-joint subject". In thinking of the role migrant women play in Gulf Migration and their presence in Gulf Migrant Literature, even within *Temporary People* (2017), we will see that women are considered out-of-joint in the Gulf amid the migrant population due to the gender ratio and in turn exist at the intersection of violence and erasure both as a woman and migrant. Unnikrishnan does subvert and play with his portrayal of female Gulf Migrant-Spectre characters in different ways e.g. Anna Varghese from "Chapter 2: Birds" which will be explored later as case study 3 in Section 3. The second gripe Spivak has is Derrida's "refusal" to honour the differences between industrial and commercial capital (65) and hence not seeing the "systemic connections" within the New World Order that creates the Subaltern, which is "between industrial capitalism, colonialism, so-called post industrial capitalism, neocolonialism, electronified capitalism, and the current financialization of the globe, with the attendant phenomena of migrancy and ecological disaster." (Spivak, *Ghostwriting*, 67-68). Derrida's wording of the "new experience of frontiers and identity" seems to present it somewhat positively, even if it means the expulsion of immigrants, exiles and the homeless from "national territory" and the cessation of their participation in democracy, and in extension, political agency (Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 101). Spivak sees that point of view as a lax approach in his considerations of migrants, not appreciating the labelling of Marx as a clandestine immigrant when thinking of privilege and erasure of migrants created by forced global displacement and exploitation. Part of Derrida's "itinerary" is that "the future is migrancy" but it forgoes the necessary nuance of the subaltern in the context of "exigencies of international capital" that can flow freer than people can, resulting in their "intra-national displacement" which is silenced in the theoretical discourse of the New International (Spivak, 71).

Considering this, we can reexamine migration to the Gulf as propagated by the exigencies of international capital within the GCC, creating the intra-nationally displaced Gulf Migrants through legal temporality and therefore rendering them doubly subaltern and spectral. However Spivak's own fallacies also become exposed when she states the subaltern are "neither nationally

rooted” nor “migrant”. She speaks from her point of view situated in North America where the privileged “well-placed” migrant in America is not subaltern when in juxtaposition to the exploited “South” (Spivak, 71). However Spivak generalises the “South” which geographically includes the UAE and the rest of the GCC but not everyone is subaltern in those regions as we discussed in section 2.a. The Gulf Migrant is almost always subaltern with the Gulf’s political systems and their subaltern status is “nationally rooted” as they are placed in opposition to the citizen and the proto-class. Therefore even Spivak’s own critique of Derrida does not consider the possibility of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre either.

In bringing Spivak and Derrida together here, we are reminded that these are lacunas within the framework of Hauntology due to a majority of its theories being often written by and situated in contexts of North America and Europe. Hence, for this thesis to work, it is necessary to select, negotiate, reframe and recontextualise concepts within spectrality, whether it is the hauntology initially written by Derrida as Menon has used or other theorists in this field such as Esther Peeren, to create our own framework for reading the Gulf Migrant-Spectre and its hauntings. In the next section, we will look into two selected concepts of “Spectropolitics” and “Living Ghosts” which expand on spectrality while considering both non-western and contemporary contexts and could serve as potential methods that can contribute to our framework. Afterwards, we will explore the possibility of a spectre that has agency as proposed by scholars Eve Tuck and C.Ree

ii. Spectropolitics of Living Ghosts - moving beyond the passive spectre

In the introduction to the second section of the *the Spectralities Reader* (2013) titled “Spectropolitics: Ghosts of the global Contemporary”, Esther Peeren and María del Pilar Blanco consider the reach that “Spectrality” as a concept has beyond the western nexus (French, British and American) it was created in (91). As we discussed earlier, the gaps in both Derrida’s Hauntology and critiques of it such as Spivak’s come from the fact that it has not accounted for contexts beyond this said nexus such as the Arabian Gulf and its migrants. However a potential amendment to these gaps could be the concept of “Spectropolitics”, defined as “an attempt to mobilize spectrality to more precisely designate the diffuse operations and effects of present-day

globalization, as well as to critique the way its processes produce certain subjects as consistently disenfranchised or, in Judith Butler's terms, forced to live in extreme precarity as "would-be humans, the spectrally human" (Blanco and Peeren, 93).

Derrida mentions "Spectropolitics" once (Derrida, 133-134) but the term is undefined by him. Blanco and Peeren take the term from Derrida and use it to name the revelation and evaluation of the effects of present-day social, economic and political structures that produce unaccountable or expendable subjects, in essence "structures" that are "spectralising" these subjects (Blanco and Peeren, 93). The two scholars note that the pliability of spectrality allowed its spread across borders and intermingling with non-western contexts too, giving the examples of East Asian Cinema, political theorist Achille Mbembe's ideas of the "wandering subject" and previously colonised areas becoming "death-worlds" inhabited by vast populations of "living dead", supplemented with Arjun Appadurai's idea of "spectral housing" in Mumbai (94-5). These examples showcase how the ghost or Spectre can be both "a globalised figure" which can absorb or be molded into new international contexts and also a "figure of globalisation" i.e. a representation of the dispossessed subjects spectralised by the "Empire", (Ann Laura Stoler, cited by Peeren, 92) which here means "a haunting structure" both operationally like discriminatory housing policy and as a legacy of "implicating histories" such as colonisation (92).

In this case, the Gulf migrant can be considered as a spectre that is both these "figures" as defined above when in the context of the UAE as said structure that intentionally spectralises the Gulf migrant into migrant-spectre. This is further explicated by Menon who points out the Gulf Migrant-Spectre has "the ability to register [as] an absence-presence" (Menon, 190) because they are denied a legal sense of belonging in the UAE. The spectralizing of the Gulf-Migrant is the modus operandi of UAE to manage them. Spectropolitics offers us an evolved view of spectrality, making it a viable method that allows us to consider the Gulf Migrant's spectrality in its relation to the UAE. Peeren and Blanco do stress that Spectropolitics or using theories of Spectrality at large heavily relies on contextualization and historization (97) for it to be a relevant framework to use to read the spectre this way, which this thesis addresses in sections 2.a and 2.c so it can be referred to throughout the case studies in Section 3.

The theoretical framework we have here thus far works as a method to analyse and affirm the presence (pun intended) of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre, define it using literature on Hauntology and tune in to its frequency within our corpus. However this thesis's goal is to not merely consider the Gulf Migrant-Spectre as an interjection from the past alone but as an active persistent figure in the present day UAE. This becomes possible with Peeren's own concept of "Living Ghosts" in her book *The Spectral Metaphor* (2014) developed from engagement with concepts by those such as Jaques Derrida, Judith Butler, Giorgio Agamben and especially Achille Mbembe. Peeren defines Living Ghosts, coming from Mbembe's vein of "living dead", as "people who, already in their lifetime, resemble dispossessed ghosts in that they are ignored and considered expendable, or, sometimes at the same time, become objects of intense fear and violent attempts at extermination" (Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 14-15). While Peeren analyses her living ghosts, a.k.a undocumented migrants, servants, domestic workers, mediums and missing persons, within literature and new media of the western nexus, her definition could well apply to the Gulf Migrant-Spectre. In Peeren's model, we would not just consider the interjections of the past but recognise the creation, perception and treatment of the Gulf Migrant in the present day that then produces its existence as a spectre within and by the UAE's structural violence.

A concern that has to be considered in this model or other older theories of spectrality is assuming a core tenet of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre is passivity i.e the Gulf Migrant-Spectre does nothing after its own spectralising but remains passive in the space. The Gulf Migrant, during emigration to the UAE is noted to lose agency in the process, as they are either forced in the choice by circumstance, usually by family (Gardner, cited by Menon, 189). I would propose that their spectralising begins as soon as their temporary visa is issued (refer to section 2.a) and when they arrive in the country, they are already spectres. This is furthered in the suppression of dissent, surveillance and censorship within the UAE along with denial of legal belonging, attributing to their spectralising. Not much thought is given to the aftermath of becoming a spectre. Menon at one point does suggest the "pravasi spectre" makes itself visible in the context of reminding others of their fabled 'return' to the country of origin that never happens but is always prophesied or as coming back to the UAE after visits to country of origin (Menon, 194).

Her focus is more on Unnikrishan's use of spectral tropes and while that helps us 'see' the Gulf Migrant as Spectre within his writing and confirms this thesis's hyphenation of both terms, there's no consideration of them beyond that. Hence, this thesis wants to explore the gap present in Menon's text that is about the Gulf Migrant-Spectre's potential agency and its (intentional) haunting back of its creator(s). Our theoretical frameworks do allow us to consider this as Spectropolitics can be "the site for potential change, where ghosts [or spectres], and especially the ability to haunt and the willingness to be haunted, to live *with* ghosts, can work" (Peeren and Blanco, 93). This can be interpreted as a reciprocal relation between haunting and being haunted, the possibility of both going hand in hand for a spectre. However this still comes from the perspective of a non-spectre having to live with ghosts, which those that maintain the UAE's structure do so. However, reciprocity requires equal ground and the point of spectralising here is to maintain a hierarchy where the Gulf Migrant-Spectre is below the non-spectre as a reminder of its temporary place.

