

## Studying Branding in the Middle East in Challenging Times: Outline of the Edited Volume

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Steffen Wippel

# Studying Branding in the Middle East in Challenging Times: Outline of the Edited Volume

## 1 Focus of the Book: Common Topics and Crosscutting Themes

This edited volume investigates branding in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), including some studies from adjacent regions and the wider Islamicate world. The book critically analyses processes of strategic communication and image building and covers three major objects of branding – consumer brands, place brands, and personal brands – as the regional unfoldings of a global phenomenon. However, the main focus is on place branding – probably due to my own research focus and knowledge of colleagues, but also to a certain preference or fashion in the current research landscape. Often following the example of Dubai, project sites, cities, and nations are trying to enhance their public reputation by means ranging from creating novel architecture and organising attention-drawing cultural and sport events to announcing strategic urban and national visions. “Green” and “sustainable” branding has been added to this in recent years. While branding in the Western world and many emerging economies has been meticulously analysed, comprehensive investigations are still missing for the MENA region, except for some Gulf countries. Some of the existing literature, for example on urban branding or Islamic branding, is again very technical and application-oriented. This was the motivation behind compiling this volume, which fills important gaps in the research on branding in this part of the world.

In addition to filling the numerous empirical gaps, the contributions to this volume simultaneously integrate the conceptual framework presented in one of the preceding introductory chapters. They contribute to spatially decentering the branding phenomenon beyond the global West and to temporally historicising it beyond the all-too-recent present. Hence, historical case studies supplement the focus on contemporary branding efforts. Isolated empirical studies for application-oriented purposes contrast with by far the majority of critical, theory-driven empirical case studies. However, the understanding and terminology of branding may well diverge between the individual authors. In particular, they look at the diversity of the actors involved in branding and marketing activities and their often conflicting interests, motives, and strategies. They investigate channels and forms

of branding, including the intended purposes, the contents of messages conveyed to a broad range of addressees (sometimes the famous “creative class”), and the (in)consistencies of communication measures. A major interest exists in the entanglements of different spatial and hierarchical scales, but also of different kinds of branded objects, which often cannot be clearly separated and which show phenomena of umbrella-branding and co-branding.

In the Middle East in particular, branding is also always a matter of countering negative associations with the region, which exist worldwide and often have to do with unrest, violence, and intolerance, and of generating new, more positive images by rebranding. At the same time, communication strategies are directed inward, at consumers who are willing to buy as well as at citizens in a nation-building process that is often still unfinished or in a city inhabited by a very heterogeneous population. Attention in this volume is therefore paid to temporal reconfigurations of certain images and to how objects of branding are positioned in time and space. Some authors point out that not only products, places, and persons are branded *in* the Middle East, but also that the region itself (and parts of it) are being branded, or references to the region serve to brand items elsewhere.

This book thereby regularly goes beyond simply presenting the ubiquitous logos and slogans, which continue to be central instruments of the widely employed branding strategies. Rather, the individual chapters also take into account the complexity of the tools used, ranging from widely visually reproduced individual architectures and entire cityscapes to other material artefacts, but also to natural products, the help of the personal reputations of producers and potentates, economic and urban development strategies and planning policies, the expressed visions behind them, and a variety of social, cultural, and political activities, and even the deliberate resort to experiential and (social) media reports. Sometimes, branding strategies that seem surprising for the region and are unusual in its study come up, such as those regarding the advertising of alcohol brands, a reputation as a gay destination, the branding of refugee camps, the use of slum eradication for urban branding purposes, or naming mosques in the European diaspora. Place branding, which is dominant in the studies collected here, thereby also reveals a multiplicity of places beyond cities and nations that are subject to branding, but often less noticed.

Processes of singularisation and qualification of the objects of branding, not only of consumer products, are described several times. Similarly, repeatedly addressed are the general conditions under which branding takes place and that have a strong impact on the MENA region – namely globalisation, neoliberalisation, and postmodernisation, as well as, in a regional perspective, increased endeavours for “worlding” and widespread lasting authoritarian rule, but also of a series of further political and economic crises, disruptions, and turmoil. Such rup-

tures and reconfigurations that have frequently happened on the local, regional, and global levels have shaken up established images of persons and places, but also enabled the repositioning of existing and the establishing of new brands. It is also recurrently shown how visions overtake reality, simulations precede or even replace actual realisations, and the unspoken and the concealed are basic for promotional representations that preferably turn to the embellished, cleansed, and smoothed.

These papers make it clear how greatly brands are socially – and especially politically – constructed, even if the relevant actors like to essentialise them again and again. In the MENA region, the race for attention and recognition, the struggle to advance in relevant rankings, and imitation and adoption effects are evident in the increasing global competition, but also in the regional context, especially in the repeatedly highlighted “Dubaisation” effect. Likewise, branding goes hand in hand with processes of fragmentation and persistent inequalities that are triggered by underlying developments and policies, but it often even directly promotes them itself. As will be shown in individual cases, the population can react to branding from above with strategies of appropriation and resistance, as well as with its own place-making strategies or at least critical brand reception. Especially in the authoritarian contexts of the Middle East and North Africa (as well as some neighbouring regions), branding is particularly successful, but also necessary to stabilise the power of the rulers in the face of lacking democratic legitimisation strategies and crumbling traditional social contracts. Political personal branding, often in unison with or derived from the branding of, for example, cities, therefore plays a significant role in the region. In contrast, participatory processes (that could also ensure that the population will consequently “live” a brand) are rare in these countries or remain opaque in the few cases in which they have been formally prompted.

Geopolitical aspects, interstate relations, and interurban competition are essential aspects of branding, especially in such a conflict-ridden region as the MENA. Despite the increasing importance of geo-economic considerations, e.g. relating to trade and tourism, hard, especially regional geopolitics continues to be of great significance in the mutual struggle for and defence against political influence. However, the comparative approach of the anthology also shows clear differences between the diverse parts of the MENA region in the intensity and characteristics of branding. The different contributions demonstrate how branding plays out in varying contexts in a region that is ultimately quite heterogeneous, e.g. in terms of the extent of neoliberalisation or authoritarianism. The triangle of the Gulf states, Turkey, and Morocco, which is represented here several times, is particularly active in the branding business, while it was more difficult to acquire contributions on other countries less well known for branding efforts.

