Branding the Middle East: A Review of Regional Manifestations of a Global Phenomenon
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1 Meandering in a Bird's Flight through the Middle East and North Africa

Branding has its ancient roots in the wider Mediterranean and the Middle East, as we have seen in the preceding conceptual chapter. Throughout history, branding products, persons, and places – even if the concept did not yet exist by this name – has been practised in the Arab, Ottoman, and Islamic realms. Especially with increasing contemporary globalisation and implementation of neoliberal agendas, the pressure on nations and cities for competitive positioning and worlding has dramatically increased everywhere in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In particular, the hydrocarbon-based ascension of the Arab Gulf countries and their quest to prepare for a post-oil and post-gas era, with Dubai clearly at the forefront, has given pervasive branding endeavours a particular push. Supported by technological advances and in a world of growing postmodern experiments, these places excelled in constructing hyperreal worlds and preparing virtual presentations, which perfectly fit the global attention economy. This allowed Christian Steiner and Steffen Wippel to define place branding as one of "four – overlapping and interpenetrating – regional and transregional megatrends" in MENA urbanism, which is used "to perform a double task, one outward-oriented to create and disseminate politically, economically, and culturally appealing images, but another directed toward the local population to (re)shape urban and national identities and legitimate political action."[1] Yet, they also concluded: "The strengthened attempts at place branding, which means transforming cities' characters from a socio-political arena into an easily readable object of investment and consumption, have not gained as much academic attention as could be expected."[2]

Last but not least, this coincides with the fact that the world's largest contiguous, densest, and longest-lasting cluster of neopatrimonial-authoritarian regimes is to be found in the MENA region. With few exceptions, its political systems can be

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1 Steiner and Wippel, 2019: 7.

2 Steiner and Wippel, 2019: 6.

characterised as relatively consistently non-democratic for many decades, despite the temporary upheavals in the wake of the Arab Spring. The broad spectrum of authoritarian regimes includes autocratically run republics, some of them currently engaged in (civil) wars or having become "failed states."[3] Among Arab monarchies in the Gulf states, a family-dynastic, rentier-state-based form of political rule prevails, based on traditional (in Saudi Arabia: also religious) legitimacy. In contrast, in highly personalised monarchies such as Jordan and Morocco, power is concentrated in the hands of the individual ruler. At the same time, these countries present economically different degrees of neoliberalisation.[4] In authoritarian regimes, political legitimacy is primarily achieved through the personal origins, merit, and charisma – i.e. the personal brands – of the respective rulers, who see themselves as protectors of their subjects. Spectacular urbanism, in combination with royal or presidential visions, is particularly helpful to distract citizens' attention from omnipresent economic, social, and political grievances and to build up positive external reputation.

Regionally, this volume is confined to the Middle East and North Africa. Generations of authors have attempted to define this part of the world, which is characterised by contrasting natural and human traits and, at the same time, by strong transregional entanglements.[5] Hence, definitions vary, largely by historical time, geographical position, research question, and even the language used. In a pragmatic way, the region under study in this volume is understood as the mostly uncontested core of the Arab world, from the Arabian Peninsula through Mesopotamia and the Levant to the North African countries that have a Mediterranean shore, even if all these designations might also be debatable.[6] Added to this are the modern states of Turkey and Iran and their imperial predecessors. Countries like Mauritania and Sudan form linguistic, cultural, and political interstices at the region's periphery. To accommodate larger regional understandings and strong historical and contemporary influences and ties, some adjacent areas of the "Islamicate world," from Europe, the Sahel, and West Africa to South and Central Asia, are taken into account.

For a long time, branding studies concentrated on the Western world and emerging economies, notably in eastern parts of Asia. Diverse samples of urban

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3 On the various regime types, see, e.g. Derichs and Demmelhuber, 2014; Bank, Richter, and Sunik, 2014.

4 Compare, as a hint, e.g. Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020.

5 On shifting definitions of the Middle East, cf., e.g., Scheffler, 2003; on transregional entanglements, Wippel and Fischer-Tahir, 2018.

6 As an adjective, "Middle Eastern" is sometimes used as a shortcut for the entire MENA region, and sometimes only refers to its actually designated Eastern parts.

and place branding studies up to the late 2000s/early 2010s showed that only a negligible number of case studies were devoted to the Middle East and Africa.[7] However, all these studies are based in a narrow base of pertinent specialised journals, limited with respect to the disciplines studied, and, in particular, biased in favour of publications exclusively in the English language. But voluminous handbooks that allude to a considerable number of case studies also usually neglect MENA cities and nations.[8] Only in recent years has the range of case studies been extended to more parts of the Global South, including the Middle East and North Africa, following efforts there to enter the branding business more eagerly. Quite early, already in the late 2000s, Dubai, but only it, played a prominent role in empirical, and increasingly critical, branding studies; other parts of the region followed, especially other Gulf places, and the entire region, from Turkey to Morocco. Approaches to empirical cases are not only descriptive, they also reflect both application-oriented and critical investigations of the images conveyed, the relevant actors, and larger economic and political contexts. However, in its width and breadth, the region remains underrepresented compared with the entire array of empirical branding research; encompassing overviews and anthologies are still missing, as are thoroughly critical analyses. Many indications of branding strategies in the MENA region can be found only in other academic publications, e. g. on local consumption, Islamic lifestyle, urban development, and regional geopolitics, where they do not constitute the actual focus, are part of larger studies, or can merely be distilled by reading between the lines of certain marginal notes and remarks.

The following empirical overview of branding Middle Eastern products, persons, and places, which is based on a variety of publications, attempts to be as encompassing as possible, but remains exemplary, selective, and subjective. Given the variety of cases and sources, the presentation is not as redundant as it could be. In the following, this chapter starts with a few tables and illustrations pointing to pertinent rankings, major international events, and general trends in branding in and of the MENA region. Commodity and company brands as well as the branding of certain personalities and political groups are discussed in separate subsections. As most of the chapters in this book have to do with places, even if not only with place branding in the proper sense, the major part of this chapter consists of a meandering bird's-eye view of the region, which gives details on previous work on and general impressions of the branding of countries, regions, cities,

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7 Cf. Lucarelli and Berg, 2011: 17; Andersson, 2014: 149.

8 Compare Dinnie, 2008, who addresses only Egypt among more than 20 country cases; or Dinnie, 2011, who mentions no MENA city among nearly 20 case studies.

and project sites. This starts with the outstanding case of Dubai, then extends to other Arab Gulf places, and crosses the rest of West Asia and North Africa, before catching a glimpse of more peripheral places. However, it sometimes proves difficult to distinguish between the various objects of branding, as especially the branding of places and (political) persons, and of products or events and places is often closely intertwined. Implicit or explicit reference to the previous chapter that presents global developments in the branding business, diverse conceptual approaches, and the main research questions is included in these sections. A short conclusion summarises the findings, gives an outlook on research gaps, and links with the next chapter that presents the contributions to this volume.

2 A Few Glimpses: In the Race for Rank and Recognition

As we know, rankings and statistical figures are highly esteemed tools in branding, and placement in these lists incites increased efforts to brand a product, corporation, nation, or city. Initially, these rankings concentrated on the Western world and sometimes objects of East Asian origin. Progressively, other parts of the Global South have been included, even if Middle Eastern and African countries have appeared only in fits and starts. Despite all methodological problems, these quantifications indicate a gradual or sometimes rapid progress in the branding business, and hence of the value of brands, not only of Gulf states, but also in the rest of the MENA region.

First, several consulting firms and other institutions have established worldwide, regional, and national rankings of corporate brands, sometimes corresponding to sectors. According to BrandFinance, there was a shift over the course of the 2010s from firms from Western, namely Anglo-American countries, to firms in the USA and China in the global brand value top ranks.[9] In 2021, Saudi Aramco was the Middle East's most valuable brand, equivalent to world rank 33 (2020: 24), followed by ADNOC, another oil and gas company, this one from the UAE (Table 1). Telecoms, banks, and airlines have also been strongly present among regional top brands.

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9 Cf. BrandFinance, 2022, which defines the six GCC states plus Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon as the "Middle East." Most other rankings of "global brands" do not include any MENA countries or companies.

Table 1: Top 20 corporate brands in the Middle East and Gulf region 2021
Source: BrandFinance, 2022.

Regional rank*	Company name	Country	Sector	Global rank (Top 500)	Global sectoral rank°	Brand value in bn USD**
–	Apple	USA	*Tech*	*1*	*1*	*263.4*
1	Saudi Aramco	KSA	Oil & gas	33	2	37.5
2	ADNOC	UAE	Oil & gas	163	10	10.8
3	STC	KSA	Telecom	189	13	9.2
4	Etisalat	UAE	Telecom	208	15	8.5
5	QNB	Qatar	Banking	321	48	6.1
6	Emirates	UAE	Airlines	421	4	4.7
7	SABIC	KSA	Chemicals	495	2	4.0
8	Emirates NBD	UAE	Banking		74	3.7
9	FAB	UAE	Banking		77	3.6
10	Al-Rajhi Bank	KSA	Banking		81	3.4
11	Ooredoo	Qatar	Telecom		40	3.2
12	NCB	KSA	Banking		110	2.4
13	Almarai	KSA	Food		33	2.2
14	Zain	Kuwait	Telecom		54	2.1
15	ADCB	UAE	Banking		120	1.8
16	du	UAE	Telecom		62	2.3
17	Qatar Airways	Qatar	Airlines		12	1.6
18	Dubai Islamic Bank	UAE	Banking		145	1.6
19	Emaar Properties	UAE	Real Estate		23	1.4
20	Enoc	UAE	Oil & gas		–	1.6

* The "region" includes only GCC members, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq. For information purposes, I added rank 1 worldwide. ** Data is freely available only for the regional Top Ten, supplemented by national rankings. ° From the global Top 50 oil & gas; Top 150 telecoms; Top 500 banks; Top 25 chemicals; Top 100 food; Top 50 airlines; Top 25 real estate services. °° In 2020. KSA: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

As more and more firms have been included in the rankings, the well-reputed Emirates airline declined to regional place 6 (2021) from place 1 (2010), when oil companies were not yet included – its logo also serves to brand other amenities in South India, as Sophie-Theresa Trenka-Dalton demonstrates in her photo essay in this volume. Since 2021, the Covid pandemic, too, contributed to downscaling economically affected firms, like airlines and banks. Moreover, in the global top

500 ranking, nearly exclusively Gulf brands dominate, with Turkish Airlines and *Maroc Télécom* being temporarily among the few exceptions.[10]

Table 2: Nation brand indices (global ranks)
Sources: BrandFinance, 2022; FutureBrand, 2020; Bloom Consulting, 2019a, 2019b.

BrandFinance Nation Brands 2020		BrandFinance Global Soft Power Index		FutureBrand Country Index 2020		Bloom Consulting Country Brand Ranking 2019/20			
Top 100 most valuable nation brands		Top 100 Countries		Top 75 Countries		Tourism edition		Trade edition	
Country	Rank	Country	Rank	Country	Rank	Country	Rank	Country	Rank
USA	*1*	*Germany*	*1*	*Japan*	*1*	*USA*	*1*	*USA*	*1*
India	*7*	UAE	17	UAE	9	Turkey	12	*India*	*4*
UAE	18	KSA	24	Qatar	18	Israel	13	Turkey	19
KSA	20	Israel	25	Israel	22	*India*	*18*	UAE	29
Turkey	30	Qatar	26	Oman	25	Egypt	27	Israel	32
Israel	37	Turkey	27	Kuwait	27	Morocco	40	KSA	35
Iran	38	Egypt	34	KSA	28	KSA	63	Egypt	46
Qatar	41	*India*	*36*	Algeria	34	Qatar	68	Morocco	48
Egypt	51	Kuwait	42	Turkey	51	UAE	72	Iran	50
Kuwait	53	Morocco	48	Egypt	54	Jordan	75	Jordan	65
Algeria	58	Jordan	50	Morocco	64	Oman	77	Iraq	68
Iraq	60	Oman	51	*India*	*67*	Tunisia	81	Qatar	75

The table shows the regional Top Ten countries, plus the world's no. 1 and India. Non-MENA countries are named in italics.

In sectoral brand listings, Aramco and ADNOC have taken ranks 2 and 10 worldwide in the oil and gas sector, but remained the only two from the Middle East in the global Top 50 as of 2021. Seven companies from the MENA region are represented in the Top 150 telecom ranking, starting at place 13 and below. In the Top 200 banking list, 15 MENA brands, all below rank 48, are included. Among airlines, five are among the Top 50, with Emirates taking global rank 4. Yet, the well-known real estate company and developer *Emaar* from Dubai ranked only 23rd in the 2020 worldwide real estate sector list, while a dairy company like Almarai from

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10 Turkish Airlines ranks 15th and *Maroc Télécom* 101st on the respective global sectoral lists. Among African brands, *Maroc Télécom* is the first non-South African company, in place 13.

Saudi Arabia, which Natalie Koch describes in more detail in this volume, appears at global place 33 in the food sector.

Second, *nation brands* are evaluated, based on different methodologies using brand strength and value, brand scores, and brand reputation. According to the Nation Brands index established by BrandFinance, the UAE has regularly turned up as the top-value regional brand in recent years; it has advanced from global place 27 (2015) to 17 (2021), with a brand value of 749 bn USD, beating Saudi Arabia and Turkey (Table 2).[11] Besides other Gulf states and Israel, Egypt and Iran have been among the upper regional ranks. Yet India, on which this edited volume includes another case study, has been constantly ranked much higher than MENA countries. BrandFinance also published the Global Soft Power Index, reflecting how national brands were perceived by the general public and specialists: it shows a similar order of MENA countries, with most of them doing (slightly) better than in the Nation Brand index. Similarly, the FutureBrand Country Index ranks the UAE first among MENA countries on its global lists, where it advanced from place 23 (2009) to 9 (2020).[12] Other Gulf countries progressed even more during the same period (e. g., Qatar from 70 to 18, Oman from 57 to 25). They closed ranks with Israel, which remained in the regional top, whereas Turkey first gained and then, from 2019 to 2020, lost rank again.

The East-West Communications Nation Brand Index 2008–2011 already ranked Gulf countries high among countries worldwide.[13] However, it also shows the UAE's heavy drop in score mentions in 2010 (from place 5 in 2008 to place 111) following the financial crisis, unlike other small Gulf states, before it rapidly recovered again in 2011 (to place 9). During the period covered, relatively stable Morocco advanced from place 154 to 73, while Tunisia, in the aftermath of the "Jasmine Revolution," dropped from rank 64 to 185. Hence, these rankings also reflect changing political and economic conditions. In addition, Bloom Consulting published two Country Brand Ranking indices: while Turkey and Israel both ranked high in tourism in 2019/20, but also had a relatively advanced position in trade, there is a striking difference in the UAE's trade position (29) vs. its rank in the tourism edition (72).[14] Finally, the 2015 Global Creativity Index, based on Richard Florida's "creative class" concept, considers Israel high on the list (place 30), followed, at a distance, by Iran, Syria, and Jordan, which clearly advance the Gulf countries. However, the

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11 Cf. BrandFinance, 2022. In recent years, the same evaluation placed the UAE in places 6 (2019) and 3 (2017–2018) of the global Top Ten of the *Strongest* Nation Brands.

12 Cf. FutureBrand, 2020.

13 Cf. East West Communications, 2021.

14 Cf. Bloom Consulting, 2019a, 2019b.

publication shows huge divergences concerning subindices related to technology, talent, and especially tolerance, where MENA countries rank particularly low.[15]

Table 3: MENA cities in the GaWC world cities ranking
Source: GaWC, 2022.

1998 (n = 55)		**2010** (n = c. 525*)		**2020** (n = 707)
Alpha world cities		**Alpha-level cities**		
12	*London, New York, Paris, Tokyo*	α++	*London, New York*	*London, New York*
		α+	Dubai	Dubai
11		α	*Mumbai*	*Mumbai*
10		α-	Istanbul	Riyadh, Istanbul
Beta world cities		**Beta-level cities**		
9		β+	Cairo, Tel Aviv	Tel Aviv, Doha, Cairo, Beirut
8		β	Beirut, Riyadh	Abu Dhabi, Casablanca, Manama
7		β-	Abu Dhabi, Amman, Casablanca, Kuwait, Manama, Tunis	Kuwait, Tunis, Amman, Muscat, Jeddah
Gamma world cities		**Gamma-level cities**		
6		γ+	Jeddah, Doha,	Algiers
5		γ		Ankara
4	Istanbul	γ-	Muscat	
Evidence of world city formation		**Cities with sufficiency of services**		
3	Tel Aviv, *Mumbai*	hs	Algiers, Ankara	Dammam
2	Abu Dhabi, Cairo, Dubai, Riyadh	s	Alexandria, Haifa, Izmir, Jerusalem	Izmir, Alexandria, Bursa, Jerusalem, Haifa, Baghdad, Sana'a
1	Tehran			

* If the same size as 2008 and 2012 applies. Hs: High sufficiency; s: Sufficiency.
Besides MENA cities, this table also gives all cities worldwide in the respective top category and the first Indian metropolis (in italics). Note: There was an important change of evaluation criteria between 1998 and 2000.

Widely used and perceived rankings have also been produced for *urban brands.* As in academic research, the range of cities covered was initially slow to expand to

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15 Cf. Florida, Mellander, and King, 2015: 40–60. The UAE is not included in this ranking.

include the Global South. Moreover, these listings are less regularly released and less comprehensive than for nation branding. The samples of cities by number and geographic coverage vary considerably from one index to another. As elsewhere in the world, MENA cities are strongly globalising and attempting to close ranks with other global cities. Whereas around the year 1300, Middle Eastern cities featured prominently in the "transcontinental archipelago of cities" from Eastern Asia to Western Europe,[16] John Friedmann's early contemporary "hierarchy of world cities" from 1986 did not include any African or West or South Asian city (except for Johannesburg, in the lowest tier).[17] Yet, the world city ranking of the Globalization and World Cities (GaWC) Research Network at Loughborough University, which measures connectivity in the field of advanced producer services, demonstrates that, since then, more and more MENA cities have appeared in these lists and advanced to upper ranks (Table 3).[18]

This is particularly evident for Dubai, which in the first 1998 edition still only showed a certain "evidence of world city formation," but quickly appeared on the alpha level of highly integrated, very important world cities, immediately below the global top dyad of London and New York. Well-established metropolises like Istanbul, Cairo, and Beirut, as well as relative newcomers such as Tel Aviv and Riyadh, have persistently held on to the regional lead, but Gulf cities like Abu Dhabi and Doha have also caught up.

Yet, few MENA cities are by now included in the evaluations of global urban brands. In 2017, the Top 100 of the Resonance World's Best City Brands considered only four MENA cities; Dubai ranked highest in the region, in place 22 worldwide, followed by Istanbul, Tel Aviv, and Doha (Table 4).[19] Ranks diverged considerably in the sub-categories: so Dubai was placed first among the City Brands for People, ninth among the City Brands for Prosperity, but only in places 58 and 63 in the Programming and Promotion categories, respectively. Dubai and Doha notably excelled for their prosperity (global ranks 1 and 2), while additional Middle Eastern cities (including Kuwait, Muscat, and Amman) were among the Top Ten places for people. FutureBrand also ranks the world's most influential cities.[20] Here, in the global Top 20 of the years 2014, 2019, and 2020, it names, first, Dubai again (oscillating around place 10), seconded by Istanbul, which advanced from rank 21 to 12 over the period. In addition, based on the work of the pioneer of place branding, the 2020 Anholt-Ipsos City Brands Index, ranked Dubai as the only Middle Eastern

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16 Cf. Taylor, 2004: 8–10.

17 Presented in Taylor, 2004: 22–24.

18 Cf. GaWC, 2022.

19 Cf. Resonance, 2017.

20 Cf. FutureBrand, 2020.

and African city in the third tier (places 21–30) and Cairo, Doha, and Riyadh in the final tier of 50 metropolises worldwide.[21]

Table 4: Top city brands (global ranks)
Sources: Resonance, 2017; FutureBrand, 2020; Michael and Sedghi, 2014.

Resonance World's Best City Brands		FutureBrand Most influential cities		Anholt-Ipsos City Brands Index		The Guardian/ Saffron	
Top 100, 2017		Top 20, 2020		Top 50, 2020		57 cities, 2014	
City	Rank	City	Rank	City	Tier	City	Rank
London	*1*	*New York*	*1*	*London*	*1*	*Los Angeles*	*1*
Dubai	22	Dubai	9	Dubai	21–30	Dubai	10
Istanbul	49	Istanbul	12	Cairo	41–50	Istanbul	11
Tel Aviv	64			Doha	41–50	*Mumbai*	*19*
Mumbai	*73*			Riyadh	41–50	Mecca	21
Doha	79					Riyadh	29
						Abu Dhabi	34
						Doha	45
						Marrakech	47
						Tel Aviv	49
						Algiers	50

Includes global top city and the first-placed Indian city (in italics).

In 2014, *The Guardian* published the results of another assessment, which included nine MENA cities among 57 metropolises studied worldwide.[22] This survey ranked Dubai tenth, closely followed by Istanbul in place 11; as a noticeable up-and-comer, Mecca arrived in place 21. Whereas for Dubai and Istanbul the "buzz strength," based on conventional and social media mentions, exceeded "asset strength," which captures infrastructure, prosperity, safety, climate, and attractions, this reverses for most cities in lower ranks, such as Doha, Marrakech, and Tel Aviv, where tangible assets contributed the most by far to their rating.

　　One measure to promote cities beyond borders is labelling them cultural capitals; besides self-proclamation, the regular nomination of cultural cities by regional entities expanded from the European context across other parts of the world.[23] Each year since 1996, the League of Arab States nominates an Arab Capital of Cul-

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21 Cf. Ipsos, 2020.

22 Cf. Michael and Sedghi, 2014.

23 On the European initiative's role in branding, cf. Vanolo, 2017: 34.

ture "to promote and celebrate Arab culture and encourage cooperation in the Arab region."[24] In a similar vein, the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) presents three annual Capitals of Islamic Culture, one each in the Arab, African, and Asian subregions.[25] Since 2005, numerous metropolises throughout the MENA region, as well as other renowned second-tier cities, have been awarded these distinctions (Fig. 1). Sporadically, MENA cities have also been selected European or African Capitals of Culture (respectively: Istanbul 2010; and Rabat 2021, replacing initially nominated Marrakech).[26]

Fig. 1: Capitals of culture in the MENA region
Sources: Wikipedia, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; ALECSO, 2019; ICESCO, 2021; UCLGA, 2023. Map: Wikimedia, 2010. Work released into the public domain. Reworked by Steffen Wippel, January 2022.
Borders on this map are not politically authoritative.

Organising a World's Fair has a similar effect on worldwide attention. Since the inception of the World's Fair in 1851, Dubai was the first in the Arab world to host one – Expo 2020 (postponed to 2021/22 due to the covid crisis), under the motto "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future."[27] For this event, Izmir, which

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24 Cf. Wikipedia, 2021a; ALECSO, 2019.
25 Cf. Wikipedia, 2021b; ICESCO, 2021. Recently, compared with the map in Fig. 1, smaller changes occurred: Abidjan is now the African capital for 2023, while Mogadishu will hold the 2025 award; Aşgabat will be the Asian Capital of Islamic Culture in 2025.
26 Cf. Wikipedia, 2021c; UCLGA, 2023; Wüst and Nicolai, 2022: 13.
27 For a list of expos, cf. Wikipedia, 2022b; see also BIE, 2022.

had beaten Ankara at the national level, was a contender in the last round, whereas Tangier, as mentioned in Steffen Wippel's chapter in this volume, was a candidate in the final round for the World's Fair 2012. For Expo 2030, Riyadh is one of the current candidates. Besides, specialised world exhibitions took place in the region, namely twice in Israel in the 1950s (on desert conquest and citriculture), in Antalya (2016, on horticulture), and in Doha (2023, also on horticulture).

Sporting events have a similar prestige benefit. Among the highest-profile competitions, Qatar hosted the MENA region's first FIFA Football World Cup in 2022. Morocco has unsuccessfully bid for the World Cup five times.[28] According to recent reports, Saudi Arabia is strongly considering applying for the 2030 World Cup together with Egypt and Greece. For the Olympic Games, MENA countries have made it only to the elimination round: up to World War II, Alexandria had unsuccessfully applied three times for the Summer Games; Tehran withdrew its bid for the 1984 Games during the selection process (Table 5). For the post–2000 Games, Istanbul applied unsuccessfully several times; other bids were not shortlisted to the candidature stage, including Erzurum's application for the 2026 Winter Games.[29] The MENA region was also a latecomer for the similarly prestigious Asian Games: the first ones went to Tehran in 1974, while the next were hosted by Doha only in 2006, which now will also organise the 2030 edition. Saudi Arabia won bids for the 2029 Winter and 2034 Summer Games.

