

Heritage, Public Space, and Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Dubai and Qatar

Matthew Gray

Associate Professor, Faculty of International Research and Education, Waseda University

I. Introduction

It has become trite for observers of the Arab Gulf states' urban landscapes to note how dramatic the socioeconomic modernization of their public spaces has been, including not only through their famous megaprojects but also by the creation of new public spaces and the reinvigoration of heritage and historical sites. Hackneyed or not, such observations are a reminder of the new roles being seized by these states on the global stage, and suggest that, as much as regime maintenance strategies might severely limit the prospects for political transition in the region, the Gulf's urban spheres are certainly *not* immune from transformations in their economic profiles, the embracing of new technologies and practices, and even changes to their social dynamics. Saudi Arabia has constructed grand public buildings and spaces, including the King Abdullah Economic City metropolis megaproject. Dubai is home to the world's largest artificially created harbor and port (Jebel Ali), a so-called seven-star hotel in the Burj al-Arab, and of course Burj Khalifa, which at 828 meters high is the world's tallest building. Qatar is now the wealthiest country on earth, measured in national income per citizen, and has constructed grand buildings and cities as part of its economic transformation. Various Gulf cities now possess world-class airlines, outposts of the world's top universities, and in certain sectors such as petrochemicals, telecommunications or desalination, often globally-competitive companies.

What is interesting is that at the same time as heritage and new public spaces are being nurtured by Gulf leaderships, so too are the symbols and meanings

of cosmopolitanism; that is, a narrative that at its simplest argues that people or groups can transcend local and national identities to embrace being a "citizen of the universe",¹ and encompassing a worldview based on egalitarianism, sometimes also individualism, as well as reciprocal recognition between peoples, impartiality, and people connecting and conversing across traditional and nation-state boundaries.² Examples of this cosmopolitanism include shopping malls, family entertainment venues, and major urban projects like Dubai's *The World* offshore housing project that eschew local or Arab symbolism for much broader, global imagery, or imaginings from other cultures that are sometimes blended together into something multicultural (or, critics might argue, *non-cultural*). This cosmopolitan focus is arguably much more surprising than the resurgence in heritage and nationalist imagery: given the relative youth of Gulf states, and the complexities of their societies, why would leaderships not opt simply to emphasize national identity and shared experiences when approving and designing megaprojects, public spaces, and major cultural sites and institutions? Would cosmopolitanism not, in fact, be a threat to national projects and extant regimes, if its underlying narrative is about transcending the local and embracing pan-national, even humanist, values and identities?

Scholars have barely addressed such questions. To be sure, they have begun producing detailed surveys and analyses of the Gulf's rise, some taking a very positive view towards the region's transformation,³ and a range of edited volumes on the region usually also include reference to the economic and cultural changes taking place there.⁴ Public spaces and cultural heritage are part

of this transformation, even if they have gained little attention in scholarship apart from some brief mentions when assessing the Gulf's state "branding" and image-making efforts, or when exploring the relationships between space and modernity at the broader of levels, often looking primarily at architecture.⁵ That noted, there has been some heritage discussion in works on issues such as tourism, plus an emerging body of journal article-length pieces on Gulf heritage,⁶ and a couple of pieces on cosmopolitanism.⁷ The aim of this paper is to examine these dynamics and, hopefully, to take a small step in addressing the relative paucity of debate around both heritage and public spaces on the one hand, and cosmopolitanism on the other. By putting these dynamics into a political economy context, the intention is to show how their coexistence – indeed, even a harmony between them at times – is not a contradiction, but rather a logical product of state policies that seek not just nation-building outcomes, but also popular support for, and engagement with, ambitious projects of economic transformation and a selective embracing of globalization and the changes that it is bringing to the region. The ultimate goal is regime legitimization, of course, and domestic political outcomes rather than globalist, cosmopolitan ones, but by virtue of its existing political structures and massive oil wealth, the Gulf is chasing this goal, it will be argued, in unique ways. In making this argument, cases are drawn from Dubai and Doha as examples, although the broad trends discussed here are a feature, if to varying degrees, of all the monarchies of the Gulf.

II. A Note on Definitions

The terms "heritage", "public space(s)", and "cosmopolitanism" form the basis of this paper, and are worth briefly discussing given their fuzzy and sometimes contested meanings. Heritage and (urban) public spaces are, of course, in many respects very separate things. A definition of "heritage" often begins with that in the *International Charter of Venice* (1964),

which in part defined it as covering: "...[w]orks of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time."⁸ This has an implied emphasis on artworks and other visual expressions of human creativity, although in the contemporary Gulf heritage is equally likely to be a site or location of past or continuing cultural meaning, such as a village, marketplace, town center, cemetery, museum, opera house, theater, large public infrastructure work, mosque, or other such site. There are intangible elements to it too,⁹ and it includes festivals, concerts, and even mass market leisure sites such as theme parks, or natural sites with cultural or historical value such as national parks.¹⁰

At its (politically) simplest, public space is a critical meeting point for state on the one hand and society and business on the other.¹¹ Civil society often also uses public spaces as an arena in which to operate. Public spaces are by definition political because they are a physical space in which the "public sphere" exists and communicates, either with its constituent components or with the state.¹² Identity, community belonging, even citizenship – some of the essences of politics – are discussed and negotiated in physical and metaphorical public spaces, but in the simplest of interactive engagements, the physical realm is especially important. As a Foucaultian concept, "space" is central to how power is exercised, while a range of other approaches grant importance to the political dynamics of how space is produced over time and to whose interests it is formed and purposes given to it.¹³ Within such analyses, political economy also has a critical role. Community-level transactions and other exchanges often occur in public spaces, and more broadly, public space is fundamentally what economists call a public good,¹⁴ making it economic in nature and not just an element of social and political geography. A public space sometimes has commonalities with a heritage site. The two may be collocated or overlapping; for example, a piece of culturally-relevant art in a city square, or buildings such as museums, art galleries, and theaters, can be at once both public spaces and heritage sites (or locations that preserve heritage).

