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PLACE BRANDING AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN QATAR AND ABU DHABI

by
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

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This paper examines the ideational factors that have influenced and contributed to formulating the emerging roles and positions of Qatar and Abu Dhabi in the world economy. In pursuance of national objectives and strategies in the systemic sphere, subjective factors – most notably for this study those of image, perception, and reputation – of international economic relations are considered to be significant complements to objective or material ones insofar as they can act to increase the soft power of these states vis-à-vis external actors. In shaping these factors, the regimes, governments, and elite in Abu Dhabi and Qatar have proactively sought to engage globally in order to formulate favorable and conducive external images and perceptions, which help to facilitate international agendas and activities. This externally oriented engagement has been a part of active nation branding and image management on the part of Qatar and Abu Dhabi's leadership.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, the Arab Gulf region has undergone a marked shift in its position in global markets and the world economy. A key element of this shift has been deeper integration into financial markets and broader economic systems as well as the pursuit of more central and active roles in international organizations (Legrenzi & Momani 2011, 6). This is not to say that these regimes had previously been isolated or insulated from global economic forces but that the nature of this engagement has changed. Notably, prior to the discovery and exploitation of oil resources, the Qatari economy centered heavily on the pearling industry, which was deeply integrated into long distance trade networks and highly exposed to global price fluctuations (Crystal 1990, 7). After the shift in primary economic activity to oil and gas production, Gulf economies became even more dependent on foreign markets for capital, labor, and imported goods, with income from oil extraction being derived from or with the assistance of foreign firms (ibid). The significance of their position in the modern global economy was spotlighted during the "oil crisis" of the 1970s, demonstrating the impact these economies and their oil resources could have on a global scale.

The boom in oil prices in the early 1970s, which led to unprecedented surpluses in the budgets of Gulf states, was soon followed by a decline in oil prices during the 1980s and a resultant contraction of these budgets. Out of this boom and bust period in the 1970s and 1980s, Gulf governments became acutely aware of the need to better manage capital inflows from hydrocarbon exports as well as the emerging recognition that economic restructuring towards post-oil economic sectors would be an imperative for future stability and development.

In the current period of international engagement, one that can be said to have begun with structural shifts in the global economy beginning in the earlier 1990s, wealth from oil and natural gas has become an insufficient explanatory variable in tracing shifts in the Gulf's external economic relations. The large amounts of capital present in the region continue to be a foundational aspect of these political economies and have certainly enabled increased international engagement and processes of advancing a more central role in the global economy. However, international integration and engagement over this period has not been solely defined by the importance of vast hydrocarbon resources and capital but additionally by a more strategic use of this wealth in both oil and non-oil sectors of the economy. Concerns regarding the future of oil and natural gas reserves, a more proactive approaches towards extra-regional actors, and increased competition in an ostensibly neoliberal economic structure have been definitive traits of current economic calculations by Gulf governments.

Beyond the centrality of the Arab Gulf region in global energy markets seen prior to these shifts, contemporary developments have increasingly brought the once periphery economies of this region to more centralized positions in other economic sectors, perhaps most notably in the areas of finance and investment. As the national economies of the Arab Gulf region have made this transition towards the center, there have been concomitant and resultant transformations in the image of these states within the international community. Individual countries and city-states in the Arab Gulf region have emerged as 'hubs' of various economic, financial, technological, and inter-governmental sectors. The formulation of these evolving images and perceptions is the simultaneous result of changing perceptions as imposed by external actors, resulting primarily from commercial, economic, social, and cultural interaction, as well as part of active policy projects and public diplomacy strategies of individual Gulf governments.