Given the nature of the book – its conceptual input, the breadth of empirical, yet theoretically informed case studies, and the range of authors and disciplines included – it aims at an international public of researchers and students. It addresses scholars in area studies such as Islamic, Middle Eastern, and Gulf Studies and to a certain extent in broader Asian and African Studies. Other readers might be found in disciplines such as human geography, international relations and international economics, media and urban studies, and the broader field of social and cultural sciences who are interested in issues of branding, marketing, image- and identity-building, and public diplomacy in and across their disciplines.

## 2 Background: How this Book Came to be Made

In retrospect, “branding,” by whatever name, has always been at least a subcutaneous and increasingly explicit aspect of the editor’s own research. Starting with my PhD project in the early 1990s, which studied Islamic economic and social institutions in Egypt, I also investigated the development of their “Corporate Identity,” which was the catchy conceptual term at that time.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, processes of regional formation and transregional entanglement long dominated my research on MENA countries. Here, I have also repeatedly addressed branding issues, when governments, business associations, and the like use economic, trade, and transport links to brand their country in regional terms and vice versa. Finally, especially in urban studies, to which I have progressively turned since the late 2000s, attention to branding endeavours has acquired a central place on my research agenda. This first started with early-developed attention strategies of Arab Gulf cities and extended particularly to new and resurging port cities that try to place themselves favourably in cross-regional positions – which links to previous research themes of regionalisation, but from local perspectives. A major collaborative outcome was a conference and an edited volume on the Arab Gulf “under construction,” which was developed together with a group of colleagues and already included elaborations on national and urban branding policies and emulation strategies “elsewhere.” This research increasingly also encompassed other parts of the MENA region, in particular extensive work on past and ongoing urban reconfigurations, emerging transregional ties, and with that, the branding of Tangier, Morocco. However, until then, these issues had been treated only as sub-

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<sup>1</sup> For the publications mentioned in this paragraph, compare the references in the preceding chapter.

ordinate aspects of contemporary attention-oriented postmodern and neoliberal urban development, but had not been part of separate publications.

From this initial interest in branding trends in the Middle East, several project ideas matured, which finally, for various reasons, could not be realised in the envisaged formats. In one of these proposals, developed in the field of Islamic Studies, I cooperated with colleagues from the *Freie Universität Berlin*, who are now all present in this volume. Earlier, I had already organised a first panel on “Branding the Middle East” in 2017, at the 33rd German Congress of Oriental Studies (*Deutscher Orientalistentag/DOT*) at the University of Jena, Germany. The call for papers attracted so many proposals that, over one and a half days, we filled five sessions of presentations, which produced much insight into current developments and showed the potential for a larger publication. Due to other obligations and research foci, the idea to continue with it lay dormant since then. In the meantime, I had the opportunity, together with the geographer Christian Steiner from the Catholic University of Eichstätt, Bavaria, to be guest editors of a special issue on “Urban Development” of the academic online journal *Middle East–Topics & Arguments* published in 2019. In it, several authors, now contributors to this anthology, addressed branding issues, which again demonstrated their topicality.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it was not until late 2020 that I took up the idea for an edited volume again and asked the speakers and other colleagues who were working on related topics at the time about a joint publication. The response was overwhelming, and another call helped to fill some existing concept- and content-related gaps and to include further perspectives. The de Gruyter publishing house also rapidly welcomed the publication of the volume. In September 2022, parts of our joint research in progress were presented again by their authors at another *Orientalistentag*, the 34th DOT convened in Berlin, and at the 12th Nordic Society for Middle Eastern Studies Conference at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík, which demonstrated the variety and multifaceted nature of branding processes in the MENA region, as well as the multiple possible perspectives on them, and which helped to promote the upcoming publication.

The book does not propose a single perspective or have a “one-size-fits-all” approach, but has been open to a variety of empirical issues, academic disciplines, and theoretical concepts. The authors represent a wide range of disciplines: from architecture, urban planning, and urban studies to social and cultural anthropology, political and social sciences, and geography and history; they also include scholars from different fields of economics, from diverse area studies, namely Arab, Islamic, Middle East, and even North American Studies, as well as from

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2 Cf. Steiner and Wippel, 2019.

disciplinary backgrounds like journalism, media and arts, religious studies, and philology. They are of Western, Arab, and Iranian origin and working in the Global North as well as in the Global South, at European and North American, Middle Eastern and North African research institutions and universities. This all allows for a variety of topics and perspectives. Often, the contributions of colleagues are based on their long-standing research work with a different focus, which, however, also considered branding aspects – sometimes implicitly rather than explicitly – and which have now been intentionally recalibrated to issues of branding. In many cases, the authors developed their own conceptual framing of their topic in preliminary sub-chapters, while others made in-text references to conceptual sources.

Such a volume and theme also lend themselves to numerous pictures. These serve not so much as pleasurable illustrations of extensive and otherwise uninterrupted text as they are usually closely linked to the respective text and its interpretations. Some of them are the authors' own photographic documentations of the branding activities. Although copyright issues make it increasingly difficult, even in the European publishing industry, to make use of illustrations from third parties, it was possible to create an illustration-rich volume with the friendly help and advice of the publisher.

All chapters were written in 2021 and 2022. Unfortunately, the precariousness of academic life – this is true especially for German universities, but much more severe, given the general life situation, e.g. in Lebanon, under simultaneous conditions of Covid, political unrest, and economic crisis – did not allow all the scholars who were willing to contribute and had even already started to write, to complete their papers.

