| Reading the City |

Architectural sites as the interlocutors of past, present and future identity in Dubai

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which architectural sites establish and maintain Dubai's claim to global city status. In a globalized world, localities must succeed in translocal networks in order to ensure their survival and prosperity, and global recognition of local uniqueness is thus integral to the establishment of global cities. Architecture plays an essential role in producing locality in the city: inhabitants and visitors in the city experience architectural sites, so too do they consume, and therefore produce, local uniqueness. Through nine architectural case studies, this thesis explores the implications of architecture on placemaking in Dubai implementing four key themes – authenticity, innovation, prosperity, and connection – to explore the ways in which nine key sites in the city produce local identity.

Chapter 1 | Introduction

> For it is still the case that no-one lives in the world in general.
> — Clifford Geertz

In an increasingly globalised world, places ensure their survival and prosperity by succeeding in translocal networks (Agnew, 1999, pp.190, Zoomers & Western, 2011, pp.377-378,). The nation-state framework dominant in the late 19th and early 20th centuries articulated place at the level of the nation: whereby states exercised political power based on national policies and international relations (Tuan, 1975, Arendt, 2017, pp.11-12). With the rise of globalisation, however, networks of global localities have increasingly contested these formal state relations as the sole arbitrators of power (Sassen, 2005, pp.27). Globalisation theory describes power as distributed along Global networks or 'flows' (Appadurai, 1996, pp.33). Thus, to succeed globally, localities – as places – must be able to: (a) negotiate global trade (Gaviria & Emontspool, 2015, pp.181-182), (b) market themselves as an 'authentic' and cosmopolitan destination (Yeoh, 2005, pp.946), and (c) position themselves as a spokesperson for the interests of their region (Sassen, 2005, pp.28-30, 40). Above all, these localities must advocate for their own uniqueness: for the value which they add to the network which cannot be found anywhere else.

With these prerequisites, the frameworks for examining places in globalisation are often staged at the city level. Although nation-state discourses still play a key role in discerning the workings of global operations, the very existence of the state is founded in key symbols and concepts which make it hard to sustain the homogenous narratives of local identity required to succeed in globalisation (Tuan, 1975, pp.160). Instead, then, it is cities, whose existence is rooted in the direct experience of objects and people, which become the key nodes of global networks (loc. cit.). The most successful become 'global cities', and this framework includes both traditional, colonial cities like Paris, London, New York, as well as, increasingly, cities of the Global South: such as Hong Kong, Mumbai and Dubai (Brenner & Keil, 2006, pp.4-5, Roy & Ong, 2011, pp.3). This thesis examines

Dubai as one such global city, looking to the ways in which Dubai stakes and maintains its claims to global city status.

Recognition and locality are both integral to the establishment of the global city, and hence, creating places which can be experienced by locals, guests and visitors alike is essential to the development of such cities (Sassen, 2005, pp. 40, Al Saed et. al., 2020, pp.122). Tuan discusses this process of placemaking in the context of experience, arguing that to know a place requires participation, an avenue for passive experience and inchoate feelings to be "given shape and made visible" (Tuan, 1975, pp.161). According to Tuan, art is one of the key mediums through which experience, or feeling, can be expressed in visual form (loc. cit.). Yet while visual, two-dimensional artforms induce an awareness of place by reflecting lived experience, architecture, a multidimensional artform creates place both materially and figuratively (loc. cit.). The architecture of Dubai plays this essential – and experiential – role in shaping the city (Elsheshtawy, 2004, pp.170, 194), staging its global identity on several characteristics which this thesis categorises under four key themes: authenticity, innovation, prosperity and connection. This thesis explores these claims for Dubai through nine architectural case studies (Figure 1). Through these architectural sites, the four key aspects of Dubai's claim to global significance are embodied and made emblematic of the city each contributing to a narrative of Dubai as a unique and valuable *future* city (see, for example, Karoui, 2021, pp.171). Architecture, as a form of transforming space into place, therefore is essential to making the city internationally recognisable, as well as providing it a sense of local uniqueness, and thus international value (Cherrier & Belk, 2015, 320). However, architecture also has a fundamental impact on shaping the societies in which it operates, and therefore a direct influence on shaping Dubai itself.
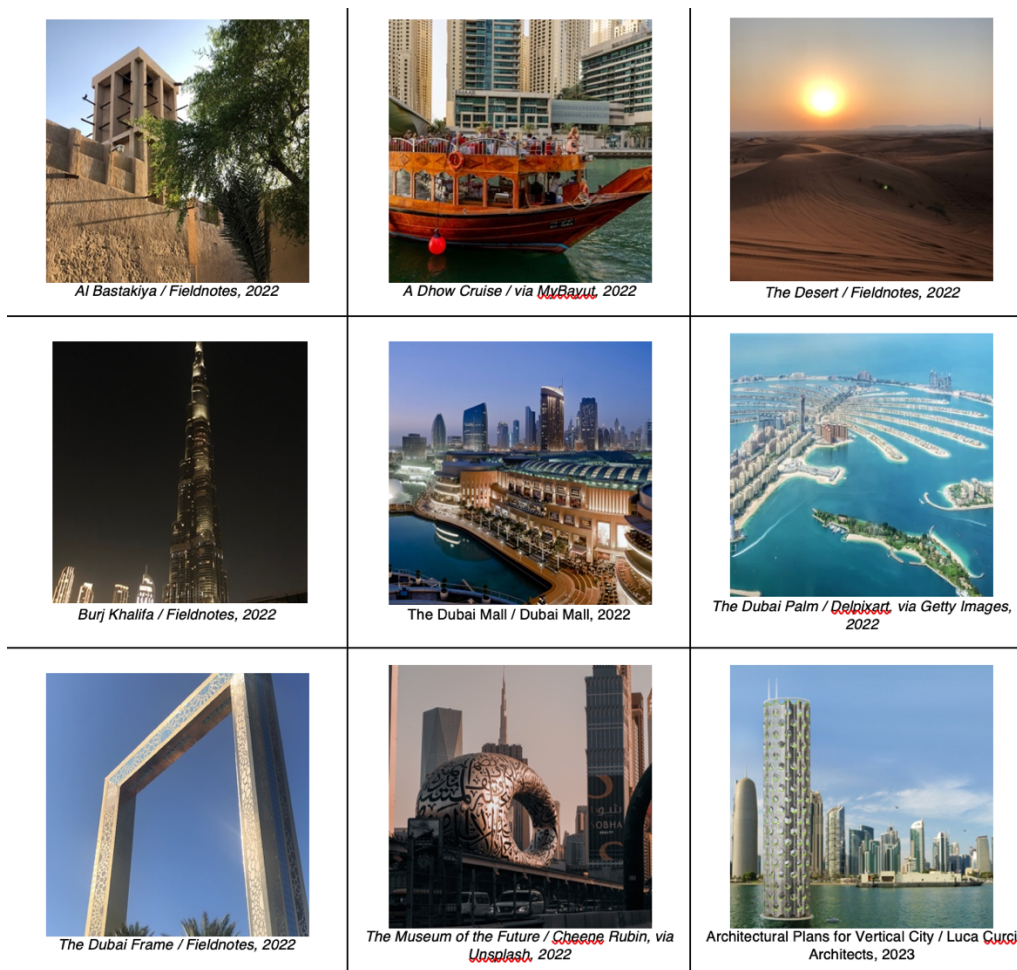
Figure 1 table of key architectural case studies

In Dubai, the push to narrate a cohesive local identity is immediately made apparent in the physical infrastructure of the city. Although guests and tourists may find the "newness" or "artificiality" of Dubai disconcerting, the city still clearly presents itself as a cosmopolitan, non-Western global city (Elsheshtawy, 2004, pp. 169, Baas, Karoui & Yeoh, 2020, pp.801-802). Dubai stakes its claims to a unique local identity through iconic architecture which narrates the key characteristics of the city: prosperity, innovation, connection and authenticity. In particular, the architectural sites of the city, as interlocutors of the city's prominent characteristics, provide a chronological narrative which celebrates the city from its historic roots to its imagined future. This chronology is even made explicit by architecture in the city itself, by the Dubai Frame (برواز دبي), designed to literally "frame" Dubai's pre-existing architectural achievements (Nastasi & Ponzini, 2018, pp.223). The Frame,

as a site, not only hosts three separate galleries dedicated to Dubai's past, present and future, but also creates a picture-border through which, from each side respectively, the old and new city can be seen (Dubai Frame, 2021). What the Frame explicitly underscores is the critical ways in which chronology is implemented by Dubai's architecture in order to make claims about locality, uniqueness and authenticity.

As perhaps the first city in the Gulf region to successfully promote itself as a global city, Dubai now performs in an increasingly competitive regional territory to maintain its stake as the primary global city in the Gulf, and therefore a key access point for the world to connect to the Middle Eastern region (Ahouzi et. al., 2020, pp.14,19). Situated in this competitive arena, Dubai's architecture makes bigger and bigger claims (often quite literally) of its vitality in a global future (Aima, 2018, pp.15). This future-facing discourse has two aims: first, to ensure the continued prosperity of Dubai, and second, to reassure the ontological insecurities of its inhabitants, whose local identities are increasingly threatened by globalisation (loc. cit.). The question which motivates this research project is thus: In what ways do architectural sites shape Dubai as a future global city, as it is perceived locally, regionally and globally – and hence, how do these sites become the interlocutors of local identity? To answer this question, this thesis first explores the existing literature on the city: contextualising the use of the global city framework in its analysis. In reviewing more broadly the literature currently available on place, space, ontological security, locality and identity, this paper grounds its methodology in existing theories of space and place, and particularly in architecture and design: suggesting ways to of making this approach more concrete and deliberate.

Chapter 2 | A Review of Key Theories and Literature

"Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings."
— Edward W. Said

2.1. Theories of the City

Current theories typically seek common frameworks through which to critically examine, interpret and analyse the city landscape. For example, Ahouzi et. al., in alignment with the European Commission, discuss Dubai as a "smart city" (2020, pp.13). Akhavan describes Dubai as a "port-city" (2017, pp.343), while Siegler argues for the further distinction of its essential connectivity using the term "relational city" (Siegler, 2013, pp.613). Kanna variously typifies Dubai as a "city-corporation", "fashionable global city" and "colonial city" (Kanna, 2011, pp. xiii, 3-5, Kanna, 2014, pp.606). Coles and Walsh echo Kanna in describing Dubai as a "colonial city" although they also – antithetically – claim Dubai as a "postcolonial city" (2010, pp.1318). Acuto suggests that Dubai risks becoming Harvey's "voodoo city" (Acuto, 2010, pp.283). Thani and Heenan describe both Dubai and Abu Dhabi as "disneyfied cityscapes", and Cherrier & Belk similarly as a "dreamworld" of consumption (2020, pp.157, 2015, pp.317). Bagaeen claims Dubai as a Gulf "instant city" or "instantly recognisable city" (2007, pp.173), a claim which Cherrier and Belk further define as "a city which is the result of extraordinarily fast urbanism and global flows" (2015, pp.318). Globalisation's increased emphasis on city or hub-based networks, rather than formal state relations, increasingly formulates the city as a subject of focus for sociological, economic and political study, and Dubai, as a city-state, is a particularly fruitful point of application for this scholarship (Sassen, 2005, pp.27). Dubai, as one of seven Emirates in the UAE Dubai has a high level of autonomy regarding development strategy and industrial

policy, and hence in articulating its significance to a global world (Cho, Moon & Yin, 2016, pp.487).

However, Dubai and its key actors are not the unanimous narrators of the city's identity, since the city operates in a complex constellation of global influence (Yeoh, 2001, pp.460). The "postcolonial" city, proposed by Yeoh, explores the complex influences of colonialism on contemporary cities in both continuity and disjuncture, (loc. cit.). Notably, Yeoh warns against 'homogenisation': the postcolonial analysis of only the "once-colonised, periphery or the Global South" (loc. cit., Coles and Walsh, 2010, pp.1318). Architecture and space are also important since both can be "interrogated for their embodiment of colonial constructions and categories in order to reveal the postcolonial condition" (Yeoh, 2001, pp.459). Yet while the latter may have limited application in Dubai, where little colonial architecture stands, certainly the broader consideration of how colonialism has shaped the hegemonic values to which Dubai appeals is essential. This thesis incorporates these considerations in the global city framework, which offers a fruitful point of departure for interrogating, as Yeoh advocates, architecture and space in Dubai.

An emerging body of literature seeks to discuss the role of Dubai as a "world city" or "global city" (Sassen, 2004, pp.25). The literature on global cities has evolved in recent years to account for emerging understandings of flows and networks which have arisen with the advent of globalisation (Allen, 1999, pp.196). Specifically, global cities operate in broader, regional or international networks (Sassen, 2004, pp.25). With this increased emphasis on connectivity, global cities secure their role by connecting the market to other regions (Yeoh, 2005, pp.995). Elsheshtawy, for example, typifies Dubai as an "emerging global city": one which has gone to great lengths to establish itself as an essential connecting node in global networks, but which still has far to go in securing this position for the future (2004, pp.169, 193). Acuto links this lack of future security directly to the "hyper-entrepreneurialism" of the city: to the constant construction of iconic sites, and impact that such sudden and ongoing change has upon the local identity of Dubai.

Moreover, if Dubai wishes to remain a global city, it must create an identity which includes all its inhabitants (2010 pp.272).

This question of intentional or 'self-conscious' placemaking arises often in city studies (Tuan, 1975, pp.157, Relph, 1976, pp.71, Lew, 2017, pp.449). Both regional specialists and the casual observer often remark that Dubai is a unique place in the world, given its deliberate sense of placelessness: the erosion of symbolic meaning in place, and the alienation of place from 'the homes of men' (Relph, 1976, pp, 143, Shaw & Enhorning, 2009, pp.32). Placelessness in Dubai is frequently attributed to the history of the city "springing up" from the desert during the oil boom of the 1970's and 1980's (Esheshtawy, 2004, pp.169). However, this sense of placelessness, contemporarily at least, does not arise from a *lack* of strategic local and international placemaking efforts (ibid, pp.170, Shaw & Enhorning, 2009, pp.31-33, Al Kodmany, 2018, pp.7). On the contrary, various agents within the city, such as the state, developers, corporations, locals and indeed even the monarchy are aware of the precariousness of the oil wealth which has brought so much global success to Dubai (Sen, 2020, pp.123, Karoui, 2021, pp.171). These actors are consequently each engaged in efforts to broaden international perceptions of Dubai, so that it may secure its status as a global city of the future (Sharpley, 2008, pp. 14, De Jong, Hoppe & Noori, 2019, pp.1658). Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum has been virally quoted saying "My father rode a camel, I'm ride a Mercedes, my son rides a Land Rover, and my grandson is going to ride a Land Rover, but my great grandson will have to ride a camel again" (Aima, 2018, pp.11). Fact-checking resources show the statement to be at least partly apocryphal, yet the virality of the quote reflects the degree to which the idea of future insecurity is proliferated and acknowledged throughout Dubai (AAP, 2021). To maintain a powerful and prosperous city Dubai must diversify its sources of revenue (Buckley & Hanieh, 2014, pp.156). Yet, to establish a future identity as a global city, Dubai must also pluralise its perception in the international sphere.