Table 5: High-profile sport events in MENA cities
Source: Wikipedia, 2023a and 2023b.

City	Candidate cities for the Olympic Games			Host cities of the Asian Games
	Unsuccessful bid	Bid not shortlisted	Bid withdrawn	
Alexandria	1916, 1936, 1940			
Tehran			1984	1974
Istanbul	2000, 2008, 2020	2004, 2012		
Erzurum		2026 (Winter)		
Cairo		2008		
Doha		2016, 2020		2006, 2030
Riyadh				2034
Trojena (NEOM)				2029 (Winter)

The general understanding is that brands are primarily transmitted by catchy slogans and logos. Logos of iconic product and company brands, such as Emirates air-

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28 Cf. Wikipedia, 2023c.
29 Cf. Wikipedia, 2023b.

lines, were already mentioned in the lead introductory chapter. Most, but not all MENA countries and some cities have also started to use tourism logos and slogans for destination branding on a regular basis.[30] Few have acquired such a presence in general perception as the "Incredible !ndia" slogan and logo, which is perhaps one of the most pertinent destination brands in the Global South. While countries like Egypt and Tunisia have changed and further developed their textual and visual marks, the brands of other countries, such as Syria's "Always Beautiful," seem to be quite outdated given their political situation. Symbols often integrate the respective place names. Among the more striking symbols, the Turkish tourism logo plays with the historical tulip motif (Fig. 2a), which Birgit Krawietz presents as an important branding item in this volume. Egypt, on which Karin Ahlberg reports in more detail, delves even deeper into its past as a country "where it all begins" and features a name tag with a final t recalling the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph *ankh* (key of life) (Fig. 2b), which, in the early 2010s, replaced the Pharaonic sun disk and the slogan "Nothing Compares!"[31] Tourism logos developed for countries like Jordan, Qatar, and the city-state of Dubai play with wordmarks in both Arabic and Latin script (Fig. 2c, 2d).[32] The same is true of the logo of Oman, where "Beauty has an address", as Thibaut Klinger describes in this book.[33] Israel, in contrast, after a series of earlier advertising slogans, has promoted the "Land of Creation" since 2013, which can be read historically and religiously, as well as with regard to its contemporary cultural and economic creativity, and a logo referring to its diversity that contrasts with neighbouring countries. Similarly, Lebanese campaigns, "Live Love Lebanon," "Passion for Living" (2018), and "A crazy love," to reinvigorate tourism during the covid crisis (Fig. 4b), hint at its reputation as an uncommon, open-minded lifestyle destination, a motif Ghassan Moussawi takes up in a later chapter. Besides many slogans lacking real content, some countries also play on words with their country names such as Djibouti ("Djibeauty") and Morocco ("Much Mor").

4 Branding Commodities and Corporations

The branding of commodities and corporations in and from the MENA region is certainly the least systematically considered in the academic literature. According-

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30 Cf. among other publications and blogs, Schaffrinna, 2022; Laura, 2022; Homes & Leisure, 2022.
31 Cf. also Nation Branding, 2011.
32 On Dubai, cf. Thorton, 2015. The wordmark also exists in other colour combinations. Its interwoven scripts represent Dubai's "fusion of cultures and nationalities."
33 Cf. also Wippel, 2013: 177–178.

Fig. 2: Examples of MENA destination brand logos
Promotional logos of a) Turkey; b) Egypt; c) Jordan; d) Dubai.
Sources: Schaffrinna, 2022 (Turkey, Egypt, Jordan); Thornton, 2015 (Dubai).

ly, the following explanations are also rather eclectic insights into the subject. In the ancient history of branding, our area of study already played a special role: branding practices on animals, bodies, and handicrafts can be traced back to the larger West Asian and Mediterranean regions from the Indus valley through Mesopotamia, the Levant, Arabia, and the Nile Valley to the Carthaginian, Greek, and Roman realms.

In more recent times, if we skip the colonial era, in particular since the *infitāḥ*, the economic Opening Policy, inaugurated in the 1970s first in Egypt, transnational companies and their products have entered the Middle Eastern markets. Yet, market penetration was not always easy. Sometimes, these foreign brands were regarded with suspicion and, especially in times of crises, had to struggle with perfidious rumours. Notorious cases have been Coca Cola, which was criticised in 2000 because the mirror-image of its Arabic signature can be read as "lā Muḥāmmad, lā Makka" (there is no Muhammad and no Mecca); the detergent Ariel was blamed for the similarity of its name with that of Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon and of its logo depicting the path of an atom with the Star of David.[34] Such allegations could be countered only by the issue of a religious *fatwā* (legal opinion), branding as a local product, and the replacement of the logo. Gradually, such global corporations adapted their centralised, Western marketing concepts to culturally more sensitive promotion strategies: they tried to convince addressees of their local rootedness, established local marketing departments with a domestic workforce, translated global campaigns for the national markets, adjusted their products to fit local consumption patterns, and communicated socially responsible activities. Thereafter, advertising billboards pervaded the urbanscape,[35] and many international brands representing a particular way of life became present in peo-

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[34] Cf. Kehrer, 2005.

[35] Cf. Abotera and Ashoub, 2020.

ple's minds, even if most cannot afford them.[36] But sometimes international brands appeal to the extent that counterfeits are imported, often from China, or locally produced and distributed. Fake brands, using (slightly altered) famous global names and logos are found across shops and markets in the region and are, in principle, subject to legal prosecution.[37]

Brands across all sectors have also emerged from local producers since the industrial era has arrived in the MENA region. A few renowned brands have already been mentioned (Table 1). While Arab oil companies needed much less vigorous promotion and positioning in the market, significant branding campaigns have pushed forward Gulf companies, in particular, which have boomed in recent decades in sectors such as transport, tourism, and real estate. In a highly competitive and globalised environment, constant (re)positioning is necessary, e.g. of airlines that also serve as national icons. Oman Air's "The Soul of Arabia" campaign has been a prominent co-branding case that promoted the company and the country simultaneously.[38] The airline needed a revamp when it wanted to develop from a regional short-haul carrier into a full-fledged international airline competing with companies from the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian subcontinent. With the help of the German Shanghai Berlin agency, it launched an attention-grabbing cross-media campaign to create awareness of a destination that had been virtually unknown to most Europeans until then. To position the country in contrast to spectacular emirates such as Dubai as a still pristine country with a lot of history and culture, the campaign featured high-quality photographs with exotic sceneries and faces. The sovereign wealth funds of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, and Bahrain, which are among the largest in the world, also engage in intense brand competition, seeking to position themselves in certain niches (such as insurance, Islamic finance, asset management, etc.).[39]

A comparative study demonstrates that in the late 1990s, the intention to buy locally produced goods was much stronger in Arab than in Asian and Western communities living in the UAE; however, this consumer nationalism was still weak compared with the general preference for international brands and was not necessarily reflected in actual purchasing behaviour.[40] Another article shows that almost half of studied Saudi TV ads used a foreign language, mostly English, which is connotated with prestige, sophistication, and modernity and can be un-

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36 Cf., e.g., also Adham, 2004.

37 Among the abundant literature, cf. for instance on Chinese-North African trade, consisting mostly of fakes, Belguidoum and Pliez, 2015.

38 Cf. Rajasekar and Moideenkutty, 2007; Karl, 2012. Cf. also Wippel, 2014: 107, 112.

39 Cf. Ali and Al-Aswad, 2012.

40 Cf. Uncles and Saurazas, 2000.

derstood as a kind of symbolic capital.[41] The defence of national products takes place in a context of increasing "war on brands" and origins and of rising political tensions.[42] The country-of-origin effect played a role, e.g., in the widespread boycott of Danish brands after emotions in the Arab and Islamic world had boiled over in 2015 because of the Mohammed cartoons in the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*.[43] Similar calls were raised against France in 2020, after the publication of other caricatures in French media; in part, the same political rejection targeted the USA and its products. Other countries can benefit from positive perceptions, such as Switzerland, at least before its ban on building mosques. In Morocco, a social networks campaign in 2018 called on national consumers to boycott products of the *Centrale Danone* brand, known for its dairy products, but also a well-known Moroccan mineral water and major petrol station chain, with the stated aim of protecting consumers' rights and purchasing power from the greed and high profit margins of manufacturing companies. While some celebrities joined the campaign, authorities opposed it, calling it sabotage of consumer goods produced in Morocco and a betrayal of the nation and its farmers.[44]

On a regional level, in the 2010s, traders, industrial leaders, and business associations in Morocco – as in Algeria, Tunisia, and Jordan – increasingly complained that cheap Turkish products inundated Moroccan markets. An amendment of the bilateral free trade agreement in 2020 allowed the Moroccan government to re-establish custom duties on Turkish textiles and to exclude a long list of commodities from free trade, in order to attenuate the effects of covid on the pandemic-plagued country.[45] Some experts, however, linked this action also to persisting bilateral political tensions and, especially, to pressures from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, two important partners in Morocco's economic diversification strategy, to boycott Turkey. Saudi Arabia had already started an informal embargo on brands of Turkish origin, and the Saudi Chamber of Commerce called on citizens to shun "everything that is Turkish" in answer to the Turkish government's "hostilities" towards the kingdom. This was due to its political role, especially during the Qatar boycott, which Natalie Koch considers more closely in her chapter, but also in supporting unwelcome Islamist movements.

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41 Cf. Olwi, 2022. Most of these advertisements were in a mix of English and Arabic, and only a small percentage were exclusively in English or, for perfumes, mixed with Italian.
42 On economically motivated nation branding and "made in" promotion, cf. also below.
43 Cf., e.g., Alserhan, 2010a: 45.
44 Cf., e.g., Berrada, 2018.
45 Cf. Pérez, 2020; Allouche, 2020.

"Islamic branding"[46] has become a field of its own. It accompanies the booming economic and social sector that proclaims that it follows Islamic rules and values and provides, in particular, *šarīʿa*-compliant *ḥalāl* brands that are consistent with religious principles of permissible behaviour and products. Branding such commodities and services has developed into a growing business; because of their assumed quality, Islamic products are also widely consumed by non-Muslim customers. On the academic side, numerous specialised conferences have taken place, and journals, research groups, and institutions were founded to develop "the theory and practice of marketing in the Muslim world and beyond"[47] and to meet the enormous demand for experts. Application-oriented research and empirical evaluation seem to dominate, while far fewer critical analyses with a social or cultural sciences background exist. Research topics start from how to advance Islamic branding, the possibilities and limits of Islamic advertising, and commitment to social responsibility and economic development; and they extend to studies of specific sectors, consumption patterns, and users' brand perceptions.[48]

Sectors that get particular attention from Islamic branding are food and beverages (e.g. excluding pork and alcohol), pharmaceuticals, cosmetics (no alcoholic ingredients or animal fats), clothing and other lifestyle products, and services, particulary in the fields of finance (usury-free transactions), hospitality (no serving of alcohol, ban on gambling), and logistics (especially the prevention of contamination with impure products).[49] In the latter field, many places within and outside the Islamic world are striving to develop into *ḥalāl* hubs and logistic centres (e.g. with their own warehouses and slaughterhouses), where Islamic products can be adequately processed, stored, and transhipped – compare Heiko Schuss in this volume for Dubai's various endeavours to become the Capital of the Islamic Economy. Also, well-known and well-reputed multinational corporations want to participate in the promising business. Their strategies of "branding to Muslims" started in the 1970s and included differentiating and converting their product portfolio to fit the needs of Muslim markets, as well as developing and introducing new brands. Especially in the food sector, firms from non-Muslim countries still dominated in 2010, while the Muslim-owned large- and small-scale local brands had not yet penetrated international markets. Vice versa, the Islamic banking segment was

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46 In the following, cf. especially Shirazi, 2016; Alserhan, 2010a and 2010b.

47 International Islamic Marketing Association, 2023.

48 Cf., e.g., the list of articles and topics covered in the *International Journal of Islamic Marketing and Branding*, 2015–2017.

49 According to Fischer, 2012, in the Middle East, *ḥalāl* primarily relates to meat, while in South East Asia it encompasses all consumable goods.

primarily a Muslim business, although Western and Far Eastern interest in the sector was also growing.

Scholars call for an Islamic branding "to change the way goods and services are sold to Muslim consumers."[50] With certain restrictions, marketing and branding are considered to be in line with Islamic values, since according to the *Qurʾān* and *ḥadīṯ*, the Prophet Muhammad himself gave new names to persons close to him to honour them and renamed personal property to avoid unethical connotations; specific colours were chosen for special occasions, and signet rings served to "brand" letters in Islamic history.[51] But branding techniques should respect the motivations and spiritual needs of target consumers and make marketing decisions in accordance with religious guidelines. Baker Ahmad Alserhan distinguishes three modes of Islamic branding: compliance with religious Law (*ḥalāl* brands); reference to Muslim-country origin (independent of factual *šarīʿa* compliance); and Muslim-customer target groups (regardless of their devoutness). "True" Islamic brands then result if all three characteristics come together. Indeed, certification with *ḥalāl* labels and logos that confirm their accordance with Islamic rules plays a central role in Islamic branding: it generates trust in the products and can be regarded as a qualification tool.[52] Accordingly, since the 1970s, certification agencies have developed all over the world, across Southeast Asia and the Arab world to Western countries. However, there is no universally authoritative accreditation body, and reputations and qualifications fluctuate, with Malaysian, Saudi, Emirati, and Sudanese labels considered the most trustworthy.

Due to its early development and great importance, the banking system has attracted particular consideration. Ishtiaq and Siddiqui show that for Islamic banks in Pakistan, Arabic script, emblems like minarets, crescents, and historical coins, the green colour associated with Islam, religious terms, addressing religious sentiments, and avoiding images of living creatures and women in particular are characteristic of their public appearance.[53] Using the Corporate Identity approach, Steffen Wippel examined the degree to which Islamic features were used by various allegedly Islamic economic and social institutions in Egypt in the 1980s and '90s.[54] Across the entire sector, the most pronounced feature was the will to follow detailed rules of conduct, the use of corresponding self-designations, and the linguistic and visual content of communication. However, there were also large differences in the manifestation of Islamic identity characteristics between, but also

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50 Doherty, 2015: 1, 3.

51 Cf. Ishtiaq and Siddiqui, 2016: 34–35.

52 For *ḥalāl* certification, cf. also Fischer, 2012.

53 Cf. Ishtiaq and Siddiqui, 2016.

54 Cf. Wippel, 1995.

within, the various sub-sectors. Islamic banks and welfare institutions used the most "Islamic" identifiers. An Islamic corporate design (consisting of graphics, architecture, and clothing) was only moderately developed; graphic elements associated with Islam (logos, calligraphy, decor, symbols, colours) were most likely to be applied by banks, whereas clothing considered to be in conformity with Islam played virtually no role in their daily work. Intense corporate communication was mainly practised by banks, investment companies, and welfare associations. In some cases, the personal identity of the owners, chairmen, and founders of the institutions played a major role. In addition to Islamic aspects, they also repeatedly emphasised their openness to the world, national responsibility, and conformity with state rules and could be regarded as typical phenomena of the *infitāḥ* period.

Alina Kokoschka shows how everyday products have increasingly become significant for Muslim religious practice.[55] In pre-war Syria in the 2000s, the Islamisation of society and neoliberal globalisation led to visible changes in the field of consumer culture, such as wearing and using symbols of faith. Syrian and international companies increasingly discovered "Muslims" as a target group. Islamic-influenced images, signs, and things proliferated in the public sphere and were consciously used by producers to market their merchandises. Historical references were made, but the aesthetics of these brands were also suitable for a lived critique of existing political and economic conditions, whereas Islamic utopias were designed on packaging and in fashion. Comparable changes can be observed from Lebanon and Turkey to Muslim neighbourhoods in Northern metropolises. In her contribution to this volume, Kokoschka discusses how international brands are "Islamised" and how fakes gain reputation, when "Islamic Garments Meet French *Haute Couture.*"

Drinking studies are a specific area of research that turned to the branding of the beverage industry. The "Cola Wars" that are being fought in the Middle East demonstrate how brands can become ideological symbols. Following the second Palestinian *intifada*, the 9/11 attacks, and the invasion of Iraq, in the early 2000s anti-American resentment soared in the Middle East, but also in parts of Europe. This included the rejection of American brands like Coca Cola as a worldwide-established symbol of the "American way of life."[56] Several competitors attempted to challenge the multinational producer and to open a niche market by launching "Muslim-friendly" drinks. The most prominent brand was perhaps Mecca Cola, cre-

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55 Cf. Kokoschka, 2019.

56 Cf. Aggarwal, Knudsen, and Maamoun, 2009; Ram, 2005. In 2021, Coca Cola ranked 39 among the most valuable brands worldwide (but took first place on the list of non-alcoholic drinks); cf. Brand-Finance, 2022.

ated in France, whose tagline "Ne buvez plus idiot, buvez engagé" called for "committed" drinking. The producer did not spend much money on advertising, but developed by word of mouth. Although there was some criticism from the clergy about the "misuse" of the name of a holy place, the brand expanded rapidly from small shops into supermarkets and into other European, Arab, and Asian countries. According to Uri Ram, in the end, the product tried to unite apparently opposing aspects, such as cultural authenticity with capitalistic commercialisation and symbols like the bottle design, lettering, and colours, which emulate those of its great model, but using Muslim rhetoric. Other brands were *Qibla Cola* from the UK, which also successfully expanded beyond its original place, and *Zam Zam Cola*, in fact a former Iranian partner of Pepsi, which was nationalised during the Iranian revolution, but in 2002 expanded beyond its home market to the Middle East and Europe.

The example of alcohol demonstrates branding in a culturally difficult environment. Historically, beer was introduced to the Ottoman Empire in the 1830s, and from the beginning it was an object of social and cultural struggles.[57] The cleavages were mostly between the acceptance and appeal of Western products and lifestyles as signs of modernity and cosmopolitanism and the denouncement of beer as a symbol of foreignness and Europeanisation. Nationalists promoted the conspicuous consumption of *rakı* as a national, yet alcoholic drink. The young Turkish Republic indigenised beer by nationalising production; brands' and beer houses' names were also Turkified. Today, the Islamist-led governments have passed increasingly draconic rules against the sale, advertisement, consumption of alcohol. This goes hand in hand with promoting the salted yoghurt drink *ayran* as a "true" Turkish alternative to beer. Wine has to struggle, too, with these contemporary constraints; yet, authors still point to the need to purposefully develop strong and innovative brands to improve national and international market positions and continue the growth of Turkish wine production that began with the turn of the century.[58] Yet, alcohol drinking and marketing is an issue also in other MENA countries. Partly based on extended previous work,[59] in this volume, short snapshots touch upon the historical and contemporary branding of alcoholic beverages, from building a brand in colonial North Africa (Nina Studer) to the qualification of Moroccan wine (Steffen Wippel) and advertising in Lebanon (Marie Bonte).

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57 Cf. Fuhrmann, 2014.

58 Cf. Oraman, Yılmaz, and Abdikoğlu, 2017.

59 Cf., e. g., Bonte, 2021.

Last but not least, rising incomes and the globalisation of lifestyles and tastes have fostered a sustained demand for gourmet products, which cater to the pursuit and display of luxury consumption.[60] Thus, in recent years, the Middle East/Africa sales region has been among the world's fastest-expanding chocolate markets; demand in Arab Gulf states in particular is booming. In the past, chocolate, especially of the premium variety, was exclusively imported, but since the turn of the millennium, a regional confectionery industry, in particular in the high-end luxury segment, has gradually developed. For reasons of reputation, these chocolate and praline producers often refer to European traditions; local authenticity is partly given through regional ingredients or special spice notes. Presentation and the art of packaging – e.g., high-class shop interiors, jewel-like displays, and treasure-imitating chocolate boxes – play a central role in the "preciosisation" of their products. By establishing special chain shops and participating in sales exhibitions and trade fairs, manufacturers try to gain recognition and enter the export market, in and beyond the region. In this way, the UAE itself has become one of the largest chocolate producers and exporters in the world. Especially in Dubai, exquisite chocolate shops have spread, fulfilling the city's claimed luxury dimension in often less noticed ways. In the Dubai Mall, a central element of its urban branding, this segment even occupied its own shopping "street." The spatially concentrated, noble presentation, in turn, upgraded the factual mass shopping centre. The spectrum of renowned brands from the chocolate industry ranges from well-known Western luxury brands to products from high-quality Arab confectioners of Syrian-Lebanese and increasingly Saudi and Emirati provenance. But despite all its resonant cosmopolitanism, the assortment obviously contains no or hardly any alcohol, even if its ḥalāl quality is rarely openly advertised.

5 Branding Personalities and Political Groups

Especially in countries where family businesses still play an important role, the personalities of their founders or owners are crucial in constituting the enterprise brand. Notably in authoritarian regimes, political rulers have a tendency to personal self-promotion; the long list in contemporary Middle East and North Africa includes monarchs, leaders, and presidents known around the world, from the first president of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (r. 1923–1938), and Egyptian presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser (r. 1952–1970) and Anwar al-Sadat (r. 1970–1981) to the Libyan revolution guide Muʿammar al-Qaddhafi (r. 1969–2011) or more re-

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60 Cf. Wippel, 2024.

cently Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud (* 1985), who is an outstanding example of using manifold personal branding strategies. As demonstrated in the subsequent section and, in more detail, in several empirical studies in this volume, e.g. in the chapters by Annegret Roelcke on the Istanbul Eyüpsultan quarter and by Hend Aly on the Saudi NEOM project, also a strong co-branding of nations, cities, or projects goes along with the ostentatious self-advertisement of these rulers.

Typical of the region is also the branding of personalities connected with Islam. Among them, Yūsuf ʿAbdallāh al-Qaraḍāwī (1926–2022), born in Egypt and based in Qatar since 1961, was an authoritative scholar, important activist, and perhaps one of the best-known representatives of contemporary Sunni Islam. As a "global mufti," he became a highly popular and at the same time controversial figure of the Islamic movement worldwide and leveraged his acknowledged religious authority to intervene in political debates.[61] To disseminate his views and visions of a worldwide Islamic community, al-Qaraḍāwī made intensive use of all available media technologies. He skilfully knew how to benefit from the political rise of Qatar (see below) and its media activism, especially the founding of the satellite TV station *Al Jazeera* in 1996, to promote himself and his activities. Until 2013, his weekly religious programme on *Al Jazeera* attracted a worldwide audience. He was the first Muslim scholar to publish *fatwā*s online, answering ordinary people's questions. Al-Qaraḍāwī also got involved in the transformation of the legal opinion practice from a religious advisory institution, directed primarily at individuals, into an instrument that publicly addresses social issues and contributes to public opinion. In parallel and subsequently, similar preachers who have become renowned through the Internet and social media have emerged at local, national, and regional levels throughout the MENA region. Liza Franke contributes on this aspect with a case study on the spiritual brand of an Egyptian television guide.

Islamic brands can also be used for national co-branding. Mauritania is an example of a state in search of its national identity and regional belonging, which are difficult to define because of the country's particular historical and contemporary legacies. Trends towards a strengthened Arab brand have regularly conflicted with the self-identification of non-Arabophone groups and sub-Saharan orientations.[62] In this respect, Islam can serve as a common reference point for national unity and help to hold the ethnolingually plural and socially stratified society together.

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61 Cf. Gräf, 2003 and 2009.
62 Cf. Frede, 2021. On the country's inner conflicts and regional orientation options, cf. also Wippel, 2012.

Thus, an Islamic brand like the *maḥḍara*, a "traditional" yet highly dynamic institution of Islamic education, has been promoted by politicians and *'ulamā'* as part of the national educational system since the late 1970s, to support social peace and national cohesiveness. Vice versa, to promote its international standing and tranquilise fears abroad that have considered these schools as breeding grounds for radicalism, Mauritania has initiated a discourse about good local Islam vs. the Islamic extremism intruding from outside and presents itself as a regional leader of counterterrorism in the Sahel zone.