### **3 The Organisation of the Book: Multiple Perspectives on “Branding the Middle East”**

All in all, the book now has about 35 longer and shorter chapters, including a few “snapshots,” all organised in five parts. The parts of the book range from branding in the field of consumption, culture, and lifestyle to branding countries, cities, and other places.

In a short opener, “Branding a Seafaring Nation: The Sailing Ship Monument at on Al Wazarat Roundabout in Muscat, Oman,” which precedes the actual texts, *Steffen Wippel* explains the volume's cover image of a ship monument displayed in the Omani capital, and embeds it in national and local branding efforts, namely

the construction of continuities from past maritime traditions to contemporary transregional connections, especially within the wider Indian Ocean region.

### 3.1 Part I: Introduction

The introductory part written by *Steffen Wippel* is divided into a brief lead-in on “A Thoroughly Branded, but Little-Known Middle East” and three subsequent chapters. The first chapter, “Branding as a Global Phenomenon: From Theory to Practice and Vice Versa,” explores general theoretical and conceptual approaches to branding, which serve as the broader framework for this book. It includes a passage through the global, mostly Western, history of branding, a clarification of terminology, and the global macro-contexts in which contemporary branding takes place. The second chapter, “Branding the Middle East: A Review of Regional Manifestations of a Global Phenomenon,” presents a synthesis of existing literature. It gives an overview of empirical developments and their interpretations in the MENA region, from product and personal branding to a *tour d’horizon* of place branding, starting from its hotspot along the Arab side of the Gulf, through West Asia and the Maghreb, to the region’s peripheries. This chapter, “Studying Branding in the Middle East in Challenging Times: Outline of the Edited Volume,” provides the general aim, genesis, and structure of this volume and explains its various parts and the individual chapters that follow.

### 3.2 Part II: Consumption, Culture, and Lifestyle

The next part starts with branding in the field of consumption, culture, and lifestyle. Here, branding commodities plays a central role. First of all, this relates to beverages, from “national” milk products in Arab Gulf countries to tea in Mali, but also to advertising alcohol, such as a colonial drink in North Africa, wine in Morocco, and hard liquor in Lebanon, and their links to nationalism, history, and way of life. Islamic features, like branding Dubai the capital of the Islamic economy and the spiritual brand conveyed by a religious scholar, contrast with selling Beirut as a gay- and queer-friendly place, which nonetheless displays much Orientalism. Fakes that are not really fakes contribute to the Islamisation of fashion brands. And finally, with omnipresent billboards, signs, and logos, South Indian products and places, too, want to partake in Dubai’s glamour and fame.

Dairy products seemed to gain a new political significance on the Arabian Peninsula in 2017, when Qatar was suddenly placed under an air, land, and sea embar-



go by its Gulf neighbours. While the country's entire food supply chain was affected, residents in Qatar were especially concerned with their access to milk products, because the embargo's two leaders, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, were their primary source. In the wake of the embargo, dairy acquired a new importance for how people understood Qatar's sovereignty. These events spurred the government to invest heavily in kickstarting domestic milk production by flying in thousands of milk cows to a dairy farm that came to be described as a nationalist champion for the country's food independence. The "cowlift" was a dramatic spectacle, but it is part of a broader trend of "milk nationalism" seen among the Arab Gulf monarchies. *Natalie Koch's* chapter "Milk Nationalism: Branding Dairy and the State in the Arabian Peninsula" traces this longer history and asks why branding national dairy companies has been so important in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Oman. As a study in political geography, she employs the lens of critical geopolitics to analyse the history and narrative construction of milk nationalism in these countries. As a kind of co-branding initiative, milk nationalism in the Gulf countries both draws upon and builds contemporary understandings of the state and sovereignty.

Foreign consumer goods have been promoted also *in* and *through* the Maghreb. Generally speaking, branding spells out, builds up, and enhances the properties of a product and is intrinsically connected with monetary, symbolic, social, and identity-related values, images, and assets. The time, creativity, and money invested in building up the brand are legally acknowledged by intellectual property law, which aims to reward owners for their efforts. A good example is Chinese green tea, which was introduced to the Sahel via Morocco in the 19th century and became a national drink in Mali in the 2000s. More than a hundred brands can be found in Bamako's largest marketplace. Many of them have Arabic names or hint at Islamic festivities and historical trading towns; their designs show Moroccan motifs or Tuareg drinking tea. In her chapter "Branding Chinese Green Tea in Mali," *Ute Röschenthaler* examines the example of the *Achoura* brand, which is the best-selling Chinese green tea in Mali, in adjacent countries, and in the Sahelian diasporas. Based on interviews with the major tea importers and on observations in African and Asian markets, she traces the creation and rise of the brand in 2013 and discusses its various challenges, including brand piracy, rumours, and health issues. The chapter argues that brand value is complicated to control and requires hard work, convincing strategies, and a portion of good luck to persist in a dynamic and competitive market.

In the colonial age, North Africa also served as an exotic background for branding a popular French alcoholic drink. Alcohol in general, and wine and absinthe in particular, were seen as representing both France's imperial power and the colonial Maghreb. Local Francophone newspapers were filled with adverts for different kinds of alcohol, and the coastal cities were decorated with the slogans of

the most famous brands of the time. These adverts aimed at the minority settler society and European travellers in a predominantly abstinent Muslim context and often incorporated orientalist imagery related to nature, urban sceneries, and local people. Some showed idyllic depictions of the “benefits” of the French presence in the region, while others portrayed a life in the colonies that was indistinguishable from life in the *Métropole*. In her chapter titled “Selling Alcohol to the Muslims? Making Byrrh a Brand in the Colonial Maghreb,” *Nina Studer* analyses the advertising campaigns of a particular southern French aperitif in the 20th-century Maghreb. Byrrh was a popular drink among Europeans – and some of the colonised Muslims – and presented itself as staunchly supportive of France’s colonial mission. This chapter asks how Islam and the Maghreb were portrayed in these adverts and which views of colonialism were chosen to be depicted.