Let's consider instead. the Gulf Migrant *living as a ghost* post-specializing, making the Spectropolitics we engage with in this thesis an ongoing phenomenon within which the Gulf-Migrant-Spectre is actively haunting in the 'present' tense. The potential change that can be done within this site is in the hands of the spectre and its ability to haunt, which I think the most of the scholarship we engage with negates or underestimates. Peeren is the exception. She reminds that living as a ghost or spectre is a state akin to "dispossessing" but instead of learning into the fallacy of the "dead metaphor" that just assumes mere invisibility and with it passivity, she asks us to see the "continuing liveliness – its apposite proclivity to keep coming back to life" even if that can be complicated by the "sometimes contradictory associations" and "near-synonyms" (Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 6). She then also suggests the notion of "spectral agency" where that allows us to consider the Spectre's "possible and impossible hauntings" that are "produced in and by the present" (Peeren, 5) albeit the "compromised agency" (Peeren, 3) due to limitations that come from being made spectral in the process of emigration and being a Gulf Migrant (Peeren, 3). While their agency prior to immigration is gone, the Gulf Migrant-Spectre gains a new kind of "spectral agency" that allows them to use their spectrality as their own to persist in the present within the UAE, which I propose is a way to haunt it back.

Why would the Gulf Migrant-Spectre haunt back though, especially in a space such as the UAE whose active suppression and feigned ignorance of their struggle is spectralising them? Haunting back is a form of agency—an attempt for its suffering, its labour and its temporal-spatial interjection to be recognised and acknowledged by the ontological in some way, particularly its creators. It is a way to gain the visibility it desires as Menon mentions, and assert their absence-presence in their respective Gulf city (in the case of our text, Abu Dhabi). However, what comes of being seen? What comes after? What is the end result of haunting back? These are the questions the thesis has to tackle to consider when thinking of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre haunting back. One can assume reassurance of the possibility for the Gulf Migrant-Spectre to be ‘unspectralised’ and then be legitimized into existence through being given permanency, thus resolving their spectral existence. In that case, how do we trust that the attempt in haunting back will work to pacify or have affect on those that denied them even being? We know that the spectralising of the Gulf Migrant is essential for these very structures of the UAE to exist and even when momentarily visible, they are ignored or ‘spectralised’ even further through their existing methods (refer to historical context). Considering this, it may seem futile to haunt back without a tangible end result.

Another option for haunting back is reconciling with its own spectrality but the Gulf Migrant is usually well aware of their state. What of reconciling with the UAE, the haunting structure? It is difficult to conceive a reconciliation of the erasure, the violence, the exploitation that alters a being (Gulf Migrant) into non-being, the spectral (Gulf Migrant-Spectre) that is not hollow promises. Hence, I do not think merely being seen or reconciling is not the point of haunting back, nor is it to reverse the spectralising or to go back to the country of origin. To conceive the concept of haunting back within our theoretical framework without assuming exorcism, a reversal of the spectre or an unlikely utopian solution that hinges on the haunting structure’s power, we need to consider scholarship that lets us think of alternative reasoning. Scholar of Indigenous Studies Eve Tuck and Artist C.Ree do so in their creative-critical piece “A Glossary of Haunting”. Let’s look at how they redefine haunting (back):

“Haunting, by contrast [to colonialism/American settler society which is the ‘Empire’/ the haunting structure referenced in this text], is the relentless remembering

and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society's assurances of innocence and reconciliation. Haunting is both acute and general; individuals are haunted, but so are societies...Haunting doesn't hope to change people's perceptions, nor does it hope for reconciliation. Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop. Alien (to settlers) and generative for (ghosts), this refusal to stop is its own form of resolving. For ghosts [spectres], the haunting is the resolving, it is not what needs to be resolved."

- Tuck and Ree, 642

This idea of haunting (back) that Tuck and Ree propose offer a dynamic approach to consider the Spectre's agency beyond visibility. Haunting is not merely a side effect of being a spectre but rather an active reckoning for the non-spectral society, the UAE proto-class that make and sustain the haunting structure. Jumping off from Tuck and Ree's proposals, I speculate in this thesis that the Gulf Migrant-Spectre(s) haunt the UAE back to persistently remind them of their absence-presence, that their structures cannot exist without their labour. Within the parameters of our framework, the strategy for haunting back for the characters of *Temporary People* is through acts of agency over their spectralised 'body', resistance against the demands of the haunting structure through acts outside the bounds of their labour and creating new relationships between themselves and the spatial they are not meant to belong to, hence refuting the intended damage of spectralising. Overall, haunting back for the Gulf Migrant-Spectre is an "uncanny return" to claim the space it has been denied in its own narratives within the Gulf (Menon, 194). Again, why would haunting back really do? Tuck and Ree go further, stating that "Haunting is the cost of subjugation" (Tuck and Ree, 643) and being haunted is the price to pay for violence, which in this case study was the Genocide of Native Americans and African Americans in the creation of the United states. Similarly, the Gulf Migrant-Spectre haunting back is in response to its own subjugation as we have established thus far. The Gulf Migrant-Spectre(s) despite being meant to be temporary in the cities of the Gulf, become tethered to it by the design of the haunting structure of the UAE which in turn deny it through suppression and silence. To haunt back is to permeate every part of the UAE through the temporal and spatial, become inescapable and inevitable and a source of "persistent unease" (Tuck and Ree, 654) to the UAE, because it is the price the state and its proto-class have to pay for the haunting structure and the spectres they have created and try to ignore— a debt with the Gulf Migrant-Spectre that needs to be settled and

till then, haunts back as a reminder for all that has been taken from said spectre. In some sense, haunting back is an attempt at revenge that Tuck and Ree call “the seeds of haunting” (Tuck and Ree, 651) that overlap with a request for justice to what the Gulf Migrant-Spectre has endured in the UAE. A form of justice beyond “law and rights” from what Derrida speaks of in his *Exodium* which has no respect nor consideration for the already spectral or those made spectral by the present day (Derrida, xviii and Peeren, 14-15). In that case, Revenge could be the main form of justice for the Gulf Migrant-Spectre that circumnavigates the UAE’s haunting structure and therefore “by way of this haunting, demands justice, or at least a response” (Blanco and Peeren, 9).

In conclusion, our theoretical framework has thus far, created a combined methodology to define and analyse the Gulf Migrant-Spectre and consider not just its creation within the UAE but also its haunting (back) as an active response to its spectralising. We have recognised gaps in Derrida’s conception of hauntology not perceiving the possibility of modern-day Migration and Spivak pointing out his lack of consideration for the subaltern, especially women. However Spivak also shows similar gaps by being North American-centric. To rectify said gaps, we use Blanco and Peeren’s *Spectropolitics*, augmented by Peeren’s arguments in the *Spectral Metaphor* (2014) to establish how the Gulf Migrant is rendered spectral through the “haunting structure” of the UAE, built by the non-spectral “proto-class”. Following that, we acknowledge that a potential gap in *Spectropolitics* and *Hauntology* writ large is the assumption of a passive spectre and propose that Gulf Migrant-Spectre actively haunts back which is substantiated by Eve Tuck and C.Ree’s propositions of haunting (back).

c. Imagining the Gulf Migrant: our corpus’s history from Petrofiction to Present-Day Gulf Migrant Literature (and the spectres within)

Seeing the critical success of *Temporary People* (2017) during its release and its relevance after, one would assume that the literary scene of the UAE and the wider Arabian Gulf would be teeming with literary works of all genres by and about Gulf migrants, representing their multiplicity and complex experiences in multiple languages. In reality, such literary works are not easy to find and are few in number and also reflect many of the demographic discrepancies

such as gender (more male than female writers) This section will highlight significant works that build the now-growing canon of Gulf Migrant Literature woven from various linguistic and cultural threads and the Gulf-Migrant Spectres they hold.