The determining factor for a “heritage” site is whether it has some link to collective “memory.”¹⁵ This contrasts with a simple public space, which may evolve into a heritage site over time or instead may never possess any cultural value. A busy road, for example, may be a public space, but few are heritage sites. Collective memory, therefore, is seminal. This may be a *constructed* memory, or one shaped and framed by the state or other actors; it does not have to be organic. A heritage site may even contribute to a “mythology,” a collective narrative that articulates “the patterns of behavior, expressive forms and modes of silence [and] into which worldviews and collective sensibilities are translated.”¹⁶ The factual accuracy of a narrative underpinning or supported by a heritage site or public space is virtually impossible to discern, and does not matter much here anyway, where it is the (political) *purposes* of such sites that are of concern.

“Cosmopolitanism” is a more complicated and contested concept, especially in terms of how it is understood in various contemporary settings and in how it relates to political identity, narratives, and meanings. Beyond the “citizen of the universe” concept and other basic features of it already noted, its use in recent times has been more multifaceted and contested. It (re-)emerged from the debate about globalization, with some scholars seeing it as a positive extension of globalization,¹⁷ and others seeing it as deriving from the universality of humankind.¹⁸ It has a substantial history in the Middle East. For example, elite culture in multicultural Arab cities such as Alexandria during the European eras is often described as having been cosmopolitan; some works treat the Ottoman period as having cosmopolitan aspects as well.¹⁹ Regardless, in contemporary scholarship, cosmopolitanism is almost always framed in contrast or opposition to localism, nationalism, and other sub-universalist units of human identity and loyalty.

Finally, in the pages that follow, the term “pseudo-cosmopolitanism” is introduced. While a little clumsy too, this word seeks to capture and describe the underlying realities of present-day Gulf

cosmopolitanism, which it is argued here is driven not by a profound humanist impulse nor a genuine attempt to transcend national identities, but rather uses state-created places and spaces with supposedly-cosmopolitan values and narratives to serve and strengthen national identity and loyalty to national-level institutions. Certain aspects of cosmopolitanism may indeed be acceptable to states and regimes – they may even be worth endorsing and supporting – but this does not change the fact that cosmopolitanism is ultimately and primarily being appropriated for national- and local-level political purposes.

III. Public Spaces, Heritage Sites, Cosmopolitanism, and Politics

Heritage sites usually perform a role in contributing to or strengthening national historical narratives, in turn or also reinforcing shared cultural characteristics and social bonds. This extends to society’s sense of shared purpose with the state. As Ouis, who in discussing tradition as nostalgia, has argued: “[h]eritage expresses the sense of nostalgia and alienation that many Gulfies have experienced during the rapid modernization [of recent decades]”, and tradition: “...can in fact be interpreted as reactions to modernity that are expressed in modern ways.”²⁰ But Gulf heritage sites are also a marker of uniqueness, contrasting sharply with the very homogenous feel of the Gulf’s modern cities and infrastructure. What might mark one Gulf society out from another, beyond less tangible components of identity such as tribal or family affiliations, are the finer points of their cultural practices and histories and thus their heritage sites. This is probably why there has been a renewal of interest in Gulf heritage; why old neighborhoods once thought “backward” are in fashion again, with the value of old places nostalgically reimagined,²¹ and why states have given it a lot of attention and funding.²² Rents such as oil income may be central to regime survival, but alone are no longer enough to guarantee it.²³ By spending

some rents on heritage sites, regimes are nearly always creating a triangular political economy dynamic of some sort between state, society, and shared heritage. There is also an international dimension to this, when for example tourists and other foreign visitors observe and engage with a site – one they usually hope and expect will be “authentic”²⁴ – or judge a society’s modernity on, at least partly, its public spaces, buildings, and infrastructure.²⁵ Similarly, both public spaces and heritage sites are integral to the construction of national “brands”, targeting both a global and local audience. Branding seeks to send a message that a country or economy is a safe yet dynamic place with which to have strong political, economic and cultural relationships. Modernity and development are part of this message, but so too is an image of society’s ability and willingness to embrace both modernity and tradition.

Cosmopolitanism is, very loosely, compatible with such narratives. It is sometimes forgotten that the region has an extensive history, especially along the shores of the Gulf, of cultural pluralism from trade, pilgrimage, and other interactions.²⁶ Many cultural practices in the area are not indigenous to it, and as elsewhere in the Arab world, many people hold a range of meta-national loyalties, identifying not just by nation-state but also as Arab or Muslim or as a member of a tribal grouping that transcends national borders. Moreover, the large populations of foreign workers residing in the Gulf states mean that many parts of the public realm defy simple definition as “Emirati” or “Qatari” or reduction to any other broad nation-state tag. Whether cosmopolitanism is accurately presented by states, and no matter how it is received by societies, it is neither the dominant political identity of most Gulf citizens nor simply a state-defined artificial construct.