Alcohol drinking and marketing remains an issue also in contemporary MENA countries. Today, Morocco is a relatively important wine producing *and* consuming country and endeavours to reposition and enhance the quality and image of its product. Advertisements for locally produced wine, a controversial commodity in an Islamic environment, have gained new prominence, at least in local magazines written in French. As *Steffen Wippel* shows in his snapshot “Branding Wine in Morocco: New Efforts to Qualify a Contested Commodity,” the adverts adapt to a global visual language to address the senses of both a young and a more settled local public and to singularise and qualify the newly created brands in the eyes of these potential consumers.

In a short chapter “From City to Society: Alcohol Advertising in Lebanon,” *Marie Bonte* seeks to give insight into the promotion of alcohol in Lebanon, focusing on local and international brands. In this weakly regulated market, alcohol is not only featured as a model for social relationships, but is also used as a tool for urban and national branding. This branding helps to shape collective identities, celebrates an attachment to the territory, and endeavours to communicate Beirut’s cosmopolitanism, as well as seeking to display a positive and “modern” image of the country. More recently, alcohol branding began to tackle wider social and political issues and to support civil society claims against strict rules for official marriage defined by religious (Islamic and Christian) law.

Along with beverages, fashion plays a central role in Middle Eastern product and lifestyle branding. In particular, Western, international brands are much requested, but often too expensive for large segments of the population. Hence, fake brands – using famous global logos on locally fabricated textiles of minor quality – are found in shops and markets across the region and are in principle subject to legal prosecution. At the same time, religiously conforming clothing has become widely demanded. Based on examples from the Levant, but also from Berlin’s multicultural district of Neukölln, *Alina Kokoschka* shows that “ficti-

tious fakes” have emerged that combine the reputation of international symbols with an equally reputed stylish Islamic fashion. In her essay “False Fakes, Fictitious Fashion, and the Liberation of Logos: On the Islamisation of International Brands,” she explores the fake side of the Middle Eastern brand culture. However, the author’s main interest is in reinterpretations of Western brands in the framework of Islamisation. This concerns commodities that carry a famous logo but differ significantly from items the brand is known for. These made-up commodities use the “fiction value,” inseparable from contemporary branding strategies, to tell a new story – as fictitious fakes, they have begun to refashion Western fashion.

Not only have Western brands become objects of reference and imitation in the Middle East; conversely, Dubai and the Gulf have grown so attractive that products and places elsewhere, too, want to shine in their glow. In her photographic essay “Dubai Gold and Diamonds: Tracing Dubai’s influence on the South Indian State of Kerala,” which is part of a larger visual arts and documentary project, the artist *Sophie-Therese Trenka-Dalton* shows shop signs and street billboards in the cities of Kochi and Kozhikode and in the rural environment of the Malappuram district, whose motifs and texts refer to the Emirates and other Gulf states.<sup>3</sup> These references allude directly to affluence and modernity, and Dubai in particular developed into an original cultural motive. Much more than simply strategically branding products and firms, these advertisements tell us about individual desires and collective nostalgia among citizens and migrants from Kerala.

Concomitantly, Dubai has added more and more facets to its already multiplex brand. In his chapter “The Branding of Dubai as the Capital of the Islamic Economy,” *Heiko Schuss* studies an initiative launched in 2013. Production of and trade in *halāl* products and services has developed into an increasingly attractive and profitable global industry. The article investigates the implementation of Dubai’s strategy to become the global centre of the Islamic economy and the synergies with and contradictions to other elements of its place branding. It shows that Dubai plays an important role, both in the wider sense of a Muslim world economy and in the narrow sense of an economy conforming to Islamic precepts. Nevertheless, there are competing *halāl* hubs in the Gulf region and the wider Islamic world, and Dubai does not seriously attempt to transform its economy into a fully-fledged Islamic economy. *Halāl* goods and services are only a part of its wider diversification strategy and are built on synergies with other existing sectors. The emirate’s strategy is to offer both secular and Islamic goods and services for a diverse spectrum of cus-

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<sup>3</sup> The photographs belong to the broader “Kerala Trilogy” project, which along with the “Gulfi” also included the videos “Dubai Ports World Kochi” and “Coir Kerala” (on the processing of coconut fibre). This work is part of her long-term project “Dubayyland.” Cf. Trenka-Dalton, 2022.

tomers, and it therefore plays on the vagueness of such designations as “Islamic” and “ḥalāl.” In fact, within the development strategy and the place branding of Dubai, the Islamic economy strategy plays only a secondary role.

The entanglement of religion and politics is also in the focus of academic research, e. g. on Islam in Egypt. Lisa M. Franke seeks to nuance the concentration on pious activism and the idea that Islam dominates everyday life in this country. Her research on individual pieties, on being religious and *doing* being religious, opens up especially the worlds of individuals who are different in the sense that they seek inspiration from television preachers because, for various reasons, they have stopped going to their local mosques on Fridays. At the centre of the paper “Islamic Ideals, the Concept of Love, and Processes of Individualisation: Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī’s Writings and his Spiritual Brand” is an individual, yet religiously toned lifestyle. Drawing on fieldwork with young Alexandrians, the article considers how their spirituality is influenced by the personal brand of an Islamic television guide, who includes everyday life experiences in his interpretation of religious sources. This development hints at tendencies away from mainstream Islam and asks about alternative versions of belief. The article analyses the preacher’s self-marketing and his way of conveying religious, social, and sometimes even political information and tries to understand the relationship between public versions of Islam and processes of individualisation.

In contrast, in his chapter “Queer Brands, Branding Queerness: Fractal Orientalism and Selling Gay-Friendly Beirut,” *Ghassan Moussawi* examines the ways the Euro-American press has branded contemporary Beirut as a gay-friendly city and destination for gay tourists, using his concept of “Fractal Orientalism.” While many cities use gay-friendliness as a means to attract and mobilise the pink economy, what happens when imperial centres brand a city as gay-friendly? He asks how Beirut has become gay-friendly in these representations. For whom is it gay-friendly, what do such designations make possible, and what do they obscure? Finally, he investigates how such designations affect local queer communities. Drawing on his ethnography of queer formations in Beirut, he highlights the (un)intended social and political consequences of such designations and illustrates how they shrink the spaces for local queer communities, especially trans, genderqueer, and working-class queer people, and how this complicates LGBT asylum-seeking from Lebanon in Western countries.