The purpose of this study is to examine two cases in the region, Abu Dhabi and Qatar, where dwindling hydrocarbon reserves have not necessarily been a driving force for the need for proactive international engagement. Focus is placed on the relationship between political economic considerations and the significance of subjective, ideational factors, and the active formulation and manipulation of these factors through strategies of branding political entities. This kind of place branding herein is broadly understood as a process of "branding and building brand equity…in relation to national, regional and/or local (or city) identity" and as a holistic concept, which includes "all interactions of a place with its environment, including political, outside investment, trade, immigration and media issues" (Go & Govers 2009, 14-16). In examining place branding in the context of Qatar and Abu Dhabi, a number of questions are addressed herein: What are the various images projected by Abu Dhabi and Qatar and to what end are they promoted? What strategies and tools are employed to carve out and expand upon these images? How has the wealth of both entities contributed to their branding initiatives? Noting the similarities between Abu Dhabi and Qatar, how do the two cases compare with one another?

The paper begins by reviewing relevant literature on both conceptual and practical aspects of place branding as well as its connection to soft power and small state behavior. Chapter three provides a discussion of the paper's methods and the cases selected. Chapters four and five give overviews of both cases, highlighting specific efforts by these two city-states to formulate, develop, and steer their respective images. These chapters will also look at the sovereign wealth funds of Qatar and Abu Dhabi as instruments utilized by political and business elite to promote favorable images in the international sphere as part of branding efforts. I proceed with a discussion chapter, which will compare the two cases, highlight some limitations of the paper, and look towards the future of place branding in Qatar and Abu Dhabi. I will then wrap up the paper with brief concluding remarks.

CHAPTER II

PLACE BRANDING

A. A Definition of Place Branding

The concept of place branding is still subject to wide variation in definition and is often used synonymously with concepts of nation or state branding. For the purposes of this paper, the term ‘place branding’ is preferred over the similar term ‘nation branding’ so as to avoid confusion concerning the use of the term ‘nation’ in reference to Abu Dhabi. The focus throughout the paper is on place branding as it relates to comparable political entities, which I contend Abu Dhabi and Qatar in fact are. As concepts of branding a state or a nation concern the branding practices of political entities, they are considered to be relevant to the discussion.

Although ‘place’ is understood herein primarily in terms of territoriality, Harvey (1993, 4) suggests that lack of clarity in the term allows for the integration of other aspects of an understanding of ‘place,’ including the metaphorical, psychological, or what I have referred to as the ideational. As Harvey (ibid, 25) considers places to be ‘social constructs,’ ideational factors of a place’s position in global economic relations are the result of subjective perceptions by both internal and external actors. These perceptions, although to a certain extent dependent upon ‘real’ and practical geo-economic calculations, are simultaneously influenced and molded by processes of exchange between various actors at both the domestic and international level as well as by agents (i.e. political and business elites of the political entity in question) who are actively seeking to manipulate this exchange for their benefit. In this vain, Kaneva defines nation branding as “a compendium of discourses and practices aimed at reconstituting nationhood through marketing and branding paradigms” (2011, 118). It is through these discourses and practices that those elites in a position to influence are able to steer the process of branding.

To this, Fan (2010, 98) adds that nation branding moves beyond purely commercial or economic interests and is “concerned with a country’s whole image on the international stage, covering political, economic, and cultural dimensions”. Place branding represents a holistic process of developing and managing a particular territorial entity’s reputation towards an international audience. As a distinct field of study and practice, nation branding emerged following the end of the Cold War as states formerly within the Soviet sphere of influence began to enter into a neoliberal global economic order dominated by the West. Competing for the first time on a truly global scale, these new capitalist actors sought to “redefine and reposition themselves within a master paradigm of globalization” (Jansen 2008, 121). With the widespread adoption of market-oriented economic policies in large swathes of the world that had been previously insulated from such external competition, these states began to turn towards capitalist countries in the West, themselves keen on gaining a foothold in newly opened markets. For these emerging capitalist economies, the end goal of these policies was primarily to attract foreign investment, favorable trade relations, and, in many cases, various forms of development assistance including aid. Broadly speaking, nation branding emerged during this period as an “engine of neoliberalism” creating a marketable asset of national identity and strictly adhering to a logic of market fundamentalism (ibid, 121-2).