However, to diversify Dubai's image, does not mean to erase its past or present identities: only to also offer a projected (and secure) image of itself in the future. In the case of Dubai, it is the singular identity of the city as an oil-rich desert space which various actors in the city aim to diversify. Dubai is described as a 'tabula rasa': a city built up suddenly, as if from a blank slate (Elsheshtawy, 2009, pp.201, Donner & Sorcinelli, 2022, pp.2). The challenge is to find ways to connect this sudden present to its historic past and thereby to lend itself the 'authenticity' or locality which it desperately needs to sustain its image in a competitive imagined future (loc. cit.). The city-state is aware of this need – evidence of which can be seen in the creation of governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Happiness (MoH) and the Ministry of Possibilities (MoP (Ribeiro, Costa & Remondes, 2019, pp.228, 237), and in the seemingly innumerable construction projects of the city (Velegrinis & Katodrytis, 2015, pp.79).

For all this literature on the *kinds* of frameworks which can be used to identify the city in a global world, there is very little which lays out a similar framework for *reading* the city as a methodological practice. This thesis seeks to address this lacuna, exploring methods to read and interpret the city in the context of global politics, and thus read and interpret elements of social construction and identity which may be lost when approached from strictly discipline-oriented, rather than interdisciplinary, strategies.

2.2.   Space and Place

Although space and place have long been purely the concerns of the mathematical or scientific, developments made in the 1970s expanded the connections between social, mental and physical space (Lefebvre, 1974, pp.2, 21). Elkington and Gammon, emphasise the unbounded nature of space, and thus the corresponding fluidity which is conferred to ideas of place (2015, pp.2) Places are processes: reproduced in interaction and imbued with different meanings for different people (loc. cit.). Indeed, some scholars view globalisation as a process which erases place, while others argue contrarily that globalisation has increased the *em*placing of

social life – in a series of complex networks which they term 'localisation' (Sack, 1997, Beck, 2000, Laclau, 2007). By differentiating between the two terms, Elkington and Gammon assert that "place not space frames appropriate behaviour" (2015, pp.5). Agnew defines three main elements: locale (areas where social relations are structured), location (geographical area) and sense of place (social feeling toward that area) (2011, pp.327-328). By contrast, Massey has suggested that places have largely been depicted as having singular identities, built on history and tradition, and therefore that place is a process of establishing boundaries (Massey, 2005, pp.266).

2.3. Place-making and Symbolic Power

This thesis refers to a Lefebvrian understanding of the term "architecture" as "the production of space at a specific level, ranging from furniture to gardens and parks and extending even to landscapes" but excluding, "urban planning and what is generally known as 'land use planning'" (Lefebvre, 2014, pp.3). This thesis examines sites as symbolic architecture in Dubai, rather than on the basis of physical size or material composition, in order to ascertain the role they play in establishing Dubai as a future global city. A crucial starting point for any theory which seeks to critically examine the discursive practice of architecture is to establish how sites are framed as key signifiers. For the key sites of the city outlined in this thesis, the interrelationship of 'signifiers' (symbols) are carefully controlled by governing officials. While individuals may be free to interpret the symbolic meaning of the structures and sites for themselves, they are not able to do so without also considering the formal narratives of place offered by, for example, state-sponsored framing. Hence, while additional or non-state readings of these places may be extrapolated by the critical observer, they are always produced either in conjunction with, or opposition to, state-sanctioned discourses. Power is intertwined with the construction of architecture and its symbolic meaning (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.8). In the context of Dubai especially, many of the city's architectural projects have been funded by state or national developers (Acuto, 2010, pp.274). Such formal bodies often seek to re-establish a kind of pre-18th century

"monumentalisation" through the architecture of Dubai (ibid, pp.276). However, the construction of 'buildings' as well as aspiring 'monuments' also prevails, and these buildings are equally worthy of consideration: constituting some of the primary symbolic 'voices' of the city (Acuto, 2010, pp.274, Elkington & Gammon, 2015, pp.18).

The multiplicity of these city-voices is essential in recognising the theoretical backdrop which symbolic power – power to constitute the given by stating it – provides (Bourdieu, 1979, pp.82). Simply put, the symbolic requires interaction (Acuto, 2010, pp.283). Objects take on meaning through interaction with the social world, as do sites (loc. cit.). Hence, despite the careful framing of symbolic meaning undertaken by formal actors in the city, it is only through interaction with the inhabitants of the city that these sites are truly able to obtain and sustain symbolic meaning. Political architecture, as a bid to procure political power, is established in an *interactive* discursive field. The architecture of Dubai is most described in the literature as a bid for soft-power (Ulrichsen, 2016, pp.99, Hertog, 2017, pp.5). Indeed, the establishment in 2017 of the UAE's Soft Power Council by Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum provides an explicit structure for this soft power strategy and, importantly, connects it to the country's humanitarian, scientific and academic diplomacy (Krzymowski, 2020, pp.4). However, to see the soft-power bid of Dubai's architecture as uniquely founded in this soft-power bid would be erroneous. For within the city these sites play a deeply significance role in shaping the sense of local place. This is true not only for non-state actors, such as developers Emaar and Nakheel, signed on to build such projects, but also for the communities around these sites (Bagaeen, 2007, pp.178). Moreover, the symbolic power of architecture is contested by those who are isolated or excluded by the creation and maintenance of these sites (Acuto, 2010 pp.283-284). Lefebvre writes that power always attempts to "represent itself in the eternal, through imperishable architectural symbols and works", that power "is exercised" on a space which it "protects", and that power has "a symbolic and practical relationship to the surrounding land; which

it dominates and penetrates" (Lefebvre, 2014, pp.13). What is clear in this theoretical modelling is that architecture – and its negotiation for power – is facilitated and contested primarily by their relationship to the local.

2.4. Globalisation and Locality

Globalisation is the term used to describe the increased movement of people, ideas and commodities across the world which has come with the advancing technologies (both digital and analog) of the twentieth and twenty first centuries (Cherrier, 2015, pp.318). Appadurai popularised the notion of globalisation as a series of global flows: networks of people ideal, technology, finance and media (loc. cit., Appadurai 1996, pp.33). The conceptual emergence of the local, therefore, is a direct consequence of the process of globalisation, even as notions of locality, home, community and identity are transformed and sometimes threatened by globalisation (loc. cit, loc. cit.). In the literature, there has been a tendency to view globalisation as a uniquely top-down process (Scholte, 2008, pp.1474,1477). However more recently, scholars such as Cherrier & Belk have argued that globalisation is more complex (2015, pp.319.). Cherrier & Belk use Jessop & Sum's theorising of 'Glurbanisation' – a portmanteau of the worlds 'global' and 'urbanisation' – to argue that in the case of Dubai, for example, the rise of mega-malls with Western shops may be organised from the top, but their survival is determined by locals (loc. cit.). Indeed, the findings of Cherrier's research on Emirati women in Dubai clearly showcases that locals are not only spectators in the globalising process, but also actors in the construction of "a particular version of globalisation" (ibid, pp.324). In her research, Cherrier points to specific strategies for going global, which build on local heritage and traditions (loc. cit). Reading Cherrier in conjunction with theorists such as Friedman, however, it is possible to not only see this strategy as built on heritage, but also one which *seeks to preserve* heritage, and therefore identity (loc. cit., Friedman, 1990, pp.327).

2.5. Consumption and Authenticity

According to Friedman, authenticity is found in its purest and most existential form in the act of identification (Friedman, 1990, pp.314). Authenticity, in this way, is the 'correct' identification of the self or the other, an alignment of internal feeling or motivation with external representation. Authenticity, for Friedman, is correspondingly "undermined by objectification and potential decontextualization" (loc. cit.). For material representation to be successful in its quest for authenticity, it must therefore remain deeply contextualised (local) and free from objectification. Moreover, as Friedman further elaborates, to be considered 'authentic' the consumption and production of identities must be rooted in indigenous or local practice. Thus, where the production and distribution of the product (in this case cultural identity) is outsourced or externally motivated, it becomes inauthentic (ibid, pp.323). Friedman's contributions to the theoretical understanding of authenticity, however, also serve another purpose, in that they explicitly link authenticity to consumption (ibid, pp.314). For Friedman, "consumption within the bounds of the world-system is *always* a consumption of identity" (loc. cit. emphasis my own). The adage 'you are what you eat' thereby contains an inherent truth: that social acts such as eating are always acts of self-identification, as are all other acts of consumption (loc.cit).

One of the key challenges facing Dubai, as outlined in the literature, is the struggle to assert a sense of authenticity in the local, which has arisen in the city due to its unmitigated growth (Elsheshtawy, 2004, pp.172). This challenge is often targeted through tourism strategies, and the lack of believably 'authentic' experiences of locality in Dubai, for visitors, is often framed as "Disney-fication" – referring to the city's likeness to a theme park (Thani & Heenan, 2020, pp.157). As Cherrier and Belk write at the beginning of their monograph on Emirati identity and consumption in the city, "Dubai has rapidly transformed itself into a dreamworld of conspicuous consumption" (2015, pp.318). Yet this "conspicuousness" to which they refer can also be considered a kind of self-conscious self-Orientalisation, one which is needed to succeed in an international sphere (by appealing to an

internationally recognised symbolic order), but also to protect locals from culture exploitation (Friedman, 1990, pp.323).

2.6. Identity and Power

The tension, in producing local identities in the global sphere, is that this process by nature necessitates the involvement of global actors, and therefore cannot be contained wholly in the local. In essence, to be recognised internationally, localities must – somewhat tautologically – be consumed globally (loc. cit). It is only by being established as a unique local identity on the world stage that cities such as Dubai may establish themselves as global. Which is perhaps why "going global" is primarily seen through tourist ventures, where the city advertises itself, and raises awareness of itself as an eminently attractive destination. Certainly, it is true in the Dubai context, where, through aviation-sponsored destination branding, Dubai has made itself a very literal link between the 'contrasting' worlds of east and west: of the Global North to the Global South (Elsheshtawy, 2004, pp.171).

The consideration of identity, of the development and maintenance of a 'local' identity, for example, is not possible without considering the evolution and flux of this fluid network over time (Lovell, 1998). The establishment of local identity is troubled by the constant state of flux encountered when participating so actively in global networks (Gaviria & Emontspool, 2015, pp.182), and often, historic locality or a 'memory' of locality, is drawn upon by cities in order to steady the turbulence experienced as a result of rapid globalisation (loc. cit.). However, in Dubai, by nature of the nomadic lifestyle practiced by local Emirati Bedouins, the spatialised aspects of this memorised locality are limited. Contemporarily, then, the city must delineate key sites of collective imagination where the future and past can be made spatial.

Chapter 3 | Methodology

> Space speaks and does what it says.
> — Henri Lefebvre

3.1. Research problem and Data Collection

I travelled to Dubai in September 2022 to conduct a two-month internship. Although I knew that there was a possibility that I would later write this thesis on a topic relating to the city, this project began with an inductive approach to the area of study. In my introduction to the city however, I became cognisant of two pertinent observations, which preoccupied me until long after I left Dubai. The first of these was the degree to which space was compartmentalised: everything needed for life in the city could be found without venturing into another area. The whole city, it seemed, was totally fragmented, connected only by Sheik Zayed Road – the highway spanning the length of Dubai itself – and by the architectural areas of interest in Dubai: the curious nodes of social life which seemed characteristic of the city itself. My second observation the degree to which I was encouraged, by colleagues, friends, and even casually by inhabitants of the city such as taxi drivers and hotel receptionists, to visit the various tourist sites for which Dubai is internationally famed (Elsheshtawy, 2004, pp.180, Karoui, 2021, pp.171). After only a couple of weeks it became clear to me that, more so than any cities I had travelled to in the past, it was not enough to *visit* Dubai, but rather, the city was also something you had to *do*.

These two observations were ones which repeatedly resurfaced during my stay, and even before the underlying questions of this research crystallized, I began to conduct fieldwork. In light of these underlying motivations, ethnographic methods, and especially observation and participatory methods, became key tools for conducting fieldwork in the city. In observations, my research question began to take shape; considering the role of the city – and its key actors – from macro to micro contexts. A visit to the Dubai Frame, halfway into my stay, proved to be

pivotal in formulating my research. The Frame offered panoramic views of Dubai, but also literally served as a frame of the city. The quasi-museum experience, structured through three, chronological 'galleries' began with an introduction to old Dubai, its heritage, tradition and local specificity, and ended with a panoramic, projected Virtual Reality (VR) presentation of an imagined future Dubai (Dubai Frame, 2023). Here, it seemed, was the key idea for my research, of Dubai as a city which connected overt imaginings of its past and future via the lynchpin of contemporary architecture. Of Dubai as a city which strives to concretise a sense of the local, in order to remain a key node in a network which is *global*. My research question is thus formulated: In what ways do architectural sites shape Dubai as a future global city, as it is perceived locally, regionally and globally – and hence, how do these sites become the interlocutors of local identity? The research methods used in this project: ethnography, observation, participation and digital ethnography- reflect the qualitative, but also necessarily *spatial* nature of this question.

3.2. Description of Data

This thesis examines how a sense of locality is created and maintained in Dubai, and to what end. In order to achieve this goal, this research employed a blended ethnographic methodology centred on a wholistic understanding of the site, in both its physical and digital forms. The key sources of data for this project were therefore the sites themselves: architecture in Dubai which served as connective social nodes within and beyond the city. Specific sites were chosen according to non-probability sampling, and purposive (typical) samples also emerged in the form of advertisements for popular destinations in the city. Convenience sampling, in the form of recommendations from friends and co-workers, as well as from locals, also helped to draft the initial list of sites at which I conducted my fieldwork. Snowball sampling, in the form of reviews and shortlists from online forums and travel guides, further suggested and solidified these recommendations, and in this way a basic topology of the key iconic sites across the city took shape. This shortlist of sites

identified comprised of 15 locations, spread from Al Bastakiya in the north, to the dhow, located at Marina Bay, in the south (Figure 2).
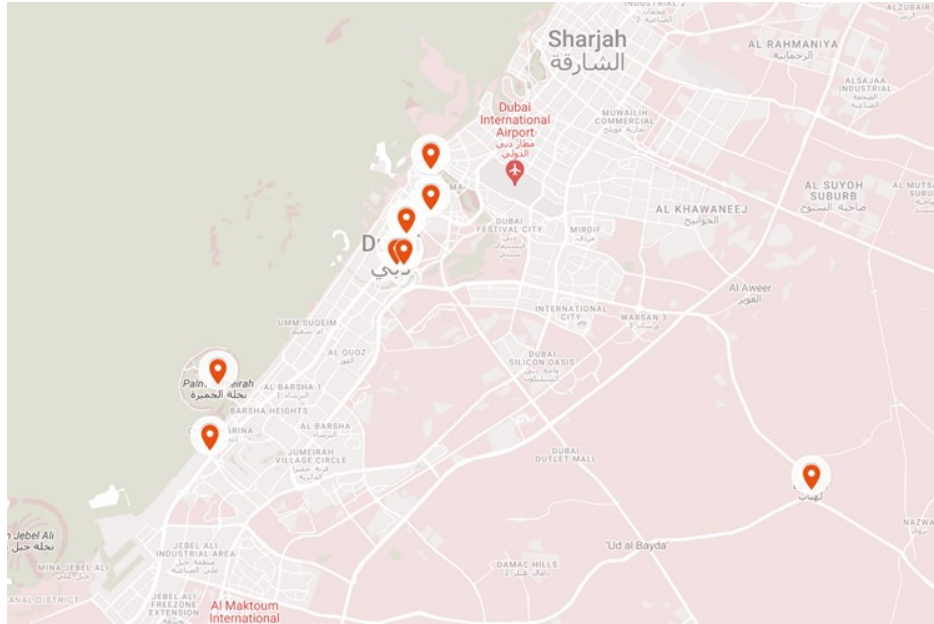
Figure 2 architectural case studies for this project, as they are located spatially in Dubai

For the purpose of this research, 'typical' was taken to be places of key social interest, from the perspective of visitors, guests and the local population. The final list of sites was selected on the basis of their production and reproduction as key areas of the city, and in this way, the list was narrowed down to only include sites where the secondary discussion and assertion of their landmark status also served as a key source of data. With this criteria in mind, the following sites were identified as key places in the Dubai's local, regional and global identity: Al Bastakiya, the Dhow, the Desert, the Burj Khalifa, the Dubai Mall, the Palm Jumeirah, the Dubai Frame, the Museum of the Future and developing sites. The Dubai Women's Museum, Bayt al Banaat (متحف المرأة الاماراتية), as a site not organised or promoted by formal or state actors, was therefore excluded, as were sites such as the Gold Souk (سوق الذهب), the Mohammed Bin Rashid Library (مكتبة محمد بن راشد) and the Mall of the Emirates (مول الإمارات), the data from which paralleled other key sites and were thus superfluous to the scope of this research.