Across the Gulf, major public works have been undertaken in the past twenty or so years to construct large public buildings and spaces, and strong state support provided for the development and protection of historical and heritage sites and the transmission of historical and cultural narratives. This has been true across the region, with oil museums, oil wells,

traditional villages, old neighborhoods and shopping streets, castles, forts, and other places restored, protected, or developed, often with new features such as museums added to them. No state has exempted itself from such activities. Religious sites have gained greater respect and attention, too, from the restoration of old mosques, to new Islamic art museums, to the preservation of locations associated with the spread of Islam. Historical sites, often reinvigorated and redeveloped, are peppered around the region, and much of the region has an Islamic museum of some sort. Qatar’s Museum of Islamic Art is world famous (more on which shortly). Impressive too is Bahrain’s Bayt al-Qur’an, an Islamic calligraphy museum which also plays a role in subtly asserting the Islamic credentials of the regime, presenting religion as a social bond and source of political authority.²⁷ Even public recreation facilities such as Bahrain’s *Lost Paradise of Dilmun* water park can be politicized public spaces. Not only is it an important family recreational venue, but its name and the symbolism implanted in it is a reminder to Bahrainis of their country’s claim to be the site of the biblical Garden of Eden, and is thus part of Bahrain’s (state-supported and strongly state-led) claims to unique historical significance.²⁸ Historical records and narratives elsewhere have also been a part of this trend. Madawi Al-Rasheed has noted how the recapture of Riyadh has been framed and promoted by the Saudi state,²⁹ for example, and Sulayman Khalaf has argued that the Kuwaiti state has framed and overstated a story of the pearling history there as a case of heritage.³⁰

The two cases focused on here are Dubai and Qatar. They offer a range of examples of heritage sites, public spaces, and other places that have strong political meanings imbedded in or linked to them, including in some cases messages about the state’s perspectives on certain forms of (usually pseudo-)cosmopolitanism. Whether genuine cases of cultural pluralization and hybridization, or simply parts of a nationalist narrative paid for with rents, the major projects of Dubai and Qatar contain a range of cases and messages. Both have undertaken massive projects along all these and

other lines, since the late-1980s and early 1990s in the case of Dubai,³¹ and a little later – the late 1990s, after the rise of Emir Hamad (ruled 1995–2013) – in that of Qatar.³² Abu-Lughod’s comment on the immediate and immense urbanization of the Gulf in the mid-to-latter 20th century is flowery but not exaggerated: “Seldom has the world seen a more striking in situ experiment of instant urbanization and hot-house forced social change.”³³

IV. The Case of Dubai

Dubai provides a plethora examples of public spaces with political meanings and with links to cosmopolitan imagery. Some of the most prominent include: the *Burj Khalifa*, the world’s tallest building;³⁴ Dubai’s offshore archipelago housing project *The World*;³⁵ and perhaps strangest of all, *Ski Dubai*, an indoor skiing slope and area located with the *Mall of the Emirates*.³⁶ These places are part of its branding efforts, and a product of Dubai’s activist approach to globalization, in which it embraces many aspects of globalization (above all, commercial and technological ones) as part of its strategy of becoming the epicenter of the Middle East and building its wealth on this pivotal economic role and on the confidence established by its pro-globalization, pro-business, and pro-Western reputation. Dubai’s experiment was thus one that had to balance local and international goals and interests: like globalization itself, the policy came with potential positives for the ruling elite, but also a strong set of risks, especially from hazards to Dubai’s conservative social and cultural traditions inherent in globalization.³⁷

Dubai’s megaprojects since the 1980s all keep this balance in mind, and indeed are driven by it. What they all have in common – and share with a raft of other such projects, too numerous to mention – is that they send a message that Dubai is embracing modernization and economic transformation, not only successfully adapting to it, but able to compete globally with the grandest cities of the world. This is a key attraction of,

for example, *Burj Khalifa*, the goals of which are not just financial or prestige-focused (although they include this), but to mark Dubai as a globalized metropolis, a *world* city. Its goal was not just to break a record for the highest building in the world, but to “embody the world’s highest aspirations.”³⁸ It is a sign of Dubai’s larger strategy to be a “city of superlatives and hyper-real experiences.”³⁹ *The World*, despite its financial setbacks, has as an underlying intention a message of globalization too. In fact, its shape and name are a crude representation of a form of cosmopolitanism, given its being shaped as a world map and located just off the coast of Dubai. It sends a message of the world lying at the very doorstep of Dubai. Even *Ski Dubai* has ambitious messages embedded in it. Its multicultural dining options and evocation of older images of European playboys and other *bon vivants* are all suggestive of a sophisticated, world-class skiing destination – but one located in a desert, with the hot, harsh climate subjugated by modernity and human ingenuity. The state has been central in all these endeavours and in how they are presented. While *Ski Dubai* is not state-owned, it is owned by the Majid Al Futtaim Group, a long-established and well-connected local firm. *The World* and *Burj Khalifa* have much closer links to the state: *The World* is being developed by Nakheel Properties, a state-backed (and as of 2011, state-owned) firm, and was originally conceived by Dubai’s ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, while *Burj Khalifa* was also a brainchild of the state and built by Emaar Properties, a company founded in 1997 with part-state ownership.⁴⁰

In the heritage sphere Dubai has also undertaken initiatives with strong political messages behind them. Perhaps the most interesting in this regard is Dubai Heritage Village. This is a state-owned heritage area where displays and events recreate traditional life and maintain older customs of the littoral Gulf coast area in and around Dubai. As Khalaf argues, it is “...a living museum, in which cultural representations and displays are organized, thematized and presented to viewers as discourses of Emirati national culture. Viewed this way,

[it] is a cultural complex of invented traditions....⁴¹ The Village is several things in one. It is a location for the presentation of traditional cultural dress, home life, symbols, and other meanings to Emiratis. It is a reminder – or claim, at least – to the same audience that modernity has not eroded historical memory or group identity and solidarity, even if arguably it has had impacts on them. It is also an international advertisement of the area’s culture, identity, and traditions to an international audience; a reminder to them that contemporary Dubai can embrace the modern while retaining the values and traditions of the past.