The rise of nation branding as a national practice is a response to this global economic restructuring following the end of the Cold War. In the world market that emerged, individual countries sought to establish their new position in the new economic order and were “compelled to align [themselves] within the emerging hierarchical structure” (Hanieh 2009, 64). In this view, the emerging positions of these states have not necessarily been imposed on states by outside actors but are a responsive strategy to increased competition internationally. It is important however to add that governments do not exercise full control of the variables, which influence their country’s nation image. History, culture, geography, environment, and location are all fixed categories that branding practitioners must consider.

Branding is significant however because the right brand can surpass these inherent qualities by actively manipulating the perceptions of outside consumers of the brand (Van Ham 2001, 3). To this end, the development of a particular nation image requires the formation of a specific narrative of the state being branded wherein “[nations] are also to be imagined by others for the purpose of shaping their views of the country in question” (Barr 2012, 85). Peterson highlights that branding must reflect fundamental aspects that makes up the state or political entity that is being branded. Sim (2012, 93) argues, “Nationalists have mobilized national history and imagery to seek competitive advantage for their nations in terms of political power, economic prosperity or cultural dominance”. To this, Anholt adds that the impact of public diplomacy is constrained if it does not have the power to “affect the background reputation of the country whose policies it attempts to represent” (2007, 14). Therefore, a key component of nation branding strategies is inherently the development of legitimacy of the brand in the international sphere.

Nation branding has emerged as an integral component of public diplomacy and is a means to develop a particular image in order to build and manage a reputation (Anholt 2007, 3). Image and reputation have become "essential parts of the state's strategic equity" as states compete. Strong nation brands are significant in "attracting foreign direct investment, recruiting the best and brightest, and wielding political influence" (Van Ham, 2001). Influencing the perceptions of individual actors is a definitive facet of place brand creation, as locales seek to differentiate themselves from others and gain international recognition (Ginesta & de San Eugenio 2013, 13). In the end, the choice of foreign actors to engage with a particular place or country is determined by their perceptions of cost-benefit analysis of that place as well as by real or material calculations.

As the economies of Abu Dhabi and Qatar converge with developed economies, transitioning from classifications of 'developing' or 'emerging markets' towards that of being 'developed', they will increasingly be compared with these economies and must distinguish themselves effectively. Within the context of place and nation branding, distinguishing the state from others is met by a simultaneous need to adapt to expected norms of the international community and thus raises the potential to lose uniqueness in other regards (Peterson, 2006, 746).

As such, a fundamental assumption within the nation branding literature is that the world economy is largely a zero sum game with states competing amongst themselves for favorable reputations. Simon Anholt (2007, 3) has conceptualized this phenomenon in the use of his term *competitive identity*, a term he employs to "describe the synthesis of brand management with public diplomacy and with trade, investment, tourism and export promotion”. These states utilize their brand equity in order to compete more effectively for investment and political influence (Van Ham 2002, 254).

B. Place Branding and Soft Power of Small States

The international relations literature on small states has tended to focus on their size as a constraining characteristic of their ability to compete in international political and economic arenas, although the survival, growth, and increased influence of these states has lead to much revision in the literature on small state behavior (Peterson 2006, 733). Due to the relative size of these states, they have come to rely more heavily on soft power than hard power to project influence internationally in order to pursue national interests and objectives. As part of wider public diplomacy strategies, place branding by governments of small states can be employed as a tool to enhance their soft power.

According to UNITAR’s 1971 report on small states, smallness is understood as a comparative term, which depends on the specific regional context, but broadly speaking small states are defined as “entities which are exceptionally small in area, population and human and economic resources.”[1] For Peterson (2006, 737), the immediate regional context is critical to understanding the impact of a country’s perceived smallness, and the small states of the Arab Gulf benefit from operating in a region made up of other relatively small states. He adds that Qatar and the UAE are in fact small states because they lack sufficient size to function as a “normal sized” state in that they do not have large enough populations to meet the demands for labor or self defense and are less capable to maintain their sovereignty vis-à-vis external pressure of bigger states (2006, 735).