Personal and corporate branding is also practised by radical activists and terrorists. Militant Islamist organisations and Jihadist networks, which among their adherents built on an identity of resistance to the depravity of national leaders, Islamic societies, and the West, established themselves as brands.[63] The extensive propaganda used mainstream media and the groups' own news agencies, social media platforms, and online magazines to spread their ideologies and messages; the reporting that accompanied their activities and visual uniformity, e.g. of logos and letterheads, also contributed to the promotion of a visible and appealing brand. This is also how *al-Qāʿida* (*1988) was able to become one of the most successful virtual communities and rose to global notoriety. Especially its leader Osama bin Laden (1957–2011) was an easily recognisable "face" and "poster boy."[64] He was a strategic architect of effective communication, propaganda, and self-promotion and applied the management techniques he had learned in his business studies and in the family construction business to maintain a long-lasting "stock value" of his organisation.[65] Yet, he did not fully control the brand: after 11 September 2001, his negative public image served as an adverse umbrella brand that fed widespread Islamophobia and resulted in a loss of reputational capital for Muslims. In branding the "Islamic State" (IS; *1999), three elements were essential to attract millennials: story creation around the historical significance of Islamic prophecies; the symbolisms linked with the brand, such as a flag, a leader, a logo, and a caliphate; and the actions and the sense attached to the IS through practised ideology.[66] By advertising death adventurously with heroism and martyrdom, it succeeded in consolidating its followers' allegiance and persuading them to commit the ultimate self-sacrifice.

In a processual perspective, also rebranding took place.[67] Bin Laden already considered renaming *al-Qāʿida*, as he was concerned about the organisation's

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63 For general branding literature, cf. Brückerhoff, 2004. Cf. also Govers and Go, 2009: 2.
64 Brückerhoff, 2004.
65 Cf. Amour, 2018; Hoffmann, 2006.
66 Cf. Bandopadhyaya, 2019.
67 Cf. Wilson, 2014.

image in the eyes of Muslims and its ability to recruit followers. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (or the Levant) was a successor of *al-Qāʿida* in Iraq and changed its name in 2014 to IS only, to underline its claim to statehood, control of conquered territories, and imperial reach beyond. Jihadist movements extended their geographical reach by establishing whole brand families.[68] This was the case with *al-Qāʿida*, which expanded from Afghanistan as far as Algeria and Somalia by building up branches and merging with existing organisations. The IS widened its brand by establishing affiliates and franchise groups, which extended to Nigeria, Russia, and the Philippines, especially when its Caliphate began to collapse. This helped the groups to increase legitimacy under conditions of lasting conflicts, to appear more powerful than they actually were, and to gain local expertise. However, brand management problems arose when subgroups' objectives and actions conflicted with the umbrella brand and tensions between local and global agendas emerged. Positioning themselves in a competitive market and striving for "Jihadist supremacy," the two groups answered with different strategies to the 2011 political unrest in the Middle East.[69] *Al-Qāʿida* attempted to improve its image by slowing down the implementation of *šarīʿa* law and by rebranding some of its affiliates at the cost of its central authority. In contrast, IS focused on the violent conquest of territory and began its own state-building. So while *al-Qāʿida* was better positioned locally and successfully expanded its impact on a series of Middle Eastern internal wars, IS lost credibility with the local population, but remained popular with younger jihadists. Even though it lost most of its territory, it retained the ideological power to inspire attacks abroad.

6 Dubai as the Signature Case of Place Branding

The surge in the contemporary place branding business in the Middle East and North Africa is strongly linked to the ascendance of Dubai as a known and reputed brand worldwide. As reflected in the global and regional rankings, Dubai is *the* "signature case"[70] of branding in the MENA region (and beyond). It is by far the best-examined case, and critical analyses prevail. It has even found its way into foundational works on branding; likewise, the nascent literature on branding in the region started with a focus on Dubai, to the extent that this section allows us to summarise only some of these findings exemplarily. Most of this was written

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68 Cf. Clarke, 2018.
69 Cf. Lister, 2017.
70 Govers and Go, 2009: 4.

in the late 2000s, when Dubai approached the peak of its boom, and in the early 2010s, taking stock of the same period before the financial crisis took place. Like for the subsequent, mostly geographically ordered *tour d'horizon* that starts in the Gulf region and ends in the Maghreb and at MENA's periphery, many of the cited works are often less explicitly, but more implicitly or only cursorily about branding.

Already as of 1989, Dubai had created a number of special institutions to promote the city internationally.[71] In the course of the 2000s, it excelled as a shooting star brand in the global attention economy and attracted tourists, buyers, investors, stars, etc. Dubai's branding helped make it a global city, and conversely, the branding reflected its becoming a world city.[72] Nevertheless, Robert Govers and Frank Go stated that, at that time, the emirate "had not yet developed an orchestrated brand strategy in terms of the use of symbols (logos, slogans)."[73] Among these classic instruments, there was a series of differing slogans, and different institutions used different types of logos. Branding was fragmented and product-oriented and failed to coherently reflect the place identity to be communicated across sectors. Too many images associated with the city were circulating.[74] Potential addressees had difficulties describing the city's identity, while the perceived image also contained many stereotypes based on generalisations about the Middle East and Islam.[75] Moreover, Dubai was among the places in the region hardest hit by the rapidly spreading global financial and economic crisis in 2009 and had to suspend, at least temporarily, many of its construction projects. In the following years, it slowly recovered and continued to develop its brand. Only in the mid-2010s was an umbrella logo developed for multifunctional use (Fig. 2d).

Instead, Dubai built its place brand mainly by means of vigorous and well-communicated actions. In particular, there was an intense, mutually reinforcing co-branding of the city, project sites, firms, and products.[76] Already since the 1960s–'70s, Dubai's planned transformation through spectacular architecture

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71 Cf. Stephenson, 2014: 725. Cf. also Govers and Go, 2009: 96–97.

72 Cf. Ooi, 2011: 56.

73 Govers and Go, 2009: 74.

74 On the brand images and perceptions, cf. Govers, 2012; Govers and Go, 2009: passim. Cf. also Balakrishnan, 2008: 81–82.

75 On the negative country-of-origin effect for DP World's envisaged investment in North American ports, cf. Balakrishnan, 2008: 68; on the effects of 9/11 and unrest in the Middle East on tourism, Steiner, 2009.

76 Compare the example given by Schmid, 2006: 357: marketing new Emirates flight routes involved the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, hotels, and real estate companies, which simultaneously woo passengers, tourists, and investors. Cf. also Burs, 2016: 183.

made it a "showpiece city."[77] Its physical appearance, above all, turns it into an "instantly recognizable"[78] place and a symbol of modernity, human endeavour, and success.[79] Many constructions have the city's toponym in their brand name, thereby equating the project and the city and vice versa.[80] Branding through the continuous construction of new, attention-grabbing megaprojects scattered across the city seems particularly suitable to meet global marketing requirements, can be economically valorised, and promises the ruling elites a considerable gain in political legitimacy.[81] This encompasses extensive landscaping, including large urban revitalisation and extended waterfront development, as well as highly impressive standalone landmark buildings designed by global "starchitects" and lavishly presented in the media.[82]

In addition, hosting events has become an important instrument. The field of culture, in particular, is another means for branding Dubai; it endows the city with an image of openness and creativity. With events such as the Dubai Art Fair, Dubai seeks to gain recognition in a regional and global network of competing venues.[83] For example, it has become a platform for Iranian artists from all over the world to showcase and market their work internationally across the political divide of the Persian Gulf. Together with extravagant malls, widely marketed annual shopping festivals where hundreds of reputed international brands are present cater to shopping purposes, for which visitors are lured to "Do-Buy."[84] In parallel, Dubai has succeeded in establishing many reputed home brands that are active all over the world and simultaneously serve as brand ambassadors, like the property developers *Emaar* and *Nakheel*, the Emirates airline, and DP World for port management. In addition to hosting the Expo 2020, which again allowed Dubai to stage its global position, the city had already "expo-ised" itself as a site where enterprises from all over the world seek to outdo each other in their external presentation, just like corporate micronations in an enormous real-world exhibition.[85]

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77 Cf. Reisz, 2020.

78 Bagaeen, 2007.

79 Compare Elsheshtawy, 2010: 161.

80 Cf. Acuto, 2010: 278.

81 Cf. Steiner, 2017: 7.

82 On "blue" waterside projects, cf. Brorman Jensen, 2007: 44–57; Bolleter, 2009; for the manmade channel that reconnects the creek, where the city originated, to the sea, Semple, 2017. On the media presentation of contemporary architecture, also generally in the UAE, cf. Burs, 2016.

83 Cf. Moghadam, 2018 and 2021.

84 Cf., e. g., Sangeeta, Anandkumar, and Peter, 2013; Brorman Jensen, 2007: 98; Balakrishnan, 2008: 80 (also on home brands); Haines, 2011: 169.

85 Cf. Brorman Jensen, 2007: 44–57.

The place image of Dubai is transported via the visual and textual content of brochures and other information media.[86] Yet, direct advertisement campaigns seem to have had only limited impact in the past. In contrast, intense global media coverage of all the iconic buildings and outstanding events had an important role in conveying and building Dubai's global brand. Personal experiences were also much-used information sources. Across the city, huge billboards announced the emergence of new projects – even if they sometimes found no reflection on the ground, but were put on hold or never realised. Literature cursorily mentions that, in contrast, people were largely absent in these images; in this volume, Philip Geisler elaborates in depth on the sanitised and immaculate images that are being created. With the growing presence of the Internet, the place image early began to be largely projected online by all available means. This includes the massive use of global social media, up to the recent trend to attract influencers to live in the city and deploy their clips in front of alluring sceneries from there – at the cost of avoiding any critique of Dubai.

The branding initiatives were conceived and driven by a small elite. The emirate's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, in particular, was associated with several strong urban visions and statements to the wider public.[87] Strategic visions for the mid-2010s claimed to make Dubai a "globally leading Arab city;"[88] according to the emir, Dubai had to be "number one in the world, in everything."[89] In fact, many different actors were involved. In particular, the private sector was instrumental in the success of branding Dubai. Numerous architecture and landscape designers and property and city developers have contributed to building the place's worldwide image. But, in the dominating political and economic system that characterises Dubai, with a mix of the sheikh's private property, formally public entities, and private corporations owned by clan members and personalities close to the ruler, the boundaries between different actors blurred.[90] However, these actors are not able to completely control the brand, given the role of, e. g., international journalists and activists.[91]

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86 On the media of branding Dubai, cf., e. g., Govers and Go, 2009: 151–167 et passim; Coombe and Melki, 2012. On media coverage and billboards, cf. also Elsheshtawy, 2010: 161–162; on the use of social media, Govers, 2012: 51. On the absence of people in and the decontextualisation of images of buildings, cf. also Nastasi, 2019.

87 For the key actors, cf. Govers and Go, 2009: 95, 98; Acuto, 2010: 278; Hashim, Irazábal, and Byrum, 2010: 218; especially on the ruler and his visions, Schmid, 2006: 357; Bromber et al., 2014: 7.

88 Quoted in Balakrishnan, 2008: 70.

89 Quoted in Acuto, 2010: 278.

90 Cf. Steiner, 2014: 18–20.

91 Cf. Haines, 2011: 167.

Dubai is to be a hypercentre of neoliberal development and a site of the techno-utopic future of the 21st century, where everything is possible.[92] According to Samer Bagaeen, Dubai also perfectly fits Edward Soja's description of the postmodern city.[93] The splintering of the city, and namely the division of previously empty desert land into numbered plots like a bingo game board, available for unconnected and monocultural uses, made Dubai an exemplary case of postmodern "bingo urbanism."[94] Everything is designed for staging and visibility in order to be able to serve as a symbol. Many projects lack any spatial, historical, or social embeddedness. In particular, Dubai is a city of hyperreal experiences. Its development is strongly linked to the creation of simulacra and replicas.[95] Uniqueness is a major aspect of the branding strategy, which intends to create an image of fascination.[96] As is characteristic of the postmodern city, the distinction between the city and a theme park vanishes and even finds its global apotheosis in Dubai.[97] Such creations of hyperrealities meet marketing purposes and grant prestige, recognition, and legitimation to their holders and owners. Simultaneously, due to their lack of ties to their immediate environment, such projects are ideally suited to be filled with symbolic significance within urban branding campaigns. Intangible emotional and experiential aspects are central for making the place consumable. With this, Dubai sells "a global dream of high-class consumption and luxurious lifestyles."[98]

Shopping malls have become outstanding examples of the citywide display of "theme-scapes."[99] Eclectically combined architectural elements of Arab, South Asian, Mediterranean, and other decors are almost non-functional.[100] At the same time, some logo-like structures, such as the Palm and World Islands, can be transmitted only by maps or views from the air or outer space, like the ground plan of *Burj Khalifa* in the form of a desert flower.[101] It is here where the primacy of the map and of branding requirements over the realisation of the projects and their relevance to daily life becomes the most apparent. Hotels also became desti-

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[92] Cf. Hashim, Irazábal, and Byrum, 2010: 211 et passim.

[93] Cf. Bagaeen, 2007.

[94] Cf. Brormann Jensen, 2007.

[95] Cf. especially Steiner, 2010, 2014, and 2017; Bromber et al., 2014. Cf. also Govers and Go, 2009: 11; Vanolo, 2017: 162.

[96] On Dubai in the global fascination economy, cf. Schmid, 2006.

[97] Cf. Bolleter, 2009: 8.

[98] Haines, 2011: 161.

[99] Cf. Bolleter, 2009: 10.

[100] Cf. Steiner, 2010: 246.

[101] Cf. Brorman Jensen, 2007: 70–72; Bolleter, 2009: 10; Elsheshtawy, 2010: 151, 166; Steiner, 2010: 247, and 2014: 25.

nations in themselves, sometimes tied to other well-known brands like fashion trademarks (Armani Hotel) or celebrities (e.g., top golfers playing on the *Burj Al Arab* helipad).[102] Touring these new themed sites, which their visitors often understand as museums (Ibn Battuta Mall) and actual historical remnants (Souk Madinat Jumeirah), is at the core of the emirate's travel business. Julian Bolleter conceives Dubai's landscape architecture as "para-scapes," which serve the *para*disiacal image of the city.[103] They are derived both from Quranic descriptions of paradise, which is symbolically recreated, and from the first president of the UAE's vision of greening the desert, which Gergana Alzeer and Tilde Rosmer explore in their later chapter. But as this hybridised landscape architecture is entirely artificial and beyond all ecological requirements, "para" also refers to Dubai's state of *para*lysis.

Already in the 2000s, Dubai had "almost more than any other city, made the spectacular its *raison d'être!*"[104] It used superlatives to build and mark its distinctiveness; many urban projects were – in the word's double sense – "exclusive" in nature. The artificially developed hospitality, office, residential, and shopping complexes had nearly no comparison in scale and volume worldwide.[105] Qualifiers, for instance in the promotion of "seven star" hotels or in claims to be or have the (preferably: world's) "highest," "tallest," "fastest," or "biggest" structures, all of which are "unique" and "ground-breaking," proliferated, with the inherent risk of being quickly outpaced in the global race for supremacy. Height like that of the *Burj Khalifa* was also a symbol of power.[106] Accordingly, storytelling is closely linked to the material constructions and can be regarded as a central feature of branding. Given that these narratives need to be constantly varied and recreated in order to avoid the effects of fatigue and to maintain a unique selling position, the metaphor of the "Scheherazade Syndrome" suggests that, as in the 1001 Nights, survival depends to a large extent on the endless stretching of a story.[107]

Furthermore, contemporary projects in Dubai intend to demonstrate the power of "making history" and represent a place "where the future begins."[108]

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102 Cf. Elsheshtawy, 2010: 140–141; Burs, 2016: 206 (and 214–215, on the planned Tiger Woods hotel).

103 Cf. Bolleter, 2009.

104 Elsheshtawy, 2010: 137.

105 Cf. Elsheshtawy, 2010: 134, 165; Steiner, 2010: 241, 247; Balakrishnan, 2008: 80–81.

106 Cf. Elsheshtawy, 2010: 152, 164; Acuto, 2010: 272–273; Burs, 2016: e.g. 250–255. Initially named *Burj Dubai*, the tower's name was changed in the aftermath of the financial crisis, when Abu Dhabi had supported Dubai and used this opportunity to strengthen its position within the UAE.

107 Cf. Hashim, Irazábal, and Byrum, 2010.

108 Haines, 2011: 165.

Yet, the temporal aspects of Dubai's brand are also reflected in the felt need to con-textualise buildings in local and broader Arab-Islamic history and traditions.[109] Es-pecially in a place without a pronounced urban history, suggesting deep cultural roots should help to realise the vision of a modern Arab and Muslim society. For this, the few historical buildings started to be diligently preserved and act as a form of staged authenticity to create awareness of the one's own cultural ori-gins, contribute to building national identity, and generate some sense of place. Heritage planning serves to improve the past; the city's own history on display, e.g. in museums and heritage villages, shows the successful rise from a poor Bedouin society to a prosperous world centre; and early-flourishing fields of activ-ity, such as pearl fishing and translocal trade, should demonstrate continuity with the city's present-day centrality and cosmopolitanism. New constructions also go along with narratives and motifs that link them to cultural traditions and natural conditions, be it the repetitive palm-tree motif, for instance the artificial islands in front of the coastline; the *dhow*-like iconic shape of *Burj Al Arab*; or the ground plan of the *Burj Khalifa*, which is supposed to represent an endemic desert rose.[110]

Simultaneously, Dubai's success, both as a brand and in economic develop-ment, has further deepened profound paradoxes and discrepancies. First, there was great unevenness in the uses and achievements of branding: while the state leadership, public authorities, and multinational businesses were very successful in their personal, urban, and corporate branding endeavours, in the mid-2010s, small and medium enterprises still experienced major barriers to brand build-ing.[111] However, there have also been exceptions, as shown for example by the re-cent branding efforts in the local confectionery industry. Second, the promising present and future marketed by Dubai also attracted a rapidly growing number of migrants. But the impressive economic and touristic development is contrasted by adverse social and environmental conditions that long remained overlooked by many incoming tourists and businessmen and disregarded in the selective repre-sentations of the brand.[112] Hence, for migrants, going to Dubai to earn a living is an ambivalent pleasure: on the one hand, the glittering face of Dubai that is stag-

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109 On the issues in this paragraph, cf., for instance, Govers and Go, 2009: 103–107 et passim; El-sheshtawy, 2010: 161; Bromber et al., 2014; Haines, 2011: 167–169; Stephenson, 2014: 8–9. On tradition-al sports, cf. below.

110 On the two *burj*s, cf., e.g., Schmid, 2006: 356; Elsheshtawy, 2010: 138–139, 161; Steiner, 2014: 24–25.

111 Cf. Gundala, Jack, and Khawaja, 2014.

112 Many authors point to this downside; cf., e.g. Haines, 2011; Bolleter, 2009; Hashim, Irazábal, and Byrum, 2010: 222–227. On hiding, cf. also Bagaeen, 2007: 187; Nastasi, 2019: 126; similarly on art and culture, Moghadam, 2021: 4, 6.

ed for the world has its important dark underbelly of absolutely deplorable living and working conditions for those who construct these fairy-tale illusions; on the other hand, they are attracted not only by material gains, but also by the possibility of participating in Dubai's special aura as a global, cosmopolitan, and ultra-modern city, which holds the prospect of raising their own status.[113] The identities and images imposed from above also have provoked conscious appropriation as well as circumventing counter-strategies from below. In a city full of para-, logo- and theme-scapes, the less wealthy parts of society and notably migrant workers often occupy space left over in planning on the margins of road arteries and other infrastructural developments for meeting, chatting, relaxing, and picnicking.[114] For national citizens, local entrepreneurs with their specific cultural knowledge of the place have been able to create and market refuges where, for example, local eateries offer typical Emirati food away from the glitzy ambience in most of the city.[115]

7 Branding other Gulf Cities and Nations

While Dubai began to establish itself as a globally perceived brand around the turn of the millennium, elsewhere in the region efforts to strategically communicate an attractive image have emerged more recently. As the debate conducted under keywords such as "Dubai elsewhere," "Dubaization," and "Dubaification"[116]demonstrates, the model of economic and urban development that appeared quite successful, despite the interim setbacks, began to be exported and imitated, including the associated attention strategies, as a kind of "travelling practice."[117] Dubai's example was first taken up in other Arab Gulf metropolises and small nations. Here, contemporary architecture in the Gulf region is also lavishly presented in the media, and, in particular, hyperreal tourist resorts and shopping malls likewise contribute centrally to image construction.[118] Nevertheless, different nuances can be discerned in the strategies adopted: while some places shine in intense brand competition through cultural and sport facilities planned by star architects,

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113 Cf. Haines, 2011: 172–176. Cf. also Vanolo, 2017: 67.

114 Cf. Bolleter, 2009: 11–12. Cf. also Brorman Jensen, 2007: 33.

115 Cf. Reichenbach and Ibrahim, 2019.

116 Cf., e. g., Wippel et al., 2014; Elsheshtawy, 2010: 249–279; Adham, 2011: 247. Cf. also Steiner, 2010: 249.

117 Related to nation branding, cf. Eggeling, 2020: 229. On travelling projects of similar design and mobilities of the spectacular, cf. Ponzini, 2019.

118 Cf. Burs, 2016; Steiner, 2010.

others present themselves primarily as ecological pioneers, business-friendly locations, or international event venues. All have founded agencies for commercial and tourism marketing, which are working within an entire ecosystem of institutions – national tourism and investment authorities, local developers, national carriers, etc. – to promote the respective place. At the same time, urban and national future "visions" with precise target years, often announced by the national or local ruler himself, have been comprehensively integrated into marketing activities in many places, too, but so far have only briefly been touched upon in academic literature.[119] They combine strategic targets for economic, touristic, and infrastructural progress with catchy images and slogans. Moreover, historical-tribal references and spectacles – including custom-fit pre-national genealogies, fantasy architectures, national museums, neo-traditional sport, dress codes, and poetry contests – have been selectively incorporated into the branding of the young nation states of the Gulf, erasing the cultural ambivalences and hardships of the past.[120] Among the many political rivalries that run across the region, geographical naming has become a central branding device, as in the dispute over the correct designation of the Gulf as "Persian" or "Arabic," which has even led to restrictions on postal and freight traffic.[121]

7.1 Establishing Abu Dhabi as a Cultural and Green Brand

The other UAE emirates strongly feel the need to position themselves against Dubai's globally outshining role. While the UAE has been consistently at the top, e.g. of the BrandFinance nation ranking (probably largely based on Dubai's reputation), as an amalgam of federal emirates, each with its own identity, history, and dynasty, it is still in process of nation building. The spirit of belonging together has long been underdeveloped.[122] In recent years, there have been efforts to strengthen the collective identity of the UAE. In this volume, Moritz Mihatsch and Richard Gauvain present recent endeavours to forge a more solid overarching

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119 Cf. Hvidt, 2012; Bromber et al., 2014. Such visions are particularly conspicuous in the Gulf region, namely Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 (launched 2006); Sharjah Tourism Vision 2021 (2015); UAE Vision 2021 (2010) and "We the UAE" Vision 2031 (2022); UAE Centennial 2071 (2017); Qatar National Vision 2030 (2008); Bahrain Vision 2030 (2008); New Kuwait Vision 2035 (2010); Saudi Vision 2030 (2016); Oman Vision 2040 (2020), following Vision Oman 2020 (1995); etc.
120 Cf. Cooke, 2014. Even Orientalist art serves as a means to confirm purged images of the past.
121 On the naming dispute, cf. Medway and Warnaby, 2014: 163. In more detail, see, e.g., Krause, 2001.
122 Cf., e.g. from the perspective of destination marketing, Stephenson, 2012: 10–11.

identity and present the federation collectively to its citizens and the outside world by creating a logo that simultaneously symbolises unity and diversity. But to a large extent, the different emirates brand themselves individually.

Compared to Dubai, Abu Dhabi was a relative latecomer in economic diversification, urban transformation, tourism development, and, with that, branding.[123] Endeavours in these directions were particularly strengthened when Sheikh Khalifa (r. 2004–2022), the son of the UAE's founder Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (r. 1966–2004), came to power. As the federal capital and presidency, Abu Dhabi aspires for a stronger centralisation of the UAE, especially since the financial crisis, when the extent to which it has to finance the rest of country, including Dubai, became obvious. The first concern has been the development of a brand easily distinguishable from its neighbour and dynamising the somewhat boring image of the city. Still, the emirate builds on a smoother transition and a more heritage- and tradition-inspired development and image. In the travel segment, the focus is on cultural and event tourism. Culture, sport, and sustainability can be considered the buzzwords of the branding strategy and are linked to the major attention-drawing projects. Since 2007, an explicit Office of the Brand of Abu Dhabi has been developing and implementing a comprehensive brand from the beginning.[124] The logo in the shape of a local *dhow* sail in which the emirate's calligraphic name is inscribed is widely used across the different sectors and regions of the emirate. The brand story centres on a small fishing village turned into a hospitable and exciting metropolis and on heritage, nature, and people. There is a strong effort to ensure the public and private entities' firm commitment to the brand and its respect in the behaviour of citizens.