The mainstream literature of the Gulf region is presented as citizens writing in the Arabic language and select ones that fit state narratives are considered national literature. Some examples of important works by Gulf nationals that have been translated are Omani writer Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies* (2010) which won the International Booker Prize 2019, and Emirati writer Maha Gargash's *The Sand Fish* (2009) which explores the lives of women set in pre-oil seaside villages of the UAE. The national body of work however prioritizes a bedouin heritage and does not encompass others outside of that with rare exceptions. The migrants are often placed in the background, sympathised, pitied or stereotyped as a threat to citizens (Daddak, 3). Since the migrant is not included in any way, it creates a lacuna which the present-day body of Gulf (Migrant) Literature is now filling. The scarcity of Migrant-led literary works can also be attributed to many factors: the linguistic and socio-economic divisions that come from the class, race and cultural differences on top of already existing structural exclusions and state censorship that often leads to self-censorship for safety or prosecution/deportation for those who cross the lines. Migrants in official national narratives of both the Gulf and countries of origin are either absent or forced out into the periphery, its invisibility reflecting the Gulf Migrant's "perceived status as temporary outsiders" (Daddak, 3). In the case of India, they are considered merely economic migrants with no vested interest to develop a cultural existence (Varghese and Karinkuriyal, 4).

Despite the struggle, Gulf Migrants were creating literary works and publishing them usually from their countries of origin or more recently with international publishers in the US and UK. The earliest works were pioneered by Arab Migrants from Palestine, Jordan and Egypt who were arriving to the GCC for work and/or safety from political turmoil and exile. These earlier Arabic-language works by writers such as Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani *Men in the Sun* (1962, trans. 1978) and Egyptian writer Ibrahim Nasrallah *Prairies of Fever* (1985, trans. 1993) detailed the trials of immigration usually inspired by personal experiences of working and living in the Gulf and the content were tragic or cynical and often commented on the new realities of

changing politics in the region (Daddak, 3). One pivotal work that foregrounded present day Gulf Migrant Literature is *Cities of Salt* (1984), the fictional five-volume series by Iraqi-Saudi Abdul Rahman Munif, which led to his Saudi citizenship being stripped. Set in an ‘unnamed country in the Arabian Gulf’, Munif’s first novel of the same name follows the lives of multiple characters through which he heavily criticises petroleum companies and capitalism changing Gulf societies, its elite classes and the creation of the structures that enabled the exploitation of migrant workers.

Cities of Salt is considered the first of what writer and critic Amitav Ghosh names as “petrofiction” in his review of Munif’s novels, defined as literary works that attempt to deal with the “Oil encounter” and its ramifications (Ghosh, 1992). It also contains the first mentions of the spectre which Munif directly mentions in relation to his central character Miteb, a local citizen forced to leave his town in grief due to the government pushing people out on behalf of the oil companies: “No [oil site] worker said it outright or pronounced his name out loud, but his spectre filled the whole desert.” (Munif, 511). The Gulf is no stranger to ghost stories and haunted spaces, the UAE’s own myths and folklore often featuring jinns such as Umm Al Duwais (Hoath) or its Ghost Towns (Nawaz). However here, Munif evokes a kind of spectre that is a departure from traditional folklore, a result of the structures of exploitation and marginalisation, alongside enforced departures from home and what is known that came with the Oil encounter. I would argue this spectre(s) is still present across literary works since, manifesting more so within Gulf Migrants. This emerging ‘spectre’ is further substantiated by Ghosh who suggests that the Oil encounter has led to displaced, heterogenous and multilingual experiences that “are lived within a space that is no place at all” (Ghosh, 30, 1992). Due to this, Ghosh believes the craft of writing and traditional literary forms is not prepared to engage with the multiplicity of the oil sites and cities (languages, nationalities and experiences), which yields no common ground for the traditional novel to tether itself to, when the form is typically used to being situated in one spatial homogenous setting. Ghosh denotes that narratives attempting to record the ‘Oil encounter’ is also silenced by “regimes of strict corporate secrecy” (Ghosh 30) like the international oil companies or the UAE proto-class, segregations of workers within the oil fields along nationality lines and the oil fields itself being physically away from populated areas. This, according to Ghosh, leads to a “muteness” about the human-oil interaction especially in the Gulf

or as Karunkuriyal puts it, “oil gave way to silence” (Karunkuriyal, 2021)— a silence is filled with the spectres Munif refers to—extrated from the oil of the Gulf and lost in its sands.

Additionally, Petrofiction as a term can feel limiting and is not centric to the region or its specific nuances but rather a pivotal moment of discovery that has happened across various regions, hence the usage of the term “Gulf Migrant Literature” for this thesis, which has intersections with Petrofiction but is more specific. Professor of Literature at Exeter University Nadeen Daddak notes that Gulf Migrant Literature does not fit the frameworks of traditional canons bound by nation-state rhetoric and it requires thinking beyond the borders of language, geography, culture and I would add, traditional ideas of belonging. Similar to Ghosh, she points out the complexity of this body of literature and a struggle to move past silence. However, Daddak proposes a solution: to make a literary canon in a transient space as the Gulf with a majority noncitizen population that is marginalized would require decentralising the ‘Arab world’ as the sole source of literary creation and centralising the region of South Asia and other regions in relation to their historical connections to the Gulf and its migrant communities (Daddak, 6-7).

This is why Malayalee literature about the Gulf from Kerala, both Anglophone and translated from Malayalam, is essential to read as Gulf Migrant Literature. Post the Gulf Boom from Kerala, there came an emergence of literary works in mainstream Malayalam literature by Malayalee Gulf Migrants around the late 1990s, almost three decades after the first recorded instances of Malayalees migrating there in the late 50s. Earlier works were primarily memoirs detailing a lonely life of hardships in the Gulf and were either self published or published in small presses and magazines. This drastically changed with the massive commercial and critical success of the book *Goat Days* (2008, trans. 2012) by Malayalee novelist Benyamin, who is now considered another forefather of the genre. *Goat Days* was published after Benyamin departed Kuwait where he worked from 1992 to 2012. The story is based on real events and follows Najeeb, a Malayalee migrant who goes to Saudi Arabia on the basis of a construction job only to be forced to work as a Goatherd with his documents taken away (Karunkuriyal, 2024). Najeeb copes by building a unique relationship with his goats till eventually, with the help of Samaritans, finds his way to freedom. This book marked a distinct change in narrating truths about the

violence of the Gulf Migrant experience and legitimised Gulf Malayalee narratives in Kerala's public discourse instead of the promises of wealth that was usually perpetuated. Since then, there has been an increase in Malayalee writers, especially those who are returnee Gulf migrants, taking up the Gulf as a subject for their writing. For example: *Memoirs by Gulf Migrants* writing about their experiences receding in the Gulf by writers such as Krishnadas PM Jabir and V. Muzafer Ahamed came to the forefront and older ones were reprinted. All of these "aimed to make the Gulf real" (Karunkuriyal, 2024) by focusing on clearly representing the hard 'truths' of being a Gulf Migrant which were of labour, time spent away from 'home' and details of struggles. Writers like Rasheed Parakkal and Nisamudheen Ravutha have used the desert similarly to Benjamin as a hyperbole for the trials of Gulf Migrant life. This is because the setting of the desert allowed for a certain distance from the urban glamour of the Gulf and used extremes like thirst, hunger, heat, the endless sand with no end, to showcase "the impossibility of migrant lives" (Daddak, 9). However despite all this, Karunkuriyal notes that there are limits on realism as there is a loss of self and with it, a loss of language that migration to the Gulf entails, making it too elusive for realism. (Karunkuriyal, 2021).

Unnikrishan tackles writing about this "impossibility of migrant lives" further in *Temporary People* (2017) by being the first to truly reject realism and circumnavigate the confines previous works dealt with (Karunkuriyal, 2024). While it is in the tradition of Gulf Migrants writing their own narratives, it stands out due to its breaking away from the traditional novel form to portray experimental depictions of the Gulf Migrant. While it builds on an existing legacy of literature from Kerala and the Gulf. Linguistically it is the first to be considered Anglophone due to the alchemic mix of other languages, especially Malayalam and Arabic, within the primarily English body to create a lingua franca within which the Gulf Migrant(-Spectre) can truly be articulated. Structurally and format-wise, Unnikrishnan moves past categorization and linearity to experiment with prose poems, articles, reports, short stories and even visuals to make its "chapters", unlike its predecessors or peers. It is also one of the rare books that factor in second-generation children of migrants, born a spectre with bodies that will inevitably be "mapped violently" by transience, cultural divisions and complicated belonging to their Gulf cities (Daddak 15). Most importantly, it depicts narratives of multiple kinds of Gulf Migrants, particularly the Malayalee Pravasi, to create a collective, generational memory of them and their

absence-presence a.k.a their spectrality, which is why this thesis chose this text as its corpus. Daddak points out that Unnikrishnan's book aims to "counter the silence" of Gulf Migrants, especially the first generation, who are constantly haunted by departure (Daddak, 14).