[1] See UNITAR, Small States and Territories: Status and Problems, New York: Arno Press, 1971, p. 29

In Joseph Nye's seminal work on soft power, he defines his notion of soft power simply as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment". Nye (2008) argues that public diplomacy is a means of augmenting a country's soft power. Fan states that nation branding is a subset of public diplomacy and that, while public diplomacy is a purely political tool, nation branding is an all-encompassing concept that "concerns nations as a whole". Influencing external perception and reputation is a key component of soft power considerations, and in this regard, place branding can be understood as a tool of improving international perceptions of the state in question.

Historically, in the Gulf context, Qatar and Abu Dhabi have lived under the shadow or umbrella of larger neighbors and regional actors, including most notably Saudi Arabia and Iran as well as the United States. The diminishing dominance of great powers has however opened the door for smaller actors to take on a larger role in the global economy. The international system of today is largely defined by "connection, interaction and membership", a system which is more favorable to a wider array of actors, including a larger role for small states (Slaughter in Barr 2012, 92). This world-historical environment has opened the door for capital rich actors like Qatar and Abu Dhabi to gain soft power through the strategic use of their wealth globally and by positioning themselves effectively. In an inherently competitive global capitalist system, smaller states must seek out niche roles in the international economic system, and branding is seen as a tool to promote and complement the creation of these roles.

According to Davidson (2012, 90), in the Gulf context, soft power strategies have largely utilized their sovereign wealth funds in order to make high-profile investments abroad. The use of these funds is directed with the intention to “boost awareness of the Gulf monarchy in question with certain Western powers” at all levels both governmental and societal (ibid.). For Davidson it is no coincidence that much of the investment coming out of Gulf SWFs is largely directed towards countries that have a vested and historical interest in maintaining the political and security status quo (ibid.).

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND CASE STUDIES

A. Methods

This paper uses intrinsic case studies methods to identify and explore key elements of Qatar and Abu Dhabi's utilization of place branding and image management in their external engagement. The purpose of these case studies is to contextually examine the goals and objectives of such practices, the audiences towards which these initiatives are addressed, and the strategies and tools employed in order to achieve the principal objectives of these initiatives. Additionally, the application of a comparative approach in chapter 6 will help to further understand how these various projects are operating in the competitive regional context of the Gulf.

Throughout this paper, focus is placed on where the regimes and governments of Qatar and Abu Dhabi have focused their investment strategies in branding-related projects. Broadly speaking, these investments can be categorized as infrastructure development, foreign asset accumulation, and the hosting of globally significant events or organizations. To this end, the role of the investment behavior of sovereign wealth funds, notably the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA), has played will additionally be highlighted. I rely primarily on relevant literature concerning branding, brand, and branding related issues in Qatar and Abu Dhabi as well as on news articles, secondary sources, and statements and publications from the governments of Qatar and Abu Dhabi.

As the paper examines nation-branding projects as they relate to the international sphere, the primary unit of analysis is placed at the level of those actors within Qatar and Abu Dhabi who are in positions to influence these projects, notably the regime, the government, and the political and business elite. As nation branding is inherently viewed as a neoliberal project, drivers of such projects come from their political and business elites who are well positioned to benefit from increased international integration and engagement. Support for neoliberalism in the Gulf context comes primarily from narrow interest of business elite and does not represent a deeper ideological commitment to neoliberal theories (Crystal in Teitelbaum 2009, 44). As such, exploration of how these neoliberal projects influence deeper elements of national identity formation or nation-building projects at the domestic level is considered to be outside the scope of this paper.

B. Sampling

Firstly, it is essential to justify the decision to include Abu Dhabi, a sub-national political entity, as a comparative case to a sovereign state actor, Qatar. The justification for this primarily stems from the federal structure of the UAE and the relative independence and autonomy that each individual emirate is given in terms of its external economic relations and policies. Although the seven emirates share a common defense, foreign policy, and currency, in areas such as trade, finance, fiscal and economic policy, and natural resource management, each emirate functions largely independently. Article 3 of the UAE constitution states that all emirates "shall exercise sovereignty over their own territories in all manners." Moreover, in regards to their nation brands, Abu Dhabi and Dubai are considered to be distinct entities with little to no focused on the UAE as a whole