Inside the city, a major urban transformation was the building of the Corniche, which embodies a modern and paradisaic place, serves as a scene where most local events resonate, and enhances the visibility of the city to its inhabitants and the foreign public.[125] In competition with Dubai, Abu Dhabi stablished its own world-class flagship carrier and more recently a container mega-port. Like other emirates, Abu Dhabi has invested in higher education as another reputational means and attracted branches of international university brands. In the field of culture, it is trying to catch up with international standards and become a world leader. Since the late 2000s, the focus has been on developing Saadiyat Island into a

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123 On the branding strategy, cf. in the following Hazime, 2011; Westwood, 2011; Bani Hashim, 2012. Cf. also Scharfenort, 2010.

124 In 2023, the new ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, instituted the Abu Dhabi Media Office to establish guidelines for the coherent use of the emirate's promotional brands; cf. Abu Dhabi Media Office, 2023.

125 Cf. Assaf, 2013.

"Cultural District" with numerous museums.[126] To attract attention, institutional and nominal links are made to Western brands; we find branches of the Louvre (opened in 2017) and Guggenheim museums (to be completed in 2025), in addition to museums, still under construction, displaying national history and ecology. Perhaps even more starchitects designed iconic buildings in this concentrated space than in Dubai; to balance between alleged global culture and local traditions, they evoke local building techniques and forms, such as wind towers, Bedouin tents, narrow alleyways, and mosque domes. The island encompasses also exclusive residential compounds, tourism resorts, shopping facilities, the unavoidable golf courses, and an eco-reserve; it sells the fascination of a tropical island, a paradise, and an Oriental dream, but can again be considered the spatial manifestation of harsh inequalities between a transnational creative and affluent class and the global marginalised and poor. Yas Island is a second island development that includes a motor racing course and theme park and integrates top-level sport as a separate field of the local brand, similar to Qatar (cf. below). Its form-finding and design directly followed a simulated 3D model.[127]

The third area that is expected to contribute exceptionally to Abu Dhabi's brand image is the pursuit of environmental sustainability. Part of its massive (re)branding since the mid-2000s has been the attempt to transform its international image from a major oil and gas producer into an energy giant relying on a broad portfolio including alternative resources; at the same time, this is meant to be a clear marker of distinction from its regional competitors.[128] Hoped-for effects are to accelerate the diversification of the emirate's economy and strengthen the ruler's political legitimacy at home and abroad. Its advocacy of renewable energies, in particular, has produced much fascination. After it was able to organise the World Future Energy Summit in 2008, it won the bid for the headquarters of the new International Renewable Energy Agency in 2009. The "jewel in the crown of the new strategy"[129] was the Masdar initiative, launched in 2006 in a joint effort of several public institutions. Its core project was Masdar City, branded as a "smart city," fully self-sufficient in renewable energies, served by an automated transport system, and following climate-adapted traditional building patterns. The Masdar Institute of Science and Technology was established in collaboration with the MIT brand to serve as a showcase for high-profile research and education and to market Abu Dhabi as a surging knowledge economy. The project was promoted as a future-oriented utopia making it possible to explore a new frontier in the des-

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126 Cf. also Dumortier, 2014; Burs, 2016: 221.

127 Cf. Burs, 2016: 211–213.

128 On Masdar, cf., e. g., Sim, 2012; Günel, 2019; Rietmann, 2021.

129 Mahroum and Alsaleh, 2012.

ert. Politically, it was said to preserve the legacy of Shaykh Zayed and his engagement for a green environment. But several setbacks already during the 2008/09 financial crisis meant that the Masdar project had to be downscaled in size and ambition. Masdar City no longer claims it will be "zero-carbon" when it is finished one day, but now aims to be "carbon-neutral" instead.

Subsequently, more and more projects, and finally cities and states in the MENA region, have been branded as "green" and "sustainable" (and in combination with that, as "smart") as an essential element in their global image-building strategy during the last decade. Other places in the Gulf region established similar projects that wanted to be vanguard, but often failed or showed limited progress.[130] According to Agatino Rizzo, "Governments in the Gulf seek to compete with one another for the title of creating the 'greenest', 'eco-friendliest', or 'most sustainable' city in the region."[131] In the UAE, this includes the Dubai Expo 2020 venue, which aimed "to go green;"[132] in Qatar, for instance, the 2022 FIFA World Cup was announced as an eco-friendly, carbon-neutral event. Like Abu Dhabi, Qatar prefers large-scale "green" projects, while Dubai displays a number of smaller scattered institutions and neighbourhoods.[133] Qatar pushes the "climate change brand" in contrast to Abu Dhabi's "renewable energy brand."[134] In 2012, Doha hosted the first United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 18) in the Middle East, which also added to its global visibility.[135] Saudi Arabia established the private King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), including specialisations in water, energy, and environment issues, and organised many campaigns, such as beach cleaning and afforestation; Kuwait has undertaken many environmental protection measures. Other countries followed suit, yet most often in smaller dimensions and less globally publicised, such as with the New Borg El Arab EcoCity in Egypt or the latest generation of planned new towns and settlements branded as "green" in Morocco (cf. below).

Abu Dhabi approached the ecological reorientation of its brand primarily to proactively pre-empt the tarnishing of its international image.[136] Consequently,

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130 Cf., e.g., De Jong, Hoppe, and Noori, 2019 on projects in Qatar, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai; Zumbrägel, 2020 with a focus on Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. On Qatar's green policies, cf. also Koch, 2014; Eggeling, 2020: 170–172. For more details, cf. also below.

131 Rizzo, 2017: 86.

132 Cf. Koch, 2014: 1118.

133 Cf. De Jong, Hoppe, and Noori, 2019: 1–2.

134 Cf. Makdisi, 2012: 6.

135 Other venues in the MENA region were Marrakech (COP 7, 2011; COP 22, 2016) and Sharm El Sheikh (COP 27, 2022); the 2023 COP 28 is scheduled in Dubai. Cf. Wikipedia, 2023d.

136 Cf. Sim, 2012: 87; Brorman Jensen, 2014: 51. Cf. also Rietmann, 2021: 48.

the Masdar project has attracted much public sympathy, but also a lot of criticism, exemplarily for similar projects. It is regarded as a decontextualised import with limited local implications, an elitist exclave contributing to the further fragmentation of the existing urban space.[137] Its promotional budget is considered its largest investment. While some authors admit that the project contributes to raising awareness of the importance of sustainability in people's minds, others underline that exactly this has failed and that urban sustainability is largely reduced to technological solutions. In the local understanding, "green" does not always equate with "sustainable," as it may primarily be about planting and supplying green spaces as an important aspect of quality of life – e.g. among students in Qatar, but also in Dubai as Gergana Alzeer and Tilde Rosmer highlight in their article in this volume. Sometimes, environmental issues are also framed in religious terms or linked to national heritage. The main concern of the branding strategy seems to be to use such projects as a political (soft power) instrument for domestic nation building and national pride; as a way to forestall external and internal pressure; and as another spectacular umbrella brand to address various important players in the field of sustainability. In fact, the Masdar project greatly resembles a theme park; it exists primarily on paper and in PowerPoint presentations, making it a hyperreal simulacrum. As an "empty signifier," it can be deliberately filled with content and shaped by the ruler.

Occasionally, the sustainability label has been attached to projects only in their latter stages of advancement. In particular, economic success prevails over the ecological achievements of sustainable projects. The official rhetoric in line with the global debate contrasts with the actual continuation of unsustainable practices, which challenge the credibility of the branding story and risk generating "science fiction"[138] projects. Martin De Jong et al. affirmed that "the branding of these [ambitious] policies is decidedly more effective than their implementation."[139] Many therefore consider such green branding schemes to be outstanding cases of window dressing and "greenwashing." This term, first used in the 1980s for greening consumer goods and later extended to governments, points to discrepancies between high-flying announcements and poor realisations, to misleading information and narratives, to dubious labels on brands, and to the manipulation and de-

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[137] In view of such unsuccessful urban experiments, Cugurullo, 2018 considers this an exemplary case of "Frankenstein urbanism." For subsequent analyses and criticisms, cf. Mahroum and Alsaleh, 2012; Brorman Jensen, 2014; Koch, 2014; Rizzo, 2017; Cummings and von Richthofen, 2017; Elsheshtawy, 2018; Günel, 2019; Zumbrägel, 2020.

[138] Günel, 2019: 38.

[139] De Jong, Hoppe, and Noori, 2019: 23.

ception of consumers.[140] Such allegations have been explicitly formulated for some megaprojects with an intensely communicated green touch, such as the Dubai Water Canal, where in fact environmental aspects are often relegated to second rank.[141] For other Dubai "para-scape" projects, "green" is rather an exotic attribute in an originally desertic environment and stands much more for luxury than for the ecological realities of the place.[142] Yet, more nuanced positions prevail in academia, which struggles to uncover the various rationalities and motivations behind such green branding programmes.

Among the small emirates, perhaps Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah have the most potential for "'catching up' in comparison with Dubai and Abu Dhabi, their wealthier and more high-profile siblings."[143] In the 2000s, high-rise buildings were erected also in Sharjah, which benefitted much from Dubai's spatial and economic expansion, but at the risk of being swallowed up by the growing agglomeration.[144] Building on its past as the most important port in the wider area, it wants to become again an important regional trade centre and, in particular, the trade "gate" to the northern emirates. Like other cities on the Arabian Peninsula, it has established its own shopping festival;[145] it has also attracted attention as the promoter of the region's first low-cost carrier. This emirate, which has a more conservative image, is consciously branded as a Muslim space that contrasts with its immediate neighbour[146] and banks heavily on culture and heritage. Its de facto status as *the* cultural capital of the UAE is reflected by its nomination as the Arab and Islamic Capitals of Culture (Fig. 1). Several cultural events, including the arts Biennial, museums, and heritage sites, are based there; the main landmarks early excelled with their reference to traditional, Arabic style. The ruler, Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi (since 1972), has authored plenty of historical and literary works. The emirate wants to be not only a cultural, but also an educational and sport hub (especially in the discipline of cricket). Yet, despite initial modest efforts, in the early 2010s, Sharjah still needed more serious branding, especially as its important cultural attractions remained marginal in its tourism offer.

Ras Al Khaimah, the capital of the northernmost emirate, experienced a more recent boom.[147] The place is also proud of a glorious past based on pearl diving and

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140 Cf., e.g., Skey, 2022: 3–4.

141 Cf. Semple, 2017.

142 Cf. Brorman Jensen, 2007: 129; Bolleter, 2009: 7–9.

143 Madichie and Madichie, 2013: 81.

144 Cf. Madichie and Madichie, 2013.

145 Cf., e.g., Sangeeta, Anandkumar, and Peter, 2013.

146 Cf. Haines, 2011: 170.

147 Cf. Dumortier, 2013.

trade, but unlike other UAE cities, it only lately showed enhanced ambitions for greater development projects accompanied by image and marketing campaigns in trade and tourism. Yet, several projects adapted to the requirements of a post-modern fascination economy failed, such as an artificial island emulating the Dubai Palms and the Gateway Eco City, resembling Masdar.

7.2 Qatar as the Rising Brand between Sport and Culture

While research literature intensely focused on Dubai's worldwide-perceived branding endeavours up to the early 2010s, this focus has greatly shifted to Qatar and its capital Doha as an emerging "brand state par excellence."[148] Since the late 2000s, Qatar has embarked on a branding strategy similar to that of Dubai, in a mix of a catch-up race and the search for specific niches, but with a clearer set of actions. This was again instigated by a generational change, when the current ruler, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (r. 1995–2013), ousted his father. He began Qatar's international branding by positioning the country as a diplomatic mediator and dialogue partner for all sides in the multiple conflicts of the Middle East and by maintaining simultaneous relationships with the USA, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran, and radical Islamist groupings.[149] It hosted international political meetings, from the WTO Doha Round 2001 to the COP 18 in 2012. In a media offensive, Qatar established *Al Jazeera* as a regional and global broadcasting station and opinion maker that challenged the Anglo-American monopoly and served as the mouthpiece of Qatari storytelling. In terms of geography and demography a micro-state, its policy-based branding and soft power approach appeared as an essential survival strategy to gain international legitimacy and awareness and to convince other international actors of its uniqueness and indispensability.

However, since its founding, the *Al Jazeera* news station has repeatedly been accused of interference in internal affairs and overly anti-Western stances, even though the opening of its English service in 2006 improved the image of the brand as a credible source.[150] The strategy failed, especially when, in 2011, Qatar took a position in favour of revolutionary Islamist movements, in the hope of gaining some moderating influence. Other states, in particular the Saudi monarchy, re-

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148 Eggeling, 2020: 95.

149 For Qatar's branding through foreign policy, including *Al Jazeera*, cf. Peterson, 2006; Windecker and Sendrowicz, 2014. On some aspects, cf. also Koch, 2014: 1119–1121; Alraouf, 2018; Eggeling, 2020: 91–94; Sons, 2022: 22; Beck, 2022: 6.

150 Cf. also King and Zayani, 2008. Compare the earlier passage on the prominent al-Qaraḍāwī show on *Al Jazeera*.

garded this as a menace to their interests. In 2013, the ruling emir handed over power to his son, who again tried to be more cautious in foreign policy and shifted international image-building more to implementing the numerous large-scale projects for economic development and diversification. Yet, this did not prevent the emirate's multi-year diplomatic, trade, and transport blockade, led by Saudi Arabia and its allies, between 2017 and 2021. How Qatar resisted and developed its own dairy industry, which became a national symbol and then sparked an accelerating "milk brands" race among neighbouring countries, is explored by Natalie Koch in her separate chapter in this book.

A second branding motive for Qatar was to demonstrate competitiveness in specific niches as a world-class performer.[151] Prominent ways to spread its name were the establishment of recognised national firm brands and direct investment in reputed companies abroad. Like other Gulf countries, it created its own successful international airline in 1993, which helps to increase national visibility by carrying its brand all over the world.[152] Qatar likewise has entered the age of "sign wars," "brand icons," and an "urbanism of spectacle" by making architecture and themed districts again a primary source of communication.[153] Doha constructed an impressive skyline of impressive high-rises, sometimes with pseudo-Arabic details. It built hyperreal shopping centres like the *Villagio Mall* with a Venetian-style gondola-lined *Canal Grande* and the artificial mixed-style island The Pearl, marketed as "The Riviera Arabia." The nearby *Katara Cultural Village* provides a stage for displaying arts and crafts from various world regions. The renovated *Souk Waqif* is a major tourist attraction, but in this form had never existed before.[154] The Msheireb Downtown quarter flagship project that is nearing completion claims attachment to a traditional Arab city layout and to principles of sustainability, like the Lusail City development, which is still under construction. Moreover, Education City attracted a number of reputed international university and research institutions. With knowledge- and technology-based development, the city wants to lure foreign experts and the much-vaunted creative class. Qatar also embarked on the cultural track, in particular by building a series of flagship museums, starting with the distinctive Museum of Islamic Art (inaugurat-

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151 Cf., among others, Hazime, 2011: 4739; Scharfenort, 2014: 74; Eggeling, 2020: 95.

152 Cf. Peterson, 2006: 747; Lebel, 2019.

153 Cf. Adham, 2011: esp. 236–251. On the large urban projects, cf. also Salama and Wiedmann, 2013; Scharfenort, 2014; Koch, 2014: 1127–1133; Eggeling, 2020.

154 Cf. in addition Cooke, 2014: 84–97.

ed in 2008) and followed by the *Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art* (2010).[155] In contrast to Abu Dhabi, its main regional challenger in this field, it focuses more on historical and modern Islamic artefacts and regional works that greatly cohere with its inward-looking nation-building narratives. But here too, many urban megastructures are exclusive urban enclaves built to serve branding purposes and the interests of a certain elite, rather than the broader population.

Thus, in the mid-2000s, the country had been "put on the map." Whereas it appeared more prominently in the Western press, it was portrayed significantly more positively in Asian, Middle Eastern, and African newspapers.[156] Doha strives to become a global hub with deep cultural roots balancing past and future and pushes the narrative of its successful rise from a former small fishing port and uninspiring provincial town.[157] Reference is often made to local history and nature, such as to certain desert flowers in the shape of the new National Museum and the name of the "Lusail" project, the pearl as a symbol of the past, and the Al-Bayt football arena that resembles a Bedouin tent; the city's development is presented "as a linear (...) trajectory from a modest past into a rich present and an even brighter future."[158] All this has been well branded, including widespread tourism campaigns, with the oryx as a widely-used logo and mascot. Yet, the branding has still tended to refer to individual spectacular projects than to the city as a whole. While the former emir was particularly eager to push sport issues, one of his wives and his daughters were engaged in promoting mainly the education and cultural sectors, respectively.[159] Branding particularly highlights the paternalistic leadership of the royal elite and ties urban development to the national visions and wise foresight of the ruler.[160] Even if numerous actors participate in establishing the brand, the distinction between emir's, public, and private entities is difficult to make, as in Dubai.[161] In this multitude of actors, Jérémie Molho underlines the central role played by star curators acting in a field of tension between ambitious top-down strategies to design world-class collections, on the one hand,

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155 On education and culture brands, cf. also Peterson, 2006: 747; Alraouf, 2018; Dumortier, 2014: 181; Molho, 2021; Sons, 2022: 22. Cooke, 2014: 79–84, describes the task of National Museums in the Gulf to build and promote distinct national brands.

156 Cf. King, 2008.

157 Cf. Eggeling, 2020: 96, 168–170; Molho, 2021: 461; Adham, 2011: 237, 251.

158 Eggeling, 2020: 170.

159 Cf., e.g., Windecker and Sendrowicz, 2014: 93; Salama and Wiedmann, 2013: 93.

160 Cf. Eggeling, 2020: 173, 227–228.

161 Cf. Koch, 2014: 1121–1124.

and cumbersome state bureaucracies and official restrictions on civil society, on the other.[162]

One specific field in which Qatar brands itself is sport, which is also prominently present in the branding portfolio of other Gulf states. First, promoting competitive sport has become a major activity integrated into place branding. Qatar founded the Aspire Academy in 2004 as a central institution behind its international ambitions; the Academy is one of the world's largest training centres for top national and international athletes in several disciplines.[163] It is part of the Aspire Zone, or Doha Sports City, which includes one of the world's largest indoor sport stadiums, Qatar's first major international football stadium, and the iconic, torch-shaped Aspire Tower. Similarly, Dubai Sports City, partially opened in 2011, is a multi-use complex that is set to become a high-profile venue with several stadiums and academies. In the international realm, ownership especially of prestigious football clubs and sponsorship by major national enterprises has also attracted much attention.[164] Beyond elite sport, Gulf states also endeavour to promote amateur sport, especially to cope with widespread diseases like diabetes and obesity. Not least, *Al Jazeera* has had an eminent role in promoting sport. Moreover, across the region, traditional disciplines associated with desert life, such as falconry and horse and camel racing, have been reinvigorated if not reinvented and sometimes exhibited in national museums, as were pearl diving and fishing, which in fact were once hard subsistence labour.[165] In addition, motifs like falcons, which refer to local history and nature, have been employed as important visual symbols and brand names for sporting events and facilities, especially those frequented by a Gulf public.

Even more important is the organisation of major international sport competitions that are also broadcast on TV screens to the broad masses worldwide.[166] Across the region, winning bids to host major sporting events has become particularly welcome (cf. Table 5). Forerunners of such global presence have been Bah-

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162 Cf. Molho, 2021.

163 On sports promotion in Qatar and partly in Dubai, cf. Eggeling, 2020: 120–122; Ginesta and de San Eugenio, 2014; Salama and Wiedmann, 2013: 77; Bromber and Krawietz, 2013: 193–196; Bromber, 2014: 120–124; Sons, 2022: 20–23; Windecker and Sendrowicz, 2014: 90, 94; Ibahrine, 2016.

164 For an entire list of Qatar's sponsorships, partnerships, and TV rights across all disciplines, cf. Blichfeldt Olsen, 2022.

165 Cf. Krawietz, 2014; Sons, 2022: 23; Cooke, 2014: 103–111.

166 On international sport events, cf. Eggeling, 2020: 122–125; Ginesta and de San Eugenio, 2014; Westwood, 2011; Windecker and Sendrowicz, 2014: 94. Cf. also Salama and Wiedmann, 2013: 77; Peterson, 2006: 747; Sons, 2022: 19–20, 23; Scharfenort, 2010 and 2014: 71–73, 83; Bromber, 2014; Bromber and Krawietz, 2013; Beck, 2022: 7; Hazime, 2011: 4741; Ibahrine, 2016: 105–107; Adham, 2011: 242–243.

rain and Abu Dhabi, which established world-class motor racing circuits and hosted regular Formula I Grand Prix from 2004 and 2009 onwards.[167] These events allowed them to attract more media "buzz," at least temporarily, than Dubai at that time.[168]

In Qatar, the first major sport event was the Qatar Open in tennis in 1993. In 2000, Qatar was the first Arab country to win the bid to host the Asian Games 2006. This was perhaps the most important turning point on the emirate's path to becoming an acknowledged sport hub, as it enabled it to stage its talent and reliability vis-à-vis its international partners. International championships in other disciplines followed, but the award of the FIFA World Cup for 2022 was the culmination of Qatar's national image strategy.[169] Related to this mega-event, it built a series of landmark stadiums and pushed the progress of several large urban development projects, comparable to the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. This reveals a kind of regional functional division: while Abu Dhabi focuses primarily on motor, air, and water sport of the highest calibre, Dubai and Doha are home to prime tournaments, for example in tennis, golf, and equestrian sport. Since winning the FIFA Cup, Qatar has clearly set itself apart from Dubai in its quest for speed, hypermodernity, and luxury. Similarly, Oman's more modest, but no less prominent sport activities allow it to distance itself further from its glamourous northern neighbour: cycling and sailing have become integral elements of the comprehensive Brand Oman campaign; especially water sport has been closely linked to the purposefully emphasised seafaring traditions of the nation (see below) and, in close cooperation with tourism marketing, to its natural maritime assets. With the Asia Games in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia will hold its first major athletic event in 2034, but has now submitted an application for the Olympic Winter Games and is considering doing the same for the Summer Games.

In line with overall interpretations of projects and urbanism in the Golf region, facilities like the Dubai and Doha Sports Cities and the architectures for racetracks and stadiums represent artificial sport worlds and exhibition theme parks that function as hyperreal attractions, entirely master-planned and lacking historical and temporal embedding.[170] According to Kristin Anabel Eggeling, "[R]ather than representing an existing reality, the projects in this sector help *make* the realities of which they speak, thereby *fixing* a certain interpretation of social reality."[171] Motives for such sport-related branding are very consistent with other fields

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167 Jeddah was added to the Grand Prix in 2021.

168 Cf. Govers, 2012.

169 While bids for the Summer Olympics failed, Qatar will host the Asian Games again in 2030.

170 Cf. Bromber and Krawietz, 2013; also Bromber, 2014: 123–124.

171 Eggeling, 2020: 138–139.

of nation and city branding. The multifaceted image that is communicated speaks to different audiences. Domestically, sport is used to strengthen cultural identity, social cohesion, and patriotism and to secure the power of the political system.[172] It serves as a vehicle for economic, infrastructural, and urban development and to make the country a healthy sporting nation. Top-down branding and royal patronage of the high-profile projects link the sport-state closely to the visions and positions of the regime. Stadiums, for instance, combine up-to-date technology and design with shapes, symbols, and motifs referencing local history and heritage.

In the global arena, sport is all about improving a country's image, showing international presence, and overcoming clichés of backwardness and conflict. It serves to make the small Gulf sheikhdoms, in particular, bigger than they are. Besides, it is very concretely about attracting investment and tourism to national economies; for corporations and organisations involved in sponsoring events and clubs, it can enhance their own brand value through co-branding effects.[173] It can help to bolster diplomatic partnerships, alliances, and support, especially when a state like Qatar is surrounded by hostile neighbours. This did not prevent the blockade in 2017, which was assumed to aim also at undermining the organisation of the football competition; conversely, the latter may have contributed to the lifting of the boycott in 2021, as the initiators did not want to suffer any damage to their own image. Ultimately, it is not just individual cities or nations that position themselves in and through the sport segment, but the entire Gulf region that benefits from increased awareness and reputation.[174]

But such strong self-portrayals can easily turn into their opposite and provoke strong criticism. Thus, already in the early 2010s, Bahrain suffered an image setback, when the very positive reputation it had generated in the media with Formula I was seriously damaged by the harsh persecution of protesters during the "Pearl" uprising.[175] In particular in connection with the 2022 World Cup, "sportswashing" has become an important catchword. Similar to allegations of greenwashing, this neologism points to the calculated staging of sport for proactive international reputation management, by hiding and silencing harmful policies and

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172 On diverse domestic, regional, and global ambitions and effects, cf. Eggeling, 2020: 132–139; Sons, 2022: 20–23; Bromber and Krawietz, 2013: 190; Bromber, 2014: 120–125; Windecker and Sendrowicz, 2014: 90, 103; Scharfenort, 2014: 71.