### 3.3 Part III: State Branding

The third part on state branding starts from early modern Ottoman practices of imperial branding and leads to strategies of contemporary nation branding.

These include the search for a unifying national logo and for a green brand in the UAE and the link between branding and spatial planning in Oman, while Egyptian destination marketing oscillates between addressing a Western-oriented and a more conservative Arab public. Gulf states also used stamps to demonstrate national progress. Lastly, Gibraltar increasingly endeavours to imagine itself as an economic and cultural bridge between Europe and the Maghreb.

Branding has rarely been recognised as a relevant theme in architectural history. Therefore, *Philip Geisler* reminds us of Fredric Jameson's programmatic imperative "Always historicize!" His contribution "Sinan's Iconic Practices: Staging Early Modern Ottoman Architecture and Power" supplements the discussion of branding in the Middle East with a historical assessment in order to better problematise its global power in modern capitalism. As an example, it studies the work of the Ottoman Empire's famous 16th-century chief architect Sinan. Conceived in a context of early globalisation, cultural power struggles, and new media technologies, three of his outstanding creations in Edirne and Istanbul illuminate the ways an emancipated architect used imperial architecture as a strategy of communication and image construction. Sinan's perceptual strategies staged the iconic architect, developed recognisable architectural styles, constructed mental (hyper-) images, and conceptualised buildings through iconicity and urban design. This reveals how Ottoman iconic practices fully exploited the twofold quality of urban icons as physical objects bound to a place and as circulating images with supraregional availability. Illustrating the imperial legacies of capitalist branding, these cases suggest the importance of delving into the transregional and transdisciplinary history of strategic architectural communication before the age of (post)modern corporate design.

Turning to contemporary issues, the chapter "Branding the United Arab Emirates as Nation Building? Constructing Unity versus Acknowledging Diversity" discusses the 2019 project to create a nation-brand logo for the UAE in terms of its potential range of meanings. It takes an interdisciplinary approach between anthropology and contemporary history. The chapter is situated within the wider literature regarding nation branding and the construction of Emirati identity. Its authors, *Moritz A. Mihatsch* and *Richard Gauvain*, advance three main arguments. Firstly, the nation-brand project is clearly to be understood within the frame of nation building in a federation of seven distinct emirates. Secondly, the design and promotion of this project reinforce established political hierarchies and structures. Thirdly, the same project may be understood as one of multiple strategies by which the UAE government also embraces the seemingly contradictory dimensions of its local/traditional and global/modern cultural and political realities. The study is based on the analysis of official documents, promotional material from social

media, media discourses, and interviews with participating artists, as well as a sample of regular Emiratis' reception of the project.

In the next chapter, *Thibaut Klinger* asks “Branding and Spatial Planning in Oman: A Neoliberal Turning Point in Politics?” As in other Gulf countries, branding belongs to Oman's national political strategy. Since his 1970 coup, Sultan Qaboos has tried to create an “imagined community” and a unified territory resistant to threats of secession and civil war; spatial planning has been at the core of this strategy. During the 1990s, globalisation spread at a faster tempo, and competition between countries, regions, and cities grew, so that they felt the need to promote export marketing and to define their brand. This was also the case with the Sultanate, especially when Qaboos emphasised the priority of economic diversification. Nation branding then means featuring competitive identity and storytelling. This shift has been accompanied by an evolution of governance in accordance with the neoliberal model. Corporate branding influences nation branding, while “visions” give a key role to the sovereign and his personal branding. These developments replace politically oriented planning with entrepreneurial management. In terms of action, the multiplication of “projects” aims to boost the territory while serving the interests of the economic elite that surrounds the monarch. This evolution privileges the country's iconic places at the risk of rifts between the different parts of the territory, contrary to what Qaboos sought at the beginning of his reign.

Then, *Karin Ahlberg* decidedly turns to destination marketing. The end product for sale in tourism is an experience, which is structured by each traveller's expectation. That expectation is formed by dreams and fantasies of the place, of enchantment, of leaving the mundane behind. Tourism marketing, therefore, is about selling a fantasy. Iconic Egyptian tourism images may appear banal or arbitrary, but in fact are the outcome of meticulous global research into customers' imaginaries. The chapter “Balancing Islam: Overlapping Images of Egypt as a Destination for International and Arab Tourists” builds on interviews with the campaign architects and tourism experts who were in charge of producing Egypt's official promotion in the late 2000s. It zooms in on two campaign ads released in 2009. Targeting the two main source markets, the Arab and the international market, their diverging symbolisms conjured up two starkly different destinations: one with bustling oriental street life, modern malls, and exotic nightlife, the other with serene landscapes of wonder and blue water. That references to Arab Muslim culture were centre stage in one campaign and omitted in the other was no coincidence, but shows how Egypt's tourism promotion is produced in close dialogue with larger political and cultural processes. Accordingly, the chapter sheds light on the uneasy relation between glossy tourism ads, darker geopolitical realities, and the role of the imagination in tourism.

*Laura Hindelang's* snapshot “Mobile Images: Stamps as Branding Tools in the Gulf States” discusses the relevance of these “business cards of states” (Walter Benjamin) as a means of political place branding. Gaining complete control over postal services was a crucial step towards political independence for the Gulf countries that were either Trucial States or British quasi-protectorates. With the takeover came the task of creating new stamp designs and developing a political iconography that could advertise the process of nation building. Stamps were especially powerful as mobile transmitters of images in the pre-electronic messages era and were spread by mail over the world. A close reading of a small selection of pictorial stamps issued by Kuwait and other Gulf states in the second half of the 20th century reveals the visual strategies employed and the motifs and iconographies used for self-promotion vis-à-vis both national and international audiences. The analysis shows that images of maps and national emblems, impressive buildings (preceding the more recent run for starchitecture), and petroleum infrastructure became seminal markers in their place-branding strategy to demonstrate the progress of formerly Bedouin societies.