During September and October, I conducted observations at almost all of these sites, with two exceptions. Although I did visit the Museum of the Future, I was unable to get full access. Likewise, although I spent some time around the Dubai Marina observing the Dhow tours, I did not buy a ticket to attend one myself. No specific time was mandated for visiting and participating in these sites, though on average I spent three to five hours at each. Additionally, for the sites where access was not limited, I conducted multiple, sequential observations: returning to different parts of the site over a number of weeks. The Dubai Mall, for example, was nearby to my place of work, and I was therefore able to conduct more studies of the exterior of the Burj Khalifa than I was of the interior, which charged a 399AED entry fee. I was alone for all bar two of my fieldwork excursions, and collected data at each in the form of field notes and material collection (e.g. brochures, tickets and fliers) as well as through digital collection methods such as photography and videography (Figure 3). Access to almost all of the sites was made available only through a ticketed admissions process, paid at my own expense. In some instances I paid additional fees to gain access to further ticketed areas of the site.

Figure 3 photo of some collected material from fieldwork in Dubai

The nature of the research demanded that the ethnographic work conducted across the different sites to be– to some degree at least – visually grounded. Although there is an argument to be made that this kind of research could fall under the scope of rhetorical fieldwork, given that it "accounts for how (constructed) places can function as rhetorical performances" (Cook et. al., 2018, pp.2), equally important to this project was the spatial, fluid and non-visible elements of this research, and hence the Bairner's suggestions of 'flânerie' as a social sciences method was a more suitable approach to adopt (2012, pp.6). Flânerie, the 'flâneur method' Bairner proposes, is grounded in an interdisciplinary theory which takes ethnographic practice, alongside the consumption of city-spaces as its central tenet (loc. cit.). The method is particularly focused on obtaining data on the architectural influence on social flows, and thus a key practice of flânerie is what I will here term 'peripatetic observations': ethnographic observations made while walking around the perimeters of the site, both along and against pedestrian flows in the site (and often, the city itself). In this way, peripatetic observation as a practice takes its cue from peripatetic measurements in the physical sciences, with the key difference being that peripatetic observations record qualitative forms of data (see, for example, Gillespie et. al. 2017, pp.295). Peripatetic observation demands, in alignment with Pink in her seminal text on sensory ethnography, attention to 'non-representational' ways of knowing place (Pink, 2015, pp.187). Moreover, peripatetic observations offer the opportunity not only for the observer to be moved with pedestrian traffic, but also to take particular note of the 'architectonics' which direct, encourage or limit these flows through physical, spatial elements (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.205-207). Equally, peripatetic observations offer the opportunity to deliberately transgress these boundaries, and therefore experience such sites from new perspectives which offer insight into the nature of these physical constraints and the design of the city. Peripatetic observations highlight the non-static nature of sites, and of placemaking itself, enabling the participant observer to account for such fluidity in their data, and thus making the method idea for the collection of data in this project.

To support this primary data collection method, I also used secondary data collection. For this, I analysed the digital aspects of my chosen sites, primarily through their official, formal websites, and secondarily through the reviews of these sites, on google and TripAdvisor. In this way, my digital ethnographic practice mirrored my physical one: orienting the primary data collection method toward the formal, produced spaces of these sites online, and only these analyses of formalised narratives with the informal, digital, reactions and perceptions of these sites (as observations could illuminate in 'real life').

3.3. Method of Analysis

In the second stage, upon returning from the fieldwork, it was necessary to establish a clear method for analysis. By conducting flâneur ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis produces an analysis which views architectural sites as "'objects of thought' as well as well as performative actions" (Schoonderbeek, 2021, pp.4). To this end, I identified each of the sites as falling into one of three categories: past, present, and future. These chronological distinctions do not refer to any historical dating of the site, although there is some overlap, but rather to which section of Dubai's chronology each site speaks. I identify nine key case studies, as the point of departure for a textual analysis of place and power (see Figure 1). The ultimate selection of analytical frameworks used in this project reflected the need to remain focused on the site first and foremost, as well as the ways in which these were consumed and produced locally, regionally and internationally. To this end, this research is contextualised by theories of globalisation, and a global city framework to analyse Dubai as a position within international, regional and local flows (Appadurai, 1996, pp.33, Sassen, 2004, pp.25). A discursive analysis is used to interpret the data from the peripatetic site observations, as well as the digital extensions of these sites, and this analysis is grounded in a four pivotal themes which emerged from the observations: authenticity, innovation, prosperity and connection. These themes have been divided into two categories: the formal, which

emerges from state or hegemonic framings of the site, and the submerged, which are more affectual and emerge from social interaction with the site.

Although at earlier stages of the research project, there was a strong case to approach the analysis of this data as a kind of textual analysis, ultimately, reducing the non-visible – or indeed, visual – elements of the field for a textual analysis was counterproductive to the methodological aims of the project: which strive to assess not only the presentation of each of these sites, but the ways in which they shape people in the city. Thus, while trying to incorporate some of the practices of critical architecture and reading, the method of analysis espoused by this research is instead anthropological, rather than architectural in its focus: using observations and participation to explore how each of the sites are consumed, and thus how different identities are produced and reproduced by each of these spaces. 'Architecture', delineated for the purpose of clarity in a number of key constructed places, supplants the role of text – in order to provide a nuanced and multifaceted reading of its sites which incorporate the non-visible elements of architecture, as well as those elements which are normally critiqued in visual analysis.

3.4. Evaluation and Justification of Method

Given the large, spatialised nature of these sites, it was not possible to conduct ordinary, static observations (from one corner of the room, for example). In this way, flânerie, and in particular, peripatetic observations, offered a unique opportunity to collect data across the whole site. Peripatetic observation, conducted while walking both with and against the flows of traffic across the spaces of interest, offered a wholistic reflection on the sites and their emplacement in a global city (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.206). Incorporating sensory methodology in these peripatetic observations offered insights into non-visible elements at each site, and the critical ways these inform the experience of the sites themselves. The breadth of the data collected using this mixed-method approach was counterbalanced by adopting a more strictly bounded approach to the sites. The experiential or phenomenological

nature of "consuming" architecture forms the basis of this research, and thus, it was tantamount that the data-collection method reflected these aims. Reflective of the area studies approach itself, the aim of this thesis was to establish and implement a research design which centred on capturing place, rather than adopting a distinct disciplinary approach (Kasaba, 2016, pp.82-83).

In the particular attention which the flâneur affords to the city as an experience, there is additionally a decentralisation of language in the flâneur approach. Rather, the method emphasises, like other forms of sensory ethnography, non-linguistic forms of understanding and meaning-making (Vanni & Crosby, 2023, pp.15). This was especially fruitful given the mixed-language landscape of Dubai, as well as my own personal limitations in Arabic fluency. Even taking into consideration the fact that English is an unofficial working language of the city, and therefore that almost all signage and commercial interactions are in English, there were undeniable disadvantages not being fluent in Arabic. Building connections with local communities of Arabic speakers was made more difficult, for example, and my interpretation of Arabic-language exchanges at each of the sites was also limited.

Even had I been fluent in Arabic, however, the myriad of languages spoken by Dubai's expat communities, pose significant challenges to any linguistic-based research methods (O'Neill,2016, pp.13). This was a consideration in excluding interviews as a data collection method. While in a longer-term project, interviews could have been an excellent source of data, for a project of this scale, interviews had two serious drawbacks. First, gaining access to the Emirati community in Dubai would require more time to build trust with potential participants (Cherrier & Belk, 2015, pp.321-322), and to conduct interviews for this project where the local perspective of Emirati informants was not represented felt, at best, an oversight. Second, in a project of this scope, interviews would have distracted from a key proposition of this research (Murto, Hyysalo & Jalas, 2020, pp.407): staging the site as the focal source of ethnographic data.

As any methodology, flânerie comes with a number of limitations. Although a key motivation of the flâneur method is to become 'unremarkable', in practice, it is not possible to pass through cities unnoticed (Bairner, 2012, pp.6-7). Rather, the flâneur-observer must participate in visual and cultural flows and systems of the city; even as they aspire pass by unnoticed. Flânerie may therefore be conducted by either etic or emic researchers, but as with other ethnographic methods, the positionality may pose contextual challenges to the researcher (Chmielewska & Schmidt-Tomczak, 2011, pp.108). Being what can loosely be described as an 'etic' observer offered many advantages in conducting ethnographic fieldwork, but also many drawbacks (Mostowlansky & Rota, 2016, pp.323). My positionality in Dubai was primarily contextualised through my whiteness and 'Westerness' (Le Renard, 2021, pp.94-95), which led me to be identified as an English-speaker expat. This visual identification perhaps could have been problematised if I wore a hijab or niqab, but as an uncovered woman there could be no doubt that I was either a guest or tourist in the city (Walsh, 2012, pp.56-57). Indeed, although I took care to dress more conservatively in the city, my expectations regarding modesty were largely over-compensatory. While I personally felt more comfortable dressing conservatively when exploring the city, there were noticeably different standards of dress for tourists and expat women, especially white women, than there were for locals, or non-White expats (Le Renard, 2021, pp.92). In this way, my own performance of modesty was a gesture of respect, but also a kind of patriarchal or local bargaining – distancing myself from other, more provocative Western women so that I could pass through the city unnoticed (Kandiyoti, 1988, pp.275).

As with all methods of data collection, there are also drawbacks to implementing two such subjective methods. To minimize bias in this data, I have therefore also included data from secondary sources in my critical analysis (Manu et. al, 2021, pp.16-17). Specifically, I have relied on many digital ethnographic methods to critically examine and contextualise my own observations. It must be noted that my research focuses more heavily on the resources available in English, however, considering English is one of the working languages of Dubai, this constraint was

perhaps not as limiting as it could have been in other areas of the Middle East (Diallo, 2014, pp.47). The websites of each of my case studies, for example, were all available in English, and a large body of the travel guides and reviews I examined were available in English or easily translated. Nevertheless, speaking only English did effect both my experience of sites and the extent I was able to research, for example, non-elite perspectives. In this regard I was helped somewhat by my fieldwork, and the conversations which I had in English with expat workers such as Taxi drivers who often reflected on the nature of Dubai the city as well as its many architectural sites.

Chapter 4 | Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Past

"He who has no past ... has no present"

- Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may God rest his soul

Narratives of the past form the essential foundation for the present and future storytelling of Dubai. Dubai's history, by virtue of the sparse array of sites in which it is articulated, is carefully cultivated to portray an authentic, non-western and distinctly Arab sense of place (Kanna, 2010, pp.104). While a sense of history is essential in creating a coherent narrative of the city as a locality, it is also integral in mediating the consumption of the city by regional and global actors. In particular, through its historic-facing sites, Dubai must negotiate the fine balance of consumption: offering itself to be 'consumed' to remain internationally recognisable, whilst safeguarding itself from foreign exploitation (Friedman, 1990, pp.323). Further, the city must offer a sense of its historic locality to be perceived as 'authentic' by global sensibilities (Boussaa, 2004, pp.26). In this way the city engages in a process of intentional self-Orientalisation to conform to the symbolic systems of the Western global hegemon (Acuto, 2010, pp.276, Feighery, 2012, pp.282). By offering a sense of historic place, however, the city also justifies its contemporary identity: including, to some degree, those aspects (i.e. traditional gender roles) which are less palatable to contemporary neoliberal discourse (Kanna, 2010, pp.104). Dubai's 'ambivalent' approach to cosmopolitanism, for example, is attributed to its multiethnic heritage as a trading port, and in some official depictions, to the golden age of Islam (Akinci, 2020, pp.1780, 2313, 2314 Karoui, 2021, pp.175). This section of the thesis addresses the many ways in which strategic visions of the past are embodied and consumed in Dubai in order to authenticate the city's local identity.

4.1.1. Al Bastakiya (Al Fahidi Cultural and Historical District)

Narratives of the past are carefully preserved in Dubai although, as scholars such as Boussaa have noted, this situation has not always been the case (2004, pp.26). On the contrary, the speed of construction during the oil boom of the 1970s led to the destruction of many historic buildings in the city (Alhasawi, 2019, pp.41). Dubai's physical landscape modernised much faster than its heritage or conservation policy, and as a result many historic sites were destroyed before their value as heritage sites could be considered (loc. cit., Boussaa, 2004, pp.26). It was only in the mid-1990s, when the effects of this erasure of architectural history were starting to be visible in the city's local identity, that such policies were brought into place (Alhasawi, 2019, pp.41) As such, the construction and maintenance of historic areas of the city is now a clear priority for Dubai. This description may sound like a tautology: how can the historic be "constructed" and not "preserved"? It is a question which the architecture of Dubai itself answers: through the strategic reproduction of historic architectural elements and styles which promote a sense of local specificity (Kanna, 2010, pp.100). The past, in Dubai, spatialised to create and maintain the kind of local identity essential in sustaining the contemporary city-state, and especially, in ensuring the *future* city-state (Acuto, 2010, pp.282). As such, discourses of the past in Dubai, as they are found in the city's sites are highly valued, especially those which portray a cohesive Emirati identity.

The sites of the past in Dubai are directly shaped by narratives showcased in the museums and galleries of Al Bastakiya. Al Bastakiya is the center for many different museums and galleries dedicated to the history of Dubai; each of which promote different, specific elements of this historic identity. The Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Centre for Cultural Understanding (مركز الشيخ محمد بن راشد للتواصل الحضاري), for example, acts as a key communications hub: facilitating group events and public forums which exhibit Emirati tradition and heritage. The Coffee Museum (متحف القهوة), by contrast, is a much more traditional museum space. Here, the cultural significance of coffee to local Emirati is articulated through the display of key artefacts such as the Dallah (دَلَّة, coffee pot)

(Baycar, 2020, pp.1). By articulating the significance of coffee to Dubai, these museums locate Dubai within a strong Arab lineage, and allude to Dubai as a *historically* global city through its involvement in coffee trade (loc.cit.). More specific portraits of Emirati life are also depicted in sites such as the Al Khanyar Museum (الخنجر, the traditional Emirati dagger). Each one of these sites are signposted clearly, in both English and Arabic, and offer open entryways or displays which describe their interior exhibits, visually demarcating key aspects of Emirati heritage even to guests who do not visit each and every site individually. Moreover, digitally, each site is represented on google maps, in both English and Arabic, a multilingual toponymy which illustrates the dual-nature of claims of sovereignty that the site makes in both the regional (Arabic dominated) and global (English dominated) spheres (Brattland & Nilsen, 2011, pp.294). Collectively, therefore, Al Bastakiya marks key symbols of historic Dubai, and frames them in a way which supports the city's claims to a rich and *authentic* local identity.