173 On this co-branding effect, cf. Ginesta and de San Eugenio, 2014: 226. Cf. also Scharfenort, 2010: 5; Ibahrine, 2016: 108–109.

174 Cf. especially Scharfenort, 2010: 6.

175 Cf. Govers, 2012: 52–56.

impacts that run counter to proclaimed objectives.[176] Accordingly, the event drew attention to social issues that appeared important in the eyes of the (Western) world public, although this viewpoint was often marked by orientalising clichés and hypocrisy. Its scandalisation clearly went beyond the politicisation of similar earlier major international sporting events.

The main criticisms were of violations of essential human and social rights and the miserable living and working conditions of the migrants who built the stadiums. Consequently, the Qatari government improved some labour rights. Strong reservations also arose about massive corruption in the process of awarding the games and the relatively fruitless attempts to promote women's football, as provided for in FIFA's award statutes. Health and environmental concerns about matches in the summer heat were countered by moving them to the cooler season and using modular constructions, combined with the idea of later altruistic donations to poorer countries.[177] Shortly before the opening of the Games, the focus turned to how the Games would be run, from the potential harassment of LGBTQ visitors to restrictions on alcohol consumption on site. Moreover, fans have questioned advertising partnerships with their clubs; and the granting of Qatari citizenship, which is otherwise almost unobtainable, to recognised international athletes in order for them to join the national team has also come in for criticism from time to time.[178] In official circles, large parts of the Qatari population, and beyond that the Arab world, this criticism was perceived as Eurocentric and Arabophobic, especially since the critics themselves were far from meeting their own standards; rather, the Games were presented above all as a reason for national and regional pride.

7.3 Branding Endeavours in Other Arab Gulf States

Bahrain, benefitting from the regional boom and Beirut's decline, has since the mid-1970s developed its brand as an offshore banking hub and, despite emerging competition from other Gulf countries, is today still one of the most important financial services centres in the Middle East. Intra-Arab tourism also became an im-

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176 On the term, cf. Skey, 2022. The notion came up in 2015 in connection with the European Games in autocratic Azerbaijan; it was used again, when Russia hosted the football cup in 2018. But many antecedents exist, such as the propagandistic use of the 1936 Olympics in the Third Reich and the 1934 and 1978 World Cups in fascist Italy and military-ruled Argentina, respectively. On the FIFA 2022 controversy, cf. Reuß, 2022; Beck, 2022; Sons, 2022: 20–21; Fruh, Archer, and Wojtowicz, 2023; Ibahrine, 2016: 113.
177 Cf. Koch, 2014: 1120; Eggeling, 2020: 135–136.
178 On this, cf. already Peterson, 2006: 747.

portant factor, mainly because of more liberal customs in proximity to Saudi Arabia. Since the early 2000s, location marketing, based on established strategies, has been a fundamental instrument to further diversify its economy and attract foreign investment.[179] Competitiveness, sustainability, and justice have been the guiding principles of Bahrain's national Vision 2030 variant. The public-private Economic Development Board conducted a successful global "Business Friendly Bahrain" advertising campaign. But the country's positive reputation was tarnished considerably following the violent suppression of the 2011 uprisings, mostly led by protesters from the less affluent Shi'i population majority. This also revealed the limited identification potential of the brand for this part of the population. As a result, international conferences moved to Doha, the annual Bahrain Grand Prix was cancelled, new foreign investment was postponed, and tourists stayed away.

In Bahrain, too, large-scale urban projects were to become image carriers and point the way to the country's future.[180] Among the first to emulate Dubai, it developed two major artificial island projects. The reconstruction of Manama's old town, which had been increasingly abandoned by its established population because of its dilapidated infrastructure, is also a means of city marketing. The redesigns were each placed under a motto, for example as a "Pearling Trail," which refers to the historically important pearl fishing and trade and serves to positively portray the ruling dynasty. Decisions are usually made without transparency by the most influential members of the royal court. Thus, the historical souk was demolished and replaced by a more attractive shopping centre, which, however, led to segregation processes between different income groups.

In contrast, Kuwait, probably long one of the most economically advanced Gulf states, seems to be the region's least-studied case of branding – perhaps due to the heavy setback it experienced during the 1990/91 Gulf War that drew attention to other, ostensibly more pressing issues. Accordingly, in this volume, two colleagues investigate the emirate, focusing on issues that also concern the wider Arab Gulf area. In line with the explanations in the previous chapter, Laura Hindelang demonstrates the long-lasting adoption of stamps with deliberate designs for nation branding in Kuwait and other Gulf countries. This is based on her book, in which she studied the aesthetic staging of petro-modernity in Kuwait's urban and national visual culture since the 1950s. In contrast to arguments that city branding follows the establishment of a basic infrastructure, already in times of high modernity, visual representations of the city advanced development projects

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179 Cf. Moock, 2012.
180 Cf. Margraff, 2019. Cf. also Margraff and Scharfenort, 2017.

and sometimes remained images only.[181] With the takeover of the postal system, the Kuwaiti government issued its own postage stamps that manifested a new visual presence and challenged the national oil company's predominance in branding the state and the city. The first set of stamps depicted sites of architectural and infrastructural development that were considered the most attractive for the country's self-promotion. This contrasted with stamps from other Arab countries at that time, which still corresponded to the colonial gaze. In his text-cum-photo essay, Roman Stadnicki continues in this line under postmodern post-oil conditions in Kuwait and other Gulf states, where billboards dominate the urban scene with images that tend to become independent of the projects they advertise – and that even survive when projects have long been abandoned.

Saudi Arabia and its rulers already have a brand core identity as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, which attract a huge number of pilgrims every year. In addition, the country is certainly the best-known oil exporter and home to the company with MENA's highest brand value (Table 1). In contrast to its conservative and illiberal image, the Kingdom is now increasingly seeking to distinguish itself through economic diversification, socio-cultural modernisation, and political moderation. Already the foundation of the KAUST symbolised the government's technology- and environment-related ambitions.[182] The programmatic Saudi Vision 2030, announced in 2016, is a central branding tool to convey the image of a progressing and modern nation. Economically, the programme anticipates a boost in investment and diversification in the long run, but also includes important promises of transparency, consultation, and social freedoms, which should help to rebrand the perception of the country.[183] A special target is to promote the country "as a new frontier for world-class tourism"[184] by creating large-scale entertainment and theme parks, upscale vacation resorts, heritage areas (including the promotion of pre-Islamic sites), and cultural institutions. This involves the use of cutting-edge social media and a "Gateway" travel programme for bloggers and influencers. Mega-events have started to play an important role: this includes well-marketed cultural activities arranged by the specially established General Entertainment Authority, as well as sport championships, which again provoked allegations of green- and sportswashing.[185]

Among cities, only Jeddah long benefited from its image as a relatively open and liberal place with centuries-old trade connections; "Jeddah is Different"

181 Cf. Hindelang, 2022.

182 For Saudi Arabia's green policies, cf. Zumbrägel, 2020: esp. 167–221.

183 Cf., also in the following, Klingmann, 2021: 41–44.

184 Klingmann, 2021: 42.

185 Cf. Tagesschau, 2022c and 2023.

(*Ğidda ġayr*) has been the motto of its annual summer festival.[186] Although in principle Mecca does not need an ambitious active branding to attract people, since the 2000s it has embarked on an urban renovation programme to rise from a religious destination to a model world city for development and modernisation.[187] In fact, the construction of new skyscrapers, including the hyperreal *Abraj Al Bait* Clock Tower, the fourth-tallest building in the world and simulating London's Big Ben, shopping malls, and accommodation and leisure facilities in immediate proximity to the Great Mosque, has in the eyes of national critics obscured the city's holy centre, instigated feelings of alienation, and forced the relocation of many local residents. The 2030 Vision also encompassed a programme for improving Saudi cities' national and international attractiveness and provides a framework for sustainable, future-oriented urban development meeting international standards.[188] A special focus of urban and architectural branding strategies is on Riyadh, in the attempt to make the national capital, reputed for its tediousness and car-orientation, a globally recognised city. To create a positive image directed at international travellers and an affluent local clientele, dimensions such as culture, leisure, lifestyle, public transport, and greening drew special attention. However, participatory and inclusive elements are still missing in the urban development and branding strategies. Similar to megaprojects in other MENA countries, the high dependency on fluctuating oil revenues and the imponderabilities of global crises challenge the extent to which these widely communicated dreams will be realised one day.

The programme of six New Economic Cities announced in 2005 has become perhaps the most important rebranding asset. In fact, by now, only King Abdullah Economic City, established as a logistical and manufacturing platform, has made some still-limited progress. Most branding initiatives for it have been undertaken by local agencies and developers instead of by national authorities.[189] In the city's initial development phase, branding focused on economic and social progress, urban development, attachment to the Saudi Vision, and national pride; different identities were used to target prospective domestic and international clients. However, the weak performance and low transparency in the city's development endangered its overall public image. As an exemplary case, its built urban form and physical fabric developed in mutual interaction with place branding. In 2014, a management change stabilised the megaproject, a new visual identity was developed, and branding turned to a more global audience, underlining luxu-

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186 Cf. Shoaib, 2017: 56–57.

187 On Mecca, cf. Al Amoudy, 2014; Bsheer, 2010.

188 Cf. Klingmann, 2021.

189 Cf. Shoaib, 2017. Cf. also Shoaib and Keivani, 2015.

ry, affluence, and exclusivity. Media increasingly took notice of the project, and the number of articles in Arab newspapers steadily grew.

Probably the most acclaimed project in the international media is NEOM, presented for the first time in 2017 as part of the Saudi Vision. This vast complex, fully automated and powered exclusively by renewable energies, envisages a series of urban projects, including an industrial city and a luxury seaside resort. In particular, the 170-kilometre-long, car-free linear city The Line has become prominent since its announcement in early 2021; the Trojena skiing resort, declared 100 % sustainable, too, appeared in the media together with the award of the Asian Winter Games in 2029. NEOM's branding has served to position the to-be-built city within the global competition of places, make it a global hub for trade, innovation, and knowledge, and attract the desired investors and creative class of "dreamers." The vision behind it is giving birth to a new kind of a "PowerPoint city" that for now exists only virtually; accordingly, the question arises whether the object of its marketing is actually the city, or rather a start-up, the country, or its initiator's personal dream.[190]

Politically, the Kingdom endeavours to position itself in competition especially with other Gulf countries that are more active on the diplomatic front; economically, since it penetrates in sectors like tourism and entertainment, it is in competitive rivalry with them.[191] International events, such as sport meetings, political summits, and environmental conferences started to be used to politically brand the country and its current leadership. A large number of environmental and research institutions have been named after the late and the current kings and support their personal image and power legitimacy.[192] Especially the de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud is a master of self-marketing. It was he who, a year before his nomination as a Crown Prince in 2017, launched the Vision 2030, which, at both the domestic and the international level, branded him as a forward-thinking ruler; he pushed several policies related to greater social and cultural liberties, mostly for economic motives, while at the same time he is eager to maintain his authoritarian rule. He also prominently announced most of the country's new urban megaprojects.[193] As Hend Aly has already shown in her recent article[194] and details further in this volume, NEOM was above all an instrument of his personal branding. After his star-like rise as a young, progressive leader, his international image experienced a series of setbacks, due to his role in the

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190 Cf. Aly, 2019. Cf. also Farag, 2019.

191 Cf. Ulrichsen, 2021.

192 Cf. Zumbrägel, 2020: 204–205.

193 Cf. Klingmann, 2021: 41, 43.

194 Cf. again Aly, 2019.

Yemen war, the Qatar blockade, and the murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. He now attempts to position himself and his country as the inevitable pivot in regional policy at the GCC level and to recast himself from an impulsive, destabilising leader into a moderate and responsible statesman and Saudi Arabia's diplomatic face.[195]

Compared with Dubai, two decades ago, Oman was still virtually unknown to the wider world.[196] Yet, preceding Qatar, the Sultanate had already acquired a reputation as a mediator in regional conflicts that is on good terms with all sides.[197] In the immediate vicinity of the UAE, Oman is under its considerable economic, politic, and social influence, but insists on its own independent, more moderate development path. It was not until the mid-1990s that Oman, based on its Vision 2020, began to diversify its economy and to orient itself towards international markets. Since then, it has made great efforts, in particular, to attract high-end tourism and to establish itself as a trade and transport hub in global networks. Gradually, large infrastructure and urban development projects were initiated. In particular, often with the help of project developers from other Gulf states, it began to build "Integrated Tourism Complexes" (ITCs) that include residential, shopping, and sometimes educational and medical facilities. The growing similarity of such resorts has required huge marketing efforts, which also serve to put Oman on the world map as a tourist destination and a place to live. At the same time, urban space has been increasingly festivalised. For trade development, Oman established a series of big ports, rivalling other Gulf cities, and combined them with adjacent free economic and industrial zones.

Its current tourism branding wants to contrast the Sultanate to its bustling neighbour as a quiet destination with deep historical roots and a varied landscape. On the brink of the 2010s, the tourism slogan changed from Oman as "The Essence of Arabia," with a certain Orientalist undertone, to "Beauty has an address," marking the difference from the other nearby sheikhdoms. As a brand ambassador, the national carrier's logo then shifted from the traditional dagger to a symbol reminiscent of frankincense smoke, and the airline's co-branding campaign pointed to Oman as "The Soul of Arabia" (cf. above). The Oman Brand Management Unit was established to promote products of Omani origin and a trademark logo was introduced, which was primarily for domestic use; later, a "Brand Oman" campaign and logo served to promote Oman internationally. However, its umbrella character pertaining to diverse sectors like tourism, business, IT, and education seemed to be

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195 Cf. Ulrichsen, 2021.

196 On Oman's branding, cf. in the following especially Wippel, 2014 and 2016a; for a more recent and encompassing work, Klinger, 2022: esp. 362–412.

197 Cf., e. g., Kechichian, 1995.

confusing and losing focus.[198] Moreover, many interviewed local citizens either did not know or did not care about these branding efforts.[199] In his paper following later in this volume, Thibaut Klinger elaborates in more detail nation branding's interaction with spatial planning and its contributions to shape national identity and to legitimate the ruler in power.

Branding is a key tool in the redevelopment of the Omani capital, as well. Muscat presented itself as the Arab "cultural capital" (2006) and "tourism capital" (2012). Urban revitalisation and reconstruction in the metropolitan area are geared towards skilful marketing to increase recognisability and to position the city in local, regional, and international contexts.[200] In addition to attracting attention, investment, tourists, and a highly skilled workforce, urban development projects, which are usually built in the most attractive and central urban locations, aim to impress the local population, foster national unity, and, via personal branding, secure the power position of the caring Sultan Qaboos (r. 1970–2020). In the process, the attempt to develop Muttrah, one of the two old city centres, into the most important tourist destination of the capital agglomeration is a beacon within the country's marketing strategy and has resulted in far-reaching social, functional, and spatial restructuring, including conversion of the country's former main port into an attractive world-class waterfront. Old Muscat, which has largely lost its importance as the seat of government, has been rebranded as a cultural flagship, but without urban life away from the tourist crowds. To cater for mass cruise tourism, the Muttrah Souk was visually "beautified" for the tourist gaze and branded with stories from the Arabian Nights as an authentic Oriental market in a fairy tale country.[201] This fits well with Oman's self-Orientalisation when it situates itself within a Western-centric discourse of tourism promotion. National history and culture are thereby transformed into assets to be traded on the international tourism market and at the same time authorise the regime's understanding of the past and vision of the future.[202] Cultural and climatic features make the southern region of Dhofar another tourist attraction.[203] Instead of a specific local marketing campaign, Dhofar's image, which refers to the area's fertility and its frankincense tradition, is part of the national branding and immediately contributes to it. Local ITCs are advertised mainly by their seclusion and the attractive combination of

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198 Cf. also Alzadjali, 2010; Klinger, 2022: 369–370.
199 Cf. Al Balushi, Butt, and Al Siyabi, 2013.
200 Cf. in comparison with Manama, Margraff and Scharfenort, 2017; Margraff, 2019.
201 Cf. Gutberlet, 2019.
202 Cf. Feighery, 2012, discussing a tourism promotional film.
203 On Salalah, cf. also Wippel, 2015 and 2016b: 88–96.

new and old; their eclectic style symbolises an invented hybrid "Orient," and their marketing presents them as an "effectively enacted utopia."[204]

Nation branding includes issues of regional orientation and belonging. Internally, this serves self-identification and nation-building; externally, the Sultanate tries to position itself as a site for production, trade, and tourism. In connection with, e.g., the new port of Salalah that is to become a central hub of world trade, and to link past and present, reference is made to historical glory and prosperity and continuous or renewed traditions and know-how, to deeply entrenched openness to the outside world, and to inherited cosmopolitanism based on Oman's trans-oceanic empire and trade connections.[205] This includes its self-image as an experienced seafaring nation. Therefore, national narratives repeatedly allude to the legend of Sindbad as a son of the country who sailed the seas of the world at a very early time. This has been enacted with symbolic and highly mediatised events, such as rebuilding traditional vessels and sending them on expeditions along the maritime Silk Road to Venice or Singapore, which aimed to reflect the early basis for today's orientation towards tourism and trade. The wooden *dhow* is a ubiquitous motif embodied by countless logos, pictures, and monuments (cf. the cover of this book and my precursory explanation). The country's historic role as an *entrepôt* for trade and its strategic location are repeatedly emphasised, which translates into a geoeconomically favourable position at the crossroads between Asia and Africa and East and West and as a gateway to the Indian Ocean. Accordingly, its nation branding positions the country less at the periphery of the conflict-driven Arab world than in the centre of a transregional and transcultural maritime region, which is simultaneously located at geographical, temporal, and cultural interfaces.

Ports in general are objects of branding. A study of the website branding of the largest seaports in the Middle East and along the Arabian Peninsula showed that Jebel Ali in Dubai, the most important transhipment hub in the region and long among the Top Ten by throughput worldwide, was the only one that had developed a distinctive brand personality.[206] In Oman, the establishment of the Port of Sohar was accompanied by an aggressive branding campaign, even up to placing promotional material in front of the Jebel Ali port entrance to entice transhippers. For countries such as Qatar, Oman, and the UAE, infrastructure branding was part of the enhancement of their country's images. In ports, "competence" was generally the most frequently used semantic field, pointing to technical superiority, ef-

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204 Cf. Wippel, 2014: 107, following Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopias."
205 Cf. especially Wippel, 2013 and 2017.
206 Cf. Rutter et al., 2018.

ficiency, and safety. The similarity of images displayed by ports within the same country indicates important country-of-origin effects. Thus, the Omani ports of Salalah and Sohar both made strong connections to the national sovereign.

8 Place Branding in the Middle East and its Entanglements

The current wave of place branding has also spread beyond the Arab Gulf countries to other parts of the MENA region. Accordingly, this subsection tours across the Middle East, from Iran at the opposite side of the Persian Gulf to the Levant and Turkey. This is followed by another subsection on Northern Africa, from Egypt to Morocco at the Western end of the Arab world.

8.1 Timid Branding Efforts in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Across the Persian Gulf, branding in Iran has been much less investigated. Since its establishment, the Islamic Republic had an overwhelmingly negative reputation as a "rogue state" in large parts of the world. Obviously, in the political and religious realm, leading figures like Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (r. 1979–1989) have been well-known, controversial personal brands. However, as in many authoritarian regimes, cultural diplomacy has been used to soften tensions over the last decades.

Through its widely acclaimed cinema, poetry, theatre, and fine arts, Iran has been able to maintain an image as a distinct cultural hotspot. Although these cultural activities are often dissident, they support the country's image, especially compared with the Arabic Gulf states, which have not been culturally active for nearly as long. Iranian cinema, in particular, including films from the diaspora, after benefitting from some relief from censorship, have gained international recognition and obtained numerous awards in international film festivals.[207] Vice versa, these films also assisted these festivals to develop a distinct brand. The *Berlinale*, in particular, used its focus on Iranian cinema since the mid-2000s to co-brand itself as a politically engaged festival in a city, where it was founded in the early 1950s as a showcase of the "free world" and that also helped to stage non-conformist movies and to highlight the personal brands of persecuted filmmak-

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207 Cf., for instance, Strohmaier, 2019.

ers.[208] As already mentioned, Dubai has developed as a global centre for showing and selling Iranian artwork and a meeting point for Iranian artists from home and exile, among themselves and with their critics and buyers.[209] Domestically, Tehran's art scene, in particular, has developed, too, and has drawn increasing interest from foreign observers.[210] This includes the many murals on buildings that are a feature of the capital's cityscape. Such public art installations, either tolerated or commissioned by the municipality, can be seen as part of a branding-like campaign. Modern public murals, billboards, and tile works not only serve as identity markers for the country's own citizenry, but also aim to counter the negative outside image of the country.[211]

Although a comprehensive strategy of nation branding has not been pursued yet by Iranian authorities, place branding nevertheless has occurred in tourism and other sectors. In an application-oriented approach, some authors thought about how to improve the positioning of big entertainment, residential, and sport projects in the country, particularly by defining a brand that respects Persian cultural and historical identity.[212] In a phase of relative détente in the 2000s, big cities in Iran also started profiling themselves and made attempts to develop into attractive and liveable places.[213] In the self-images promoted in their masterplans and on their websites, religious, cultural, historical, and natural dimensions featured more prominently than in comparable cities in Germany or China. A focus on future economic development, smartness, and knowledge-orientation, as well as the most professional branding strategies, appeared mainly in cities that had already experienced some economic progress. Tehran showed the strongest global ambitions as a "world-class" city, while Mashhad, Isfahan, Tabriz, and Qom were the most eager to demonstrate the links between past, present, and future. Yet, this did not fully overlap with the set of cities that stood the most firmly behind their policy choices and were therefore accredited the highest brand credibility.

For a few years now, the city of Qom, which is widely reputed the religious capital of Iran and had a key role in the Iranian Revolution, has experienced a

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208 Cf. Ullmann, 2020. In 2021, Viktor Ullman successfully defended his (as yet unpublished) PhD thesis "Staging Iranian Cinema at the Berlinale" at the *Freie Universität Berlin.* Compare also his presentation "Buddy-Bears: Discursive Branding of Iranian Cinema at the Berlinale" at the *Deutsche Orientalistentag* 2017 in Jena.

209 Cf. again Moghadam, 2018 and 2021.

210 Cf., e.g., newspaper articles such as Krüger, 2017.

211 Cf. Walter, 2016.

212 See, e.g., Divandari, Ekhlassi, and Rahmani, 2014.

213 Cf. Noori and De Jong, 2018.

sweeping rebranding.[214] Based on its well-known Islamic architecture, it wants to boost its tourism profile, but also intends to become a smart and green city. Compared with other big Iranian cities, it scored high in displaying an overarching strategy.[215] While municipal authorities aspired to conserve the city's historical image, recent trends in urban formation and policy made Qom enter the path of "Islamicised capitalism," neoliberal urbanism, and middle-class consumerism. Shopping centres, luxurious shops selling international brands, and leisure facilities have popped up across the city. Fashionable neoclassicist villas present a postmodern architecture of Western origin. Many of the mushrooming buildings in the better parts of Qom belong to religious seminaries competing to have the most spectacular and luxurious ones. The prosperity of the richer neighbourhoods contrasts with the disregard for poorer parts of the city, and social protests have erupted time and again. In this volume, Kamaluddin Duaei demonstrates the role of the new social media and of Qom's closeness to Tehran, making it a kind of wider suburb in its factual rebranding.

8.2 Branding the Levant between High-Tech, Pinkwashing, and the Conditions of War

In the Levant, beyond being a nation rich in historical and religious places, Israel, since its founding, has endeavoured to position itself as an innovative high-tech superpower and to transform this into a strong nation brand. It developed from a small-country model in agricultural and irrigation technologies resisting a naturally and politically inhospitable environment into one of the most important centres for information and security technology and a pioneer in areas such as medical technology, biotechnology, and nanotechnology, and today not least in artificial intelligence.[216] Beyond this reputation as a "start-up nation" and "Silicon Wadi," since the early 2000s, Israel also recognised the need to rebrand the country and overcome detrimental images that trigger antisemitism, anti-Israeli rhetoric, and divestment campaigns. For this, led by the Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs (with the Jewish diaspora playing an essential role as brand ambassadors), the government invested in *hasbara*, approximately "soft power," to counter the negative perceptions and to discredit sceptics of Israeli pol-

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214 On Qom, cf. Duaei, 2019.