More and more projects, and finally cities and states, are being branded as “green” and “sustainable.” Accordingly, Dubai’s government invests in diverse efforts to brand the emirate accordingly. This comes as an extension of its successful place branding as a business hub and a tourist destination and is part of its efforts to instigate a green shift as a strategic plan for future energy adaptation and to secure an international position. Methodologically, the chapter “Greening the Desert: Emirati Youth’s Perceptions of Green Branding” is based on qualitative data from in-depth interviews with focus groups encompassing young Emirati women in higher education in Dubai and their written reflections. *Gergana Alzeer* and *Tilde Rosmer* apply the theoretical Brand Box Model with its two dimensions of functionality and representationality to guide their questions and analysis. The thematic analysis of the data collected focuses on experiences, perceptions, and emerging themes of green branding among these young women students. The authors find that the themes were clearly driven by their local culture, including the role of the Emirati leadership, heritage, and religion, as well as by the speedy modernisation of the UAE. This demonstrates that, in the local understanding, “green” does not always necessarily equal “sustainable,” as it often focuses on greening the desert and the city as important aspects of the quality of life.

Several examples from Europe are also included in this volume. As *Dieter Haller* shows, against the background of the current Brexit, Gibraltar has rediscovered its strong human, cultural, and economic links with Tangier and Morocco on the opposite side of the Strait and has started to brand itself accordingly. The place’s name (originally, in Arabic, *Ġabal Ṭāriq*, the “Mountain of Tarik,” after the commander who in 711 AD crossed the Strait and led the Muslim conquest of

the Iberian Peninsula) already reflects its historical significance. The article “Branding Gibraltar: British, Mediterranean, European, or a Bridge between Two Worlds?” widens the scope of the economic concept of branding by embedding it in local and translocal politics and identity building. It explores different branding periods of the British overseas territory from the 1960s onwards and its shift from a local to a British and a European identity to a link between the continent and Northern Africa. Local politicians, entrepreneurs, and other decision makers have developed a number of cultural, infrastructural, and economic activities with Morocco, stressing common bonds and ties. As both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar have been densely interconnected in multiple ways for many centuries, the key question of this chapter is how Gibraltar makes use of which former links in its new strategy.

### 3.4 Part IV: City Branding

Part IV decidedly turns to city branding. Opposite Gibraltar, Tangier is similarly being placed at spatial, but also at cultural and temporal interfaces; its multi-scalar and multimedia branding of places has also become obvious in other case studies in this book. As in Cairo, urban branding relates mostly to brand-new developments and imagines and sells a prosperous future. Yet, “slum-free” urban action programmes are another means to brand cities (and the rulers behind), e.g. in Egypt and Morocco, while often passing over the local populations’ interests. In contrast, in Gulf cities like Kuwait, urban advertising may outlast long-abandoned projects, whereas in a Turkish neighbourhood, local people attempt to adopt official branding narratives and enforce them against repression “from above.” The brand development of the Iranian city of Qom, which reflects a turn towards an Islamically gilded capitalism, is closely related to its “Tehranisation.” But first, a chapter will investigate local residents’ brand perceptions of Casablanca, which presents itself as having the first comprehensive city-branding strategy in Africa.

In 2016, Casablanca was the first city in all Africa to initiate an urban branding strategy, aimed at enhancing its attractiveness for local people, investors, and tourists. According to the chapter “City Branding and Residents’ Perception: The Case of Casablanca,” this strategy accompanies an ambitious development plan that embraces economic, social, and environmental challenges that the metropolis is called upon to manage rapidly and innovatively. After five years of the strategy’s deployment, the two authors, *Dounia Sedra* and *Hicham El Bayed*, restudy the perceptions that Casablanca residents have of their own city and also of the development of its place brand. In their analysis using an online image assessment, they recognise the degree of local citizens’ involvement in the dynamics of place brand-



ing and allow them to express their views about the development plan's effects on their daily lives.

In his paper "The Multilevel Branding of Tangier at Temporal and Spatial Interfaces," *Steffen Wippel* points to the multi-scalar aspects of place making. He starts his analysis of the branding of the northern Moroccan metropolis from a comparative historical perspective: already in the first half of the 20th century, the city was strongly marketed to attract travellers and residents, but also economic and financial institutions. After a post-independence period of stagnation, it has experienced another rapid urban transformation in recent years. Its main goals are to become an international hub for trade, a major place for foreign investment, and a recognised tourism destination. The article is interested in how a wide range of actors at different national, local, and project levels contribute in multiple ways to the construction of brands for Tangier and specific places in it. Special attention is directed to how strategic communication positions the city in space and time, especially between different world regions, between several civilisational realms, and between a great past and a prosperous future. Methodologically, the study is based on repeated fieldwork in the city from 2013 onwards, including expert interviews and photo-geographic excursions, the thorough assessment of written documents in printed media or available in the Internet, and the analysis of illustrations and other images used in branding.

Beyond glittering images and iconic buildings, the label "slum-free" has become another synonym of urban modernity and progressive development, leading many local and central governments to reinforce policies against self-constructed housing. Since the turn of the millennium, UN-Habitat and the Cities Alliance have promoted the slogan "Cities without Slums" as a development objective. Soon, the "slum-free" brand reached North Africa, as well. Morocco initiated the "Villes Sans Bidonvilles" programme in 2004. King Mohammed VI has declared that informal settlements endanger the country's development plans and its global competitiveness. In 2015, Egyptian President El Sisi announced the objective of an "Egypt Without Slums" as part of a wider strategy to modernise the country through megaprojects and construction. In their comparative study "Constructing Legitimacy through Pro-poor Housing? Branding Cities in Egypt and Morocco as 'Slum-free'," *Raffael Beier* and *Hassan Elmouelhi* argue that this label enables governments to propagate quantitative development successes and to enhance national and international political legitimacy, while simultaneously fostering repressive and neoliberal urban planning agendas. Following this, they ask about the consequences of this branding strategy for the place in city life of those who dwell in informal settlements in Cairo and Casablanca.