If Al Bastakiya can be thought of as a site which offers non-locals the opportunity to consume historic Dubaian identity, then equally important is the consideration of the role which locals play in performing and producing this identity. Indigenous involvement in producing narratives of the past is often seen as a keystone for the production of 'authentic' local identities (Friedman, 1990, pp.314). However, in Dubai, local involvement in producing the city is limited – often leading to the city's various places to be considered inauthentic (Haq, Seraphim, & Medhekar, 2021, pp.253, 255). Al Bastakiya it is one of the few places in the city which serves as a site of interaction for visitors and expats with Emirati locals (Reichenbach & Ibrahim, 2019, pp.170). This interaction is particularly important given the pronounced class separation in Dubai (Elsheshtawy, 2020, pp.806). The local Emirati population make up just 10-15% of Dubai's overall population and the cultural emphasis on privacy as well as the relative wealth of this demographic further exacerbate the limit of interactions between Emirati nationals and their foreign counterparts (Kanna, 2010, pp.103, Alawadi, 2017, pp.2975, Elsheshtawy, 2020, pp.806). The wealth of Emirati nationals means that it is possible for a large

majority to maintain a life of luxury and seclusion without having to diminish their sovereignty over Dubai as a global city. Moreover, these distinctions are reinforced through the wearing of traditional dress as an expression of indigeneity – and indeed, class – without being subject to constant tourist scrutiny (Kanna, 2014, pp.605, Akinci, 2020, pp.1784). Thus, the consumption of Dubai identity is separated from the subjugation of an Emirati one thereby protecting local identities from external Orientalisation or exploitation.

The way that the presence of Emiratis helps to offer the site authenticity, therefore, is through their consumption of the site – and the resulting production of identity – rather than through their participation in producing the site to be internationally consumed. Al Bastakiya is one of the few places that tourists and guests can eat traditional Emirati food, and some of these Emirati establishments are likewise popular among locals (Reichenbach & Ibrahim, 2019, pp.131). By consuming the site as a nostalgic representation of their local identity, Dubai Emiratis endorse the histories that Al Bastakiya embodies for a foreign audience (loc. cit). By contrast, in the practice of performance, only a very small minority of Emirati locals are employed in the tourism industry (ibid, pp.254, Hannam & Paris, 2018, pp.332-333). Working in service roles which offer Emirati tradition up as a comestible is seen as undesirable to locals: a sensibility which protects locals from being subsumed by global processes (Hvidt, 2009, pp.399). However, consequently, the job of performing Emirati-ness is often given to middle eastern, or even West-Asian nationals from other places of origin. These expatriates, without the class privileges of Emirati nationals, are chosen to fulfil a racialised or orientalised portrait of the Emirates to an international audience, thereby attempting to ensure Emirati identity is maintained as a global identity without compromising the sovereignty of the Emirati themselves (Haq, Seraphim & Medhekar, 2021, pp.250).

This performance of Emirati history and identity is further orchestrated through the spatialisation of the site itself. The strongly enforced boundaries between Emiratis and other demographics who inhabit Dubai are reflected in the clear boundaries

between Al Bastakiya district and the surrounding Al Fahidi neighbourhood. Within the bounds of Al Bastakiya, the streets are not the labyrinthine, organic structures developed over time but rather clean-swept empty streets which offer neat pathways to boutique shops with large wooden doors and shaded interiors (Haq, Seraphim & Medhekar, 2021, pp.251). These are the shops selling richly embroidered fabrics and tourist souvenirs such as magnets and postcards: a sanitised impression of the Middle Eastern souk (سوق), or market. This reproduction of a historic marketplace has been described by tourism scholars such as William G. Feighery as a kind of self-Orientalisation: the production of 'exotic' culture or tradition to appeal to a Western or international tourist market (Feighery, 2012, pp.282). Outside these walls, by contrast, the richness of 'everyday life' could not be more pronounced (de Certeau, 1984, pp.xi). The physical infrastructure is less well-kept: cracks and potholes pepper the pavement, rubbish and occasional cat-faeces litter the verge, oil-spills leak from old cars parked on the side of the road, and a fine layer of desert dust covers all. Some shops are abandoned, others open to dingy interiors selling miscellaneous electronics, knock-off handbags or home repair items. The men sitting outside these stores call to one another, talk on their phones, smoke. A steady stream of pedestrian traffic moves up the street from Al Ghubaiba metro station to the bus station over the road. Al Fahidi, in essence, is a space which is lived-in: filled with 'rhythm' and reflecting Lefebvre's architectonics of everyday life (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.205-207). While visually, Al Bastakiya represents old Dubai perfectly, visitors perceive of the absence of the 'non-visible' city as a lack of authenticity (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.225, Haq, Seraphim & Medhekar, 2021, pp.251). In direct contrast to Al Fahidi's rhythm, the sound, smell, even the feel of Al Bastakiya is *too* sanitised, a fact all the more visceral to a guest who has stepped into the compound from the surrounding area of Dubai.

Al Bastakiya mediates expressions of Emirati identity and history in a desert city which otherwise 'wiped clean' of a historic architectural footprint (Donner & Sorcinelli, 2022, pp.2). Al Bastakiya gives form to key historic architectures of the city: architectural forms which guests can then identify as they are strategically

reproduced in other areas of the city. As a space, Al Bastakiya is demarcated primarily by the traditional style of the buildings, some historic some replicated, replete with traditional barjeel, or windtowers (برجيل) which have been iconic to the area since the 13ᵗʰ century (Boussa, 2014, pp.179, Assi, 2022, pp.39). Through a repeated and carefully maintained visual homogeneity, Al Bastakiya identifies the architectural structure of the barjeel as a key architecture of pre-oil Dubai and stands in stark juxtaposition to post-oil architecture (ibid, pp.42). However, it is important to note that these structures are not actually archetypal of the Trucial states, who practiced a primarily nomadic lifestyle, but rather the effect of the pearl industry on settlements such as Al Bastakiya (Hawker, Hull & Rouhani, 2015, pp.628, 632). However, far from undermining the narrative of the barjeel as a historically iconic architecture of the city, this acknowledgement reinforces Dubai's nuanced history as a trading port. Moreover, it underlines the significance of the barjeel as architecture: given the invisibility of Dubai's early nomadic history. By isolating the windtower as a historically significant design, Al Bastakiya orients guests toward the reception of windtower-reproductions in other areas of the city, authenticating, rather than contesting, these replicas of these structures (Biln & El Amrousi, 2014, pp.99-100).

Aside from in the promotion and celebration of traditional Emirati structures such as the barjeel, technology plays another key role in the site: in security. Although designed to look historic, and therefore not luxurious or expensive in the same way as more contemporary sites, the façade of historic simplicity is belied by the presence of security cameras around the Al Bastakiya district. These cameras, strategically dispersed across the site, offer a reminder of the closely intertwined relationship between security and control in the Dubai's smart-city strategies (Ahouzi et. al., 2020, pp.13-14). The calm, safe atmosphere advertised in Al Bastakiya appears, under the scrutiny of the flâneur-observer, therefore, to be directly related to this constant surveillance. Moreover, the technological surveillance is mirrored in the attention given by staff in the Al Bastakiya to guests and visitors. Guests waiting for a place at the Al Khayma Heritage Restaurant

(الخيمة التراثي), for example, will find themselves being invited to sit and drink traditional Arabic coffee, around the traditional Emirati burner- as a part of the experience of dining at the restaurant. If the wait is longer than ten or fifteen minutes, the guests will be invited to enjoy this coffee in the air-conditioned reception of the Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Centre for Cultural Understanding: where a small library of books on the Al Bastakiya neighbourhood and the history of Dubai is available, and a small documentary about the ministry and local open days are open to the public. Hospitality is an essential part of the experience, but this comfort and security also offers the opportunity to directly guide visitors towards the narratives of Dubai history which are most aligned wit hegemonic interests.

4.1.2. The Dhow

The dhow (داو), the traditional boats used as trading vessels before the Dubai oil boom, are another key architecture of Dubai's heritage. As with many of the historic sites of the city, the scarcity of places which remain untouched in contemporary Dubai mean that it is symbolic representations of the dhow, rather than a specific singular site, which deliver this aspect of the historic narrative of Dubai (Elsheshtawy, 2004, pp.186). Like the historic Al Fahidi district, the dhow are demarcated as a site by their physical appearance. Although dhow, in Arabic, is a relatively broad term (referring to a number of different trading vessels) in Dubai's cityscape the dhow are often characterised as broad wooden boats with two tiers and traditionally a long mast in the middle (Agius, 2012, pp.15). Initially, the dhow is positioned as a historically influential symbol in the Al Bastakiya district of Dubai: where an exemplary vessel is located by the Dubai Museum. However, in the city, the dhow is perhaps most embodied in the tourist cruises offered by companies in Dubai Creek or at the Marina (see, for example Tripadvisor, 2023). Marketed as a "traditional cruise" and most often serving 'authentic Emirati food' the dhow tours of Dubai harbour are seen as a contemporary link to the seafaring heritage of Dubai as a city state. By offering up an experience of the dhow boat,

visitors are invited to consume the seafaring identities of Dubai's past, and to indulge in a romantic, intentionally self-orientalised portrait of the dhow as a symbol of Arab identity (Causevic & Neal, 2019, pp.505).

In this contemporary iteration, the site of the dhow is often stripped of its traditional sailing apparatus in favour of more modern and accessible motors and, as such, contemporary dhow are also often adorned with fairy-lights or branded signage advertising the tourist companies who run their charter (Figure 4). In short, the symbolic language of the sail – the key element of the dhow – is replaced in the contemporary site (Elsheshtawy, 2004, pp.186). Indeed, if – as it appears – marketing the dhow-experience is predicated on the integration of the dhow with contemporary renditions of Dubaian identity, it ostensibly difficult to argue that the significance of the dhow to Dubai's global identity is framed as a historic one. Nevertheless, it is the dhow *are* overtly coded as historic: a key symbol of Dubai's heritage, which authenticates Dubai's claims of connectivity by connecting them to a broader, trade-oriented past (Elsheshtawy, 2004, pp.185-186). As an architectural site, the dhow introduces experiential forms of site-making, offering the dhow as an experience to be consumed by paying guests, and using food as a major tool in underscoring claims of authenticity in the experience. Dhow cruises are often accompanied by buffet dinners or more luxury dining experiences, which bring non-visible aspects of the site to the fore when the constructing and attributing symbolic meaning to the dhow (Lefebvre, 1971, pp.225). Food, is often perceived by visitors to be an essentially local expression of culture and heritage, and as such, by offering food on the dhow, the site suggests itself to be an authentic interlocutor of Emirati tradition (Sharaf, 2020, pp.323-324).
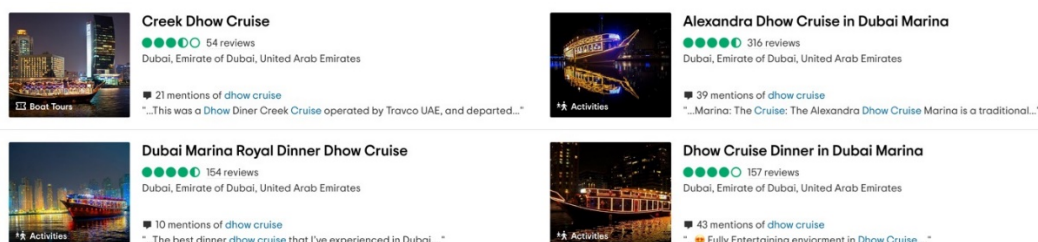
However, contrary to these claims, experiences of the dhow often serves to alienate, rather than engender, perceptions of authenticity by visitors. While the spectacle of the dhow, aligned with the process of consumption suggests that experiential, more than visual, activities are encouraged as measures of authenticity, the lack of direct ties to Emirati or Dubaian identity undermines the narratives of history which the site attempts to establish (loc. cit.). In part, this lack of local distinction can be linked to broader self-orientalising tourism strategies, which subsume depictions of the local in broader, oriental images of the Middle East (Feighery, 2012, pp.282). Dubai remains an active trading port even in a contemporary setting, yet contemporary shipping vessels are not symbolically valued for their contributions to the city's landscape. Rather, it is the historic significance of the dhow which makes it a poignant visual representation of local identity, emblematic of a romantic Emirati past no-longer accessible to the Emirati guest or visitor. The dhow site, like the food onboard, although articulated by Dubai, is also a key symbol in the Gulf region as a whole (Agius, 2012, pp.13). Connectivity, then, portrayed as a foundational aspect of the city's identity, links Dubai to the Middle Eastern region, and by extension to the Global North and Global South (Sigler, 2013, pp.618). By intentionally emulating Oriental narratives of the self, the dhow not only appeal to a global tourist market, but also locate Dubai as an authority on these regional histories: situating the city as a vital connection to the region.

The dhow also invite analysis on the elite-facing nature of the narratives which surround the sites and city-world of Dubai. By virtue of the consuming nature of the various key sites of Dubai, most, if not all, of these spaces are ones to which access is limited by cost. The 'experience' of each site, charged to tourists, locals and guests alike, is not for the majority of the city's population, but rather for the wealthy elite who can afford to participate in these experiences. Participation of the wealthy is not unilateral, either. Emirati nationals, for example, are rarely seen

participating in tourist-centric activities, and certainly if any locals indulge in this experience, they do not wear the traditional Emirati dress, which is seen as a status symbol and therefore not worn when participating in lower-status activities (Akinci, 2020, pp.1785). This segregation is similarly spatialised by the dhow site itself: in departing from the mainland, the dhow site is quite literally removed from Dubai as a space isolated by water.

4.1.3. The Desert

Geographically, there are three deserts in the United Arab Emirates: Rub'al Khail (ٱلرُّبْع ٱلْخَالِي), Al Badayer (البدائع) and Liwa Oasis (وَاحَة لِيْوَا). Each have their own unique history, with different geographical formations, flora and fauna, however, much of the ethnobotanical knowledge of the indigenous Bedouin tribes has been lost and detailed information on the native species of Emirati deserts is limited (Alam et. al., 2017, pp.374-375). Within the Emirate of Dubai specifically, reference to the desert usually pertains to one of two geographical areas: Al Badayer or Al Maha (المها) (El-Keblawy, Ksiksi & El Alqamy, 2009, pp.347). Geographically speaking, then, to delineate the desert as a singular space is problematic: following fictional cinematic depictions of the desert as a singular, 'empty' space (Eisele, 2002, pp.70, 73). To culturally delineate the desert as a singular space is ostensibly problematic, too. Kaj Århem notes that vast, undifferentiated landscapes often discourage anthropologists from studying local phenomenologies: assumed to be poorly developed (1998, pp.78). Yet, as Århem elaborates, not only is the landscape in fact "exceedingly diverse and differentiated", it is also perceived as such by its human inhabitants (loc. cit.). What Århem poignantly identifies, therefore, is a common problem in Western-led anthropological study on non-Western space: a blindness toward landscapes not common in the experiential references of the author. It is a poignant consideration the context of contemporary Dubai, however, given the unique relationship to nature in Dubai, in conducting anthropological research about the spatialisation of the desert, the consideration is also true in reverse: researchers should be careful

not to romanticise local relationships to place in line with oriental depictions of parochialism, and equally, be mindful of local romanisations of place (Keshodkar, 2016, pp.90).