215 Cf. Noori and De Jong, 2018: 10–14.

216 From a political economics perspective, cf., e.g., Hofmann, 2020.

icy.[217] As part of this operation, US supporters, such as the Brand Israel group, launched initiatives to turn existing brand awareness into a more controlled, positive direction of a sympathetic nation and multicultural melting pot.[218]

Hence, much of the nation's branding has been done in large part to conceal controversial dimensions of the Israeli state. Culture ranked high in these endeavours, including promoting Israeli writers and artists abroad and inviting foreign celebrities to tour Israel. First, what Rhys Crilley and Ilan Manor call "un-nation branding," promotion, e.g. as a destination, has avoided (too much) reference to the nation state, but has represented Israel through its regions and cities, such as Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Vice versa, cities obviated being associated with the state of Israel in their branding.[219] Second, a particular strategy was to stage Israel as liberal and open-minded towards gay and LGBTQ life and rights.[220] Tel Aviv, in particular, is presented as a hotspot for leisure, a meeting point of the youth of the world and in particular for the larger LGBTQ community. The pride festivities in the "Gay Capital of the Middle East" soon attracted a lot of visitors, many of whom returned to their home countries with positive impressions, including the "safety" provided by Israeli forces at such events. At the same time, disseminated images of Western modernity and progressivity contrast with exoticising Orientalist ones and make Tel Aviv a symbol of the "Progressive Orient." Yet, soon critical voices, including opposition from the queer community itself, accused this branding of "pinkwashing" and inherent homonational aspects.[221] The festivalisation of basically political concerns was opposed as commodifying and consumeristic. In particular, it is criticised that the positive, gay-friendly image is exploited by Israeli foreign policy to divert attention from the continuing occupation of Palestinian territory and violations of Palestinians' human rights. White gay people feel misused by this brand strategy for anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments, while LGBTQ people from other ethnic backgrounds still face many problems in and from Israeli politics and society. Simultaneously, this was also an opportunity for a local *Mizrahi* ("Oriental" Jewish) gay culture to develop.

In a similar direction, accusations of greenwashing are directed, e.g. against a large-scale wind turbine farm project on the Golan Heights.[222] The project is part of a decades-long campaign by the Israeli state to boost its image as green and eco-

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217 Cf. Dart, 2016: 1406–1408.

218 Cf. Popper, 2005; Cravatts, 2007.

219 Cf. Crilley and Manor, 2020.

220 Cf. Kama and Ram, 2020; Hartal and Sasson-Levy, 2021.

221 Cf. also Schulman, 2011; Ritchie, 2015; Dart, 2016: 1408. Moreover, see Skey, 2022: 4 on the concept, compared with greenwashing and sportswashing.

222 Cf. Dajani, 2020.

friendly. This not only contrasts with its enormously high per capita ecological foot-print; the country's image is further tarnished by environmental rights violations in the occupied territories. Considered part of Israel's green colonialism, the project stands against the interests of the local inhabitants. Finally, small sport events were used to project a positive image of the country.[223] Yet, critical Palestinians and their European supporters denounced this and asked for the, at least symbolic, exclusion of Israel from international institutions and tournaments.

In contrast to Israel, it has proved difficult for the Palestinian community to keep up by pursuing an equally positive image building. Its situation is perhaps best characterised as being "[t]he newest country probably with the oldest nation brand in the world."[224] Even if cities such as Bethlehem and Jerusalem were important pilgrimage destinations for centuries, Palestine suffers from having an undefined state brand. Developing a nation brand has not really been a priority since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1993, except for a few initiatives to brand exports. Accordingly, two papers discuss fundamental questions of the development of a successful image via nation branding and public diplomacy on a theoretical basis. In general, it is proposed to integrate a wide spectrum of stakeholders to ensure that all critical building factors are being considered.[225] It is suggested, for example, that governmental bodies involve Palestinian writers who could market the story of the Palestinian refugees better and more convincingly than the official story delivered by diplomats.[226] In contrast, reference to history and religion is considered too sensitive, as it collides with the Israeli narrative of having been the first in previously empty lands. To counter the image of victimhood and statelessness, Dalal Iriqat proposes to concentrate on the human capital of its heroes, from iconic political leaders such as Yasser Arafat to contemporary artists, poets, singers, and musicians; other identifiable unique selling points could be the high number of world heritage sites and cultural aspects, from traditional dress[227] to cuisine and hospitality.

The capital of Israel's northern neighbour has an old reputation as the "Paris of the (Middle) East," while the country had the byname of the "Switzerland of the

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223 For a soft power perspective, cf. Dart, 2016.

224 Abdalmajid and Papasolomou, 2018: 189.

225 Cf. Abdalmajid and Papasolomou, 2018.

226 Cf. Iriqat, 2019.

227 In line with this, Nagla Abed, who presented a paper "Palestinian Women: Preservers of History, Culture and Identity through Tatreez [i.e. embroidery]" at the 27th International DAVO Congress 2021 in Osnabrück, originally proposed an (unfortunately not realised) article for this volume on "No Nation Branding for Palestine: Changing the Image of Palestine through Women-led Social Media Initiatives to Preserve Cultural Heritage."

Middle East," stemming from its banking and entertainment industries, art scene, tourism potential, and variegated landscapes.[228] This image already singled Lebanon out as an exceptional Arab nation, but was repeatedly tarnished by periods of war and unrest. With its immense downtown reconstruction project after the civil war (1975–1990), Beirut aspired to modernise and develop into a "Hongkong on the Mediterranean."[229] The city recovered, was in large parts remodelled according to neoliberal urban planning, and has become another paradigmatic case of post-modern urbanism. While its cosmopolitanism and Westernisation are promoted by entrepreneurs and the state to attract business and, in particular, tourism, this contrasts with the image of sectarian strife that still marks post-war Beirut, as it is publicly reflected in the personality cult around sectarian leaders and in public rallies that brandish portraits of martyrs, flags, and insignia as emblems of collective identities. In the 2000s, the Ministry of Tourism made great efforts to rebrand the country and to encourage Arabs and Westerners to fly in for visits. New large urban development projects were widely advertised with slogans such as "Beirut is back on the map" or "The World is Beiruting Again" (Fig. 3a).

Fig. 3: (Re-)branding Beirut
Sources: Photo Ghassan Moussawi, 2010; Rasool, 2021. The first image is courtesy of the photographer.

Above all, over the past century, Beirut acquired a reputation as the nightlife destination of choice in the region – from the era of the grand ball during the Mandate period to informal underground nightlife during the civil war.[230] Nowadays, Beirut has regained this former reputation for lifestyle and entertainment.[231] This concurs with its widely perceived image as a liberal and tolerant place,

228 Cf. Seidman, 2012; Abdallah, 2015.
229 On this label, cf. Schmid, 2001.
230 Cf. Buchakjian, 2015.
231 Cf. Abdallah, 2015.

where consuming alcohol poses no problems, gambling is allowed, women can move and dress freely, men find their – also sexual – pleasures, and people of all classes, beliefs, and countries can meet and mix. This has resulted in another label, that of "Sin City," especially in the eyes and minds of many Arabs. Photography plays a major role in the global image of Beirutas the capital of nightlife fun. It constitutes a kind of grassroots place branding, which is also an implicit resource for state authorities seeking to promote the "Brand Beirut." Decadent parties became the pride of the city and a showcase for the whole country. Certain quarters such as Hamra, in particular, benefit from a collective representation as especially secular and diverse, catering to the various needs of its visitors.[232] The assumed geopolitical exceptionality in the Middle East, which is part of the original national myth, is thereby paralleled by similarly conveyed images of differentiation inside Lebanon and within the capital of modern and globalised vs. conservative and communitarian places. Inherent in these narratives is a normative claim that these progressive territories and places should serve as a model for other parts of the region, nation, or city. Certain quarters emerged as new hotspots of alcohol consumption with a reputation for fashionable brands of liquor and spirits. [233] In this volume, Marie Bonte discusses alcohol branding and how it becomes connected with growing demands for more liberties under still sectarian religious law.

In particular, the city experienced a "queering" of its exceptionalism. It acquired a reputation as a place and "safe haven" where the LGBTQ communities and visitors from East and West can freely meet and party, similar to Tel Aviv, less than 250 kilometres to the south, but barred by an impermeable border.[234] Academia, too, has started to critically analyse the complexities and incongruities of these ascriptions, the gaps between the brand and lived realities, on the one hand, and inherent Orientalisms, on the other. Nightlife in general, and queer life in particular, are characterised by many exclusive moments, mainly with regard to possibilities of access, based on income, race, gender, and nationality, which the inclusive branding avoids mentioning. Ghassan Moussawi interprets his work on "Fractal Orientalism" further in the direction of branding distinctiveness at various spatial scales in his chapter of this book. The current multiple crises of economic collapse, political unrest, covid pandemic, and the mega-explosion in the harbour make it difficult to maintain Beirut's polished image; generally speaking, Gregory Buchakjian considers the rise and fall of Beirut as a nightlife

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232 Cf. Seidman, 2012; Abdallah, 2015: 9.
233 Cf. Bonte, 2016.
234 Cf. Bonte, 2013; Moussawi, 2013, 2018, and 2019.

destination a paradigm for the failed state.[235] Consequently, in 2021, the (Maronite) tourism minister launched a new promotional campaign "I love you in your madness" (English version: "A crazy love"), alluding to the recent turbulences as well as to the country's exceptionalism (Fig. 3b). The "bold" slogan to be carried into the world by the national airline and social media instantly triggered criticism, especially from the (Sunni) prime minister, for turning instability into a reason for pride.[236]

Other countries in this part of the Middle East, for example Syria and Iraq, currently have much bigger problems branding themselves positively. Correspondingly, few studies consider branding issues in these countries. As mentioned above, despite the ongoing war, Syria has continued to sell itself in an outdated way as a tourist destination. In the late 2000s, Damascus was characterised by a mix of frozen socialist appearance (from its architecture to the ubiquitous slogans) and a "new architectural philosophy" that reflected the economic opening and the atmosphere of new beginnings; this was mirrored in newly opened hotels, shopping malls, and cultural institutions – the image of the "Beirutisation" of the capital was certainly a welcome side effect that found its way also into Western newspapers.[237] The introduction of the Dubai model in Damascus, manifested in (a limited number of) high-end residential, commercial, and office projects – cancelled or put on hold soon after the outbreak of war in 2011 – served as a modernisation narrative for private interests. This policy resulted from a "combination of the local authorities' need for a 'quick fix' to solve multiple internal urban issues, the Syrian state's desire to attract new investments and the investment strategies (mainly) from big Gulf property developers."[238]

Important changes also happened in the brandscape of consumer products, imported or manufactured under licence (notably fashion, food, health and beauty products, technical items), since the country's cautious *infitāḥ* in the 1990.[239] Simultaneously, this contributed to the transformation of the urban landscape, from the mushrooming large advertising posters to the emergence of new distribution cen-

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235 Personal communication. Last but not least, this accumulation of adverse circumstances has prevented two scholars who had already agreed to participate in this edited volume from completing their contributions, one by Gregory Buchakjian on "The Rise and Fall of Beirut as Nightlife Destination: Paradigm for a Failed State," the other by Sally Zakhia, "Territorial Branding and Local Development in Ehden, Lebanon: An Economic Factor Facing the 2020 Crisis in Rural Areas," on efforts to brand smaller communities in the countryside.

236 Cf., e. g., Sheikh Moussa, 2021; Rasool, 2021. The slogan is taken from a song by the star singer Fairuz, another component of the national brand.

237 Cf. Nüsse, 2008; Vignal, 2014.

238 Vignal, 2014: 259.

239 Cf. Vignal, 2006.

tres and consumption-related places, like shopping centres, boutiques, Internet cafés, and trendy bistros. At the same time, Syria and Jordan alike rediscovered and rebranded their urban heritage, which contests and competes with hitherto dominant Western-centric (and nationalist) imaginations of local history, relating to Antiquity, the biblical Levant, and colonial nostalgia (as well as ideas of the early Golden Age of Islam).[240] This resulted in a restoration and building boom in Damascus as a central locus of Arab-Levantine heritage, which was reappropriated by an urban bourgeoisie that the socialist regime had pushed aside. Since King Abdullah's accession to the Jordanian throne in 1999, downtown Amman, reflecting a more recent Levantine modernity, was reconceived as an attractive traditional Arab city. This process included a reappraisal of the Ottoman heritage, often left out of previous historical narratives, and also catered to the increasing number of tourists and investors from the Arab Gulf countries and their growing interest in regional history. In contrast, the huge refugee camps that appeared in recent years experienced their own strategic brand placements from donor states and organisations, as Melissa Gatter demonstrates in her contribution to this book.

Despite enduring war and crises, people endeavour to change the brand of their respective cities. For instance, in Mosul, until 2017 the capital of the IS in Iraq, the local "Green Mosul" initiative has been trying to give the city a more favourable image, albeit large parts are still in ruins.[241] The quasi-state of Iraqi Kurdistan wants to broadcast to the wider world an image of relative peace, stability, and progress in turbulent surroundings, notably to attract foreign investment. Its capital Erbil, in particular, has rapidly expanded in the last two decades. Building on a prosperous and cosmopolitan past and emulating Dubai's urban role model to become a "new Dubai," it wants to be present in the world's mind as a booming and attractive metropolis.[242] Mushrooming shopping malls became the material symbols of neoliberal transformation, socioeconomic progress, successful integration in the global economic system, and the overcoming of past oppression. Many other large urban development projects were started, including the spread of skyscrapers and gated communities. Yet, falling oil prices and the war with IS brutally halted the economic boom in 2014, and many development projects have been abandoned.

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240 Cf. Jacobs, 2010.
241 Cf. Musharbash, 2021.
242 Cf. Sama, 2015; Boissière and Morvan, 2019; Champigny, 2020.

8.3 Branding Turkey between Past and Present, East and West

North of the Levant, in Turkey, branding has become a widespread practice in the production and tourism sectors. This serves to promote the many well-known holdings, which are also expanding beyond national borders, and, vice versa, to lure international investors as well as foreign travellers, who arrived in rapidly growing numbers particularly since the late 1990s. In the meantime, Turkey has been among the Top Ten destinations in the world and has become by far the most frequently visited MENA country (cf. Table 6), even if growth in this sector was temporarily stalled by several geopolitical incidents and the recent health crisis.

Table 6: MENA top tourism destinations

Ranks	Country	International tourist arrivals (2019)
Global 6; Europe 4	Turkey	51.2 million
Middle East* 1	Saudi Arabia	17.5 million
Middle East* 2	UAE	16.7 million
Africa 1; Middle East 3*	Egypt	13.0 million
Africa 2	Morocco	12.9 million
Africa 4	Tunisia	9.4 million
Global rank	**City**	**Arrivals (2018)**
7	Dubai	15.9 million
10	Istanbul	13.4 million
12	Antalya	12.4 million
21	Mecca	9.6 million
24	Medina	8.6 million
43	Cairo	5.8 million

* UNWTO "Middle East" definition without Turkey.
Differing methodologies make it difficult to compare country and city figures.

Nation branding is not a practice as new as most of the literature supposes and is linked not only to postmodern capitalist development emanating from the global West, as Philip Geisler demonstrates in his chapter on architectural "imperial branding." Today, as the successor state of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey can avail itself of an ample foundation for historical nation branding. Birgit Krawietz shows how a central symbol of Ottoman times, the tulip, has been integrated as a history-laden emblem into contemporary nation branding and destination marketing. This simultaneously alludes to the fact that place branding is sometimes multi-

scalar, using symbols that refer to nations, cities, and specific places within cities simultaneously.

In geographical and cultural terms, Turkey suffered repeatedly from an image of being situated between East and West.[243] After the Empire's disintegration, the young Turkish Republic pursued an ambitious Westernisation programme lured by the Western world's perceived progressiveness and modernity in contrast with the negative view of the (lost) Arab world as backward and untrustworthy. Since the 1990s, Turkish political and economic elites have tried to transform this double liminal situation into an attractive asset in foreign policy, trade and investment promotion,[244] and cultural diplomacy. This started with positioning Turkey as a "Eurasian" state, underpinning its orientation towards the post-Soviet Turkic Republics in the early 1990s, and continued later with its efforts for EU accession and more recently with its self-labelling as "Afro-Eurasian" in its quest to conquer African markets. In the aftermath of 9/11 and of debates on the "clash of civilisations," Turkey represented the Eastern (and Spain the Western) pillar in the UN-sponsored Alliance of Civilisations.[245]

Especially under the governments led by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002, when neoliberal economic policies married political authoritarianism, nation branding has become an essential governance tool. The party's Political Academy prepares its trainees to take an explicit brand approach to Turkey and to pay attention to improving its various international rankings.[246] A central aim is to spur economic growth and to attract international investment by emphasising political stability in difficult regional environments. Its dual belonging allowed Turkey to speak to different audiences with different economic and political agendas.[247] Directed at its Western allies, officials presented Turkey as committed to Western norms and standards and working towards peaceful conflict solutions; they sponsored large exhibitions and established cultural centres abroad. Particularly as rapprochement with the EU became increasingly difficult, the AKP embraced a policy of "Neo-Ottomanism," not only expressed in a historicising architectural style and urbanism, but also by reframing Turkey's history as anchored in a multi-oriented and multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire and propagating the image of a

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243 Cf. Al-Ghazzi and Kraidy, 2013; Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum, 2017.

244 The parallel 2005 "Turquality" program expected to establish ten Turkish brands as international trademarks in the next ten years and served as a mutual co-branding strategy of state and products.

245 Cf. Iğsız, 2014. In fact, according to the author, these discourses at least implicitly perpetuated existing Orientalisms.

246 Cf. Iğsız, 2013 and 2014: 698. Cf. also Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum, 2017: 551.

247 Cf., again, Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum, 2017.

politically influential, economically successful, culturally attractive, and morally powerful nation.[248] Vis-à-vis its Middle Eastern and Muslim partners, the state-guided strategic communication pointed to the country's civilisational compatibility, historical ties, and cultural proximity. In particular, this reorientation towards the East and South was supported by performing again as a mediator in conflicts, concluding cooperation agreements, opening diplomatic missions, and expanding the Turkish Airlines network. Turkey's cultural policy has used popular culture and media broadcasting, especially Arabic language satellite TV channels that show sentimental drama series. All this resulted, by the early 2010s, in the successful construction of a powerful, integrated "Neo-Ottoman Cool" brand and a spectacular rise of popularity among Arabs.[249]

However, these rebranding efforts also experienced a series of limitations that constrained the presentation of a coherent image to the world. First, domestic controversies about national Western or Islamic identity were fuelled even further and, second, hegemonic global discourses continued to consider East and West incompatible and mutually exclusive. After the Arab upheavals in 2011 and the Istanbul Gezi protests in 2013, the country's brand lost much of its international credibility; in the Middle East, Turkey was often considered an unwelcome interventionist in domestic affairs.[250] Here, its role in recent geopolitical conflicts even ended with the threat to boycott Turkish products (see above). In the West, its image was further damaged by the strengthening of authoritarian rule and its ill-regarded foreign policy decisions. The authorities' first concern seems to be to safeguard foreign investors' interests, which led to accusations during the Gezi protests that the international press' coverage of the events was jeopardising Turkey's brand value.[251] A final move to rebrand the country was its renaming in 2022 in all languages as "Türkiye," mainly to avoid mockery based on the other meaning of the English name.[252]

The tension between a secular and religious modernity is also reflected on the urban stage. This has become evident, for instance, in the long-lasting controversy

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248 Cf. Al-Ghazzi and Kraidy, 2013. Cf. also Iğsız, 2014: 692–693.

249 Cf. Al-Ghazzi and Kraidy, 2013: esp. 2346–2350. For TV broadcasts, cf. also Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum, 2017: 560–561. Compare brand coolness with the "Cool Britannia" brand, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

250 Cf. Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum, 2017: esp. 561–563. For Turkey's image loss in the Middle East, cf. also Al-Ghazzi and Kraidy, 2013: 2351–2353.

251 Cf. Iğsız, 2013 and 2014: 698.

252 Cf. Nüsse, 2022; Tagesschau, 2022b. Already earlier, exports were marked "Made in Türkiye" and Turkish Airlines advertised with the promotion slogan "Hello Türkiye"; cf. Tagesschau, 2022a.

about Ankara's urban emblem.[253] In the course of this conflict, a broad range of stakeholders started to discuss the historical, political, and cultural identity of the national capital and expressed their claims to brand ownership, legitimacy, and authority. The metropolitan mayor, affiliated with the AKP and its predecessors, argued that the pre-Islamic Hittite Sun that was used before did not adequately reflect the city's identity; in 1995, he replaced it with a logo depicting an urban scenery that included the minarets of the biggest mosque in Ankara. In 2010, in the course of the heavy debate, he changed the logo again into a more innocuous smiling Angora cat, intended to symbolise the capital's hospitality and its young and dynamic population.

Even more than Ankara, Istanbul is in the focus of current city branding strategies. Turkish destination branding long concentrated on tourism to the country in general or to seaside resorts and heritage sites outside the big cities. Hence, branding efforts in Istanbul to promote urban tourism developed only slowly, in parallel with its ascending global economic position.[254] Until 2007, the city's promotion was part of centrally administered tourism policies, which strongly relied on a self-orientalising discourse reflecting Western representations of basic civilisational differences. Only when Istanbul had won the bid for the 2010 European Capital of Culture (cf. Fig. 1) and EU accession seemed at hand did the metropolitan municipality activate its own branding process and develop a coherent communication strategy to present the metropolis as an open, tolerant, and multicultural "City of Religions." This changed again with the city's candidature for the 2020 Summer Olympics (Table 5), submitted in 2012.[255] A variety of themes and motifs introduced Istanbul as a "cool," dynamic and creative, multifaceted place that addresses multiple lifestyles and interests, including potential visitors from Russia and the Middle East, according to the government's geopolitical reorientations.

Already before 2012, project megalomania inspired by Dubai had made itself felt in Istanbul, in particular in the field of infrastructure. This was part of a global city-making project to catapult the largest Turkish city into the top league of various rankings. In this worldwide competition, its rapidly changing appearance, its central intercontinental location, its economic dynamism, and its rich human cap-

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253 Cf. Hayden and Sevin, 2012.

254 Cf. Uysal, 2017. The first GaWC inventory in 1998 categorised Istanbul as a global city that had just arrived at a minor ("gamma") status; in the meantime, it has ascended to an "alpha" world city profile since 2016, second in the MENA region only to Dubai; cf. GaWC, 2022 (compare Table 3). It is also the second-most frequently visited MENA city after Dubai and the tenth most frequently visited city worldwide (Table 6).

255 Baş and Delaplace, 2023, show that even this unsuccessful bid has helped to boost the city's reputation and develop its infrastructure.

ital have been fervently branded.[256] This cosmopolitan claim contrasts with the marketing of gated communities aiming at a religiously oriented, if not Islamist-friendly middle class, which have gained momentum as shelter against the moral threats of the rapidly changing metropolis. In the case of the Başakşehir community, however, this led to negative propaganda in the mainstream media and secular investors' reluctance to engage in the housing project; instead, supporters of Islamist parties stepped in.[257] More recently, promoting new real estate projects as "green," "ecological," and "sustainable" has also become fashionable. Advertising the sustainability of high-rise buildings, in particular, which have special brand value, is often contested as greenwashing.[258] Additionally, to enhance their prestige, contemporary projects like the Bio-Istanbul smart and sustainable city use references to the historical urban landscape in accordance with the AKP's ideological ideas, like the traditional *mahalle* (neighbourhood) offering refuge and social and physical proximity, even if, in the end, this only advances neo-liberally inspired speculation and segregation.[259]

Also, urban quarters and their branding have become objects of political struggle, as demonstrated by two examples from Istanbul presented in this volume. The historical quarter of Eyüp is a prime example in its use for political ends and demonstrates the interplay between personal and place branding. The municipality, governed by the AKP and its predecessors since 1994, has considerably modified its branding strategies for the neighbourhood several times in accordance with shifting political contexts.[260] Initially, Eyüp was described as a significant place for the Ottoman state and society in the context of the party's Islamic and neo-Ottoman activism and as an attractive, modern place to live for higher-status residents. After consolidating power, the municipality promoted Eyüp as one of the most important spiritual centres of the Islamic world to attract religious tourism. In contrast, since 2014, Eyüp has been branded the "Capital of Inner Peace," aiming at visitors from various backgrounds. The shifting branding activities indicate the constructed nature of a place's identity and demonstrate the quintessentially political nature of tourism marketing. By portraying itself as the protector of Eyüp's heritage and, by extension, of the larger Islamic-Ottoman community's identity, the AKP seeks to legitimise its grip on power. The use for the personal branding of politicians is exemplified further in Annegret Roelcke's contribution to this book, in which she demonstrates that members of secular parties have likewise

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256 Cf. Adanali, 2011.