*Khaled Nezar Adham's* essay "The Power of the Speculative Image: On Branding Desert Developments and Selling Cairo's Urban Future" addresses the question

of how current branding and promotional methods and visualisation techniques used by real estate developers to promote their residential and commercial offerings are implicated in the political economy of the urbanisation process in today's Egypt. The essay builds on the premise that the planning, designing, and building of new cities and large-scale urban developments reflect the way we organise the relationship between our imagined urban future and our lived present. The article argues that the functional power of the various visual and experiential techniques lies in their ability to transform into "urban lifestyle script" materials that can be used to make the future a source of extractable revenue for the present. This concept refers to a set of expectations loosely shared by a globally oriented class of citizens about the quality of certain lifestyle forms in a prototypical global city. Based on this concept, the essay investigates the layouts of showrooms, architectural visualisations, and TV promotional materials produced for large-scale real estate in Cairo and aims to shed light on how they can become instrumental in constructing a memory of the future and transforming it into current wealth.

Planned to respond to the demands of post-oil economic diversification, Gulf cities are also the result of an image policy aimed at creating an urban spectacle of modernity. Current images of urban projects setting their sights on being avant-garde and out of proportion are heirs to a relatively old policy of creating showcase cities. Urban communication is conceded to single-niche private sector stakeholders, blurring the boundaries of governmental approaches and strategy. Worse still, systematic recourse to visual communication and the proliferation of urban advertisements has produced a series of counter-effects. The chapter "Branding Backlash: The Erring of Urban Advertising in Gulf Cities" first reveals the tensions generated by the advertisers' domination of the urban scene. Then it shows how urban images tend to become independent of the projects they support, thereby accentuating the process of virtualisation. Lastly, the chapter addresses the excesses of urban neoliberalism, including the symptomatic obsolete and misused billboards, particularly in Kuwait City, where the author *Roman Stadnicki* has carried out systematic surveys. This photo-rich essay is based on fieldwork and qualitative research conducted in the UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait from 2011 to 2019, during which urban imagery was understood as both a method and an object of research to address the political, economic, and social dynamics at work in the urban field.

*Kamaluddin Duaei* confirms the recent global trend of place (re-)branding as an opportunistic urban strategy, in which numerous cities across the West Asian and North African regions have undergone both physical and representational developments. Qom, widely if unofficially recognised as the religious capital of Iran, constitutes an authentic case of this fashion, too, exhibiting both similarities to other cases and its own unique features. The glimpse this short piece with the title "Qom to Tehran and Back, Express: Branding a 'Suburb'?" takes of the city in-

tends to provide insight into how its urban reconfiguration has been influenced by its geographical adjacency to the national capital. While partially satisfying the desire for consumer amenities, the project of modernising the Islamic city in light of Tehran has fostered a new place that is not so much a neutralised Tehran or another case of Dubaisation, as an increasing “Tehranisation” of Qom.

As already demonstrated, conflicts around or fuelled by a brand often arise between state power and the local population. In “Who is Branding Beyoğlu? Commodification and Surveillance of Public Space in Istanbul,” *Pekka Tuominen* studies an urban district that exemplifies a specific form of secular urbanity. Debates about different qualities of public space throughout its history have formed a distinct historical consciousness, mostly running parallel to but occasionally colliding with other senses of authenticity and modernity. In Beyoğlu, the celebrated sense of freedom of expression in public space coexists with powerful practices of surveillance and repression; the illustrious past of its secular modernity becomes entangled in unsparing commodification of its key symbols. At specific events, such as the yearly May Day demonstrations, its associated senses of inclusion and belonging are put into question, often in violent terms. Therefore, the distinct image of urbanity, exemplified by the egalitarianism of boulevards and public squares, has become a battlefield of historically rooted understandings of the desired characteristics of contemporary cities. The quarter’s brand has been both contested and revitalised throughout its history, often with significant changes of emphasis. Its historical trajectory remains contested and invites citizens from different backgrounds to the quotidian work of constantly redefining their position through its urban transformation.

### 3.5 Part V: Place Branding

The final part of this book addresses the branding of further, uncommon and less studied, places. The brandings of the new town of NEOM in Saudi Arabia and of the Eyüpsultan neighbourhood in Istanbul both primarily serve the self-promotion of political leaders. More ephemeral sites, like refugee camps, also undergo branding processes, while mosque naming in Denmark relates to diverse national (geo)political backgrounds in the Middle East. In Istanbul, from past to present, tulips have been showcased ubiquitously as a symbol of Ottomanism. And conclusively demonstrating immaculateness, cleanliness, and purity, untainted by the downsides of daily life, can be a particular goal of branding, as is practiced in Dubai in its pursuit of maximum attractiveness.

First, *Hend Aly* investigates “Place Branding as a Political Act: Approaching Saudi Arabia’s NEOM beyond its Shiny Façade.” The megaproject beside the Red

Sea was first announced in 2017 by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. As his “brainchild,” NEOM (which is short for “new future”) cannot be understood apart from his aspirations, and its place branding is used as a spatial realisation of self-branding and power reaffirmation. Hence, the chapter foregrounds place branding as a political act composed of processes, actors, and narratives, triggered by local and international dynamics, and entailing political and socioeconomic consequences. Importantly, by systematically applying this lens to NEOM’s branding, the chapter propagates the value of broadly approaching place branding as a political act. The study is based on analysing the project’s branding documents and platforms, including the launch event, its official website and YouTube channel, and statements by major stakeholders. It first engages with academic debates on branding the city in a neoliberal context. It then explores NEOM’s branding processes, involved actors, and main branding narratives as constituent pillars of the political act of place branding. The last section gives two solid examples of how NEOM’s branding narratives reflect the Crown Prince’s power aspirations and realise his self-brand.