Unnikrishnan was also the most visible amid a new beginning of Anglophone Gulf migrant writers publishing work from all around the world with different levels of connection to the Gulf region. Some examples are Mia Alver's collection of fiction stories *In the Country* (2016), Tanaz Bhathena's fiction novel *A Girl like that* (2018), Zeba Talkhani's memoir *My Past is a Foreign Country* (2019), Andre Naffis-Sahely's poetry collection *The Promised Land - Poems from an itinerant life* (2017), Sabin Iqbal's book *Shamal days* (2021) and Noor Naga's novel *If An Egyptian cannot speak English* (2022). Second generation Gulf writers are also showing their hand in Arabic, like Saud Alsanousi with his book *The Bamboo Stalk* (2012) that features a Half Kuwait-Half Filipino protagonist's cultural struggles, and Haji Jaber's debut novel *Samrawit* (2012) of a young Eritrean boy in Jeddah and African diaspora in the region. Circling back to Daddak's definitions earlier, the works listed in this section make up part of what is Gulf Migrant Literature—a substantial alternate literary body to the supposed canon, speaking to lived marginal realities within the Gulf. US based literary scholar Mona Kareem, who writes about being Bidoon (stateless) in Kuwait, suggests Gulf Migrant Literature is part of "a textural conjuring of a whole other Gulf" (Kareem, 2021). In Kareem's terms, Gulf Migrant Literature can be interpreted as an anti-canon, a literary corpus that is inherently a parallel, spectral realm conjured by the Gulf Migrant-Spectres and others at the margins like the Bidoon in an attempt to resist the silence and their spectralising—a collective retrieval and archiving of occulted histories (Menon, 187). In some sense, the writers here are enacting their own form of haunting back the Gulf states in the form of what one of Unnikrishnan's characters describes as "fictive literary revenge" (Unnikrishnan, 70).

We conclude our literature review here, which has covered both the contextualisation and historization necessary for our theoretical framework to be applied to *Temporary People* (2017). Section 2.a covered the real life structures of the UAE created by the non-spectral "proto-class" that marginalise its migrants and spectralise them. Section 2.c goes over the various ways writers over the years depicted, imagined and even reimagined, from realism to the speculative, in Gulf

Migrant Literature and Temporary People's impact within it. The following section will be applying our detailed theoretical framework from section 2.b to recognizing the making of Gulf Migrant-Spectre and their haunting back using our methodology of Spectropolitics.

3. Case Studies on the Gulf Migrant-Spectres in *Temporary People* (2017)

This section's main aim is to highlight and deconstruct representations of the spectralising that is done to the various Gulf Migrant-Spectre characters by the haunting structures of the UAE within *Temporary People* (2017), their absence-presence in Abu Dhabi and their assertions of spectral agency to haunt back. This section is segmented into three "case studies", each centered around a close readings on specific archetypes, motifs and characters that bring together different facets of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre throughout Unnikrishnan's book to argue our thesis of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre's creation and their haunting back the UAE using our theoretical framework of spectropolitics. While this method of structuring the close reading is unconventional, so is the book's structure as well (refer to introduction), this allows us to read the nuances of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre by bringing together disparate parts of Unnikrishnan's novel together under its relevant umbrella like with cast study one, which focuses on the construction worker characters in different parts of the book.

a. Case study 1 : the construction (of the) worker archetype's spectrality

The construction worker, also referred to as the labourer, is a critical figure in the imagination of the modern-day Gulf due to their contributions in the cities and the subject of many literary works mentioned in Section 2.b. While the UAE is lauded for their skylines and architectural wonders, multiple news reports about human rights abuse in the region often center on the uncredited construction workers behind them. Primarily able-bodied males from the ages of 18-60, they deal with severe working conditions such as working under harsh sun with temperatures as high as 50 degrees over the summer, low pay, passport confiscation and segregation into cramped housing away from the main cities (Human Rights Watch). The physical and psychological exertion required for the job often lead to death or severe health issues. The reason for many of their deaths have no plausible explanations or are hidden under

reasons such as “natural causes” or “accidents” (Vital signs). Construction workers can be considered amid the earliest and the most enduring of the Gulf-Migrant-spectres in the context of this thesis.

With their signature blue overalls, construction helmets and reflective vests, the images of the construction workers are so commonly featured in news articles and TV segments, to the point that they are an archetype of the UAE and the rest of the Gulf. This is why the construction worker is the first Gulf Migrant-Spectre we are introduced to by Unnikrishnan and it is represented in various “chapters”, characters and scenarios throughout the book from its very beginning. This section focuses on reading the construction worker/labourer archetype of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre(s) in *Temporary People* (2017) and thinking of how its spectropolitics is constructed (literally) and their responses to it.

The very first text of the book we encounter is a short poem about the construction workers titled “Limbs”. The poem is by a unnamed narrator talking of a city where the inferred construction workers disappear once the buildings they make are completed and some believe they have become ghosts. The ending, often quoted in scholarly papers and reviews, reminds the reader to “take note” when outside by the buildings during visits because ghosts may fall upon you (Unnikrishnan, 3). The whole poem is quoted below for easier reference:

“LIMBS

There exists this city built by labor,
 mostly men, who disappear after their
 respective buildings are made. Once
 the last brick is laid, the glass spotless,
 the elevators functional, the plumbing
 operational, the laborers, every single
 one of them, begin to fade, before dis-
 appearing completely. Some believe
 the men become ghosts, haunting
 the facades they helped build. When
 visiting, take note. If you are outside,

and there are buildings nearby, ghosts
 may already be falling, may even have
 landed on your person.

–NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST”

- Deepak Unnikrishnan, *Temporary People*, 3

“This haunting preface”, as Menon calls the poem, is the first direct mention of ghosts in the novel as well, “alluding to the many ghostly presences” that is the Gulf Migrants (Menon, 186) which makes it an ideal starting point for us. The title “Limbs” seems odd as there’s no direct mention of human limbs itself but we can infer that it is a comment on the labour being done by the worker’s limbs, and acknowledge that they are only valued in parts. We see here the first instance of a reference to the ‘body’ of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre, which is already spectral as it is not even present in the poem but it lingers underneath, the building as the only proof of their labour. The short length with the straightforward free verse style of the poem makes it seem deceptively simple and laidback but at closer inspection, the overall speech act here is a heralding about this city and its makers by the narrator to the reader as preparation for what’s to come. The poem’s language at the start is akin to that of a myth or folktale setting the premise in line 1: “there exists this city built by labour”. The men disappearing are presented as an inevitable fate, just the final step in the list of tasks to make the building they are assigned (lines 2-8). Here we are showing a clear example of spectralising. In the context of the construction worker, it is the very act of creating the building for this city that makes them “fade” into a spectre, a slow erasure of their presence with each brick laid.

However there comes a shift with “some believe the men become ghosts, haunting the facades they helped build”. Aside from the direct statement of the Gulf Migrant transforming into a spectre, there is a resurrection of the workers that were thought to have left, albeit with some disbelief that suggests that it almost seems like a wish “some” were making in hopes of it being true and it also insinuates Gulf-Migrant spectre’s absence-presence. There are already hints at the Gulf-Migrant Spectre haunting back here in some way or at least a hope of it at this point. The phrase “haunting the facades” has a double entendre as well : the actual buildings made by

labourers but also the deceptive facades that make up the haunting structure of the UAE which their spectralising helps to sustain. It ends with a warning; to “take note” when the reader is outside during her visit to the city as “ghosts may already be falling, may even have landed on your person.” The worker-ghosts falling reflects real life where falls are a common cause of injury or death on construction sites. I would argue they fall upon visitors of this city in an attempt to make their absence known in the spatial, bypassing the temporal limits of their presence in the city. The visitor/reader is an unintentional receiver of the spectre onto their “person”, marking them an arrivant of the city’s spectralising effects. The ending serves as an omen or prophesy, that the reader will feel the presence of the worker, even in their absence and eventually become one themselves.

“Limbs” hence serves as the thesis of the book, preparing the reader on the spectropolitics of Abu Dhabi and introduces the Gulf Migrant-Spectre through the archetype of the construction worker. It also makes folklore out of the origin story of Abu Dhabi’s buildings and other gulf cities made similarly, structures as a myth to be passed down from newcomers. The final haunting component of the poem is that the narrator/poet’s name is “withheld by request”. We cannot tell if this is an epigraph written by someone who cannot reveal themselves that Unnikrishnan uses as a prologue or if it is a character from this same city who does not wish to be known, which would denote the poet is by a Gulf Migrant-Spectre who is not a labourer. This unnamed poet’s omnipresence ends the poem with no grasp of its own origins, denoting the Gulf Migrant-Spectre’s overall absence-presence in their own folklore (refer to section 2.a).