257 Cf. Çavdar, 2016.

258 On the case of the Bayraklı Towers in Izmir, cf. Öner and Pasin, 2015.

259 Cf. Arik, 2015.

260 Cf. Roelcke, 2019.

entered this battlefield. In contrast, Pekka Tuominen's chapter explores the question how the local population conforms with, resists, or appropriates official urban brands in a more central and more secular neighbourhood.

Fig. 4: Welcome Edirne city logo with the Selimiye Mosque in the background
Photo: Birgit Krawietz, 2017. Courtesy of the photographer.

In the shadow of global cities, secondary cities also endeavour to brand themselves and to communicate a favourable image to their citizens and the world. Among them, Edirne has recently attracted much scholarly attention. The city was already an early example of architectural branding. Namely, the iconic Selimiye Mosque was used to brand the 16th-century Ottoman Empire, challenging the role of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, which represented the Byzantine past.[261] The extreme visibility of the Selimiye not only transformed Edirne's urban space, but also branded the city with an Ottoman imperial image (for a comparison with other Ottoman iconic practices, see Philip Geisler in this volume). Today, the promotion of Edirne as the "City of Sultans" is nearly exclusively oriented towards its glorious past and hints at the precious historical buildings.[262] The iconic Selimiye clearly stands in the centre of these efforts and visually dominates the official logo of the city (Fig. 4). Its

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[261] Cf. Geisler, 2020.
[262] Cf. Krawietz, 2020, including wrestling; Wippel, 2020; Krawietz and Riedler, 2020.

importance has grown even more with its international recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site. In the meantime, the sheer number of UNESCO-branded tangible and intangible heritage items helps to draw attention to the town and province of Edirne, which can compete in this respect with the Istanbul metropolitan area. In particular, the tradition of oil wrestling is not merely staged as a regular event that contributes to a temporally limited urban festivalisation, but also maintains its visual presence all year round. The ubiquitous presence of Turkish flags and municipal emblems at the annual festivities contributes to both national and local branding. The encompassing reappraisal of the Ottoman past has also a specific regional component, with a certain nostalgia for Rumelia, the historical European part of the Empire. However, the (re)opening of the City Museum and the Synagogue attest to different versions of history presented to different audiences. Nevertheless, branding the city is not exclusively backward-looking: the national tourism office also introduces Edirne as an open "border city," a "gateway to the West," and a "cultural mosaic." But in the end, Edirne's brand promotion is still limited, especially if compared with the top image enjoyed by nearby Istanbul.

9 Branding North Africa

9.1 Place Branding from the Nile to the Maghreb

Turning to North Africa, comparatively little seems to have been written explicitly about branding (in) Egypt, despite (or perhaps because of) the widespread history-packed images of the country. First, Egypt is considered a "must see" destination in tourism, which is a major source of national revenue. For this, its historical roots and continuity since ancient times are widely used in national destination branding. However, domestic and regional crises, such as wars, unrest, and attacks, as well as growing authoritarianism and Islamism, have resulted in negative perceptions among potential visitors regarding safety, but also sanitation and nightlife.[263]

Therefore, especially since the 2011 "revolution" and the 2013 restorative move, international nation branding specialists and PR consultants have worked hard for a global repositioning of the country and to reshape its image in the world.[264] To attract investors and tourists, the brand strategy has focused on president Abdel-Fatah al-Sisi as a leader stabilising the country against extremism and insecurities

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263 Cf. Avraham, 2016. On transmission effects on tourism from events abroad, ascribed to the entire Middle East region, cf. Steiner, 2009.
264 Cf. Shenker, 2017.

and making its resources available to the world. A qualitative content analysis of branding material demonstrates that marketers employed three types of strategies to counter negative perceptions; these strategies aim at international opinion influencers, try to influence the audience itself, and endeavour to correct stereotypical messages.[265] In this volume, based on her unpublished PhD thesis on strategies to present a "Brand New Egypt" to the global public, Karin Ahlberg analyses Egypt's official promotion in the late 2000s, which separately targeted the two main source markets, the Arab and the international market, and made use of diverging symbolisms. Beyond tourism, one high-quality export product, namely cotton, was long in the focus of national branding efforts. As this proved too narrow and was no longer considered representative, the government tried to rebrand the country as a business destination.[266] Still in the era of President Hosni Mubarak (r. 1981–2011), a service company group proposed a strategy to increase buyers' and investors' awareness of Egypt as a business partner and, in line with application-oriented literature, suggested a central office that would guarantee a consistent message focusing on transparency and reform.

On the urban level, Cairo, nicknamed "Mother of the world" (*umm al-dunyā*), is not only a historically important city, but has also been reputed an urban Moloch and acquired an image as a favourite place of entertainment and pleasure to the point of becoming an unofficial sex tourism destination, mainly for Arab tourists from the more restrictive Gulf states, who thronged the city from the 1980s on.[267] Already in the 19th century, Egypt's capital experienced several spatial reconfigurations aimed at a more modern image of the city. This included a first "new town," Heliopolis, built in 1907 at the city's desert fringe, which required a specific marketing strategy to target foreign residents as well as certain segments of the local population.[268] Like other quarters, the settlement's architecture mimicked a pretended historical Arabian style and stereotyped Oriental atmosphere reflecting colonial visions of the Orient. Similarly, contemporary real estate projects, such as the more recent "desert cities," luxurious residential compounds, shopping malls, and theme parks, are widely advertised today. While huge billboards feature architectural elements of gated communities built recently or in the near future and praise again the conquest and the greening of the desert, they physically hide and even replace existing buildings and green spaces, making the latter

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265 Cf., again, Avraham, 2016.

266 Cf. Dinnie, 2008: 29; ZAD Group, 2008. On the intense branding of products in Egypt and of Egyptian origin, cf. earlier passages in this text.

267 Cf., e. g., el-Gawhary, 1995.

268 Cf. Adham, 2004: esp. 144–151; also mentioned by Stadnicki, 2017.

even more scarce and the city more crowded.[269] According to visions already developed under the former Mubarak administration, Cairo was to have been largely reconfigured with new high-end real estate megaprojects and attention-drawing starchitecture following the fashionable Dubai model in order to attract more international tourists and investors.[270] Promotional videos showed an immaculate city, cleansed of its inhabitants and with polished streets, in which Gulf visitors stroll around and are served by Egyptian celebrities. "The proposal was replete with eye-catching perspectives of architectural and urban design solutions that promised a rebranded Cairo that by 2050 would be totally transformed into a truly global city."[271]

After the 25 January Revolution, the new governments' strategies first tended towards a few socially more inclusive showcase projects, the provision of social housing, and an appeasing policy towards informal settlements.[272] At the latest with the consolidation of al-Sisi's power in the mid-2010s, the strategy changed again towards more control and repression. The neoliberal worlding projects, which had been hesitantly remodelled to meet some social concerns, were deftly put into operation again. To circumvent earlier criticism of incommensurability and forced evictions, a number of less all-encompassing sub-projects were announced. New sites for visits continue to be built, such as the Grand Egyptian Museum in outer Giza, where the planned installation of "true copies" of the most threatened Pharaonic tombs from Luxor constitute examples of second-order simulacra.[273] The most spectacular component of the intense efforts to establish a "modern" image of the city is the construction of a New Administrative Capital at the megalopolis' periphery. The megalomanic project helps the Egyptian president present a strenuously implemented strategy of innovation and modernisation to the world and reflects its decision-makers' ambition to place Cairo on the map of global cities.[274] Yet, with the slow progress of the project, the huge number of images that initially circulated on billboards and in the media rapidly stopped; in particular, promotional brochures and films have avoided highlighting the centrepiece of this "Sisi City," the immoderate Presidential palace.[275] Khaled Adham's essay in this volume takes a closer look at the political economy behind such large-

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269 Cf. Abotera and Ashoub, 2020.

270 Cf. Adham, 2004, 2014, and 2017.

271 Adham, 2014: 239–240.

272 Cf. Beier, 2016: esp. 12–15, 20–22.

273 Cf. Steiner 2010: 246. For Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, cf. the previous conceptual chapter.

274 Cf. Stadnicki, 2017.

275 Cf. Loewert and Steiner, 2019.

scale urban advertising, showing how this constructs a memory of the future and transforms it into present political and economic wealth. In contrast, Raffael Beier and Hassan Elmouelhi demonstrate how legitimation-seeking politicians, modernist urban planners, and international organisations brand "slum-free" metropolises and subsequently eradicate neighbourhoods that consist of precarious housing conditions.

On the countries west of Egypt except for Morocco, only a limited number of publications specific to branding have emerged within the bulk of literature on economic and political transformation and contemporary urbanism; most of the few cases in Tunisia and Algeria are studied in comparison with Morocco. In the case of Libya, the revolutionary leader Mu'ammar al-Qaddhafi was a strong personal brand in his own right until the collapse of his regime. In the mid-2000s, a US consultancy developed a branding project for a "New Libya" after economic sanctions had been lifted to counter existing perceptions as a pariah state.[276] This aimed at encouraging trade and investment and improving the country's political standing and included a vision for the 50th anniversary of the Revolution in 2019. A programme directed at the domestic audience sought to convince it to "live the brand"; other measures were designed to encourage international academics and media to publish positive reports – to the extent that some articles portrayed Libya as the future Norway of Africa – and convey a positive brand image of al-Qaddhafi as a responsible and recognised leader.

In the Maghreb, too, the 21st century has become an age of urban megaprojects, which cater primarily to branding issues. According to Raffaele Cattedra, we are witnessing the staging of gleaming models that reproduce images of future or futuristic developments, disseminated through various channels.[277] Sophisticated marketing strategies often promoted projects only for their performative efficiency, creating a kind of "mirage effect." The image serves as a political device to legitimise the project in society. However, in Tunisia, the capital's central axis Avenue Habib Bourguiba has been a case of continuous spatial rebranding since its construction in the 1860s: while the French administration established it as a "Parisian Colonial" boulevard, after independence, it could be labelled an example of "Tunisian Modernity" and was refurbished under the Ben Ali regime as a "Parisian Global" streetscape and historicist showcase of globalisation ambitions.[278] In and after the 2011 revolution, it became emblematic as a meeting place and demonstration arena of civil society and could capitalise on images of an open and tol-

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276 Cf. Aronczyk, 2013: 153–156. The consultancy was headed by Michael Porter, the protagonist of the "competitive advantage of nations"; cf. previous chapter.

277 Cf. Cattedra, 2010.

278 Cf. Coslett, 2017.

erant identity. In each historical era, the avenue was a component of staged authenticity in which diverse actors, from planners and architects to preservationists and public authorities, strategically condensed and simplified history into a thematic brand. Today, it is charged with complex images and reflects Tunisia's hybrid postcolonial identity.

Especially under the rule of then-President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (r. 1987–2011), Tunisia undertook strong worlding endeavours. Here, another example of postmodern simulation was built to feed visitors with illusions: the themed *Medinat Hammamet* project, at the artificial Yasmine Hammamet tourism complex, pretends to represent an authentic (and by the way, cleansed) old city with various shopping and leisure areas, each in a distinct architectural style.[279] In both Morocco and Tunisia, the concept of waterfront development and the role of territorial marketing have become essential in contemporary urbanism, given cities' claimed interurban competition and aspired internationalisation. In Tunisia, the most notable project was the clean-up of the Lac de Tunis lagoon in the 1980s and the subsequent plans to develop a new urban waterfront to stage the city.[280] According to Pierre-Arnaud Barthel, the extensive rhetoric that accompanied the land-use scheme for the Southern Lake's shore and the Tunis Sports City project on the Northern Lake since the mid-2000s had, on the one hand, a performative function to increase the visibility and legitimacy of the transformation of a hitherto neglected urban area. On the other hand, its ideological function was to mobilise and to insinuate continuities with prestigious city models, from Dubai to Miami. The presentation as "presidential projects" aimed to consolidate the position of the state leader. The claimed sustainability of these large urban development schemes was seen as window dressing, especially as it lacked any participatory approach, social inclusion, or spatial integration. While the *Berges Nord du Lac* development was accomplished with a 30-year alcohol-free Saudi concession, the other megaprojects failed mainly because Gulf developers withdrew after the economic crisis and the Arab Spring. Not least, the accusation of corruption and having ceded the "jewels" of the city for these urban prestige projects contributed to Ben Ali's ouster. In contrast to these showily branded projects, shortly after the Jasmine Revolution, the Tunisian government endeavoured to lay the foundations for a more decentralised and inclusive urban policy to reduce disparities within and between cities.[281] Yet, a few years later, the regime was torn again between social responsible urbanism and revitalised worlding endeavours: megaprojects re-emerged in public de-

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279 Cf. Steiner, 2010: 244–245.
280 Cf. Barthel, 2006 and 2014; Gaillard, 2016.
281 Cf. Beier, 2016: esp. 15–17, 23–24, and 2017.

bates, as they were considered an opportunity to boost attractiveness for tourists and to demonstrate the country's global economic ambitions, but they made hardly any progress.[282]

In Algeria, branding is particularly discussed in connection with the widely advertised construction of "New Towns" intended to provide housing and relieve existing urban agglomerations. Compared with Tamansourt near Marrakech, the Algerian *ville nouvelle* of Ali Mendjeli on the outskirts of Constantine is better equipped, which gives the project a rather positive image and makes it more attractive for residents to stay.[283] However, those who wish to leave essentially attribute this to the gap between the cajoling projected images of a kind of ideal urban utopia, on the one hand, and still less-illustrious life realities, on the other. As part of neoliberal urbanism and in much harsher competition with other residential projects, Moroccan branding is more opulent, but disillusion over project implementation much greater. Especially in Tamansourt, "outre l'objectif de vendre la 'ville nouvelle', [le marketing urbain] vise aussi une territorialisation du projet par l'image, à défaut de pouvoir se prévaloir, comme dans le cas d'Ali Mendjeli, d'une territorialisation par la pratique."[284] The term "new town" lends itself to two different readings. One refers to the future town, conveys the image of a town (perhaps) to come, and distorts the reality that users will have to live with in practice.[285] The second reading points to the town of the future, a fantasy city, which by its very existence enables a leap into a new era. Such urban megaprojects mobilise all the vocabulary that urban marketing has at its disposal to disseminate the image of their modernity: competitiveness; excellence; green, sustainable, and zero-emission towns; and intelligent and smart cities.

9.2 Morocco as Another Case of Intense Product and Place Branding

Morocco has perhaps become one of the Arab countries beyond the Gulf most active in nation and product branding. Constitutional preambles can also constitute a kind of nation brand marker by defining the fundamentals of political regimes and especially the regional and civilisational belonging and orientation of the nation. Accordingly, as reflected in the Moroccan constitution, the kingdom today brands

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282 E. g., the Sports City project has been reconsidered recently; cf. Galtier, 2022.
283 Cf. Ballout, 2015.
284 Ballout, 2015.
285 Cf. Sidi Boumedine and Signoles, 2017.

itself as an ethnically, religiously, and linguistically pluralistic country that possesses multiple transregional historical and cultural roots and ties. In contrast, in the first post-colonial decades, its unity and homogeneity were emphasised and alternative narratives were largely ignored or forcefully suppressed.[286] This already started to change in the 1970s, when King Hassan II (r. 1961–1999) wanted to present the country as a predestined mediator in political conflicts, based on the image of a cultural melting pot and a bridge between different world regions. Given Morocco's difficult relations with Europa and within the Maghreb, the preamble today situates the whole country between the Mediterranean, the Arab, and the African worlds, which allows it to have several geostrategic orientations simultaneously.[287] Morocco's affiliation with the encompassing Berber lands between the Maghreb and the Sahel and with *Al-Andalus*, stretching from the Iberian Peninsula to Northern Morocco, with its Sahrawi-Hassani component, and with the artistic and architectural legacy of the Islamic Golden Age has all been rediscovered relatively recently. In particular, on a microregional level this also includes the newly branded Strait-crossing bonds between the Tangier Peninsula and Gibraltar, which Dieter Haller discusses later in this book.

The current King Mohammed VI, who acceded to the throne in 1999, has repeatedly emphasised the promotion of the *Label Maroc*, the Moroccan nation brand.[288] Together with government authorities, he has worked hard in international arenas to make his country recognised as an equal and reliable partner sharing universal values and constituting a haven of safety, peace, and tolerance. These nation branding endeavours not only serve as a strategic tool of foreign policy, but are also directed at the national citizens to promote an alternative image and vision against radical Islamist movements. A state think tank has repeatedly evaluated Morocco's domestic and international reputation.[289] The latest report positioned Morocco in the mid-tier among the 72 nations under study; its image has improved over the long term, but suffered a short-term decline internally and among Western observers. Among several dimensions, living conditions are rated the best, outdistancing institutional quality and the level of development.

To pursue its foreign policy goals, the Moroccan regime has increasingly employed economic and cultural soft power. This public diplomacy that has politicised art and culture from above has helped Morocco to gain more support for its claim to sovereignty over the Western Sahara, especially among African governments,

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286 Cf. Wagenhofer, 2021.
287 Cf. Wippel, 2018: 283–284.
288 Cf. Wüst and Nicolai, 2022: 7.
289 For the latest report, based on opinions in 25 countries, cf. IRES, 2021.

while it also seems to have been appealing to foreign investors. In particular, the kingdom has capitalised on its considerable cultural treasure to improve its image and influence abroad.[290] Cultural policy conveys a specific Moroccan brand of Islam, folklorises and commercialises immaterial heritage, and invests massively in cultural infrastructure, namely a modern museum landscape. Host cities have been profiled, but urban film, music, and art festivals that have widely proliferated over the years have also become vehicles to transmit to the world a decidedly positive image of a modern, open, and dynamic country. Specific festivals intend to demonstrate the position of cities like Rabat as an "African capital" and the country's role as a bridge to the continent.[291] Museums in particular strongly reflect this shift in self-understanding and have become an important tool to display images of diversity. Among them, we find newly established museums dealing with "minorities," such as the those for Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca (opened in 1997), Saharan Art in Laayoune (founded in 2001), and Amazigh Culture in Agadir (2005). In contrast to other Jewish museums worldwide, which often emphasise differentness, the Moroccan one promotes the sameness of Jews and Muslims and the historical integration of Jews in Moroccan society.[292] While conveying the image of peaceful coexistence, the museum maintains silence on sensitive issues such as their situation during World War II, their later mass emigration, and contemporary antisemitism. Morocco is presented to the outside as an outstanding example in the Arab world and a potential mediator in the Middle East conflict. Within the country, the positive picture of Jews fits well into the new image of a plural society, promoted by state representatives, but also among the younger generation.

Sport, and football in particular, is of course also a key means of branding the country internally and externally, including in terms of regional affiliations. The royal announcement of a tri-national bid together with Spain and Portugal for the 2030 World Cup is presented to the world as historically unprecedented in its Euro-African, trans-Mediterranean, and Arab components.[293] Likewise, the recent advance to the semi-finals of the Qatar World Cup 2022 is declared the first "Muslim," "African," and "Arab" success, which also contains an anti-/post-colonial dimension in the victory against Spain, even if this actually ignores other aspects,

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290 Cf. Wüst and Nicolai, 2022.

291 Cf. Dines, 2021. On similar cultural activities to demonstrate Tangier's role as a springboard towards sub-Saharan Africa, cf. also Wippel, 2021.

292 Cf. Wagenhofer, 2014. When it opened, the museum was the first officially recognised of its kind in the Arab world. In Istanbul, a museum on Turkish Jewry opened in 2001.

293 Cf. Le Matin, 2023.

such as the strong Amazigh and European identities of the country and the majority of its players, as well as the earlier successes of Turkey and Senegal.[294]

At the same time, in the course of its economic opening, the country is trying to attract international investors and establish itself as a trade hub. The collective origin of product branding in Arab countries often is quite recent. For example, a 2016 study found that Moroccan efforts in this regard are mostly sectoral, and each public company or agency promotes its own individual brand.[295] A non-profit association of companies did not establish a "Made in Morocco" label to promote national products until 2014 (Fig. 5a).[296] In 2015, a national strategy with a common umbrella label for the handicrafts sector was launched.[297] Even more recently, Morocco has developed a new official business brand to sell the country as an exporter and to place itself as a valuable and attractive destination for investment, close to European and Mediterranean markets. The multi-coloured "Morocco NOW" word sign logo (Fig. 5b) has been widely displayed, from its official launch at the Dubai Expo through its web presence to diverse national and international media.[298] As part of its "Restart" strategy in the covid crisis and in the course of refreshing its tourism promotion campaign, the Moroccan National Tourist Office (ONMT) also introduced a new visual identity with a more vivid word logo (Fig. 5c).[299]

Fig. 5: Moroccan national promotional logos
Sources: Made in Morocco, 2014; Morocco Now, 2021b; ONMT, 2021.

Morocco is above all an established and much-studied tourist destination. It aims to become one of the 20 largest tourist destinations in the world (cp. Table 6). Some

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294 Cf. Warshel, 2023.

295 Cf. Ghannam and Ghoufrane, 2016.

296 Cf. Made in Morocco, 2022. For the struggles accompanying international and regional trade, cf. earlier passages in this chapter.

297 Cf. Ministère de l'Artisanat, de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire, 2015.

298 Cf., e.g., Morocco Now, 2021a.

299 Cf. Menara, 2021; El Rhazi, 2022.

of the numerous publications on Moroccan cities also analyse their external perception, especially as top tourist destinations. The perception of tourism advertising among emigrants, considered key in transmitting country images, has also been studied: often they regard existing destination branding as insufficient and inadequate, and gaps exist between images conveyed by official websites and by emigrants.[300] The few focused empirical or critical, theoretically grounded appraisals of urban branding contrast with numerous papers that, since the mid-2010s, present general explanations and application-oriented suggestions how to enhance the brands of Moroccan cities, which I mostly ignore here. Yet, many analyses of contemporary urban development reserve some remarks on issues of "territorial marketing" and image-building.

Especially the two decades since Mohammed VI took power have been characterised by mushrooming urban megaprojects throughout the country as part of growing worlding ambitions. Such iconic projects (often playing again with superlatives) reflect the neoliberal and postmodern shift in urban management towards strategies of branding and communication and are based on practices of exemption from urban planning. Political decentralisation increased local political actors' interest in having their "own" prestigious large-scale projects built. In parallel, geopolitical change led Morocco to open up to capital and expertise from the Gulf states, especially in the real estate sector. Initial admiration of the Dubai model gave way to a clear distancing, while French influences, for instance, continue to have an impact.[301] Except for some projects that were delayed (or cancelled) after the 2008/09 financial crisis, these constructions continued after the 2011 uprisings, and even new projects have been launched to signal stability in a regional environment of political turbulence.

In particular, Casablanca, the country's economic centre, endeavours to overcome its bad reputation as a congested and run-down metropolis. Instead, it wants to establish itself as a world-class city with new attractive business and residential quarters. To this end, several metropolitan visions and strategies have been launched. In particular, Casablanca strives to excel with a series of megaprojects.[302] The first contemporary project, which dominates the urban coastline, was the construction of the Hassan II Mosque, completed in 1993, with the then-tallest minaret worldwide. Other big projects ensued, most of them still under construction, among them Anfa City, including Casablanca Finance City, whose ambition is to become Africa's financial hub; the Morocco Mall, the largest African shopping cen-

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300 Cf. El Aouni, Cascón-Pereira, and Hernández-Lara, 2012.