The snapshot “Two Politicians and a Shrine: Competing Personal Brands around Eyüpsultan in Istanbul” examines how rival Turkish politicians brand themselves by visiting a famous shrine attributed to a Companion of the Prophet in Istanbul. In doing so, it investigates the close interplay between personal branding and place branding. Taking its name from the shrine, the surrounding neighbourhood features prominently in contemporary Sunni Islamist and Ottoman revivalist narratives, such as those promoted by the ruling Justice and Development Party. Many who consider themselves secular regard President Erdoğan’s often-performed public prayers there as an aggressive demonstration of the Islamisation of politics. By analysing Turkish news coverage and social media, *Annegret Roelcke* shows how Ekrem İmamoğlu, of the secularist Republican People’s Party and Istanbul’s mayor since 2019, has also branded himself by praying at the Eyüpsultan shrine. At the same time, he combines this with visits to other shrines in the neighbourhood that are connected to groups such as the Alevi, which allows him to position himself in opposition to the polarising Sunni Islamist discourse. By incorporating Eyüpsultan into the image of his own powerful brand, İmamoğlu also opens up the place’s predominantly Islamist image to alternative claims.

*Melissa Gatter*, then, turns to two Syrian refugee camps in Jordan that are decorated with the colourful brandmarks of international nongovernmental and UN-related organisations, while emblems of Gulf countries are generously stamped on donated items. In contrast, enforced by the policing of space by aid organisations and Jordanian security, Syrian flags do not appear in either camp. Based on data collected during ethnographic fieldwork between 2016 and 2018, her chapter “Who

Labels the Camp? Claiming Ownership through Visibility in Jordan” examines how branding in both sites constitutes a regime of visibility that sustains corporate humanitarianism and donor politics and goes hand in hand with simultaneous depoliticisation and “NGOisation” trends. It argues that these symbols have marked the camps as belonging not to their residents, but instead to their humanitarian governors, who claim not only spatial ownership, but also credit for their presence in the world’s largest refugee crisis. Camp residents form their own associations with the logos in their everyday spaces, but they also become extensions of these brands through strategic brand placement. However, this chapter argues, this visibility does not signify accountability to refugee beneficiaries. On the contrary, these brands work to deflect responsibility onto either the individual donor in the Global North or the host country.

In her chapter “Branding the Middle East in the Diaspora: Names of Mosques in Denmark,” *Helle Lykke Nielsen* elucidates that mosques in Europe can be seen as sites of everyday geopolitics. By regarding toponyms as a discursive construction of narratives that are compressed and materialised into a short form, names of mosques have the potential to express a sense of belonging and thus to brand mosque affiliations with various states, ideologies, and actors *in* and *through* the Middle East. This onomastic analysis of mosque names takes Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch’s theoretical framework for naming as a starting point and combines it with the concept of scaling. Following a brief overview of the complex practices of naming mosques in Denmark and a few methodological reflections, two mosques in Copenhagen and Odense illustrate how the choice of names situates them in the geopolitical landscape. The chapter concludes that not only do the two mosques position themselves differently towards the Muslims and the Danish majority; they also use their names in ways that suggest that they want to minimise the risk of triggering discussions of geopolitical issues with the Danish majority. For the Muslims, one place-branding strategy indexes Islamic tradition to obtain religious fame, which eventually can be exchanged for political reputation; another highlights cultural prestige and political greatness that are used as a branding device for recognition and heritage.

Symbols used in place branding sometimes extend across several scales, from nations to cities and specific urban places, and cover widely separated times. In her contribution to this volume, “Showcasing Tulips in Istanbul,” which is based on several field visits and close inspection of the secondary literature, newspaper articles, Turkish MA theses, and a number of visuals, *Birgit Krawietz* starts from the finding that the tulip is certainly one of the most famous cultural icons of Turkey; but as a highly “polyvalent symbol,” it defies close confinement. Her text first takes stock of some prominent historical contexts going back to the Ottoman Empire, namely the “Tulip Age” of the 18th century, and discusses the religious under-

pinnings of its display. The first part of the chapter demonstrates the extreme variability of tulip messages and the religiously ambivalent profile of this flower. Today, the tulip has been integrated as a history-laden emblem into Turkey's contemporary nation branding and destination marketing. Even an ancient metropolis like Istanbul now feels compelled to reframe its old worthies and new assets in a thoroughly branded fashion. Consequently, in the second part of her article, the author highlights certain more recent representations of this flower and asks what kind of branding is taking place. She states that the tulip plays a major role in both these periods of enhanced global outreach, although they are separated by up to three centuries.

In the final chapter "Architecture and the Myth of Immaculate Form in Dubai," *Philip Geisler* examines some of the city's residential and multifunctional projects, their form, and urban materiality to conceive of the deeper aesthetic meaning of hypermodern spatial production. He suggests that the myth of the immaculate form is at the heart of Dubai's corporate architectural culture. *Vis-à-vis* the emirate's flawed socio-political realities, immaculateness epitomises the quintessential counter-narrative and operates as an aesthetic echo of its investor and tourism strategy. Immaculate form evolves out of Dubai's specific configuration of space that orchestrates architecture through geometric design principles, seamless and reflecting surfaces, and technologically controlled and isolated climatic totalities. As a consequence of these architectural aesthetics, urban megaprojects, master-planned neighbourhoods, and individual buildings foster the interiorisation of space in a place whose rapid modernisation project is staged as inherently protected from the contagion of surrounding systems and an overcome past. The paper argues that this projected spatial closure foregrounds an aesthetic and at the same time a socio-political purification that grows out of American and European post-war corporate modernism.

The book closes with a list of contributors. This separate list of biographical notes at the end of the volume reflects individual status and affiliation (often subject to rapid interim change in the contemporary academic system) at the time when the articles were written.

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