V. The Case of Doha, Qatar

On the surface, Qatar may seem to be following Dubai’s lead in modernizing its economy, developing its urban spaces, and emphasizing its history and heritage. This has included large, landmark projects and events to establish an international image for the capital, Doha. Swift as Doha’s development has been, there are substantive distinctions between its modernization and that of Dubai’s, especially the greater attention given to national and nationalist narratives in many of Doha’s major projects and heritage works.

Doha’s major museums are notable in this respect. One of the city’s icons is the Museum of Islamic Art,⁴² located on the water just off the Corniche near the older part of the city. The architecture of the Museum building is a blend of the traditional and Islamic with the modern and global: the famous Chinese architect I. M. Pei, who came out of retirement to design the building, used as inspiration a *sabil*, or ablutions fountain, in the Ahmad Ibn Tulun mosque in Cairo, and the angular geometric style of the building’s exterior also echoes the traditional Islamic art and architecture usage and repetition of mathematically-precise geometric patterns. At the same time, the building is explicitly modern and international in its design and the feeling it generates. The angular features on the exterior are reminiscent of early cubism, while the interior has

a cool, cavernous feel, but with a very modern feel.⁴³ The intention behind the Museum encompasses both the local and the global. The Chair of the Museum, Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, noted around the time of the Museum’s opening that it was part of a broader attempt to preserve the heritage and promote Qatar abroad: “[T]he challenge for every country is to have its people embrace new ideas while not forgetting where they come from. Qatar’s Museum of Islamic Art serves to place and present Arab civilisation in an historical context, while the Arab Museum of Modern Art, through contemporary displays and exhibitions, is able to reflect the tone of current socio-political times. Lastly, we are preparing to open the National Museum, which explores and displays our own national identity.”⁴⁴ This statement reflects the use of heritage sites for political purposes, and it is notable that the range of museums allows for both a national narrative, supportive of the ruling family’s history and legitimacy, to be pursued alongside messages of modernization and globalization.

Comments on the new National Museum mentioned by Sheikha Al Mayassa reaffirm these goals. The National Museum’s architect, for example, stated that it “...[embodies] the pride and traditions of Qatar’s people, while offering international visitors a dialogue about rapid change and modernization,” and that architecturally, “...the building suggests the image of a caravanserai – the traditional enclosed resting place that supported the flow of commerce, information and people across desert trade routes – and so gives concrete expression to the identity of a nation in movement.”⁴⁵ Qatar’s museums in conglomeration reflect, therefore, a deliberate blending of tradition and national identity assertion with a message of internationalism, openness, and willingness to (conditionally) change. They are a core part of the state’s and regime’s efforts at branding the country.⁴⁶

There are even cosmopolitan messages in Qatar’s museums. The clearest example is Mathaf: Museum of Contemporary Art, where there is an overt attempt to engage with global arts production and trends, and little

reference to Qatari identity, cultural traditions, or values beyond the fact that Qatari contemporary artists have greater prominence here than at the other museums. Mathaf's website articulates a goal that comes close to promoting a quasi- or pseudo-cosmopolitan message: "Mathaf museum hosts exhibitions, programs and events *that explore and celebrate modern and contemporary art and offer an Arab perspective on international art*. The Museum ... opened to the public in 2010, is *conceived to be used as an inspiring space for dialogue and scholarship about modern and contemporary art in Qatar, in the region, and in the world*. ... [The] collection [is] a starting point, *to create more opportunities for artists and for art-lovers in Doha and around the world*. [emphases added]"⁴⁷

Another example from Doha of where imagined global images are brought together, somewhat uncomfortably, is in the Villaggio Mall. The mall – at least until the 2012 fire that killed 19 and led to parts of the mall being closed – was designed with a mix of international symbols in it. It is most famous for the Venetian-style canal that runs through a large part of the main thoroughfares of the mall, with gondola rides available that rather tackily replicate those on the canals of Venice. The *Gondolania* Theme Park in the Mall includes an ice rink, a small rollercoaster and a rather American-feeling ten-pin bowling center. In combination, these very culturally-different aspects of Villaggio all provide a constructed and imagined international experience in a public space where various groups of Qataris (families, youths, sometimes businesspeople and others) gather and interact with each other and with expatriates and tourists. While this may be a fake or false interaction with other cultures, just as US public spaces such as Disneyworld's cultural displays or Las Vegas' evocation of the Egyptian pyramids are artificial constructions, the political messages embedded in Qatari malls are quite different to the purposes behind Disneyworld or Las Vegas.

VI. Dubai and Doha: Parallels and Distinctions

The exact narratives and symbols used by the Gulf states vary noticeably. In part this is because their exposure to and experiences of globalization differ. Dubai opened to the world economy substantively at an earlier time than did Qatar. It had been a very open trading port for almost a century⁴⁸ when it began reforming and diversifying its economy in the 1980s.⁴⁹ By the mid-1990s this transformation was visibly and rapidly advancing, and by the early 2000s Dubai was a household name in much of the world. Qatar's transformation has been almost as impressive but came later, after Emir Hamad had come to power in 1995 and once the economic strains of the late-1990s had passed; Doha's dramatic modernization accelerated only in the early 2000s.⁵⁰ Thus, their international economic engagement has varied, as have their social and cultural approaches to globalization: Dubai has had a broader and more liberal engagement with foreign social and cultural forces, including relatively liberal policies on, for example, mass leisure tourism. Qatar, in contrast, has been more cautious about social change and cultural influences, including those from mass tourism and a surge in its foreign workforce. Both states have pursued "branding" strategies that include at least some cosmopolitan ideas or imagery, but have also varied in this branding, too: Dubai's has been centered on a narrative that Dubai is the friendly, modern, open face of the Middle East and is harmonious with Western culture, big events, and consumerism; Qatar's has centered on major sporting events, commercial tourism and links, and diplomatic initiatives.