(Govers 2012, 52). Additionally, prior to independence in 1971, both Abu Dhabi and Qatar functioned as distinct sheikhdoms of the Trucial states, and elements of this history remain visible today. It is therefore justifiable, and common, to examine each emirate as separate cases in terms of their economic behavior and outward relations. In order to reconcile the differences in politico-territorial classifications of Qatar and Abu Dhabi, I will employ the term ‘political entity’ or ‘city-state’[2], a term which Jill Crystal applies specifically to Kuwait and Qatar but one which I contend remains an appropriate descriptive classification of the two cases of this study. It is however important to note that, although I have argued that the individual emirates of the UAE can be examined on their own, one area that will prove problematic is that Abu Dhabi is often not disaggregated from the UAE as a whole, a fact which limits the number of sources on Abu Dhabi specifically.

Concerning the selection of the two cases, both were chosen because of the similarities they share in terms of primary characteristics and their political economic situations. In describing international competition amongst places Edward Malecki (2007, 638) employs the term ‘peers’ to describe places like Qatar and Abu Dhabi, which are “considered similar in size and scope and likely to attract investment, skilled workers, and tourists from one another.” Throughout this paper, I use the terms ‘city-states’ or ‘political entities’ in order to avoid confusion concerning differences regarding politico-territorial classifications of Abu Dhabi and Qatar.

Firstly, both states are considered to represent clear-cut examples of small states, in terms of area, population, and size of the economy, and thus have similar inherent

[2] Numerous authors on the Gulf use the term ‘city-states’ both categorically and descriptively of the small Arab Gulf states. See Jill Crystal 1990, pp 3.

constraints on their behavior in the international system. The behavior of both states however suggests that they are looking beyond these constraints, seeking to play a role internationally that is disproportionate to their relative size. Furthermore, as small states, neither Qatar nor Abu Dhabi as a part of the UAE rely on external security assurances, most significantly those of United States.

Secondly, both have vast hydrocarbon resources and wealth relative to their respective national populations, which has facilitated efforts to develop and manipulate particular images internationally. In both cases, development strategies and nation branding projects have been bankrolled by vast reserves of capital. This level of fiscal stability and security distinguishes them from a case like Dubai and has allowed them to take a more gradual and more tightly controlled approach towards international engagement.

Additionally, they are both centered around a dominant capital city which functions largely as the exclusive entry and exit point of material goods as well as plays a fundamental role to the state's international reputation. The centralized nature of both Abu Dhabi and Qatar has meant that these capital cities are the face of these city-states and serve as vital entry and exit point for external image creation. As they are both competing for similar market segments, convergence in infrastructure and facilities built is apparent.

Finally, although place branding is widely understood as a neoliberal project emerging in the contemporary era of globalization, the political economies of Abu Dhabi and Qatar point to a fundamentally different logic behind their place branding projects. In both contexts, wealth accumulation is not a primary driver of the introduction of neoliberal economic policies. In the context of oil-rich Gulf States, openings to neoliberal policies are carried out in a highly calculated and conservative manner, one that targets segments of the economy where the elite can benefit from increased access to global markets. Although the limited approach to neoliberal would seem to bring into question whether these policies represent adherence to neoliberalism as an ideology, Harvey (2005, 19) argues that neoliberalism shows inherent contradictions between ideology and practice, especially when elite interests are threatened. He argues, “The evidence suggests, moreover, that when neoliberal principles clash with the need to restore or sustain elite power, then the principles are either abandoned or become so twisted to be unrecognizable” (ibid.). Additionally, ostensibly neoliberal economic policies have the added bonus of being a convenient means to garner kudos from western audiences, as Gulf leaders are viewed as adopting western-promoted neoliberalism. In both Abu Dhabi and Qatar, the approach to neoliberalism has

CHAPTER IV

QATAR

This section explores the Qatari regime and government's approach to place branding and identifies specific characteristics of these initiatives. Large revenue windfalls on the back of surging hydrocarbon exports have supported greatly increased fiscal spending. Qatar's ability and flexibility in its branding initiatives stem largely from this remarkable wealth, which acts as a platform from which Qatar has facilitated its rapid accession into the global limelight.