The distant, mythic figure of the construction worker in “Limbs” is a juxtaposition to the construction worker Gulf-Migrant Spectres we meet up close later in the book, fantastical reflections of their real life counterpart. Unnikrishnan’s representations of them and spectralising are also far more nuanced and done with depth within the more detailed world building as we switch into irrealism and prose. Part 1 Chapter 2 of *Temporary People* is “Birds”, a magical realist short story about Anna, a Malayalee woman in her 40s who works in Abu Dhabi as a “sticker” that fixes up “construction workers who fell from incomplete buildings” by sticking them back together using tape, glue, thread and needle after finding them on the building sites (9). The narration of the third person omniscient with a focus on Anna and her interactions with the

people she works with, mainly the construction workers. The falling of the construction worker we saw in “Limbs” is a recurring motif in “Birds” as well but here, the reader is made to face the impact of their bodies hitting the ground, visualized in detail as a regular occurrence in this Abu Dhabi. Their “deaths are rare” to the point the narration jokes that it’s as if “labour does not die here” suggesting an inhuman endurance to damage from their job and fixable with tape like they are toys or machinery so they can remain functional to the haunting structures of Abu Dhabi.

The cyclical damage is what spectralises them as Tuck and Ree note: “Damage” is how “future ghosts are conjured” (Tuck and Ree, 647). Veteran workers jump for new arrivals to prove their endurance “as a lark” (9) which can be interpreted as revenant Gulf Migrant-Spectres (the veterans) and arrivant Gulf Migrant-Spectres (the new workers) meeting at their own distinct disjunction of time within which they are spectralised, apart from the public as their own inside joke. We also see here that there is a difference in degree of spectralising, that the veteran Gulf Migrant-Spectres are more used to its repetitive effects. According to Derrida, repetition is critical to spectralising a subject into spectre: “Repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time, since the singularity of any first time, makes it also a last time. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time” (Derrida, 10). In a sense, the construction workers are broken in repeatedly in the course of their time working into Gulf Migrant-Spectres and there is a clear timeline to it that in “Birds” is represented as the first fall and the last fall that kills them. However if they never die, it becomes a cycle of spectralising that comes from the event of falling over and over itself, showing the “multifarious cyclicity of spectral repetition” present throughout the text (Menon, 196). The waiting after having fallen to get taped back together also adds insult to injury here as aside from the stickers, no one cares for their cracks or lost voices (Unnikrishnan, 11). If made to wait too long or never found, then they deteriorate into death (11), similar to them fading in “Limbs”. The sun, like in real life, also plays a role in their spectralising, because “the Gulf’s heat baked a man differently” (14) and if you were on the top of the building, you “decay” (15). These spectres are also pinned to the spatial area of the haunting structures even if their presence is temporal, as their bodies cannot be removed from the work site to be fixed or they would die (12). They are therefore entrapped within the buildings they make so long as they can still labour after being taped back together. Scholar Pascal Sieger notes how “Death is a prism” through which the life of Gulf Migrant-Spectre can be seen and

through that prism, the haunting structure spectralises by denying the Gulf Migrant-Spectre “mourning and joy” that comes with the “very intimate moments like death and birth” (Sieger, 129). The rarity of their demise makes it seem like literal death is seen as (ironically) the only escape from the spectropolitics of Abu Dhabi and only a few receive it. The worker’s durability can also be interpreted in this context as a presentation of their absence-presence where if they don’t die, they don’t need to “leave” as Gulf Migrants are supposed to. Hence, they negate the temporal limits Gulf Migrants usually have set on them by the haunting structure.

Even as spectres, the construction workers having a “lark” about their spectral lives seems to be how the construction workers of “Birds” circumnavigate their spectralising, whether it be jumping off buildings to show off or in the worker Iqbal’s case, “impregnating the sky” (Unnikrishnan, 14). Iqbal, who dies despite Anna’s attempts to fix him, is a great example of the spectre haunting back through strange actions that may be absurd to the reader but make sense within the world of the story. While being soothed in his last moments, he shares a series of confessions about his life to Anna during which he jokes, shows grief about stealing money from his dad and talks about his fellow workers. At these moments, the story makes us face the spectre and hear it speak, even if it is laughing at its own fate, which defies the silence that spectralising insists upon the Gulf Migrant-Spectre. For example Iqbal reveals he fell to his demise because he was masturbating on the roof of the building he worked on and a pigeon landed on his “pecker” surprising him. The pigeon here is the basis for the title of the short story “Birds” and after this point, appears multiple times in the story, as a caged pet of Iqbal’s fellow construction worker Nandan (18) and later at the ending dream sequence Anna experiences (22). The title juxtaposes the falling worker-spectres who cannot fly to freedom from the high rooftops they make, further substantiating how they are pinned to the spatial confines of their workplace. The suppression of their desires here attribute further to their spectralising.

When Anna expresses disbelief at the cause of his fall, he jokes that she should try because it’s like “impregnating the sky” (Unnikrishnan 12-19). The crass sexual acts of Iqbal can be seen as exerting agency by experiencing pleasure on his own terms where he is only meant to be labour and “decay” away – haunting back by using his ‘body’ outside the bounds of labour within the spatial confines of the construction site. As we denoted earlier in section 2.b and with the poem

“Limbs”, the Gulf Migrant is already a spectre when we meet it in this story as the visa is what begins the spectralising. It should also be noted that sexuality and intimacy in the UAE is “subject to state control” on the basis of religion (Islam, as mentioned in section 2.a) so acts of sex are only legally allowed within marriage (Siegler, 126). The worker’s bodies are spectral at this point, so the sexual act of Iqbal undermines the UAE’s intention of spectralising to control their bodies and mocks the haunting structure of the UAE as a whole. Here, fun and pleasure or to sum it up, ‘Desire’, become methods for the Gulf Migrant-Spectre to assert their spectral agency and haunt back even after spectralising. Iqbal also gives other examples of similar but non-sexual acts by other workers that function similarly like Badran, who collected the sweat of his fellow workers to make a swimming pool for them in which Iqbal says was fun as they “floated for hours” (Unnikrishnan, 15). Desire is therefore “a refusal to trade in damage” that we speak of earlier by recognising “the suffering,” and “thrive in the face of loss anyway” (Tuck and Ree, 747).

Within our framework, the workers in “Birds” would also fit the description of Peeren’s living ghosts as they are “expendable” and “objects” in the story (Peeren, 14-15). It is clear that while writing, Unnikrishnan is well aware of the objectification of construction workers as simply tools of labour that are dispossessed and also that their large numbers being necessary to cities like Abu Dhabi to keep functioning and growing. To comment on the latter point of large numbers, Unnikrishnan reimagines the workers to be supplied by scientists growing workers in labs, which is the plot of Part 1, Chapter 7 “In Mussafah Grew People”. A sci-fi short story written in the tone of dark comedy, the story is set in a neighbouring unnamed gulf country whose leader, Sultan Mo-Mo, hates Dubai for always being at the top. The Sultan meets three Malayalee men Pinto, Tinto and Vimto, who tell him “Dubai grows their labour” with the help of Moosa, a Malayali scientist (Unnikrishnan, 49) to maintain their rapid growth. Here we see the other side of the haunting structure and how the spectralising works top-down from the proto-class to the Gulf-Migrant Spectres. While comedic in its caricatures, the dark undertones of creating genetically modified idea workers come through as a clear metaphor for the haunting structure (literally) creating the labourer archetype of Gulf Migrant-Spectres. Here, we have the introduction to the scientific project behind the grown labour of Dubai:

“The Canned Malayalee Project was born after the labor ministry realized in 1983 that the country would have to multiply its workforce by a factor of four if the sheikhs were to accomplish the growth they envisioned in the time they wanted it.” (Unnikrishnan, 49)

This section is a satirical reinterpretation of the actual historical moment of the “Gulf Boom” that marks the high migration rates of Malayalees to the Gulf into the context of this story (refer to section 2.a). The solution to the labour ministry’s discovery comes from the Head of intelligence who suggests the Malayalee as a test subject because they are best suited for the harsh conditions of these cities in terms of “temperment” and “vulnerability to weather” according to research done. Moosa is the one who cracks the code to make the Canned Malayalee. Earlier in the framework, we had stated that the spectralising of the worker, as in the gulf migrant spectre, is done by the haunting structure of the UAE. I argue that this short story within *Temporary People* is a representation of the haunting structure’s mechanics of spectralising that twists the ‘body’ of the worker for their own benefit. He creates a way to grow this special brand of synthetic workers from flower pots in greenhouses, based on agricultural practices in the UAE which require greenhouses to grow plants non-native to the desert ecosystem (Hassan). After much experimentation, it resulted in the literal “fruits” of his labors (pun intended) named MALLUS, short for “Malayalees Assembled Locally and Lovingly Under Supervision”. Where there are many humorous references to use of quintessential food products from Kerala to fertilize the MALLUS like plantains and toddy, there is a distinct horror in knowing they are “cerebrally customised” and considered a produce (Unnikrishnan, 51). They are also designed to be temporary, with a life span of twelve years, after which they go back to headquarters and then are dropped into the desert, much like how stray cats are removed from the cities in UAE (Look). The satire here highlights the haunting structure’s proclivity for spectralising a migrant class to ensure only the presence of their labour and nothing else by eliminating the ontological aspects of Gulf migrants till it is absent from being erased. We see this in the select curation of labor-benefic characteristics chosen for MALLUS.