The underlying dynamics of the two regimes ultimately accounts for their political strategies. Dubai's is in effect a "neo-rentier" post-hydrocarbon strategy. The government has sought to build new non-hydrocarbon but still rentier-like ways for people to make money and to associate this with the state and its development strategy. Its stock market and property boom were a part of this in the 2000s, while more widely, the development of the city as an *entrepôt*,

regional headquarters, and investment center opened up enormous opportunities for people to make money acting as equity partners, agents, advisers, and other business service providers. A similar set of opportunities have emerged in Qatar, but the traditional oil and gas rentier structure of the economy remains dominant there: whereas Dubai's oil and gas rents now provide less than six percent of state revenue, in Qatar they were 62 percent of state revenue in 2012–13,⁵¹ and even with the fall in energy prices, remain around half of state revenue. The Qatari approach to economic liberalization has been more restrictive in many areas, although state-owned firms dominate its economy, as in Dubai.⁵² The legitimization strategy of their rulers is different too: Qatar's Al Thanis look for popular support and legitimacy from the country's international role, economic reach, and support of regional Islamic identity, while the Al Maktoums in Dubai focus more strongly on economic opportunities and influence – regardless, neo-rentierism is present in both political economies. Despite the variations in Dubai's and Qatar's political economies, the language of selective internationalization and pseudo-cosmopolitanism features in both, with very similar political objectives.

VII. Cosmopolitanism and “Pseudo-Cosmopolitanism”

Dubai and Doha both contain various examples of state-defined, top-down, globalization-driven (or at least globalization-informed and -influenced) projects, public spaces, and heritage sites and initiatives, many of which contain variations on what is here termed “pseudo-cosmopolitanism” as a narrative, symbol, or implied message. Whether to serve the purpose of justifying state policies, building and consolidating nationalist sentiment, or encouraging a sense of (qualified) internationalism, multiculturalism, and adaptability in contemporary society, they are examples of pseudo-cosmopolitanism provided that they ultimately form part of a state's identity-building

and -framing efforts, as opposed to *transcending or superseding* national identity as a more comprehensive and genuine cosmopolitanism would do. What is being promoted by the state is not anything close to such a comprehensive and genuine cosmopolitanism, even if occasionally a Gulf citizen might be swayed towards such a worldview, including as a result of the state-led changes and narratives around him or her. States instead are promoting a selective, limited, and often redefined conglomeration of certain features of cosmopolitanism, framed to deliver the state certain benefits while avoiding the political costs that might otherwise come from the spread of deeper or wider-ranging cosmopolitan identities. Neither cosmopolitanism nor pseudo-cosmopolitanism are the sole, or even the most important, political element in the public spaces and heritage locations of the Gulf. Yet as a dynamic it is important; both Dubai and Doha possess heritage and public places where cosmopolitanism, globalization, or internationalization features as a core, if sometimes underlying, theme in their symbolism, meanings, or narratives.

To take an example: on the surface, Dubai Heritage Village, a public space for the promotion of heritage and tradition, does not have a strong cosmopolitan message. In fact it could be viewed as seeking to constrain deep, genuine cosmopolitanism from developing, by acting as a cultural counter-balance to Dubai's rapid modernization and its globalized, nationally-detached megaprojects. Yet, to a limited extent, even Dubai Heritage Village has a direct if basic relationship with (pseudo-)cosmopolitanism: as Khalaf notes, the city's trading history is given prominence in the Village's narratives, with an underlying message that its history of commercial contact with the outside world is “precursor to [its] entrepreneurial present.”⁵³ By implication, this includes an open setting for interpersonal connections and, both historically and (differently) today, as a location for migrant and multicultural communities to interact and trade. In such ways, the Village brings together state development strategy, superficial multiculturalism, and pseudo-

cosmopolitanism, justifying present policies to both Emirati and foreign audiences. This blurs the lines between public space, heritage, and politics, using state power and funds to define a politically-based narrative around and from society's traditional culture, real or imagined, and history.⁵⁴

In Doha, somewhat similar aims underlie many public spaces. There, both branding and nationalism are served through public spaces and their attached (pseudo-)cosmopolitan and symbols. Even if locations such as museums and Villaggio Mall are simply part of an attempt at expanding tourism, this has political purposes and cultural aspects. Qatar has struggled to attract tourists in substantial numbers, at least the wealthy sort they desire,⁵⁵ yet tourism is seen as important for both economic diversification and for its political value. If managed well, the sector can work to strengthen national pride and identity – reminding citizens of the international interest in their country – and through new business and other opportunities can support neo-rentier types of regime legitimization, as discussed earlier.⁵⁶ Qataris and foreign tourists will interact with each other, even if in managed ways, but often at heritage sites and public spaces; both will gather at malls, museums, and historical and archeological sites. This makes heritage sites such as the (re-)created Souq Waqif marketplace or the new, faux-traditional shopping and restaurant Katara village area north of Doha very important. At these places, tourists and Qataris see each other and may sometimes interact, and thus tourism, linking to such locations, reinforces the state's modernization messages. Such messages often have pseudo-cosmopolitan elements, which are reinforced by the visibility of (well-behaved) tourists and citizens' interactions with them. It matters little how genuine these interactions are, just as it matters little how truly cosmopolitan the host society is: it is the meanings and implications of the state's narratives and symbolism that matter most, provided they are effective – not reality.