In the complex contemporary social makeup of Dubai, social understandings of the desert and its intricacies as a landscape are varied. Simplistically, it could be assumed that there is a linear progression of knowledge of the desert landscape with local Bedouin knowledge at one end of the spectrum, longer-term visitors (expats and immigrants) somewhere in the middle, and tourists at the other extreme. However, as a consequence of early nation-building exercises in settling the local Bedouin populations of the Emirates, contemporary Emirati identity is rooted in a knowledge of global modernity, rather than parochialism (Ouis, 2002, pp.336). The aspirational identities of young Emiratis are grounded in urban lifestyles, and traditional relationships to the desert, where they exist, are kept in the private sphere and often found in 're-traditionalised' forms (loc. cit). Therefore, analysis of the role of the desert in the spatialisation of Dubai has to be based on the social interaction with and interpretation of the site – of the place, and not only the formal space. In other words, articulating the desert as a singular 'site' reflects the way the desert is socially constructed by Dubai's inhabitants (Keshodkar, 2016, pp.90). Particularly in the context of consuming Dubai, the site of 'the desert' is promoted as an archetypal experience of the city and its natural landscape (Stephenson, 2014, pp.730). Zagaki and Gallagher have elaborated on Jonathan Crary's description of "spaces of attention" to incorporate nonvisual aspects of encounters with the landscapes, a description which is immediately appropriate to the desert in Dubai (2009, pp.81). For tourists, guests and locals, going to the desert is an essential activity which much be performed in order to concretise a Dubai identity.

However, the consumption of the desert in the context of the past is coded differently between key demographics in Dubai. Most prominently the desert is branded as space for the romantic memorialisation of nomadic Bedouin traditions (Keshodkar, 2016, pp.88): a claim echoed in the marketing of the desert as an

'authentic' Dubai experience by various tourist companies (Haq, Seraphim & Medhekar, 2021, pp.25). However, it is difficult to locate this idea of the romantic past in the site's spatialisation. High-octane adventure sports form the backbone of tourist activity in the desert, and a very literal link to the fast-paced, 'high-life' narrative of Dubai as a city (Stephenson, 2014, pp.730). The big-ticket items of 'desert experience' packages invariably include quad-biking or other motorsports, as well as "dune-bashing", being driven across the dunes in an off-road four-wheel drive (Pillai, 2010 pp.16): an adrenaline-boosting experience which underscores the "theme park" tourism strategy adopted by the city (Thani & Heenan, 2020, pp.164). Like at a theme park, drivers of these experiences aim for the swiftest drops and tightest turns to elicit the most dramatic and evocative responses from their participants (Figure 5). The traditional hostility of the desert environment, orientalised in Western cinema, is translated into a contemporary adventure in the Dubai desert (Eisele, 2002, pp.70, 73). This contemporary, experiential depiction of the site creates tension with the natural landscape, producing a sensationalist effect aligned with such oriental depictions of the site. Local Dubai tradition, as it is produced for visitors in the desert, locates its own significance in the adventurousness of its consumers. The city is able to do so without undermining its local significance, precisely because the local experience of the desert, embodied in Emirati-Bedouin practice, remains deeply private and is not offered for international consumption (Alawadi, 2017, pp.2975).

Figure 5 tourists participating in motorsports in the Lahab desert

The experience of the desert through the 4x4 vehicles also provides a tie to Dubai's oil resources. Compared to the other emirates, Dubai has fewer oil resources, and yet the conceptualisation of oil as an essential part of the construction and sudden rise of Dubai is often directly or indirectly referenced in the sites of the city. This is especially true in the context of the desert, where the romanticised (or even orientalised) portrait of the desert is shown through the distinctly non-romantic vehicle of the 4x4. The desert spaces of the site are busy and crowded with people, adding to the energetic environment. Taking a moment to sit, or to watch the crowd is rare, and few observers take time away from the central focus of the crowd. For those who do, however, these peripheral spaces at the edge of the constructed environment and the desert offer shade, calm and a place where wild animals such as guineafowl – a rarity in the often sterile environment of the city – scratch for seeds in the thin grass. Although guineafowl are not native to the UAE, wild guineafowl have been present in these areas for many years having been transported with maritime trade in past centuries (Vine, 1996, pp.63).

This juxtaposition is further accentuated by the visual construction of the site. In advertisement as well as consumption of the site itself, the desert is framed as a deeply romantic construction of the past (Keshodkar, 2016, pp.88). When tourists are let out of the car to take photos of themselves in the desert, they are also encouraged to take off their shoes to "really feel" the sand beneath their feet. The physical sensation of the natural desert landscape is here seen as an authenticator of its significance (Lamont, 2014, pp.2-4). Visitors are encouraged to walk around, and unlike other sites, the lack of physical boundaries such as walls or paths mean that it is possible to traverse the spaces around the site without reference to clear pedestrian or infrastructure flows. However, pedestrian movement across the site is limited in other ways. First and foremost, vehicles are the transportation methods for exploring the desert: driving, not walking, is the way the desert is experiences, and participants have limited time physically interact with the desert through walking. The implication, in this limitation, is that the desert, once seen from a single spatial point, has been effectively consumed. Beyond the singular point, the desert is more of the same, and therefore there is no value in moving further away from the site.

However, the romantic notion of the desert as an endless and empty space is belied by the presence of litter- especially petrochemical products such as plastic water bottles (Eriksen et. al, 2021, pp.1). Even more so, the romantic empty-desert narrative is belied by the large oil rigs which hover perpetually on the horizon of the landscape (see Figure 6). Each of these visual markers are by-products of the consumption of the desert, by both the Emirati state and the visiting tourist population. However, what they highlight as visual markers in a critical reading of the space, is the absolute essentiality of oil in creating and financing the contemporary formation of Dubai and the desert. The presence of oil, then, in both its visual markets and practical use, serves as a strategic reminder to maintain the power and agency of Emirati identity in the storytelling of their parochial past. By framing the historic significance of the desert to Emirati tradition in an oil-saturated

present, narratives of the role of the desert in informing the past of Dubai do not relinquish the authority of the narration itself – even for a moment – from local actors themselves (Friedman, 1990, pp.323).

Figure 6 oil rigs and 4x4 on the Lahab desert horizon

4.2. Present

"The thing about the genre of "before and after" photos is that they usually describe an external, often calamitous, out-of-human-control event. Here's the verdant forest and here it is decimated by a tsunami; here's a once-prosperous city after a fire, a tornado, a hurricane, a flood. But in Dubai's

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case, there is never any event except Dubai. Here's the city before and after itself, and during the ongoing process of its own becoming."

- Rahel Aima, *Life on Mars*

The architectural sites of Dubai which make claims about the present typically try to establish a unique contemporary identity for the city through superlatives. Dubai, in the present, is wealthy and iconic for its first-of-their kind landmarks – the tallest building in the world, the largest man-made island, and so on. The present in Dubai is therefore framed by these claims of 'superlativity', since being the best in a global community offers power to the wealthiest, most profitable and most well-connected cities. Indeed, connectivity is an essential criteria of global cities: which often center their profitability on how many other cities, and thus markets, to which they offer access. Dubai, as one of the earliest cities to build itself internationally in the Gulf, has established itself as an international city by being trade-oriented and business focused (Akhavan, 2017, pp.344). To the global market, Dubai offers tax-free business districts and advertises its unique geographical position as a way of connecting 'east' and 'west' (Akhavan, 2017, pp.345). Critically, as a successful Muslim-majority Arab city, Dubai positions its lineage of success as a direct continuation of the Golden age of Islam: and thus also stakes claims as a regional hub with unique connections not only to other cities and states in the gulf, but also across the MENA region more broadly (Aima, 2018, pp.13).

While Dubai may have been one of the earliest cities in the Gulf to build its international image, contemporarily, regional competition has seen increasing bids from neighbouring cities in the Gulf to be seriously considered as global cities in their own right (Matly & Dillion, 2007, pp.27, Akhavan, 2017, pp.344). While there is certainly no rule which dictates that there may only be one global city in any region, competing claims for global city status contest Dubai's assertions of a unique access to the region. Other Gulf cities, such as the Qatari capital Doha, have increased their efforts to be globally recognised cities in recent years, pursuing airline-layover tourism and increased global participation strategies to raise their

profile in the global sphere (Al Saed, Upadhya & Saleh, 2020, pp.121-122). However, these efforts have not always been uncontested. In the Doha example, for instance, successfully hosting the 2022 FIFA world cup, may have proposed a local Qatari connection to global sports, but internationally, this proposition has been met with a great deal of pushback (Hertog, 2017, pp.15-18). Similarly, within the Gulf, Abu Dhabi competes for global recognition as a cultural hub through the construction and completion of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, as well as through other sites on Al Saadiyat Island (جزيرة السعديات, literally "Island of Happiness"): the still-developing arts and culture hub of the city (Hennessy, 2016, pp.401). Gulf bids for cultural influence in the global sphere face many of the same criticisms as Dubai: of a lack of integration between global and local performances (ibid, pp.400). However, Dubai has a regional advantage, in that it is perceived as being more liberal and more open to the West in both its military and cultural makeup: an advantage which the city leverages to position itself as the unique interlocutor of the region to a Western-led global hegemon (Matly & Dillion, 2007, pp.7-8).

Throughout the MENA region more broadly, multiple cities make claims to global city status. Some, such as Cairo, Istanbul, or Jerusalem, have the advantage of being world cities, and are already perceived as having unique local identities in the global eye (Sassen, 2004, pp.28, Abu-Lughod, 2004, pp.119, 123, Alfasi & Fenster, 2005, pp.351-352, Alvarez & Yarcan, 2010, pp.273). As postcolonial cities, however, the various cities of the MENA region must negotiate the legacies of colonialism in order to compete in the global sphere: a consideration which has less impact on instant cities such as Dubai (Bagaeen, 2007, pp.173). Other MENA cities which have made more recent bids to establish themselves as global, may be able to promote a strong sense of local identity, but struggle to keep pace with the tax cuts and other incentives offered by oil-rich states to entice global industry, or else are held back by challenges posed by remnant colonialism (Elsheshtawy, 2004, pp.1-4). For the Lebanese capital of Beirut, for example, which enjoyed some success strategically positioning itself as an artistic and cultural global hub, has been impacted by increasing issues of infrastructure and insecurity (Levitt, 2020, pp.766).

Progress made attracting regional and international talent for the city has been quickly eroded as industries relocate to the more stable and financially attractive cities in the Gulf (Jacobs & Hall, 2007, pp.335-336). Moroccan cities such as Tangier and Rabat build increasingly strong ties with China (Horesh, 2023, pp.289-290), and thus expand their networks of connectivity which already extend across the USA and deep within Europe (see, for example, Sefiani et. al, 2018, pp.21). In short, Dubai's claims to connectivity are constantly under pressure to be proven or elaborated in a region with several either historically established, or equally competitive cities (Hertog, 2017, pp.16). An identity which founds Dubai's uniqueness in superlativity, therefore, is a fragile one: requiring almost constant development to sustain its claims.

The increased pressure to perform in this regional and global setting has visible effects in the social and physical landscape of Dubai. Wealth and luxury, the main characteristics of Dubai's contemporary international identity, are seen as increasingly fragile by the city's inhabitants. Oil, the primary income source for the city, does not promise a sustainable future, and Dubai's inhabitants – especially its indigenous population, are acutely aware of the fact. For the former, the precariousness of life in Dubai is resplendent in every aspect of their lives- the difficulties of obtaining or maintaining long-term visas, the lack of avenues to citizenship, and within the landscape of the city, the prominence of temporary as opposed to permanent, living options (Akinci, 2022, pp.982-983). Sheik Rashid bin Saeed al Maktoum is famously quoted discussing the temporariness of Dubai's current profit, stating "My grandfather rode a camel, my father rode a camel, I drive a Mercedes, my son will drive a Land Rover, his son will drive a Land Rover, but his son will ride a camel" (Aima, 2018, pp.11). The prominence of this quote is such that its origins have become apocryphal: illustrating the degree to which acknowledgement of Dubai's future insecurities permeates through all levels of Dubai's society (loc. cit.). Imagined pathways to future security – for *all* of the city's inhabitants – must be firmly established in the present to assuage these existential insecurities. The larger-than-life architectural accomplishments of

Dubai offer a key symbolic foundation for such imagined futures (Acuto, 2010, pp.274). Architectural sites of contemporary Dubai attempt to root the city's wealth and prosperity in a deeper tradition and chronology. The present is therefore a temporary state in Dubai the city: a dreamworld which exists to secure the past to a better, imagined, and secure future.

4.2.1. Burj Khalifa

The Burj Khalifa (برج خليفة, hereafter Burj) is the singular most prominent work of architecture in Dubai (Acuto, 2010, pp.273). The Burj, as the tallest building in the world, is a standout landmark for the city, designed as a tourist attraction and listed in every guide to the city (see, for example, Lonely Planet, 2023, Tripadvisor, 2023). Unlike the museums of Dubai, such as the Museum of the Future, and Al Bastakiya, the focus on the Burj, from both an internal and external perspective is its physical construction and the experience of its architecture. The Burj is experienced even from the descent into Dubai airport: clearly visible from the window of the plane. In downtown Dubai, the site is omnipresent: visible from across the north of city and thus a reference point of location for vehicles and pedestrians alike. In this way, the site of the Burj functions across all demographics of the city: even the poorer migrant classes which cannot gain access to interior or upper stories of the building itself. The Burj is embedded in a powerful strategic discourse on Dubai, and the lasting influence of Dubai in the future global world (Acuto, 2010, pp.274). As the tallest building in the world, the Burj of Dubai contributes to a long tradition of cities who seek to obtain global significance through tall buildings and iconic structures (Krzymowski, 2020, pp.4).

As the first Arab city to join the international competition to build high, Dubai secures the more fragile identity of the Burj as the current tallest building in the world, by being the first of its kind in the region (Acuto, 2010, pp.274). It is also important to note the global reception of the Burj: especially in the early stages of the build, when the project was considered to be beyond the scope of human

engineering (Burj Khalifa, 2023). In completing the Burj against these expectations, the site symbolically underscores Dubai's claims to realise the imagined. This realisation of human life, against the odds, can be seen as an allegory of the city as a whole: perched on the desert, Dubai lacks the natural resources to sustain its current population, and thus, the survival of Dubai let alone its success, is founded in the technologies of human engineering (Aima, 2018, pp.12). This physical challenge is of course negotiated through man-made solutions and engineering. Much like the Burj, Dubai exists despite the geographical realities to the contrary. Moreover, the success of the Burj against broader global criticism is significant in how it shapes the narrative of the Burj as a success of Emirati engineering and innovation, thereby intertwining the Burj as a site with the narratives of Dubai which expand the city's wealth from the present to the future. Moreover, the completion of the building, physically achieved by a labour market sourced primarily from central and Southeast Asia, further emphasises the role of Dubai as a facilitator (facilitating node) in global city networks.