301 Cf. Barthel, 2014 and 2015b.

302 Cf. Beier, 2016: esp. 22, and 2017; Aljem and Strava, 2020.

tre;[303] the new *Grand Théâtre*, which will be the biggest one in Africa; and the *Avenue Royale*, an ongoing vast urban renewal programme in the city centre. The high-end Casa Marina project, conceived in the late 2000s, in particular has been intensely marketed for international investors and purchasers, but also contributed to the evolution of the brand of its Moroccan development holding, which kept power over the project's management vis-à-vis its Gulf partners, in contrast to Tunis' experience at that time.[304] Transport infrastructure is also to back the image of aspired world city status: accordingly, Casablanca's tramway network, opened in 2012, has become an important part of the local marketing mix that points to aspects like speed, progress, and environmental concerns.[305] The project helps to promote the image of a socially more inclusive city; however, it has instead made the ruptures in the urban fabric even more visible. Throughout the MENA region, such mass transit projects also contribute to the prestige and political legitimacy of the mostly authoritarian rulers, who preen as initiators and promoters of ecologically and technologically pioneering means of transport.[306] However, there is a huge gap between local needs and the neoliberal and worlding logics behind these megaprojects.[307] They greatly impede the population's right to the city and displace residents to poorly developed outer districts. To eliminate informal settlements, viewed as hardly controllable, a nationwide "Cities without Slums" programme was proclaimed in the early 2000s.[308] In a separate chapter of this book, Raffael Beier and Hassan Elmouelhi compare Cairo and Casablanca to demonstrate how these processes are being used to upgrade the cities' current brand images.

Finally, in 2016, Casablanca was the first Moroccan and allegedly the first African city to initiate an encompassing urban branding strategy. The strategy was based on a preceding survey of inhabitants and visitors to carve out the city's "identity" and to identify gaps between the perceived and the desired images. As a coherent umbrella brand, the newly created logo and slogan "WeCasablanca" and related promotional materials and activities can be adapted as sub-brands to various target sectors (e. g., housing, transport, tourism, business).[309] It is piloted by a local agency that represents regional, prefectural, and municipal authorities.

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303 Developers envisioned that the shopping centre would turn Casablanca into a kind of Dubai in Africa or at least for the Western Mediterranean; cf. Elsheshtawy, 2012.

304 Cf. Barthel, 2014.

305 Cf. Strava, 2018; Beier, 2019. The similar Rabat-Salé tramway opened in 2011.

306 Cf. Wippel, 2022.

307 Compare Aljem and Strava, 2020: 12.

308 Cf. Beier, 2016: 17–20, and 2017.

309 Cf. Sedra and El Bayed, 2022; Echattabi and Khattab, 2021: 51–52.

A few studies investigated residents' perception of the city before the brand was created and of the brand's adoption shortly after its launch.[310] This hints at the need to improve the quality of life and public services before such a strong branding strategy is implemented. In their article in this volume, Dounia Sedra and Hicham El Bayed provide insight into the genesis of the branding strategy and an evaluation of its reception by the local population at a greater temporal distance, with a view to preparing its updating.

In other major cities, construction of numerous emblematic large-scale projects with new landmarks has also begun. In Rabat, prime examples are the slowly progressing conversion of the seafront road into a luxurious corniche and the ambitious Bouregreg Valley project, including a new marina; the Zaha Hadid-designed opera; and the Mohammed VI Tower, which will be the second tallest one in Africa.[311] They aim to convey a new image of the capital, making it a city by the water, which it never was historically. Here, too, prestigious Gulf partners are often involved in project development. These projects especially benefit the better-off classes and are intensely promoted with the help of targeted ad hoc structures. In fact, the Bouregreg project is not just a wasteland development, as it is often presented, but represents the creation of a globalised space, at the expense of small-scale farmers and private landowners. As in the case of the Rabat Corniche, the failure to consult the population parallels challenging environmental and sustainable effects. A special case is the extended new suburb of Hay Ryad, which was the object of intense marketing operations that led to an elitist image of the area as a ghetto for the rich and wealthy.[312] Furthermore, a series of "Rabat Ville Lumière" projects valorise Rabat's new World Heritage status from 2012 and seek to make the hitherto undistinctive administrative city a more vibrant national capital of culture able to compete, especially with Mediterranean cities.[313] Moreover, in order to also increase its reputation as a continental centre, the newly created title, African Capital of Culture, has been first awarded for 2020 to Rabat.[314]

Tangier also suffered for a long time from its political neglect and deteriorated image; for two decades now, strategies promoted by the king have endeavoured to develop the northern metropolis into a showcase city and a supra-regional commercial hub whose favourable location is sold to the world. Steffen Wippel points

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310 Cf. Belkadi, 2015 and 2019.

311 On the Bouregreg project, cf. Amarouche and Bogaert, 2019; esp. on the Corniche, Mouloudi, 2009 and 2015.

312 Cf. Serhir, 2017.

313 Cf. Beier, 2016: 22, and 2017: 28.

314 Cf. Wüst and Nicolai, 2022: 13.

to the multifaceted branding that goes along with its urban restructuring, is realised by a great diversity of actors and at different scales, and positions the city at several spatial and temporal interfaces.

In 2004, in the context of starting to liberate cities from slums, the government presented a comprehensive national programme that envisaged the construction of 15 "New Towns," which were reduced to four a few years later. The labels "green" and "sustainable" were attached to the first plans only afterwards and were widely considered a form of greenwashing. In contrast, the newer projects were designed with an ecological claim from the very beginning. The *ville nouvelle* Chrafate, still in its infancy on the outskirts of Tangier, was the first project to be promoted as a modern "Green City," but in the end, the communication was dominated by images of exclusivity and singularity.[315] One of the main characteristics of the New Towns Programme is the extensive use of large billboards for urban marketing and image promotion; gigantic numbers put these projects out of the ordinary. If we compare the promising images and slogans with the disillusioning reality on the ground, a vast enterprise of urban illusionism appears, which Jean-Marie Ballout calls "territorialisation through image."[316] For these projects, what counts is again not so much the materiality of the results as the performative effectiveness of the discourses that accompany them. In addition to these mass constructions, further large-scale settlement projects, most of them directly adjacent to existing urban structures, also claim ecological and social sustainability.[317] Among them, the *Ville Verte Mohammed VI de Benguerir* is promoted as a technology hub accompanying the conversion of a former mining area. As "Africa's first green city" with a polytechnic university at its heart, it is set to become a continental hub for environmentally relevant research and education. The project aims to contribute to the royal, national, and local image, as well as to improve the reputation of the responsible mining company, which is in the process of transforming its activities, even if it has not yet succeeded in overcoming social and territorial marginalisation.

Such intensive communication about "green" showcase projects and technologies first and foremost serves place branding, but also shines a favourable light on the current ruler. Morocco likes to present itself as a pioneer of sustainability in the Mediterranean region and the Arab world. Thus, the widely branded "sustainable cities" are in line with Morocco's general endeavours to institute green policies. The conception of its sustainable energy transition follows an imaginary of

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315 Cf. Barthel, 2015a and 2015b; Ballout, 2015 and 2017; Sidi Boumedine and Signoles, 2017.
316 Ballout, 2017.
317 Cf. Barthel, 2015a; esp. on Benguerir, Harroud, 2020.

"green modernisation" that serves the ideological stabilisation of the regime as well as catering to activists' demands.[318] While cities in the Gulf States are primarily propagating a regional and global pioneering role in the race to be the greenest and most sustainable city, Morocco considers itself a role model of ecological projects and sustainable policies in North Africa and on the entire African continent, which also represents a possible export destination for projects, technologies, and expertise.[319] Specifically, the country brands itself as a green leader among African nations and the voice of Africa at international conferences. Mohammed VI personally is at the "green heart"[320] of these endeavours, and the Moroccan energy transition is presented as a strategic decision by the far-sighted monarch. The organisation of the COP22 2016 in Marrakech was a milestone in enhancing Morocco's national and the king's personal brands, which still contrast with green land grabbing and the violation of social rights in the name of sustainable development.[321]

Smaller cities in Morocco also increasingly endeavour to improve their images and attractiveness by employing branding strategies, often integrating national endeavours to develop tourism. Essaouira, for instance, already began to evolve as a flourishing town distinct among other Moroccan places a few decades ago.[322] A group of Moroccan actors have marketed the city as a cultural product to visitors and tourists, invested in the historic centre, and organised art events and renowned music festivals. Reputed as the "Wind City" and surfers' paradise, Essaouira builds on its image as a liveable and visitable place with a creative spirit and relaxing atmosphere. Chefchaouen, long considered the prototype of a marginalised small town cut off in the mountains, managed since the 2000s to turn its image as the "capital of kif" into the more positive brand "La Perle Bleue" (The Blue Pearl) of the North.[323] It capitalised on its local material and immaterial wealth to win as large an audience as possible. The logo adopted in 2013 was only the most visible aspect of this branding process. The Andalusian cultural and patrimonial heritage that make it "Granada's little sister" is at the centre stage of the strategy and includes the restoration of buildings according to an obligatory architectural charter. This strategy extends to preserving the natural environment and declaring itself an eco-city; to its listing as a UNESCO heritage together with three other cities for their Mediterranean diet; to efforts to create a local

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318 Cf. Haddad et al., 2022.

319 Cf. Nicolai, 2022.

320 Nicolai, 2022: 731.

321 Cf. Bogaert, 2019.

322 Cf., e.g., Bauer, Escher, and Kniper, 2006.

323 Cf. Ghailane, 2022.

label of origin; and to organising traditional and modern music, song, poetry, and film festivals. Finally, the city is mediated by TV documentaries and as a stage for TV series and movies. This new image has been fabricated in joint local efforts, especially by actors from civil society associations and the municipal president, who managed to network with local, national, and international actors.

The "advanced regionalisation" tackled in the mid-2010s intended to give Moroccan regions more autonomy and competencies to strengthen economic development. One region after the other launched regional development programmes; for the more peripheral entities, specific public economic and social development agencies have been established. At the same time, they also entered "latent" interregional competition. However, as some solution-oriented publications state, accompanying promotion campaigns to communicate "differentiating advantages" are rather exceptional; they propose to use existing urban, regional, and national agencies to strengthen territorial marketing.[324]

10 "Dubai Elsewhere": Branding on MENA's Periphery and in Adjacent Regions

Dubai's and other Gulf cities' and nations' successes have induced stakeholders "elsewhere" to copy not only their economic and urban development models, but also their branding strategies – this also spread to MENA's immediate peripheries and adjacent regions of the Islamicate world like Africa, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent.[325] At the same time, neo-patrimonial authoritarian regimes in need of legitimacy and modelled on the Arab world exist in sub-Saharan Africa[326] or have established themselves in recent decades in Turkic-speaking countries,[327] which is why Pauline Jones Luong speaks of their political "Middle Easternization."[328]

South of the Sahara, Dubai's "glitz, glamour, and flashiness" have been an appealing vision, and its hyper-capitalistic urban development model has become a reference that serves as symbolic power.[329] Based on a few success stories, Africa started to gain a reputation as the new rising star of the 21st century, full of eco-

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324 Cf., e.g., Echattabi and Khattab, 2021.
325 For "Dubaisation," "Dubaification," and "Gulfication," cf. above. Cf. also Haines, 2011.
326 Cf., e.g., Erdmann and Engel, 2007.
327 Cf., e.g., Lewis, 2012.
328 Jones Luong, 2003.
329 Cf. Stoll, 2010; Watson, 2014.

nomic promise that changed the long-prevailing image of a lost continent. From West to East Africa and south to Angola, large-scale luxurious and widely advertised urban greenfield and waterfront transformation projects have been conceived, often with the help of Gulf investors and sometimes backed by soaring income from oil and other resources. Among the urbanistic trends since the 2000s, "smart", "tech", "sustainable," and "green" city labels have also entered the rhetoric of African political and economic elites, together with a popular claim to development that immunises against criticism.[330] The development into "world-class" metropolises is presented as a necessary means to kick off national economies and used to rebrand countries with a modern and progressive image. However, this speculative urbanism has not always resulted in finishing the proposed projects or achieving promised aims, but instead contributed to the further social and spatial fragmentation of cities.

While separated by the vast desert, places at the sub-Saharan fringe have old historical and reinvigorated close transregional connections with North Africa. As we have seen, to promote its foreign policy ambitions and especially its economic trade and investment links, Morocco brands itself as an African nation with strong historical and cultural ties with areas south of the Sahara. In one of the following chapters, Ute Röschenthaler explains how difficult it is to control a product brand in the case of Chinese green tea in Mali, which initially arrived there in the 19th century via Morocco and still alludes to this provenance and related trade networks of that time. In this transition zone between North and sub-Saharan Africa on the periphery of the MENA region, Sudan is another country that has to struggle with a reputation for lasting dictatorship and war and with building a stable multiethnic and multireligious nation brand. In the 2000s, with the beginning oil production, authorities endeavoured to give its capital Khartoum a "brand"-new face as an African outpost of Gulf investment and urbanism.[331] Likewise, Mauritanian authorities had started to follow the Emirates' model and stage their capital to stand up to the perceived race for competitiveness. Hence, in Nouakchott, too, luxury ventures dominated over social housing projects. In both these metropolises, the urban megaprojects followed international planning principles and took inspiration from the postmodern and fascinating urbanism of the Gulf, but also tried to adapt to the local context, e.g. with architectural styles and project names that bear Arab cultural and historical references – not least to reaffirm the contested Arabness of their countries. However, the widely announced pharaonic undertakings mostly remained literally at the project stage.

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330 Cf. also Côté-Roy and Moser, 2019.
331 Cf. for both Sudan and Mauritania, Choplin and Franck, 2014.

Further south, Eko Atlantic City in Lagos is an outstanding and widely promoted example of a Gulf-style urban megaproject and claims to be the largest undertaking of this kind in Africa.[332] On the Horn of Africa, Djibouti was regarded as one of the first African examples to follow Dubai's economic model of an interconnected port/free zone/airport hub, realised with capital and expertise from the Emirate. It benefited from co-branding as a recognised partner and participated in Dubai's reputation for quality management.[333] In neighbouring Ethiopia, Addis Ababa showed first symptoms of being infected by "Dubai fever" at the end of the 2000s. Developers, architects, and state authorities endeavoured to promote the city as the "next Dubai."[334] Major constructions started to transform the urban physiognomy and to pave the way for an investor-dominated city. As in the Gulf, economic megaprojects and inherent economic progress have been attributed to the national ruler. After his sudden death, Ethiopia's President and Prime Minister (r. 1991–2012) Meles Zenawi was branded across the capital with images and posters as the architect of the country's vision for future economic and political progress.[335] This iconographic campaign used the Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile River as the key visual symbol of the country's aspiration for regional exceptionalism and was declared Zenawi's boldest initiative.

When the Central Asian republics became independent after the fall of the Soviet Union, historical ties with the Middle East were quickly restored and rulers learnt rapidly from its autocratic regimes.[336] Namely, old and new capitals had to be transformed to meet the expectations for the domestic and international recognition of the newly installed presidents. A major example was the new capital of post-Soviet Kazakhstan, proclaimed in late 1997 and subsequently renamed Astana (intermittently Nur Sultan, after the then-president). Numerous authors have investigated the branding strategies behind the building of its impressive urbanscape and architecture. The city was praised the "City of the 21st century" whose architecture had overcome "Western thinking" and was compared to Dubai and planned capital cities in the world; in fact, it is reminiscent of the Gulf's many "instant city" projects.[337] The dominating large central axis climaxes in the presidential palace, which paraphrases a fictive national architectural tradition and recalls the Emiral Palace in Abu Dhabi, while at the other end, the national oil company's

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332 Cf. Watson, 2014.

333 Cf. Chorin, 2010.

334 Cf. Stoll, 2010.

335 Cf. Izabela Orlowska's paper "Branding a Hero, Forging New Symbols: The Aftermath of Ethiopia after Meles Zenawi" at the *Deutsche Orientalistentag* 2017 in Jena.

336 Cf. again Jones Luong, 2003.

337 Cf. Brorman Jensen, 2008.

headquarters follows the style of Dubai's iconic Atlantis Hotel. As the new "court architect," Norman Foster was able to design several outstanding buildings, and President Nursultan Nazarbayev (r. 1991–2019) was glorified in the official media as the ultimate visionary of the new capital. Accordingly, urban planning, power symbolism, and the cult of personality have intrinsically interwoven. Iconic architecture serves primarily uncritical branding purposes that conceal tangible power interests and a project to shape a national identity at the domestic, regional, and global levels. New images of the country aim to counter existing ideas about post-Soviet bureaucracy, corruption, and oppression (as well as those conveyed by the ridiculing film with the fictitious reporter Borat). Besides extravagant urban development, sport, namely participation in international events, and higher education, such as the founding of "world-class" universities, have been central components used for national branding strategies that parallel Qatar's endeavours.[338]

In Aşgabat, Turkmenistan, another "presidential" capital, the head of state likewise presents himself as an urban architect and planner, glorified by numerous sculptural and architectural monuments, and legitimises his rule with identitarian buildings and a general urbanistic staging of power.[339] But even in much poorer Tajikistan, Dushanbe's cityscape is experiencing serious transformation, financed by foreign, including Gulf Arab investors.[340] The developing Gulf tourism and business, as well as representations of Dubai's success in the media, reinforce the Gulf-style branding. Closely related to the spectacular architecture and urban hyper-modernity, an Islamic lifestyle oriented towards a romanticised and hybrid Gulf-inspired Islamic image has become fashionable, and consumption brands with an imprint of piety have been increasingly considered to be of high quality and to bestow prestige.[341] "[T]he manufacturing of modern urban identities is in line with the launched urban renewal that promotes the 'Dubaisation' or 'Gulfication' (…) of Central Asian's urban centres and repositions the meta-narrative of Dushanbe's future as a modern, rising and Muslim city."[342]

Dubai-inspired branding has also extended to South Asia. During the 1970s oil boom, the UAE had become the central destination for labour migration from the South Indian state of Kerala; vice versa, remittances from the Gulf are an essential part of local income and have induced far-reaching socioeconomic reconfigura-

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338 Cf. Fauve, 2015; Eggeling, 2020. Sim, 2012: 87, and Koch, 2018: 56–57, also mention the Borat case.
339 Cf. Fauve and Gintrac, 2009, on both Astana and Aşgabat. Cf. also Koch, 2018, on Astana and other Central and East Asian and Gulf capitals.
340 Cf. Stephan-Emmrich, 2017.
341 Cf. also Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev, 2016.
342 Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev, 2016: 17.

tions in the local "Gulf pockets."[343] Initially, investment focused on the construction of individual "Gulf houses," especially in rural areas; but already in the 1990s, it shifted to prestigious residential quarters, tourism resorts, and shopping centres. With that, futuristic Dubai-style megaprojects popped up in the large cities of Kerala just as in other Indian metropolises.[344] Advertisements in Gulf newspapers for ultramodern apartment complexes directly address the South Asian diaspora (Fig. 6a). In general, the opening of the Indian economy in the last three decades has been linked with extensive national and international product and tourism marketing.[345] At the same time, India's federal states have endeavoured to position themselves independently. Kerala, "God's own Country," in particular, has been regarded as a pioneer in Indian place branding.[346] In a photo essay, Sophie-Therese Trenka-Dalton demonstrates that images and titles of business and advertising signs in urban and rural areas of Kerala intensely refer to Dubai and other Gulf places.
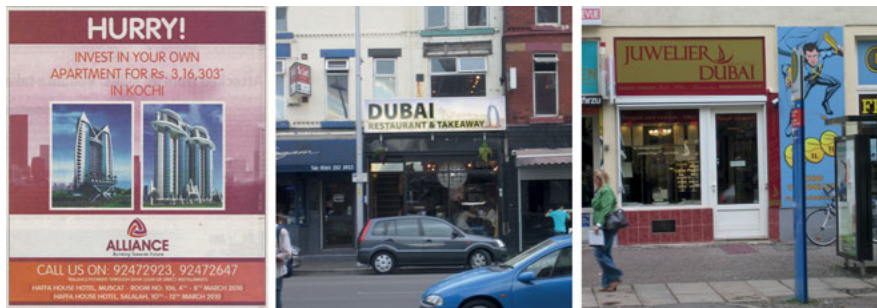
Fig. 6: The Dubai brand beyond the MENA region
a) Advertisement in Omani newspapers for apartment blocks in Kerala; b) Dubai Takeaway, Manchester; c) Dubai Jeweller, Leipzig.
Sources: Oman Observer, 3 June 2010; Photos Steffen Wippel, 2009 and 2010.

Middle East-related branding has also appeared in Western Europe. As shown above, film festivals like the Berlinale use the Middle East to brand themselves. Dubai appears as a reference and marker in word or assimilated logos (*dhow*, *Burj Al Arab*) in daily and non-daily places of consumption (Fig. 6b and c). The decades-long presence of Muslim immigrants and refugees has left its mark on the

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343 Cf. Venier, 2010. Cf. also several contributions in Reisz, 2010: esp. 476–483.
344 On the example of Delhi's satellite city Gurgaon, cf. Haines, 2011.
345 Cf., e. g., Kerrigan, Shivanandan, and Hede, 2012.
346 Cf., for instance, Vasuvedan, 2008.

urban landscape of European cities. Names alluding to iconic buildings, places, and personalities from the MENA region also serve to brandmark mosques in the European diaspora and demonstrate specific affiliations, as Helle Lykke Nielsen shows in her contribution to this volume.[347] Such Islamic place-making is also expressed, for instance, in cemeteries and burial grounds in Denmark.[348] Like such globalised brands as Coca Cola and Google, Arab-Muslim gravestones do not refer to the context in which they are placed, neither in text nor in form, and almost always look the same wherever they are placed. These decontextualised tombs function as a means of creating a transnational space in the diaspora, thus branding Islam in a non-Muslim context. This reflects a process in which Muslims are creating a space and a new, anchored identity for themselves in their countries of residence.

11 Outlook

This chapter has highlighted the varying intensity and scope of branding in various countries in the MENA region (and beyond) – or at least the varying degrees of coverage in academic publications, which certainly reflect the respective uses of branding. Application-oriented works have been largely omitted here; however, a growing body of academic literature, gradually extending from its initial focus on Dubai and then on Doha and other Gulf places to other parts of the region, can be observed in recent years, which deals with this field of research both empirically and theoretically/critically. There are even more articles and books available that have a different focus but consider product, personal, and above all place branding as an important aspect. But in the end, still, the geographic area targeted in this volume is by far underrepresented compared with the amount of specific scientific work on branding in other regions of the world, and many issues need to be studied from various angles and perspectives. Unlike political studies of conflicts and regimes, cultural issues, or urban development, a comprehensive publication on the diverse facets and regional manifestations of branding products, persons, and places is still missing. This volume aims to fill these important gaps.

The breadth of terminology in the existing literature varies from branding, marketing, promotion, advertising, and image building to public diplomacy. The purposes, media employed, responsible actors, and addressees are manifold; branding is often directed simultaneously to domestic audiences and external pub-

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347 For a long version, cf. Lykke Nielsen, 2021.
348 Cf. Lykke Nielsen, 2018.

lics. Delimitations between place and personal branding, product and place branding, and several hierarchies of places repeatedly blur. Branding and the use of worlding strategies have generally intensified with increasing integration into globalisation, adoption of neoliberal agendas, and the attraction of postmodern experimentalism – often at the cost of growing socio-spatial discrepancies and favouring the stabilisation of authoritarian rulers. Imitation and emulation of established branding models play a crucial role, and geopolitical aspects and geoeconomic goals are central in the drafting of many branding strategies. Finally, there is no unique branding model, but producers, politicians, and PR managers are learning from each other and conceive their branding strategies, depending on given constraints and challenges. All of this is explored in greater depth in the following parts of this volume.

In her ground-breaking comparative study of Qatar and Kazakhstan, Kristin Anabel Eggeling, for instance, formulated a number of opportunities for further research, which this book has intended to tackle in great part.[349] What has been done is to extend the context of branding across objects, fields, and places to have a rich, theoretically informed empirical fund of insights for further comparison, finding similarities and divergences, and, especially, showing the phenomenon's complexity. In particular, a number of contributions address the questions by whom and to which ends branding is being exercised and practiced – particularly in cases where political, personal, and place brands overlap and interpenetrate or when the plurality of relevant actors and brand-makers is being considered. Moreover, a few chapters show the historical depth of branding endeavours. Others study the reception and perception of brands among different audiences, which is a more difficult task than to investigate its production; there are also examples of the ethnographic immersion and participant observation that Eggeling requests. Islam-, North Africa-, and Gulf-related product and place branding on the periphery have also been included in this volume. Furthermore, it includes branding of and by unconventional places such as mosques and shrines, slums, and camps. Finally, the book has been open to and, in fact, includes a variety of alternative theoretical and conceptual approaches to branding from a broad range of disciplines and subdisciplines, as well as from interdisciplinary standpoints. But first, the next introductory chapter presents the genesis and broader outline of the book and introduces its different parts and individual contributions.

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349 Cf. Eggeling, 2020: 241–243.

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