A. Goals and Objectives of Branding

The principal objective of Qatar's place branding initiatives is to project "an image of an economically successful, globalizing, pro-business, and independent state" (Gray 2013, 159). To this end it has sought to develop a "disproportionately visible international profile both diplomatically and economically" (ibid, 7). Much of the changes seen in Qatar's approach towards the international engagement began in 1995, when Hamad bin Khalifa seized power from his father in a bloodless coup and sought to implement a modernizing, globalist agenda (Kamrava 2009, 401). A key component of his political and economic agenda was to expand and integrate Qatar into the global economy, while simultaneously establishing Al-Jazeera as the mouthpiece of the 'new' Qatar (ibid, 2). The change in the political leadership in the mid 1990s and the oil boom of the early 2000s ushered in an unprecedented era of international engagement in Qatar, both politically and economically.

Qatar's brand aims to strike a balance between traditional and modern imaginations of the emirate, as "a community reconstructing itself as a modern nation-state within shifting global contexts" (Fromherz 2012, 158-9). Historical narratives of the Qatari monarchy have been managed to a large extent by the ruling regime in order to ensure good standing internationally (Fromherz 2012, 160). The *Qatar National Vision 2030* (2008, 1), a government produced document outlining the emirate's vision for future development, highlights the need to balance economic growth and the Qatar's cultural and traditional values linked to its Arab, Muslim, and traditional identities.

As discussed in the literature review, a key determinant of the success of place branding projects is their ability to successfully promote unique aspects of the entity being branded. In the Qatari context, 'heritage' and 'tradition' are continually being redefined vis-à-vis the gradual encroachment of modernity and external values (Fromherz 2012, 158). Although this is largely seen as being carried out in order to maintain the legitimacy of Al-Thani rule, the dynamic nature of these fundamental aspects of identity has serious implications of branding projects, forcing them to respond to changing perceptions and increasingly to international norms.

Many in news media and academia today refer to Qatar 'punching above its weight' underling the fact that the small emirate projects a disproportionate amount of power and influence in the international sphere. The country has continually sought to take on a more active role in international organizations, with notable examples being its hosting of the Doha round of WTO negotiations in 2001 and its role in international diplomacy and mediation. Branding has been essential to promoting the image of a reformist agenda in the country, which has been part of a longer-term effort ensure the regime's legitimacy amongst external audiences (Peterson 2006, 735).

B. Strategy and Tools of Branding

Qatar has fully bought into the need to develop a strong, independent national image and brand in the international sphere (Peterson 2006, 746). Qatar's brand has notably been developed through the hosting of international conferences, through increased participation in international organizations, its hydrocarbon wealth, Qatar Airways, high-profile sporting events, arts and culture, and educational institutions (ibid, 746-8). Moreover, it is increasingly seeking to establish itself as a regional hub of financial services, challenging the traditional primacy of Bahrain and the more recent strength of Dubai (Chatham House 2008, 19).

The Qatari government, like elsewhere in the Gulf region, has placed a priority on developing an economy free of dependence on oil and gas revenue. The Ministry of Finance has set the year 2020 as the date by which it expects to have achieved a truly 'post-oil' economy (Fromherz 2012, 122). A critical component of this transition will be the ability to attract and employ investment, both internally and externally, on wealth accumulating assets and economic sectors that are viable without subsidized energy inputs from oil and natural gas.

In terms of attracting international business to the country, Qatar is developing large-scale projects for various 'parks' – notably, its Science and Technology Park – as centers for outside businesses to set up operations. In purely profit-earning terms, investing billions of dollars in these massive projects, to where businesses are largely attracted by tax-free environments, makes little sense as these projects are not likely to provide adequate returns to justify the building costs (Sultan et al. 2011, 24-25). But this understanding ignores key components of the rationale behind such projects. While these projects may be seen as a loss in terms of returns, they form an integral part of projecting an image of modernity to the international business community and make Qatar a more desirable location with which to carry out commercial relations.