Similar to the other buildings which create the discursive landscape of Dubai, the architecture of the Burj is also designed to shape a distinctly local sense of place. The unique star-shape of the building is designed to emulate the hymenocallis, or desert spider-lily: a regional flower widely cultivated in Dubai and the UAE (Burj Khalifa, 2023, Figure 7). Despite the dominance of state-sponsored discourses on monumental architecture such as the Burj, non-state discourses tied to the building are perceptible to the critical observer. Given that the entrance to the Burj is located within the Dubai Mall: a place of luxury and consumption, its access is overtly gated from the outset.
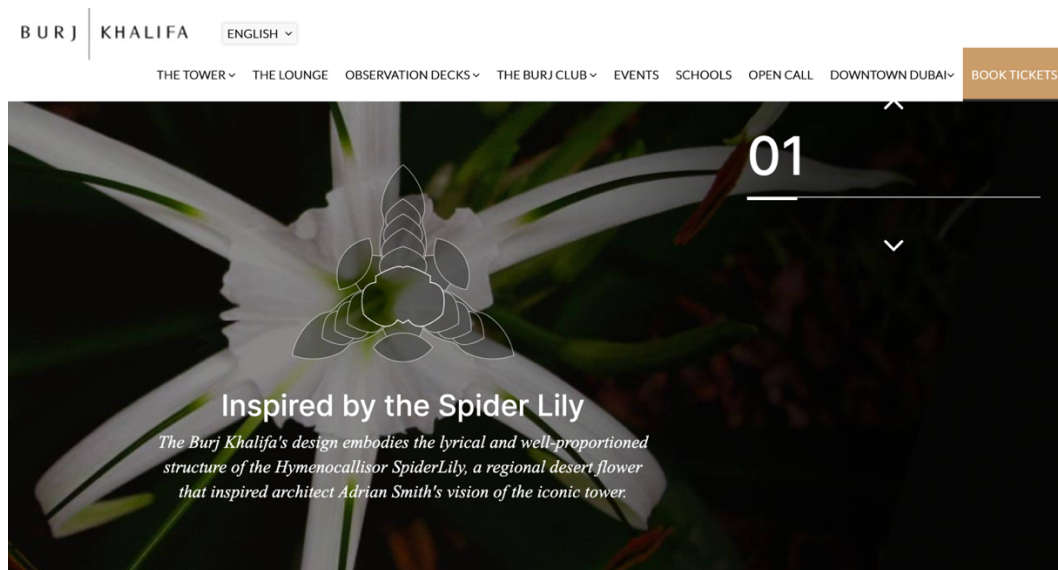
Figure 7 screenshot showing the Burj's local inspiration

Some scholars may argue that analysing sites such as these, which overtly erase subaltern voices, offer limited contributions to the field. If only the capitalist state, and its investors, are able to effectively 'speak' through architecture, then the voices of the socially marginalised remain in the dark. There are two key rebuttals to this line of thinking. First, that there is much to be gained from the analysis of the state-sanctioned voices. As with the examination of any state apparatus, or indeed, any expression of hegemonic values, an architectural discursive analysis provides insight to the insecurities and aspirations of this body (the state). Second, while it is true that the state and its investors form the primary operators (or perhaps, mouthpieces) of these instruments (architectural sites) and thus it is those narratives which may be most extensively identified and examined, as in any form of discursive analysis, an essential part of the framework is formed by the analysis of which voices are *excluded* or *absent* from the discourses of these sites. Hence, a proper analytical examination of the sites of present-day Dubai, such as the Burj Khalifa and the Palm, should explore that *which is not said* as much as much as it examines that which is.

External Experiences of the Burj

The approach of the flaneur, therefore, enables this investigation of the absent through an analysis of the Burj Khalifa as an experiential phenomenon from various different perspectives. As the tallest building in the world, the building can be seen from much of the city, and is always visible from the areas downtown. In this way, at a basic level, and to all inhabitants of the city – not only the elite – the Burj acts as a site of mutual location: a physical compass point of reference for those traversing the city. The tower as an icon sets the tone for much of the architectural symbolism across Dubai, standing as a superlative ("the tallest") in conjunction with other superlatives. It is not enough for the building to be tall enough to serve the city, it must be tall enough to serve the world, a title which it claims as an exemplary monument to human engineering. Given that globally, the height of buildings has in the modern period been a focus of spectacular international attention, the Burj's role as the tallest building in the world also leads the other superlative architectural sites of Dubai (Acuto, 2010, pp.274). Almost as a vector, global attention to Dubai's monuments is drawn first by the Burj, as the tallest, then to the Palm, as the first man-made island, then to the Dubai Mall, as the world's largest, then to the Museum of the Future, and so on and so forth. The Burj Khalifa is the central bid for this attention and draws tourism from around the world. Its claim to superlative-ness leads the claims of other iconic sites in the city for global attention.

On the ground floor, the Burj is accessed most commonly through the Dubai Mall. The Burj is experienced without cost by visitors to the Dubai Mall, who may view not only the building's access point, but also the fountain light show which is held every evening directly in front of the tower. The tower, as a semi-formal part of the light show, reiterates its significance, while also reiterating its commerciality- the name of the developers almost permanently projected onto the side of the building (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 'Emaar' (in Arabic) the developer's name projected on the Burj Khalifa

However, to enter the building itself and not only view it from this external, iconic perspective, requires payment and the extent of access aligns with expenditure. Tickets for the "At the Top" experience, visiting the viewing decks at the 124th and 125th floors, cost 169 AED. For an additional 230 AED visitors can purchase the At the Top 'SKY' experience, which will take them to the 148th floor, and which includes a guided tour and refreshments. The most exclusive package, marketed as simply 'The Lounge' offers access to the 152, 153 and 154th floors, along with a light meal, for the total cost of 769 AED (Burj Khalifa, 2023). At each level, the physical space is constructed to reflect the degree of luxury, and access is limited to the more exclusive areas through exponentially more expensive ticketing (ibid.).

For visitors to the inside of the site, the early foyers and waiting capsules comprise various displays, introducing the building, its construction, its symbolic meaning and its architectural specifications. The ascent, in this way, is incorporated in the experience itself, and the focus on state-curated storytelling, as in a theme-park, draws participants' attention away from the material ways they are processed within the building, and hence allows the building to process a much greater volume of people (Zambetta et. al, 2020, pp.2). The earliest stages of the building, on the ground floor, are darkly tiled to match the aesthetic sensibilities of the Mall's interior. Once inside the official bounds of the site proper, the interior shifts to a brighter white, with curved archways and reliefs which let light into the building and accentuate the its physical structure. This juxtaposition of light and dark serves to demarcate the boundary of the site from the lower areas, which may be viewed by passer-by within the Mall, and thus aesthetically reflects the physical separation of Burj guests from ordinary mall-visitors.

Upon arriving at the upper and more luxurious viewing floors, the open layout of the space and while panelling on the walls immediately expresses difference or distinction to visitors. This physical shift is one which is equally embodied in the carefully created atmosphere – of a more relaxed and prestigious area. Free Arabic coffee and traditional Arabic sweets (halwa), such as pastries and dates, are handed out to guests by attendants, dressed in smart, contemporary uniforms with distinctly Emirati elements to indicate the traditional nature of the refreshments. At this high level, then, it is not only important that the Burj be unique in its superlativity, but also in its Arabness (Steiner, 2016, pp.29). This idea of particularly Arab success, is reiterated in presentations of the site online. Almost all the panoramic, floor to ceiling windows, reminiscent of a hotel interior, offer sweeping views of the city, and beyond it, the desert, broken only by the small giftshop, which functioned as an entryway to the outdoor, balcony viewing platform on the north-eastern side of the building. The souvenirs are notably luxurious: silk scarves, artists impressions of the city or the rooftop, fine quality jewellery including precious metals and pearls.

More affordable souvenirs, such as sleek portable mugs or bespoke stationery, mitigate the implications of the lower price point on their overall value by marketing their functionality – or use-value (Paraskevaidis & Andriotis, 2015, pp.3). While some of the items in this upper boutique may be considered the 'banal' souvenirs, still they differentiate themselves as more exclusive and therefore more valuable (Peters, 2011, pp. 235).

The more limited access to upper observation decks also serves to produce a calmer, less stressful atmosphere in these spaces. Soft furnishings, such as sofas and stools, soften the echoes of chatter and movement in the space, while also allowing guests to sit and look out over the city, and to take their time exploring the site. In contrast to the other floors of the Burj, there is no site-storytelling at this higher level. The view of Dubai is the only spectacle which this upper observation floor showcases: and for those who are 'cultured' enough to enjoy it, the splendour of the city needs no further embellishment. Although the upper floors of the Burj are designed to maintain the attention of the visitor for no more than an hour, no guest is asked to leave or move along. Instead, attendants at this level are at the disposal of guests – embodying hospitality, rather than traffic-management. However, the access that guests who buy this experience is limited to one ascension. Returning back down to the lower viewing tower means to step away from this luxury, exacerbating the image of exclusivity intertwined in the upper floors of the Burj site. The experience of Dubai, from this great height, is materially communicated in a space which is designed to be consumed *quickly*.

At the Top
Descending from the upper floors to the 124th and 125th level viewing decks is another sharp contrast in the space of the Burj site. Primarily, this contrast comes in the way of population: as the size of this space is much larger and filled with people and noise. Upon exiting the elevator, visitors are greeted by a formal photo experience, where for an additional fee, professional photographers take pictures of guests against a greenscreen backdrop, so that 'perfect' views of the Burj may be

photoshopped behind them. These backdrops are photographs taken only a few meters away from the greenscreen itself, yet they serve to 'erase' the realities of glass windows and poor lighting from the photographs of guests. This space serves two clear functions. The first, within the site itself, these spaces serve to limit the flow of traffic to the popular outdoor observation decks, staggering the flow of traffic from the elevators and steadying the overall pedestrian progression through the space. However, aside from this physical site reality, they also serve to promote Dubai and the image of the city globally: creating more photo opportunities even than those which naturally exist with the site as a tourist attraction, and through the medium of professional photography, raising the chances that these souvenir photographs will be the ones which are displayed the most overtly when taken home – whether in homes or as postcards sent to friends .

Other material aspects of these lower floors are evident to visitors coming from the upper decks, however. The darker tones of the floor, walls and lighting in this area of the site mean that the atmosphere of the room general feels less polished. The space is also dirtier: although not outright dirty, because of the increased pedestrian traffic. In contrast to the upper floors, where the material commercialism comes in the form of 'boutique' items and where a selective approach to curating these items is showcased, in the lower levels, the items available are designed to cater to the widest audience possible. Materially, the lower levels of the Burj Khalifa also offer ways for visitor to engage with the site through two additional ways: through coin-stamp machines and through sending postcards. However, unlike regular souvenirs, these items are given value not only through the cost of their purchase, but also through the uniqueness of the experience by which they were acquired. Printing the coins of the Burj Khalifa, is only possible in the site of the Burj itself, for example: and the collectability of the pressed coins themselves is seen as a marketable feature of the coins: which act as stamps authenticating the participants visit to each of the key sites of Dubai. Similarly, "sending a postcard from the highest point in the world", is imbued with additional meaning by virtue of its location, and not the practice itself. Nevertheless, each of these material activities offer visitors a

material interaction with the site: adding layers of tactile and practised meaning to the otherwise largely observational experience of looking out over the city. Moreover, as with the professionally-taken photographs at the entry of this area of the site, each of these material shaping of the site, are deeply enrooted as practices which market the Burj to external, largely international audiences. The experience of sending a post-card from the Burj, therefore ensures the continued profligation of the Burj, and by extension of Dubai, in the international imagination.

4.2.2. The Dubai Mall

The Dubai Mall (دبي مول) is a key public space in the city of Dubai itself. Popular among locals, visitors and tourists alike, the space of the mall is fully enclosed and airconditioned and therefore a popular common space, especially during Dubai's inhospitable summers, where the ambient air temperature can remain above 40°C for almost four months (Taleb, 2015, pp.285). Yet it would be erroneous to paint this space as neutral. For although it is free to access the building itself, as a shopping centre, the site of the Mall is largely occupied by those who can afford to purchase the material goods inside, or who can afford to participate in the activities which the mall provides. In essence, the Mall is open to those who can afford to participate in the (very literal) consumption of the identities within its bounds. The Dubai Mall, the largest shopping center by area in the world, measures over 100 hectares. However, while it is true that the site itself is very large, and that within the site there exist multiple distinct spaces which are coded in a distinct visual and material style, these perceived differences are largely aesthetic, and the consumption of the site remains consistent across these supposedly disparate areas. The number of people, for example, who move throughout each of the sections of the site is fairly uniform. Likewise, despite different colours and styles being used more or less predominantly in different areas of the mall, the lighting across the entire site is uniform, bright and cold- the fluorescent lighting which is common across most hospitals and shopping centres across the world (Mayhoub & Rabboh, 2022, pp.15). The surfaces tiled, clean, bright, shiny and reflective.

Figure 9 local Emiratis wearing traditional dress at French patisserie Ladurée, Dubai Mall, 2022

The Dubai Mall is one of the few places that the local Emirati population share public spaces with the broader inhabitants of Dubai, and one of the very few places where community life or 'frīj' (فريج) is performed (AlMutawa, 2020, pp.45). What is notable about the consumption of space by Emiratis in Dubai is their *visibility*. As some studies have shown, younger Emiratis are more likely to adopt traditional dress as a performative display of difference and may not always wear these items when moving about the city more generally, especially when they wish to pass unnoticed (Akinci, 2020, pp.1783-1784). By contrast, while at the Dubai Mall, the performance of donning of traditional clothes is essential in maintaining an image of the Emirati as the wealthy and powerful constituents of the city. The Emirati in the Mall are visible only in the highest-end areas of the site: in the luxury, classic fashion houses, and at the boutique French patisseries (Figure 9). The Dubaian Emirati identity, here, is built on the consumption of luxury, and particularly, on the consumption of luxury as a means of differentiating Emirati identity from the inhabitants of the city more broadly.

Site-making and Differentiation within the Dubai Mall

The elite and luxury areas of the mall, then, is one section which is differentiated from others, although this differentiation, interestingly, is perhaps the least physically constructed difference. Spatially, smaller, emblematic spaces inside Dubai offer 'experiences' which facilitate guest consumption of the site, such as the ice-rink, the souk, the indoor waterfall, the fountain show, and the aquarium (Dubai Mall, 2023). Some of these spaces are marketed in Dubai in their own right: such as the aquarium, which is marketed as the world's only indoor aquarium, and one of a kind. However, unlike the Burj Khalifa, which is accessed via the Dubai Mall, but is a site in its own right, each of these areas are entirely subsumed in the site of the Mall itself, and symbolically positioned in the city's landscape in a way which reflects this secondary nature. The Dubai Aquarium, as the area with the most claim to being considered as a site for this study in its own right, is the perfect illustration of how unique areas of the Mall are nevertheless consumed in comparable ways. The aquarium, as a part of the superlative bid for uniqueness embodied by many of the contemporary sites of Dubai, offers a plethora of different experiences for the visitor to purchase alongside their entry to the aquarium itself: walking under the aquarium itself, taking a glass bottom boat over the top of the water, feeding the fish, feeding penguins, or even holding hands with an otter. These three latter experiences are particularly notable for the physical aspects of spatialisation which they embody in the consumption of the aquarium, and therefore the ways in which they enroot Dubai's present in the lived and material.

Within the aquarium particularly, the experience of authenticity is attributed to the material. However, it is not enough to experience the site materially, the material itself must also be judged to be authentic. In this way, it is the animals themselves which authenticate the experience of the material in the aquarium. Given the overtly synthetic construction of the space itself (artificial trees, unconcealed lighting fixtures, etc) the animals then, are the sole arbitrators of the natural, or authentic, in this space. Participation from the guests themselves are carefully limited – but unlike in other areas of the site, this limitation is an enabler of authenticity, since it

is based on wellbeing of the animals, wellbeing which should be an impossibility, in the desert, but has been realised by Dubai.