Moosa himself is an odd character, hard to place. One could consider him “proto-class” at the time of creating MALLUS he is part of the haunting structure but he is still Malayalee and a Gulf Migrant. I would digress that Moosa could be also a spectre, perhaps with his degree of spectralising is different from MALLUS due to the difference in the kind of labour his work involved and his close proximity to the proto-class who are the “patrons” funding his

experiments (51). Hence he is allowed more ontological existence and in turn, a less spectral existence. Moosa's situation shows us that the degree of spectrality a Gulf Migrant-Spectre is designated is dependent on their role within the UAE's spectropolitics and a method of survival is to increase your proximity to the proto-class by enabling the spectralising of other Gulf Migrants. His spectrality becomes more prominent when he is arrested for doctoring the formula to produce workers that have far more agency and reasoning abilities and they end up revolting. In some sense, he disturbed the haunting structure by imbuing the MALLUS with the ability to act with their unique spectral agency via reasoning skills, so much so those canned labourers resisted their ill-treatment and imagined making their own nation (Unnikrishnan, 52). In exchange, he gives up his own agency to be further spectralised, shown with him refusing to explain what he had a change of heart. This would be an example of Tuck and Ree's "Spectral dissemination" where Moosa enacts "a logic of personal rescue through social contamination" of the haunting structure of the UAE by releasing the doctored MALLUS into Dubai and in turn took on the "debt" accrued from creating the canned labourers (Tuck and Ree, 641). Even making the MALLUS could have been some form of dissemination to begin with. Hence, he haunted the narrative as we see with his wife's Firdosa's book titled the same as Chapter 8 "Le Musée". In this part of the story, we find that his actions enabled retribution toward the haunting structure of the UAE as it resulted in the surviving MALLUS and rebels led by "the Commander" allegedly making a museum of kidnapped locals and expats.

Overall Temporary people (2017) presents the construction worker/labourer archetype of the Gulf Migrant Spectre to us in various forms and genres. Unnikrishnan first mythologises them in Limbs as a way to warn the reader of the seemingly inevitability of the UAE's haunting structure and the resultant Gulf-Migrant Spectres. Then he showcases specific forms of spectralising in irreal being fixed up by tape after falling from the buildings they make and even growing them in greenhouses. Exploring this archetype has shown us that the spectralising is often a repetitive process forced onto the Gulf Migrant labourer archetype to make them a spectre and is seen as merely a consequence of their role in the city rather than the haunting structure's design itself. We also see there are different degrees of spectralising a Gulf Migrant-Spectre is subjected to. Either it is based on the temporal, with veteran labourers more spectralized than newcomers, or proximity to the proto-class and role in sustaining the haunting structures of the UAE like Moosa

versus the canned labourers. However the workers also haunt back, by falling on the “person” of the visitors' attempt to make their absence known, engaging in desire as ways to reclaim agency after their spectralising or disturbing the haunting structure by dissemination of spectral agency.

b. Case study 2 - the non-human and the inanimate as renderings of the spectre

This case study's focus will be on the personification of inanimate objects and the non-human (animals, insects etc.) as representations of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre undergoing the effects of the haunting structure of the UAE and wider Gulf, made of the systemic exclusion of its migrants. We already see glimpses of this in our earlier case study where men “shrivel into raisins” under the sun (Unnikrishnan, 15) or plants that grow laborers (Unnikrishnan, In *Mussafah Grew People*, 47-60). My interpretation of these specific kinds of representations is that Unnikrishnan employs this strategy as a way to visually represent the transformation spectralising does onto the Gulf Migrant, who often has control over their labor and bodies taken away by the haunting structures. Spectralising can generally be a disruption to the ontological ‘body’ of the Gulf Migrant such that it is made to shift into a spectre. Erasure due to spectralising does not necessarily be only represented as a fading body as in “Limbs” (refer to case study one). That shift can also be made visible through using the physicality or perspective of the non-human and the interaction between human and non-human, be it insect or inanimate.

The first example is “*Blatella Germanica*” a magical realist story titled in the scientific name of the German Cockroaches. It follows a boy's interactions with anthropomorphic German cockroaches that infest his family's apartment, which we assume from contextual details is in Abu Dhabi. It is a two-part story, the first part in Part 2, Chapter 3 and the second in Part 3 Chapter 6. Migrants have often been referred to as pests/insects in anti-migration discourse (Shariatmadari), so drawing connections or even parallels between Unnikrishnan's “*Blatella Germanica*” and the Gulf Migrant-Spectre characters is not unfounded. Unnikrishnan's focus on cockroaches is due to them being the most common invasive insect in apartments in the UAE, especially in older buildings. The story names them “Immigrants” that “infested this kitchen” (Unnikrishnan, 119) It is estimated 75% of homes in Abu Dhabi have cockroaches as they thrive

in heat and are extremely hard to exterminate without professional pest control (Hume). A key fact to remember is that they are also an invasive species that is not native to the Gulf. Part 2, Chapter 3 is in third person omniscient but mainly from the point of view of the “General” an albino cockroach elder to the *Blattella germanica* community in the boy’s building. The General is an uncanny figure as he learns to mimic the humans through clothing, walking on two legs instead of six and eventually learning to speak. Eventually they figure out methods to evade attack and survive the humans till the boy goes on a killing spree with bug spray and the General dies. (Unnikrishnan 120-125). In the analysis, I propose that the non-human can be conceived as a non-being and therefore spectral and that the anthropomorphism of the cockroaches manifests from it tuning into the “frequency” of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre it comes into contact with. As a reminder, it is explained in the theoretical framework that the Gulf Migrant-Spectre has an invisible “frequency” beyond the ontological ‘being’ that comes from their enforced temporariness by the haunting structure of the UAE and anything resultant of it (refer to Derrida and Menon’s use of spectral ‘frequency’ in section 2.b.i). An example of this is the role of language here. An example is the General creating the ‘patois’ he made from the languages of the various Gulf Migrants, which is described here:

he started picking up the language of the building’s tenants, bits of Arabic from the Palestinians and the Sudanese, Tagalog from the Filipinos, modern variations of Dravidian languages, that he began crafting a custom-made patois from the many tongues he heard, then practicing it at night in the kitchen

- Unnikrishnan, *Blattella Germanica*, 125

We have discussed silence in the context of Gulf Migration that is resultant from censorship, segregation amid the population due to the linguistic and cultural barriers and the politics that have emerged from oil (refer to section 2). Even though migration policies contributed to the variety of languages, it did not allow them to mix due to the above reasons. Spectralising necessitates silencing the Gulf Migrant-Spectre in a myriad of ways and that includes the lack of a common language that can encompass the experience of being a Gulf Migrant-Spectre. Unnikrishnan himself says in his interview that “it’s very hard to talk about a city like Abu Dhabi” without considering all its languages together (*Guernica*). In creating this patois, the

General is evoking a spectral language of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre, a revenant vernacular that could have been but never came to be. The general even names it “street baasha” (126) baasha simply being the word for language in Malayalam. After his anthropomorphosis saves his life through confusing Boy, the General teaches street basha to the younger cockroaches and “From then on, in every flat in Boy’s building, strange chatter could be heard at night, mystery sounds of some tenants attributed to ghosts buried deep inside the walls” (Unnikrishnan, 127), which further substantiates our point about this spectral language. This also suggests the cockroaches in mimicking the Gulf Migrant-Specties, matched the frequency of their inherent spectrality, hereby shifting them into an anthropomorphic state, symbolizing the disruption of the otological ‘body’ due to spectralising.