There is a veneer of cosmopolitanism in the Gulf's multicultural and polyglot communities and

in locations where international workers meet and interact. These linkages between Gulf societies and other cultures have the potential to cross-pollinate ideas and transmit cultural features.⁵⁷ Identity may even be shaped to the extent that long-term migrants, while almost never obtaining citizenship in a Gulf state, may remain there long enough to constitute a specific (sub-)group. They become, as Ahmad argues as an example, not “Kuwaiti” either culturally or in law, nor do they remain “Indian” in the same way as others back home, and instead become “Bombay-Kuwaiti,” where their social ties, kinship patterns, and some cultural practices change into something new and unique over their long-term residency in unique Gulf expatriate communities.⁵⁸ The complex conglomerations and hybridization of such communities may create a *prima facie* impression of cosmopolitanism, but in fact it is not. It may contain some cosmopolitan features, but even where residents spend two or three generations in a Gulf city, the communities and identities they develop may become transnational and cross-cultural, even multicultural, but not truly cosmopolitan. Above all, they are hybridized cultures, not (usually) culturally-rootless people absent of any national sentiments. Occasionally it is argued that migrant communities can form a type of cosmopolitan identity – or as Khondker claims, engage in “cosmopolitanism from below”⁵⁹ – but on closer inspection, the evidence for this argument (bilingualism, the ability of educated groups to communicate across a range of ethnic groups) is more that these communities are instead internationalized by their location and work and exposed to new experiences by globalization. Such groups often are also kept separate from others: in many cases, poorer workers from developing countries, even if they are quite highly educated, have only a limited interaction with Gulf citizens or Western expatriates. Their local community may also be socially delinked from some others by the urban geography of Gulf cities, where “petro-urbanism” has led to extensive suburbanization, limited public transport, and for the wealthy, sometimes gated communities.⁶⁰ Thus, these communities and locations

are at best a manifestation of pseudo-cosmopolitanism.

Above all, such dynamics reinforce the argument that what the state is seeking when it narrates cosmopolitan messages or uses cosmopolitanism's symbols and imaginations, is not genuine cosmopolitanism. The Gulf leaderships hardly want a citizenry that is truly cosmopolitan; one that is rootless or de-territorialized from the Gulf political geography and the state's nationalist messages, or one where a mass of the population would put humanistic values above their national, religious, and specific cultural ones. What the state instead seeks to do is to create an image around a constructed and quasi- or partially cosmopolitan identity. In this sense, it is pursuing and responding to cosmopolitanism in the same way as it engages with globalization; selectively and on its own terms. States and leaders are taking advantage of the perceived positive attributes of cosmopolitanism, especially cultural sophistication, openness to new experiences, and an ability to include global perspectives in one's thinking and assumptions, and promoting these selectively. Such a limited cosmopolitanism serves the state's interests while posing few threats or risks. The very presence of large, varied international communities in the Gulf may even be preferable for regimes to an indigenous working class, given the political benefit to states from a foreign workforce that is financially-motivated, often only living in the host society for the short-term, and which is nearly-always apolitical.⁶¹ The selective use of cosmopolitan language may consolidate this benefit further, helping justify the state's narratives of such multicultural societies as being a harmony between modernity and development. It carries still more potential scope and legitimacy for citizens to accept the international labor markets of most Gulf states, especially where this means citizens are a minority of the population in their societies. It is also useful as a message to foreign audiences, as noted earlier, when "branding" the economy abroad and claiming legitimacy at home.

If such cases of quasi-cosmopolitanism reach a point of actually serving nation-state interests and

supporting, for example, a state's nationalist aspirations and imagery, then this constitutes an inherently false or self-contradictory cosmopolitanism. This is why the term "pseudo-cosmopolitanism" is used so much herein. Even where a cynically formulated cosmopolitan narrative appears genuine in aesthetic or descriptive terms, and is accepted as genuine by some of its audience and embraced, it still constitutes pseudo-cosmopolitanism where it is state-created and state-driven, and where the overarching aim of it is actually to serve nation-building and political legitimation efforts. A cosmopolitan message at a heritage site or contemporary art museum – if such messages serve to strengthen national identity, nationalist imagery, or specific community distinctions – are cases of pseudo-cosmopolitanism by virtue of their impact being almost the opposite of what a genuine cosmopolitan identity would be.

The limitations of cosmopolitan political narratives are also evidenced in major architectural works, which if too cosmopolitan – if too culturally rootless or insufficiently distinct from similar projects in other cultures – will lose much of their ability to convey particular meanings. Perhaps the large public spaces in the Gulf are intended to impress the observer, are the result of a cultural cringe, or self-consciousness, or are just symbols of a leader's modernization dreams. But probably there is more to them. They are often presented with such little subtlety to their symbolism or meanings that at least *part* of the reason why they exist is for the larger political goals of coopting acquiescence in the dramatic socioeconomic transformations that are taking place in the Arab Gulf monarchies. That this includes messages about the positive impacts of international linkages, and even certain elements of cosmopolitanism, should not be surprising given the setting in which they are conceived, funded, constructed, and promoted.