4.2.3. The Palm Jumeirah

The Palm Jumeirah at 560 hectares, is the largest site of the case studies (Lewis, 2023). The Palm Jumeirah is a man-made island, built of the coast of Dubai's Jumeirah beach, and known for its unique shape as a palm frond. Despite its size, the Palm is acknowledged as a site to visit in the city. Like the Dubai Mall, the size of the palm means that several key areas exist within the site itself. However, many of the palm's "Fronds" are each made up of private residential areas, and thus not available to the public (Palm Jumeirah, 2023). Even walking down these streets is not possible without the private access. While the experience of the Palm is technically free, the monorail: the most common transport route to the Palm, costs around 35 dirhams for a return ticket, and although taxis also drive to the Palm, it is not possible to walk to the Palm from mainland Dubai. At the furthest outer ring of the Palm lies the Atlantis Aquaventure Park- a waterpark attached to the Atlantis the Palm hotel. Although a small shopping area exists around this end of the Palm, there is little public space here, and even walking around the ring of the Palm is inadvisable for safety reasons. The only spaces which are open to visitors not staying at the hotel itself is the small boutique shopping area, and the food court, both housed inside the Atlantis hotel itself. These are largely themed to suit the interior décor of the Atlantis, which itself is fashioned into a light plastered interior, with sea-shell and similarly themed details to mimic the imagined underwater city.

As visitors are not able to access this farthest part of the Palm, it is instead the tip of the frond, titled "The Pointe" which draws the most tourist traffic. From here it is possible to see the distinctive shape of the Atlantis hotel, made to mimic a gateway to the ocean, as well as to view the monorail which extends out across the water in another technological feat to gain access to this hotel. The monorail in this sense is a technological symbol of the Palm, and one which again highlights the

ways in which space and place in Dubai are distorted and made accessible or even luxurious by technology. However, the monorail is also another claim to Dubai's superlative identity: as the first monorail system in the middle east (Nakheel, 2023). From the Pointe, it is also possible to ascend from the point up to the Palm observation deck, where guests can enjoy views of the Palm: another chance to see engineering and technology as a defiance of the natural environment, since the point itself is man-made. The Pointe also hosts a very small public beach, at which guests may swim if they so choose. The water is warm and clear, but not clean: small plastics visible to the naked eye, and a slight sheen on the surface of the water from the petroleum and other chemicals from the high volume of jet ski and other maritime traffic passing in the near vicinity. This evidence of the synthetic nature of the space reiterate to the visitor the oil-based nature of Dubai's contemporary spaces. It is not possible to fully embrace the 'natural' aspects of the city Dubai, nor of its particular sites such as the Pointe, as reminders of the unnatural permeate this natural landscape. Despite the relative calm of the Pointe itself, for example, the atmosphere is disturbed by the roar of jet skis, as well as loud music playing from speakers of the hotel across the water. To participate in the unique and 'authentic' experiences of the Pointe, therefore, visitors must also acknowledge the unnatural and inauthentic elements of the site and its spatialisation. As in the Dubai Mall and other high-access public spaces, Emirati identity is preserved through a lack of access and affordability made 'too elite' to be excessively commercialised to an international audience and thus is safeguarded against international exploitation.

4.3. Future

"Whoever owns these ideas and this imagination, will own the future."
— Mohammed Al-Gergawi, UAE Minister for the Future

The sites of this study which seek to address future in their narratives of place are by nature the most precarious. The future, by nature, is a collective exercise in imagining, yet in Dubai, the future is also expressed discursively and materially. Many of the architectural sites of Dubai stand as monuments to the present also allude to the lasting significance of Dubai's future. Some sites even address the future directly: such as the Dubai Frame which literally speaks to the past, present and future of the city, or the Museum of the Future, which expands on the narratives of Dubai's future presented by the Frame. However, the constant construction at play in contemporary Dubai also speaks to the future: the improvement and evolution of pre-existing parts of the city, as well as the development of whole new regions - currently desert - into lively districts of the city (Acuto, 2010, pp.280). This constant development has a very real and material effect on inhabitants and guests consumption of the city, and this section of the thesis will critically examine the 'developing site' alongside the Museum of the Future and the Dubai Frame as examples of sites which articulate Dubai's future identity. Imagining the future is essential to Dubai, whose local inhabitants lack a common history on which to build a strong sense of local identity (Akinci, 2020, pp.1786). In the present, the relative insecurity of oil, the resource responsible for Dubai's "instant" city transformation, leads many in the city to turn to a collectively imagined future to satisfy their ontological insecurities (Bagaeen, 2007, pp.173).

Yet, Dubai is not the only oil-funded city in the Gulf to strategically leverage the future as a tool ensuring its global city status. Indeed, the Gulf in particular is territorially competitive when it comes to building and sustaining discourses of the future, and Dubai, in comparison to many of the Gulf cities such as Abu Dhabi, Riyadh and Doha, has relatively limited oil resources. While Abu Dhabi through the building of Islands such as Al Saadiyat makes claims on a future based in cultural and artistic tourism, Doha pursues a stake in international sports, and Riyadh expands its imagine in the international eye through spectacular projects such and by building prestigious institutions such as KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology) (Hertog, 2017, pp.15-18). Indeed, upon

closer examination, many of the oil-rich cities in the gulf pursue a diverse portfolio of strategies designed to establish longer-term eminence on the back of the prosperity that natural resources of oil have provided them. In fact, in comparison to many of the Gulf's cities, Dubai's more meagre oil resources have led it to be one of the best adapted cities when it comes to diversifying its sources of income. Nevertheless, oil remains the resource which has permitted this diversification of income, and thus it remains oil which provides contemporary ontological security to Dubai's inhabitants. As such, to extend this security into the future, Dubai must imagine a local identity for itself which is equally prosperous, but in which oil does not play a leading role.

4.3.1. The Dubai Frame

The Dubai Frame, discussed earlier in this thesis, is a monument which stands as the winning entry of the Thyssen Krupp Elevator contest (Nastasi & Ponzini, 2018, pp.223). Materially, the Frame takes shape as a 150 meter tall building in the shape of a picture frame- finished with golden panels and situated in the city so that looking from the south side, the building literally frames the historical Al Fahidi district, while from the north, the frame captures the new developments of Downtown Dubai. The Frame is essential to the understanding of the context of Dubai's struggle to produce a clear local identity as a Global city, and showcases some of its contemporary claims to individuality and also highlights the role that an imagined future plays in creating a homogenous locality for the city, especially in the context of an elusive, elite indigenous minority. As it has already been established in this analysis, the Dubai Frame as a site itself acts as a keystone for the contemporary role of Dubai's architecture in explicitly shaping and framing narratives of the city. The Dubai Frame is the site which overtly establishes the connection between the past and future, and the spatialisation of the site likewise follows this chronological depiction. Guests are first taken through an exhibit of historic Dubai, with painted illustrations, old photographs and video footage showcasing the city "before" the discovery of oil and its consequent rapid urbanisation (Figure 10). After this history of Dubai has been established, visitors

ascend 48 floors in an elevator, before reaching the upper viewing platform: a long corridor across the two vertical sides of the Frame (The Dubai Frame, 2023). This corridor, made of large, super-thick glass windows cased in a sturdier metal structure, showcases again these two "halves" of the city (old & new) for guests to observe. After crossing this corridor, with its views of the city, visitors are taken back down the other side of the corridor, to the "future" gallery, where a short virtual-reality-styled presentation depicts a future Dubai, founded in Emirati technology and innovation (Figure 11).
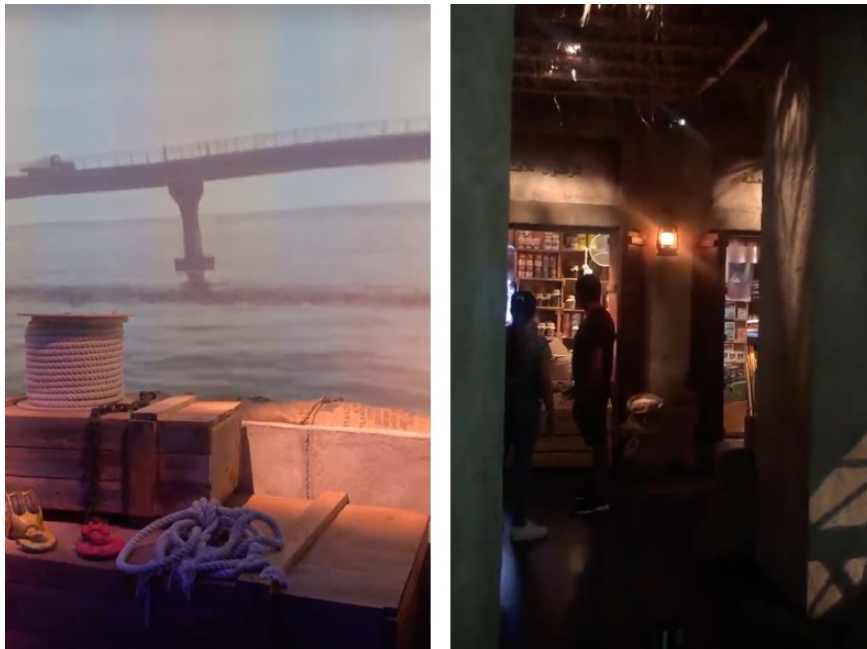

Figure 10 photographs from the "Past" Gallery, The Dubai Frame, showcasing 'historic' Dubai

Figure 11 VR presentation on Dubai's future at the Dubai frame

Similar to the Burj, the Dubai Frame, in locating the landscape of the city behind glass, in conjunction with the specific "framing" narrative makes the city itself visual – an image to be consumed and made recognisable to the observer. By flattening the city into this two-dimensional, visual form, the Frame makes Dubai more simple and comprehensible to the foreign observer. It is not necessary to know the details of Dubai's history and local culture in order to recognise Dubai, and differentiate it from other global cities. Thus, through emblematically visualising the two parts of the city, the Dubai Frame is able to profligate the image of present Dubai through the interconnected networks of the visitors who experience the site: ensuring a degree of promotion for the city into the future. However, the site also emphasises the connectivity of Dubai the city by articulating Dubai's future in connection to its past and present: a connection which is spatialised through the site

of the Frame itself. By articulating the history of Dubai through the structure of the building, the site is both able to physically constrain the flows of people moving through the space, distract attention away from these physical realties of the experience, and simultaneously suggest a natural progression from each stage of the chronology to the next (Dubai Frame, 2023). In consuming the site as an experience, guests are encouraged to reproduce ideas of Dubai not as inauthentic, or 'without history' but rather as coming from a rich nomadic tradition.

As with many of Dubai's key architectural sites, the Dubai Frame is not a public space and visitors must pay for ticketed entry to the site (50 AED for adults), although as a site the Frame is experienced as a landmark in the city. Its golden metal casing serves to highlight the 'luxurious' nature of the site, and especially to highlight the site itself, as sunlight at different times of the day reflects on this surface, causing the building to light up like a beacon. Within the city, the Frame is also unique in that unlike many of the other tall buildings of Dubai, which are located in hubs, it stands alone on the horizon: surrounded by parkland and the palace of Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum (Dubai Frame, 2023). For those who pay to gain access, the site stresses the Emirati heritage of the desert, and the innovative and resilient culture which engendered the survival of Dubai's first inhabitants in hostile conditions: an innovation which the Frame then expresses as the key to the future success of Dubai the global city. This emphasis on technology is not only stressed in the virtual-reality style exhibit in the final gallery, but also in the "present" gallery, on the upper floor, where the glass bottom "falls out" through an opaque effect being removed from the glass every minute or so: showcasing the underside of the frame, as well. This effect does not physically limit guests from standing in the middle of the room, but many guests feel uncomfortable or afraid of the height, and therefore this glass-bottom acts as a de-facto divider which keeps streams of pedestrian traffic moving steadily toward the exit.

The sensationalisation of the floor through this "disappearing glass" trick has another effect on producing the site, however. In creating an element of "hot/cold

experience" through the glass floor, the site reinforces the sense of Disneyfication introduced at the beginning of the exhibit. The introductory scenes of life in pre-oil Dubai, told through painted images and recessed dioramas with life-size models, ostensibly have the purpose of creating a sense of local authenticity, by providing a historic narrative through which the site may be connected to Dubai's local identity (Donner & Sorcinelli, 2022, pp.2). However, through the deliberate separation of contemporary local involvement in producing these images of a romanticised past, it is instead possible to see that while these images and figures are designed to tell a story of Dubai's past, they intentionally adopt a storytelling method similar to those found at theme parks such as Disneyland. In essence, it is more important to the city that its audience understand the narrative which is being told through this "gallery" as a "coolly" authentic experience, than it is that they find it to be a compelling, communitas-driven one (Turner, 1973, pp.193-194, Cohen & Cohen, 2012, pp.1298-1300). In this way, then, the glass-bottomed walkway serves to make an experience of the chronology of Dubai: so that it may be consumed more easily by guests to the site (Elsheshtawy, 2008, pp.167, 172). More literally, consumption at the site is engendered through the purchase of souvenirs, such as printed coins manufactured identically to those discussed at the Burj site. By offering souvenirs from the top of the frame which are only purchasable from the site, the site is able to tokenise the experiences it offers, and promote itself as a site which is more broadly essential to the experience of Dubai.

4.3.2. The Museum of the Future

The Museum of the future (Arabic, hereafter: MotF) is, like the Burj Khalifa, one of the sites in this analysis which has a symbolic presence in the city, even for inhabitants and visitors who do not pay to access the site itself, which is a significant consideration given the extremely limited access to the building itself. As with many of Dubai's most iconic sites, the MotF is firstly only available to those willing to pay for the experience (adult entry is set at 149 AED). However, access to the

MotF is further limited by the availability of tickets, and guests may have to book two to four weeks in advance to secure a ticket. This limited access to the interior only serves to exacerbate the symbolic weight of the building's exterior, however (see, for example, Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2015, pp.35). The MotF building has a unique, ovular structure designed to represent the humanity (Museum of the Future, 2023), and the building itself is engraved with large-scale Arabic script from a poem written by the Sheik Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum (ibid, see Figure 12). Moreover, the building is strategically positioned along the Sheik Zayed Highway; the main 'artery' of traffic which intersects Dubai (Aima, 2018, pp.11), meaning that it occupies a central place in the urban skyline of Dubai, despite having a shorter profile than many of the skyscrapers in the area (Museum of the Future, 2023).

Figure 12 interior of the MotF site, showcasing lighting and large-scale Arabic script.

Although billed as the "most beautiful building in the world" to match the superlative claims of Dubai's urban landscape, the MofT primarily stakes its claim to a local identity through innovation: expressing a distinctly Emirati vision of the future (Aima, 2018, pp.11). Technology is implemented wherever possible: in the structural design of the building (its distinctive round shape) as well as in the interior, in the light displays which 'animate' the poetry lining the interior walls, or the dirigible-drone which floats around the atrium unpiloted. From this inner atrium,

visitors who have paid for access to the museum itself are metered out through timed-ticketing (Beaven & Laws, 2012, pp.186), and guests queue to enter through a series of tubular glass elevators. These elevators are notably different from the ones found at the Dubai Mall, the Burj Khalifa, 'The View at The Palm' observation deck, and the Dubai frame, which are traditional silver boxed metal structures. Instead, the elevators at the museum of the future are clear, tubular structures which reimagine traditional elevator structure (although not, apparently, the traditional elevator function) (Parikka, 2018, pp.40-42).