Reading further, we find that this mimicry, in the pure sense of the word, comes from (spectral) agency and death being a common thread between non-human and spectral. In the story, the boy notes that killing the cockroaches is hard as “this insect is programmed to live” (120). Then when the General witnesses two other cockroaches die violent deaths, his reasoning behind mimicking those tenants was so “He wouldn’t die like that; he wanted as much agency over his own demise” (Unnikrishnan, 124). This want for agency over one’s own self over death, is similar to the workers of “Birds” in case study one, who cannot die easily and are “programmed to live” as well. The anthropomorphosis is a manifestation of this spectral agency, which is further exemplified by the cockroaches returning for the dead killed by Boy and consuming them (Unnikrishnan, 238). Even the General’s life ends this way, his cannibalism by the younger cockroaches who were still on two legs speaking street basha, is an aggressive way to reclaim the intimacy of death (Sieger, 126) by enacting agency over the remnants. It also represents the cyclical nature of being Gulf Migrant-Spectre, the arrivant taking over the revenant in the process of being spectralised, sustaining the haunting structure that cannibalizes your ontological ‘being’ in the process. This could also be interpreted in the context of Gulf Migrants returning to their countries of origin dead and in coffins (VitalSigns). The *Blatella Germinica* of Part 2 Chapter 3 haunt the Boy years later as well, following him into his new home a continent away in Part 3, Chapter 7, despite having killed them. This suggests that the Gulf Migrant-Spectre remains spectral even after leaving the space and does not return to the ontological being, haunting back new spaces by virtue of being haunted by their own spectralising in UAE. Menon

in her own analysis of “Blatella Germanica: comes to a similar conclusion that the cockroaches represent the Gulf Migrant-Spectre who remain “a revenant” a remnant of the UAE, “that which returns to haunt the living” (Menon, 197) still pinned to the spatial of the “haunting facades” by spectral chains (Unnikrishnan, 3) even after departure like the workers of “Birds”. However the difference in opinion I come to here is that the cockroach is not directly representing the Gulf Migrant-Spectre but rather mimicking its characteristics due to being impacted by this spectral frequency due to sarong in the same space.

The shapeshifting as spectral agency is also evident in Part 1, Chapter 1 “Gulf Return”, a surreal flash-fiction text about three labourers trying to get back home. Return is a central theme as we have seen this far, the Gulf Migrant haunted by the disjunction of time that comes being caught between the prophesied return to their country of origin but also entrapment from being forced to come (back) to the haunting structure of the UAE to exist, even spectrally. As we have established earlier with the labourer archetype (which we encounter again here), Boy and the cockroaches: once a Gulf Migrant-Spectre, you remain one. However, departure is possible if you are quick enough to see this as the three labourers prepare to leave and to do so, they shapeshift:

“IN A LABOR CAMP, somewhere in the Persian Gulf, a laborer swallowed his passport and turned into a passport. His roommate swallowed a suitcase and turned it into a little suitcase. When the third roommate, privy and vital to the master plan, ran away the next morning with the new suitcase and passport”

- Unnikrishnan, “Gulf Return”, “Temporary People”, 5

The labourer’s spectral body has always been malleable after becoming a spectre as we saw in earlier examples in section 3.a, initially meant to labour but the same body also can exert agency to make themselves known and to haunt back, which in this case means shapeshifting into the passport and suitcase, reclaiming the two objects that tend to define the Gulf Migrant’s perpetual transience. This is also a commentary on the taking away of passports that many working class gulf migrants are subject to (VitalSigns) and their objectification as tools of labour coming in “cargo” (Unnikrishnan, 7). The disguise allows them to bypass symbols of the spectralising

agents of the haunting structure of the UAE in the book such as the “guard on night duty” (surveillance and state control), “petrol in the air” (the oil economy), “cranes in the sky” (construction and labour) and “humidity and hot air” (sun and heat). The most interesting thing they bypass is the temporal limits set upon the Gulf Migrant-Spectre: “past his past, past his present and in doing so, the third labourer who held the passport and suitcase broke the barrier and now “held the future in his hands” (Unnikrishnan, 5). Gulf migrants have always been denied a future as we have mentioned earlier, both in terms of permanence and also return due to the circumstances that creates the haunting structure of the UAE (refer to section 2.a) and in regaining control of those two objects by swallowing them also meant regaining lost time. This is also an example of the Airport being a space where “the temporal take precedence over, if not completely annihilate, the value of the spatial” (Daddak, 8). The Gulf Migrant-Spectre are incorporating themselves into these objects or rather, possessing these objects to assert their presence in the face of the haunting structure that has used these objects to spectralise them.

However right before boarding, the passport and suitcase start spouting human appendages again like ears and arms and are made to wait while the airport staff try to figure out protocol. An interesting aspect here is that everyone here knows they are dealing with an unknown element here, Gulf Migrant-Spectres in semi-inanimate forms. If fully inanimate, they can be treated as objects, but as they are indefinable like these Gulf Migrant-Spectres in non-human form, the plane and airline staff have to be protected from them (Unnikrishnan, 6). They are made to wait, which we know from our analysis of the workers waiting to be fixed in “Birds”, the act of being made to wait can be a denial of their agency from the structures. In response, the labourers “swallow” everything in sight from the people in the queue to the plane, after which it takes off by itself. The hyperbole of the third labourer opening his mouth “wide, wide, wider” to do so while the suitcase becomes a sinkhole with the passport assisting in pushing people represents an attempt at haunting back through possession for the purpose of retribution. There is vengeance in the way these labourers possess everything in its way, transforming into each object they swallow till they reach their goal—the plane. They don’t stop there but instead, take off the runway, “ignoring the pleas from the control tower” while “returning the cargo” (Unnikrishnan, 7). This continual transformation and ignoring the control tower that could be a stand in for the haunting structure of the UAE, is an example of spectral revenge through haunting (back)

because it requires “a refusal to stop” (Tuck and Ree, 642). The swallowing is how these labourers resolve their crisis, and therefore is the result of them haunting back. “Returning the cargo” also sticks to the use of the inanimate as a vehicle for retribution by and for the Gulf Migrant-Spectre, toward “an uncanny return” that will forever haunt the airport left behind (Menon, 194).

We can conclude that in this case study, the non-human and the inanimate have been used here to either renderings of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre itself or results of the spectralising effect the haunting structure of the UAE as on the Gulf Migrant-Spectre and what was lost due to this process. The anthropomorphic cockroaches enact spectral possibilities of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre from tuning in into its frequency, picking up on a spectral “patois” that was not allowed to be created. They also reflect the desire for spectral agency over their death, returning (for their) dead much like the Gulf Migrant-Spectre does to reclaim the sanctity of death in general in the face of spectralising. Shapeshifting is also an exercise of spectral agency as we see in the labourers morphing into a passport, suitcase and then a plane through swallowing these objects, possessing them to take control. These transformations are veiled commentary on Gulf Migrant-Spectre’s objectification and a reclamation of objects used by the UAE to render them temporary, and thus reclaiming a “future”. They haunt back by refusing to stop in their pursuit for this “future” and get their revenge by

c. Case study 3 - Anna’s rituals in her haunt(ing)

This case study is more so a character study on Anna, the central character of Part 1, Chapter 2, “Birds” within which we explored the labourer archetype in case study 1. As stated before, the short story follows Anna working as a ‘sticker’ who fixes construction workers who break their bodies falling from the buildings they work on by using glue, tape, needle and thread. We will analyse her as a Gulf Migrant-Spectre and her haunt(ing) (back) both by her relationship to Abu Dhabi stated in the first sentence: “Anna Varghese worked in Abu Dhabi” (Unnikrishnan, 9) and with the workers she fixes.

Before we continue, It is important to note that in comparison to the other case studies, we are focused on a female character, which is an important aspect. Earlier in our theoretical framework, we had established that Derrida neglects women in *Spectres of Marx* (1993) using Spivak's critique of Derrida in *Ghostwriting* (1995). that Spivak notes that Derrida does not seem to conceive the idea of subaltern women, with whom according to her is "the dubiously felicitous out-of-joint subject" (Spivak, 67). She also reminds us though that "the subaltern women" who are "patriarchally defined" have now become "to a larger extent. the support of production" of capital (Spivak, 67), which is the case in the UAE. Even if migrant women are a minority in general (refer to section 2.a about gender ratios) they are still labour in the UAE and in the conjunction of being women and migrant, subject to spectralising by the haunting structure of UAE, which is also patriarchal in its very nature. The women-spectre of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre is subject to erasure and violence not just the proto-class but also migrant men. Here relationship to the spatial/temporal are this complicated, because her absence-presence is rare and based on a different metric in comparison to male counterparts who also recognise that "in a city where women were scarce" (Unnikrishnan, 11).

In an example from a different part of the book the chapter "In Mussafah Grew People" where Moosa, in his attempt to grow a female version of MALLUS (refer to case study 1) and the initial attempt had "germinated naked" and she died of loneliness in her petri dish because handling her was "a cause for concern" (Unnikrishnan, 50). Unlike the male canned labourers, the female one was abandoned from the start because there seems to be no place for her at all because her hauntological 'body' seems to be out-of-joint in that specific context, disrupts the typical mechanics of spectralising the (male) scientists of the proto-class, have already established with the other labourers. Similarly, Anna, in a world of construction workers as a sticker, is doubly disconjunct and yet is the one conjoining people's spectral limbs together. She is the only woman in the story as far as we read and all her dialogue is with men. There are mentions of other women like cousin Tracy (Unnikrishnan, 10) or Khaled's wife (20), no other noticeable female character is present nor are there mentions of other female stickers. Khaled puts Anna alone in her own petri dish of "runt-like" Hamdan at the time Abu Dhabi was an experiment in progress with oil having "just begun dictating the terms" (Unnikrishnan, 10).