NOTES

- 1) This basic definition, drawn from the etymology of the term (in Greek, *cosmos* meaning “world” or “universe” and *polis* meaning “city”) is routinely mentioned in the literature; see for example Pheng Cheah, “Cosmopolitanism”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23, 2-3 (2006), p.487.
- 2) This is a conglomeration of the definitional discussions in David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities*, Cambridge: Polity, 2010, pp.14-17; and Gavin Kendall et al, *The Sociology of Cosmopolitanism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.1.
- 3) Among the pieces that cover the transitions of key Gulf cities in recent decades and which are broadly positive in their assessments are, as a couple of examples, Christopher M. Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009; and Mehran Kamrava, *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013.
- 4) A very positive assessment of the evolution of the Gulf into an important financial center, down to the quality of housing and socioeconomic infrastructure, is John Nugée and Paola Subacchi, eds., *The Gulf Region: A New Hub of Global Financial Power*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2008. Other edited volumes include at least one or two contributions that note the speed of socioeconomic change in the Gulf, though they are not as blindly lauding as the Nugée and Subacchi volume: see for example John W. Fox, Nadas Mourtada-Sabbah and Mohammed al-Mutawa, eds., *Globalization and the Gulf*, London: Routledge, 2006; and David Held and Kristian Ulrichsen, eds., *The Transformation of the Gulf: Politics, economics and the global order*, London: Routledge, 2012.
- 5) A couple of excellent works along these lines – but there are few others with such a focus – are Ahmad Kanna, *Dubai: The City as Corporation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011; and Miriam Cooke, *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014. A few journal articles also exist, such as Melodena Stephens Balakrishnan, “Dubai – a star in the east: A case study in strategic destination branding”, *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 1, 1 (2008), pp.62–91; and Mounir Bouchenaki, “The Extraordinary Development of Museums in the Gulf States”, *Museum International*, 63 (2011), pp.93–103; and the excellent piece on the symbolism and messages of landscaping in Dubai, Julian Bolleter, “Para-scape: Landscape architecture in Dubai”, *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 4, 1 (2009), pp.28–41.
- 6) While there are a number of journal articles on the politics of Gulf heritage, book-length works are in effect non-existent. There are a couple of pieces which cover the dynamic in part; on tourism, an example is Rami Farouk Daher, ed., *Tourism in the Middle East*, Clevedon: Channel View, 2007, however this work covers the broader Middle East, not just the Gulf, and heritage is only one of several themes in it. Likewise, in Cooke, *Tribal Modern...* there is substantial discussion of heritage, but again only as one point in the particular argument that heritage is state created in the Arab Gulf states.
- 7) For example the book Roel Meijer, ed., *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East*, Richmond: Curzon, 1999, and a few journal articles, for example Jillian Schwedler, “Amman Cosmopolitan: Spaces and Practices or Aspiration and Consumption”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 30, 3 (2010), pp.547–562.
- 8) Article 1 of *The Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*, Venice, 1964; quoted in Marilena Vecco, “A definition of cultural heritage: From the tangible to the intangible”, *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 11, 3 (July–September 2010), p.322.
- 9) *Ibid.*, pp.323–324.
- 10) Einar Bowitz and Karin Ibenholt, “Economic impacts of cultural heritage – Research and perspectives”, *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 10, 1 (January–March 2009), pp.1–2.
- 11) Neil Smith and Setha Low, “Introduction: The Imperative of Public Space” in Neil Smith and Setha Low, eds., *The Politics of Public Space*, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp.4–5.
- 12) *Ibid.*, pp.4–5.
- 13) Farha Ghannam, *Remaking the Modern: Space, Relocation, and the Politics of Identity in a Global Cairo*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, pp.21–22.
- 14) A “public good” is, broadly, a commodity or service that is provided without profit and to all members of a society, and where its use by one person does not detract from the quality or quantity of what is available to others. Examples are clean air, national defense, and, as cases of public spaces as public goods, areas such as town squares, roads, national parks, and even accessible sources of knowledge such as public libraries.
- 15) Vecco, “A definition of cultural heritage...”, pp.323–324.
- 16) Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems and Method”, *The American Historical Review*, 102, 5

- (December 1997), p.1389.
- 17) Kendall et al, *The Sociology of Cosmopolitanism*, pp.2–3.
 - 18) For example Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, London: Penguin, 2006, pp.101–113.
 - 19) Will Hanley, “Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies”, *History Compass*, 6, 5 (2008), pp.1348–1355.
 - 20) Pernilla Ouis, “Islamization as a Strategy for Reconciliation between Modernity and Tradition: Examples from Contemporary Arab Gulf states”, *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 13, 3 (2002), p.317.
 - 21) Cooke, *Tribal Modern...*, pp.100–103.
 - 22) See the examples peppered throughout *ibid.*, pp.100–122. A similar point is noted in Fred H. Lawson and Hasan M. al-Naboodah, “Heritage and Cultural Nationalism in the United Arab Emirates” in Alanoud Alsharekh and Robert Springborg, eds., *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, London: Saqi, 2008, pp.22–28.
 - 23) The salience of rentierism as an explanation for Arab Gulf states’ state-society relationships, but the inadequacy of rents *alone* as an explanation for the structure of these relationships, is outlined and argued as the central theme in Matthew Gray, “A Theory of ‘Late Rentierism’ in the Arab States of the Gulf”, *Occasional Paper No. 7*, Doha: Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2011.
 - 24) On this see Ira Silver, “Marketing Authenticity in Third World Countries”, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 20 (1993), pp.302–318.
 - 25) This is briefly noted in L. L. Wynn, *Pyramids and Nightclubs: A Travel Ethnography of Arab and Western Imaginations of Egypt, from King Tut and a Colony of Atlantis to Rumors of Sex Orgies, Urban Legends about a Marauding Prince, and Blonde Belly-Dancers*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007, pp.16–18.
 - 26) Lawson and al-Naboodah, “Heritage and Cultural Nationalism in the United Arab Emirates”, p.15.
 - 27) N. I. Nawwab and H. A. Al-Ramadan, “Beit Al Qur’an: Religion, Art, Scholarship,” *Saudi Aramco World*, 51, 3, (May/June 2000), pp.24–31.
 - 28) Anon., “Eden on the Isle of Bahrain,” *The New York Times*, 18 November 1984, n.p., online at <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/11/18/travel/eden-on-the-isle-of-bahrain.html> (last accessed September 13, 2016).
 - 29) Madawi Al-Rasheed, “The Capture of Riyadh Revisited: Shaping Historical Imagination in Saudi Arabia” in Madawi Al-Rasheed and Robert Vitalis, eds., *Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society, and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp.183–200.
 - 30) Sulayman Khalaf, “The Nationalisation of Culture: Kuwait’s Invention of a Pearl-Diving Heritage” in Alanoud Alsharekh and Robert Springborg, eds., *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, London: Saqi, 2008, pp.40–70.
 - 31) For examples see among others Christopher M. Davidson, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*, London: Hurst, 2008, especially pp.99–135. Dubai’s rejuvenation and development does date to earlier if one considers the improvements made to the Creek area and in town dating back to the 1950s: see Frauke Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates*, London: Motivate, 1982 [reprint 2004], pp.258–270.
 - 32) For examples see among others Matthew Gray, *Qatar: Politics and the Challenges of Development* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2013), especially pp.1–2, 117–152.
 - 33) J. Abu-Lughod, “Urbanization and Social Change in the Arab World”, *Ethnics*, 50, 300 (1983), pp.227–228, quoted in Sulayman Khalaf, “Globalization and Heritage Revival in the Gulf: An Anthropological Look at Dubai Heritage Village”, *Journal of Social Affairs*, 19, 75 (Fall 2002), p.18.
 - 34) See <http://www.burjkhalifa.ae/> (last accessed September 12, 2016).
 - 35) See <http://www.nakheel.com/en/communities/the-world> (last accessed September 12, 2016). The various offshore projects around Dubai are also discussed in Jim Krane, *Dubai: The Story of the World’s Fastest City*, London: Atlantic Books, 2009, pp.151–159.
 - 36) See <http://www.skidubai.com/> (last accessed September 13, 2016).
 - 37) This point is made, in effect, in Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, “The Arab Gulf Moment” in David Held and Kristian Ulrichsen, eds., *The Transformation of the Gulf: Politics, economics and the global order*, London: Routledge, 2012, p.117.
 - 38) W. B. Baker, D. S. Korista and L. C. Novak, “Burj Dubai: Engineering the world’s tallest building”, *The Structural Design of Tall and Special Buildings*, 16 (2007), p.361, quoted in Marcus L. Stephenson, “Tourism, development and ‘destination Dubai’: cultural dilemmas and future challenges”, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 17, 8 (2014), p.727.
 - 39) Stephenson, “Tourism, development and ‘destination Dubai’...”, p.727.
 - 40) On these and other key property firms see Davidson, *Dubai...*, pp.130–134. Such business-government dynamics are a feature