This tendency to form over function is resplendent throughout the museum. While video displays and interactive or virtual reality experiences are utilised by the Museum, there is little to offer by way of material science. It is a tendency which is reflected online, too, in the museum's "Museum Experience" page. According to the text, guests are invited to "gaze out the window", "observe the missions" of space explorers, and "witness the wonders of nature" (Museum of the Future, 2023, see Figure 13). Partly then, this visual focus is a consequence of the museum's future vision: the depiction of future technologies are by nature prospective, rather than realised. The site serves as a material demarcation for the visual depiction of the future, and uses interactive, non-visible elements such as audio or atmospheric queues, to accentuate participant's perception of the space.
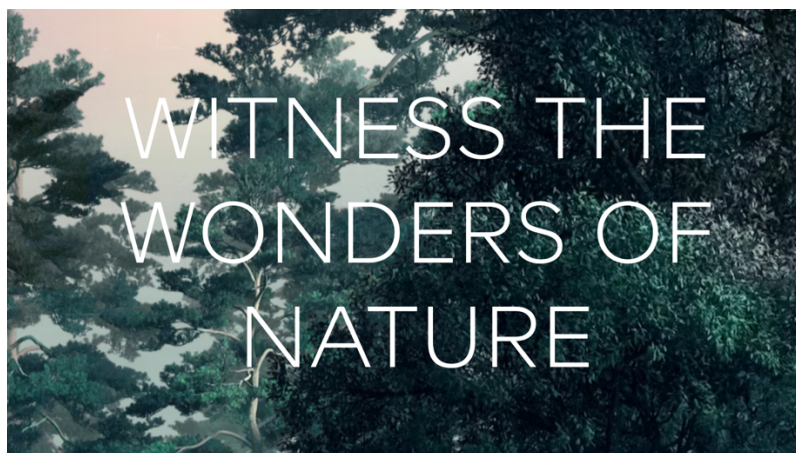

Figure 13 sample screenshot from the MotF website

Visually, the use of text on the MofT building, and specifically the use of Arabic script, is also essential in creating a distinct kind of identity for the imagined future of Dubai. In this way, the building is not only symbolic of a unique future, but a uniquely Arab one (Aima, 2018, pp.11), connecting the narrative of Dubai's success not only to the Emirates, but to the Middle Eastern region as a whole (Museum of the Future, 2023). This regional connection is one which is built on the notion of historic past which has provided the foundation for contemporarily shared traditions and language, and in turn, will provide the basis on shared 'Arabic' traditions and values in the future (Museum of the Future, 2023). Furthermore, the notion of connectivity as it is depicted by visual symbolism in the building is also reinforced by the spatialisation of the site itself, however. The MotF is not only structurally connected to the UAE's ministry for the future, it is also a popular conference location for global summits, conferences and business events: such as the foundation's flagship "Dubai Future Forum" which hosts a number of keynote speakers from around the world (Dubai Future Foundation, 2023). By making the Museum of the Future a literal site for global connection, the building allegorically centres Dubai as a future connector of global networks.

However, it is also pivotal to note the particular depiction of Dubai in this imagined future – Dubai is not only unique, not only a key point of connection in the future global world – it is also profitable. In essence, the depiction of future-Dubai is in line not only with the contemporary profitability of the city, but its earlier profitability: right at the moment of the oil-boom. This specific positioning is evident in some of the digital dimensions of the site, in the language used to describe future-Dubai: the museum is "Of Dubai" and "for the world", yet critically, it is also a space which "...builds on the visionary culture that has transformed the UAE into one of the world's most advanced nations in less than 50 years." (Museum of the Future, 2023). In suggesting Dubai as an accelerated city, the museum frames its narrative of innovation as a uniquely Dubaian one, intertwining this idea of the local by connecting it to another of Dubai's most prominent characteristics: consumption (Elsheshtawy, 2008, pp.167-168). In the MotF, as in other key sites

of the city, consuming the site itself is paired with the consumption of souvenirs, to extend the sites global network of consumption (Brennan & Savage 2012, pp.144-145). The marketing of the site, and selling of souvenirs is not particular singular, in global tourism, yet still the dominance of souvenir marketing is notable. Online, the site's focus on selling can be seen reflected in the layout of digital space. While most of the home-screen buttons are uniformly shaped as sized, the button to "Shop" is twice this standard size, and listed first to accentuate its prominence (Museum of the Future, 2023, Figure 14).[1] In the physical site as well, the gift shop occupies pride of place in the Atrium: an open plan boutique which is the only interruption of the curved clean vectors of the building itself. Even the coffee shop is tucked into a corner of the building so as to not disturb the interior shape. It is not spending money at the MotF, then, which matters, inasmuch as it is the consumption (and therefore international reproduction) of the site itself (Friedman, 1990, pp.314).
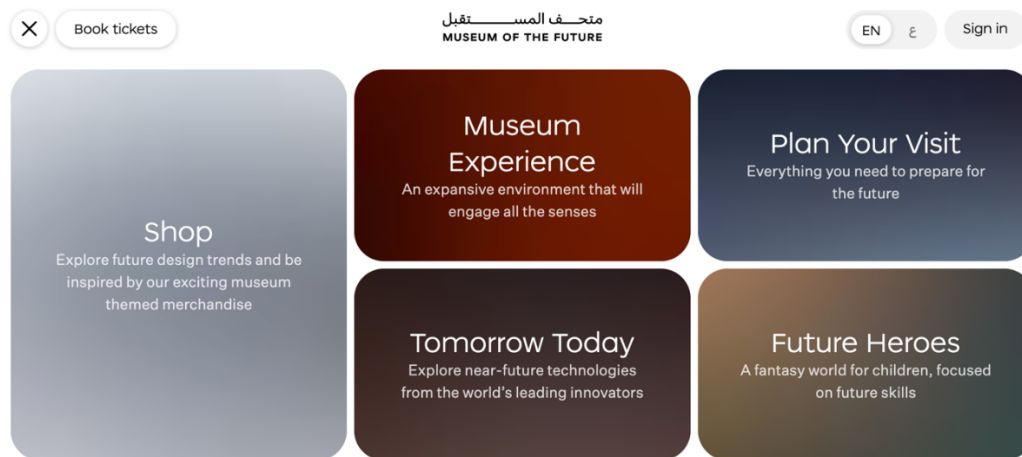

Figure 14 screenshot of the MotF homepage

4.3.3. Developing Sites

Developing sites, the final case study examined by this thesis, are perhaps the most poignant to observe in analysing Dubai's narratives of the future, and yet are also the most nebulous to categorically delineate. This thesis takes the constant construction work of Dubai to be a site in its own right – one which plays a

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[1] The placement of the "shop" button on the left is not merely for aesthetic alignment: when changing the site language to Arabic, the order of the buttons in reversed, ensuring that the "shop" (متجر) button is still placed first for an Arabic-speaking audience, who of course read right to left.

significant symbolic role in the landscape of the city, and one which can also be explored in digital dimensions – through architect plans (i.e. the Dubai "Vertical city"). The skeletons of incomplete buildings are omnipresent in the city itself, and it is common to see labourers, usually young men of south asian origin, digging new roads or pouring fresh concrete under the hot sun (Hamza, 2015, pp.82). For the most part, these workers are not mentioned by formal narratives of the city. Sites, once built, are claimed toward the project of localising the post-oil Dubai landscape, and little local attention is given to the global conditions which have supplied the means (cheap labour) for Dubai's "instant" materialisation from the desert (Bagaeen, 2007, pp.173). Dubai's expat community, although constituting 90% of the city's population (Elsheshtawy, 2020, pp.806), are rarely formally represented in Dubai's sites: especially manual labourers form the working class of this imported labour force. Thus, the developing sites are perhaps some of the only places in which this demographic can be visualised in the city, where they claim a part of the city as their own: in the abandoned spaces at the margins of construction projects (ibid, pp.814).

The presence of migrant workers in Dubai's developing sites helps to narrative the city's assertion of international connectivity: with all the postcolonial concerns that such a claim, in the current global sphere, entails (Yeoh, 2001, pp.460). What Dubai illuminates, as a city focused on becoming the "best" example of a global city, are the pre-existing power imbalances of the modern world. In connecting east and west, global north and global south, as Dubai does, and continues to aim to do, then, is also to participate in networks of uneven power. This observation holds equally true in observing the digital dimensions of developing sites. The plans for new Dubai are often formulated and designed by European architecture firms, such as the Italian firm Luca Curci Architects, responsible for the plans behind Dubai's proposed "vertical city" (Luca Curci, 2023). Thus, even in an imagined future where Dubai is powerful as a key global city, still Dubai continues to position the Global North as the narrators of global systems, and the Global South as the

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executors of their vision: perpetuating the global inequalities of the present (Haider, 2008, pp.1064).

In providing the groundwork for a future Dubai, developing sites of the city also visually demarcate the explosive growth and development of the city, emerging from the blank landscape of the desert. The continued building, physically, signifies to the inhabitants of the city that the emergence and development – the prosperity – of Dubai the city is still ongoing. In developing sites, the promise of future claims of superlativity, and resulting uniqueness, are extended to the city's inhabitants. Building projects which have been halted, or sites whose developers have gone bust, seem peripheral to the city, perhaps because those projects which are essential to the landscape of Dubai – the key architectural sites – are handled by Emirati developers, who in times of global economic downturn, will be supported by the wealth of the government itself (Bagaeen, 2007, pp.191-193). However, reliance on state-funding is not conducive to imagining a future without oil, and it is for this reason that the city increasingly focuses on sustainable building and lifestyles (De Jong, Hoppe & Noori, 2019, pp.1658). Dubai's proposed Vertical City, for example, advertises itself as a first-of-its-kind self-contained city, erasing the need for suburban space by building vertically (Luca Curci, 2023, see Figure 15). Moreover, the use of photovoltaic glass is fundamental to the building plans, which suggest that through the use of this material the site would primarily be powered without the use of oil or other non-sustainable materials (ibid). Architectural sites' increasing orientation toward sustainability serves to reassure the ontological insecurities which stems from the city's foundation in oil.

Figure 15 screenshots from the Luca Curci proposal for Vertical city

Chapter 5 | Conclusion

The Lasting Effects of Architecture

Although Dubai's rapid oil-boom driven development of the mid-20th century was initially unchecked by robust conservation or heritage policies, these systems were quickly adopted and reinforced as urbanisation led to an increased sense of placelessness in the city. Architecture, as an urban strategy, was introduced as a key facilitator of placemaking in Dubai. However, architecture's ability to 'make' place, can only be achieved through interaction. Hence, architecture does little to offer future security to the establishment of place and locality. Indeed, Dubai's architecture is less concerned with the process of creating lasting monuments than it is with producing lasting symbolic narratives about itself. Through sites such as the Burj Khalifa, the Dubai Mall and the Palm Jumeirah, Dubai identifies itself as a city of superlatives: of the tallest, the biggest, the first-of-its-kind. By showcasing its success to a global audience, Dubai structures itself as a city which has managed to achieve – like an ocean (aquarium) in the desert – "the impossible" by defying natural order to create its own reality. Through these discourses, what is made clear is that this success, despite appealing to Western hegemonic understandings of globalisation, is a uniquely Emirati one: that Dubai has succeeded *because,* and not despite of, its Emirati, Gulf or Arab identity.

Power and People

In the production of such powerful narratives, however, only a select few of Dubai's inhabitants are celebrated for their contributions to producing the city. The questions of who tells the story of Dubai, who is included in that story, and who is absent, are perhaps the most revealing indicators of the submerged aspects of Dubai's identity which its key sites relate. This idea, as it pertains to both the elite and non-elite migrant communities of Dubai, is one which has reoccurred throughout the examination of the sites, which limit access to interior spaces to select members of its population. The exclusion of migrant workers, and the similarly imported middle class, from broader narratives about Dubai is

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disconcerting given the proportion of the population they constitute (around 90%), and especially given their very visible role in consuming and producing public and semi-public space in the city. The abundance of multinational stores, and the availability of multi-ethnic food stores and restaurants, for example, speak to the diverse communities of the city and their various tastes and identities, yet in the most symbolic and superlative sites of the city they are absent. Even at the Dubai Mall – one of the most consumed locations in this study – the distribution of pedestrian flows throughout the site materially reflects the stratification of class within the city. It is not the newness of such sites which lead international visitors to question their authenticity, inasmuch as it is their lack of interaction with local inhabitants, be they Emirati or expatriate. Even within the small local population of Emirati Dubaians, certain narratives are centred while others are made liminal. The careful positioning of Emirati identity through the symbolic implementation of traditional Emirati dress, closely aligns Emirati-ness with wealth and, consequently, power. However, by the same token, these spatialised expressions of symbols police the performance of Emirati identity to protect it from external exploitation.

Dubai as a bridge the Neocolonial world
In the contemporary world, Dubai strategically positions itself as a facilitator of global exchange: both of ideas and trade. It does so primarily by making claims of itself as a distinctly Emirati global city. However, while the architecture of Dubai, as a key interlocutor of the city's identity, continues to address only a small portion of the city's inhabitants, the possibility of a secure future identity remains elusive. If Dubai is a city made possible by the exchange of ideas, material and labour, then without its current immigrant population Dubai cannot exist. As such, while the symbolic identity of Dubai remains separate from the identity of its inhabitants, no ontological security can be offered to the city itself. In a global world in a constant state of flux, there is no incentive for these inhabitants to continue to choose Dubai should another city make a bid for their attention. This is not to say that for the Emirati-Dubai to prosper in a global future it must relinquish the power it currently wields to protect its own citizens from exploitation. Indeed, there is a fine balance

between being known in the world, and therefore consumed, and being made a cultural other who is subsumed by the global, entirely. Nor does it mean, from a purely analytical perspective, that Dubai must offer security or in any way change the working conditions of its current expatriate inhabitants: only that the city must restructure its spatialisations of place to account for the populations who make it a living, interactive city.

Toward a Future of the Peripatetic

With these reflections in mind, it is essential that the literature regarding urban placemaking centers the lived/experiential aspects of the city in its analysis. Locality, founded in a distinct, secure sense of place, is equally embedded in lived everyday experience and in social interactions with sites. As such, peripatetic observations offer a unique insight to the ways in which these site-based interactions occur. By considering the fluid, informal, non-visible and experiential ways in which sites are consumed, peripatetic observations enable critical enquiry into the discourses of place. As such, research which considers the city as not only visual and material but a field site that is spatialized and experienced, offers the opportunity to reveal how specific places produce local identity.

Concluding Remarks

Architecture forms a site through which identity is spatialised, consumed, and ultimately, produced. The architecture of a city shapes its inhabitants in their everyday lives, and in so doing creates locality: a unique sense of place. In an increasingly global world, architecture can be seen as a key strategy of emerging global cities, such as Dubai, to create a clear, unique and authentic image of itself in the international sphere. Through the examination of nine case studies, the architecture of Dubai can be seen to overtly shape itself as a global city of the future by defining its local characteristics as those which are conducive to global networks. These characteristics, as they strategically place Dubai at the nexus of global exchange, can be seen to fall under four key themes: authenticity, innovation, prosperity and connection. Only through the establishment of the city as a *future*

key site – as a future world city – can a degree of ontological security can be offered to its inhabitants.

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