In short, we cannot see her spectralising as that of the workers, as her body is not being repeatedly 'broken in' and she doesn't haunt back with 'bodily' desire in the same way the labourers do, like Iqbal falling from the roof as he masturbated or Badran collecting buckets of sweat to make a pool (refer to case study one when we talk of the construction workers in the story). The only time we see Anna consider desire is in the scene with repeating Iqbal's words about "impregnating the sky" and thinking about trying it once but we don't see her engage in the same way. Her 'body', which she knows as intimately as Hamdan (9), seems to have merged with the city. Hamdan is perhaps Anna's "haunt" (19) because the Gulf Migrant spectre hauntological 'body' is one with the city, a spatial intimacy of sorts with Hamdan that gives her agency. She essentially is haunting back Abu Dhabi by making it her own over thirty years. This would be an example of "spectral commingling of the spatial and temporal" that registers as an absence-presence that makes her a Gulf Migrant-Spectre, where the time she spends in Hamdan labouring embedded her into the space, not unlike the worker's death-proofing coming from being pinned to the construction site. However haunting the city also means she is changed as the city is changed. We see her weep about the new construction "exact maximum mileage from death-proof labor" and change Hamdan (Unnikrishnan, 19) and that "Anything with an old soul was being taken apart" (21). This seems to predict that due to her degree of spectralising making her a kind of veteran (refer to case study one), she will eventually be taken apart from Hamdan, the haunting structure attempting to negate her spectral intimacy.

Another aspect of her spectralising comes from the repeated task of sticking broken labourers together and seeing their pain multiple times, not just in terms of physical injury but also "the loneliness and anxiety of falling that weight heavy on [the worker's] mind" (Unnikrishnan, 11). This was not a job she chose to do as she came in on the promise of a hospital job that she borrowed money for but instead was met with Khaled breaking the news to her. Her spectralising begins with a lost future taken from her by the haunting structure of UAE, a common occurrence for many Gulf migrant women tricked to come in on false job offers (ET Online). However the lost future does not stop her from making the job her own, which in a sense is responding back to the spectralising that came from that lost future by rooting herself in the rituals of the present, which is her work as a sticker. I describe her work as ritual due to the description of her work below, especially her "other skills":

“She also possessed other skills. The fallen shared that when Anna reattached body parts, she spoke to them in her tongue, sometimes stroking their hair or chin. She would wax and wane about her life, saying that she missed her kids or the fish near her river, or would instead ask about their lives, what they left, what they dreamt at night, even though they couldn’t answer. If she made a connection with the man or if she simply liked him, she flirted. “You must be married,” she liked to tease. If she didn’t speak his language, she sang, poorly, but from the heart.”

- Unnikrishnan, “Birds”, 11

Anna doesn’t just do her work and leave as the haunting structure of the UAE would have her do. Instead she makes a ritual, a ceremony out of fixing, reminding them (and herself) of life beyond the labour, even flirting and singing. When Iqbal was dying, Anna sat with him for four hours and listened to his stories and remembered them after. The spectral intimacy is not just with the city but also with other Gulf Migrant-Spectres, her haunting back by acknowledging the intimacy of death and life through making her fixing ceremonies like a funeral (Seigler). This furthered by her insisting on keeping “a superb track record” of every worker on her route, finding the fallen like a “bloodhound” within a flashlight and finding the workers. No worker left unfound or forgotten by her, even if the UAE wishes to do so. Tuck and Ree had established “Haunting is the resolving” (Tuck and Ree, 542) which we used in our framework for the basis of haunting back (refer to section 2.b) and it is later stated in *A Glossary of Haunting* that “ceremony is the only resolution” (653). Putting the two statements together, we can propose haunting (back) as a continual ceremony for and by the Gulf Migrant-Spectre to resolve the spectralising done onto them, an offering of “Mercy” which Tuck and Ree say is “a gift only ghosts [spectres] can grant” (648). Anna’s ceremony of mercy, made from not just glue, tape, needle or thread but seeking and ritualising the fixing of the worker-spectres. allows her to haunt back the city with creating a spatial intimacy with other Gulf Migrant-Spectres and with the city, her revenge for the haunting structures of the UAE taking her future when she first arrived. This character study of Anna offers a new perspective on the Gulf Migrant-Spectre, of a women-spectre that sticks out amid her male counterparts because of her alternative response to her spectralising.

4. Conclusions : Gulf Migrant-Spectre futures & my own haunting(s)

I am a future ghost, I am getting ready for my own haunting.

- Eve Tuck and C.Ree, *A Glossary of Haunting*, 648

To conclude this thesis, where it argues the case for the concept of the Gulf Migrant-Spectre, who is created by the Gulf states' (haunting) socio-political structures in a process of spectralising that renders them temporary and who haunt back these states to remind them of their existence, I was asked to consider the futurity of this project and the future of Gulf Migrant Literature. In terms of the thesis, my hope for its future is to expand it into a longer project that involves analysis of more works from Gulf Migrant Literature to solidify the Gulf Migrant-Spectre as a theoretical concept that can address the violence(s) the GCC states have enacted onto the Gulf Migrant and their many strategies of haunting back these states as the inevitable ghosts of their own making, the monster to their Frankenstein experiments. I would also like to include more exploration in terms of the craft itself by writers of Gulf Migrant Literature—exploring more on choices in genre, form, settings and characters in the future. Gulf migration studies, not just literary analysis but also other disciplines, should consider spectrality as a serious theoretical approach more often in order to address our absence-presences and our agency in spite of the temporariness instead of relegating us as passive because our resistance differs from what the western nexus assumes and expects of us. This thesis also was written in the hopes that scholarship on spectrality continues to expand and evolve so that the Gulf Migrant-Spectre is not a new addition but rather one amid many other new kinds of spectres created in the present day all across the world, through wars, genocides, the climate crisis and especially today, technology when considering the advent of AI.

To speak on the future of Gulf Migrant Literature itself though, requires me to shift to using “I” and insert myself here. For context, I am a second generation Malayalee Gulf Migrant from Abu Dhabi, UAE and my own theoretical framework in section 2.b designates me a Gulf Migrant-Spectre, twice disjunct as a woman and (child of) migrants. It is odd for me to think of futures where Gulf Migrants like myself are generally denied one within the UAE, the only future possibility being that of departure, which my family has managed to delay for decades,

borrowing time through visas since my paternal grandfather first arrived in the Arabian Gulf. My parents are still working in the UAE and despite my departure from Abu Dhabi, I am still a Gulf Migrant-Spectre who is bound by visas wherever I go, even here in the Netherlands. The ideas of haunting over the years since my first encounter with *A Glossary of Haunting* by Eve Tuck and C.Ree during my Bachelors have always influenced my thinking especially in the context of Gulf Migration in the UAE because of the parallels of ghosts to our impermanent yet tethered lives in the region. Time and time again, I have watched the Gulf states create ghost after ghost out of my people to use every bit of our time, labour money and more for themselves with nothing in return. My own desire to haunt the UAE is because my rage and grief insists upon it as a way to stake the claim for home that I and my family were long overdue. For me, the best way was to write and join in creating the future of the very corpus this thesis deals with because reading works like *Temporary People* (2017) showed me that our narratives could thrive, circumnavigate the surveillance and silencing with creativity and even envision new alternatives outside of the states. All this has accumulated into my science fiction novel *Thoo!* (2026) which is set to be published next year by Hachette and follows a researcher who grew up in an alternate Abu Dhabi where machinery embedded into the city's buildings dictate the fate of its migrants. While i am glad of my contribution, what is more important is that I am not alone. Aside from me, contemporaries of mine are doing the same across multiple genres and disciplines, which has found homes not just in individual publications but in special issues that collate our works like UK-based Wasafiri magazines, *the UAE issue* (2025) and the Common's *Arabian Gulf Portfolio* (2021). These catalogs marking the growth of our genre and in the introduction for the latter, Unnikrishnan writes what I believe marks the future of Gulf Migrant Literature:

“The children have become adults. They have started to talk back.

Remember us, some are saying.

And you will, because we went everywhere.”

- Deepak Unnikrishnan, “Introduction- Portfolio of Writing from the Arabian Gulf”, *The Common*, 2021

Here's my final thoughts on the future of Gulf Migrant Writing. So long as the UAE and the rest of the Gulf states insist upon making ‘temporary people’, amid them are writers who remember and will place pen on papers to remind them that eventually the ghosts they make will haunt them back by writing their own stories back into the gaps of their monolithic narratives,

concretizing our presence. It is not a threat. It is a prophecy, “a fictive literary revenge” if you will (Unnikrishnan, 70) and I am ready. I will end on a note of irony or maybe, fate : my name ‘Aathma’ means “soul” or “spirit” in Malayalam but in certain contexts, it also translates to “ghost”.

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