- of the “new” or “entrepreneurial” state capitalism that is a feature of the Gulf monarchies; see on these Ian Bremmer, *The End of the Free Market: Who Wins the War Between States and Corporations?* New York: Portfolio, 2010, pp.7–24; and Gray, *Qatar...*, pp.10–11, 64–70.
- 41) Khalaf, “Globalization and Heritage Revival in the Gulf...”, pp.19–20.
 - 42) <http://www.mia.org.qa/ar/home> (last accessed September 13, 2016).
 - 43) On the design and architectural aspects of the Museum, see Sean Anderson, “Lightness and Being: The Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar”, *MARG: A Magazine of the Arts*, 64, 1 (2012), pp.66–77.
 - 44) From the interview article “New Frontiers” in *The Report: Qatar 2011*, London: Oxford Business Group, 2011, p.231.
 - 45) See Ateliers Jean Nouvel, “National Museum of Qatar”, *arcSPACE.com* (architecture e-zine), 29 March 2010, <http://www.arcSPACE.com/features/ateliers-jean-nouvel-/national-museum-of-qatar/> (last accessed September 13, 2016).
 - 46) Gray, *Qatar...*, pp.160–166.
 - 47) From the “About Mathaf” page of the *Mathaf: Museum of Contemporary Art* website, <http://www.mathaf.org.qa/en/about-us> (last accessed September 13, 2016).
 - 48) On this history see for example Fatma Al-Sayegh, “Merchants’ role in a changing society: the case of Dubai, 1900–90”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34, 1 (1998), pp.87–102; and Davidson, *Dubai...*, especially pp.67–98.
 - 49) Davidson, *Dubai...*, pp.99–113.
 - 50) Gray, *Qatar...*, pp.117–132, 140–152.
 - 51) The Dubai figure is widely cited in media. The Qatari one was calculated from statistics in: “2014 Article IV Consultation—Staff Report; Press Release; and Statement by the Executive Director for Qatar”, *IMF Country Report No. 14/108*, Washington: International Monetary Fund, May 2014, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2014/cr14108.pdf> (last accessed September 13, 2016), p.28 (Table 3).
 - 52) Gray, *Qatar...*, pp.64–70.
 - 53) Khalaf, “Globalization and Heritage Revival in the Gulf...”, p.34.
 - 54) *Ibid.*, pp.35–38.
 - 55) Pamela Ann Smith, “Qatar Pledges \$20 Billion for Tourism and Culture”, *The Middle East* (July 2010), p.36; and Gray, *Qatar...*, pp.175–176, 178–179.
 - 56) Gray, *Qatar...*, pp.175–180.
 - 57) Attiya Ahmad, “Beyond Labor: Foreign Residents in the Persian Gulf States” in Mehran Kamrava and Zahra Babar, eds., *Migrant Labor in the Persian Gulf*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, pp.21–27.
 - 58) *Ibid.*, especially pp.32–36.
 - 59) Habibul Haque Khondker, “Wanted but not Welcome: Social Determinants of Labor Migration in the UAE”, *Encounters: an international journal for the study of culture and society*, 2 (Spring 2010), p.225.
 - 60) Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “Views from Dubai: Oriental Globalization Revisited”, *Encounters: an international journal for the study of culture and society*, 2 (Spring 2010), p.23.
 - 61) These points are made in Christopher M. Davidson, “Expatriates and the Gulf Monarchies: Politics, Security and the Arab Spring,” *Asian Affairs*, 45, 2 (2014), pp.270–288.