As a complement to its business friendly policies and facilities, Qatar has sought to attract foreign expertise, as well as to develop its domestic labor force, by attracting foreign universities to its Education City. The *Qatar National Vision 2030* (13) highlights the need to further expand upon Qatar's "positioning as a regional hub for knowledge and for high value industrial and service activities". Qatar has also sought to establish itself as an education hub with local branches of Georgetown, Texas A&M, and several other American universities. The presence of these foreign institutions work in tandem with its efforts to attract major corporations in efforts of promoting Qatar as a globally relevant force on the world stage in terms of business, education, and technology. Similarly to its 'parks', the $33 billion Education City cannot be said to have been carried out with the expectation that it would earn its money back but instead serves an invaluable function of improving the reputation and image of Qatar globally.

Furthermore, a key tool for promoting Qatar's image and place branding projects towards an international audience has been its satellite television network, Al Jazeera. Media plays a critical role in processes of repositioning and integration of Qatar in the global consciousness.[3] The launch of the channel's English language news service in 2006 and of Al Jazeera America in 2013 clearly demonstrate the intended audience of Al Jazeera and

Like the country's 'parks' and 'cities,' Al Jazeera serves little economic purpose in purely profit-earning terms for Qatar's future (Sultan et al. 2011, 23). The Qatari government spared no expense in launching its long sought after foothold on American television, spending nearly $500 million to purchase Current TV channel, which it promptly gutted after acquisition (USA Today, Aug. 2013). It does however serve a critical role in terms of the presence and image of Qatar in the global consciousness, a fact that has serious albeit indirect implications on Qatar's economy as well as its role in the international sphere.

C. Qatar Investment Authority

The Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) is one of the newest sovereign wealth funds in the region having been founded in 2005 (Karake-Shalhoub in Sultan et al. 2011, 64). It is the fourth largest SWF in the region with assets of an estimated $115 billion in late 2012 and has emerged as one of the most aggressive SWFs both regionally and worldwide (Gray 2013, 63). This aggressive strategy has pushed the QIA and Qatar towards center stage in global financial markets and further contributed to efforts to establish Qatar has center of global finance. The investment strategy of the QIA is closely linked to the Al-Thani regime and Investments by the QIA are tightly controlled by the regime. The current Emir Tamim bin Hamad serves as the chair of the QIA, a position that he held as crown prince.

[3] See Simpfendorfer 2011, 116-135.

Many of the investment decisions made by the QIA have been in high profile, globally recognized, and often luxury brands as a means of promoting images of ultra wealth often associated with Qatar. Notably among these investments are high profile stakes in German auto giants VW and Porsche, banks such as Barclays and Credit Suisse, the London Stock Exchange, and even ownership of Harrods, a British luxury store (Defterios 2011). Although these investments often conform to sound wealth-accumulation rationales, there is at the same time certainly an ulterior objective behind investing in globally recognized, high-end firms. These kinds of investments build a portfolio recognizable brands upon which the Qatari brand is able to piggyback and is more likely to receive attention in international media outlets and within the business community. It is no coincidence therefore that historically the vast majority of these investments have been directed towards the West as it is in these countries that Qatari regime seeks to gain favor and influence.

D. Constraints on Branding Initiatives

Although Qatar is arguably the most stable country in the gulf region and the Al-Thani has almost no visible opposition to its rule, political maneuvering within the family have raised serious questions about what image Qatar is to project externally. Strong internal divisions between visions of modernity and traditionalism have constrained the Al-Thani regime's ability to adopt a more internationalist approach. Peterson (2006, 732) argues that such an approach to international engagement is actually designed to shore up internal and external support as a means of regime survival. The 'progressive internationalism of Emir Hamad and his immediate family has not resonated with more traditional segments of Qatari society (Fromherz 2012, 157). The direction his son, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad, will take the country however is still being formulated, but at this point, it is unlikely that he will be able to radically shift away from an approach that seeks to engage strongly on an international stage. If he is to continue the reformist agenda of his father, appeasing more conservative or protectionist elements within the family and the ruling elite will continue to be a key consideration he will need to make.

Another area where branding practices experience constraint is in the fact that international engagement is not a one way street in that the more Qatar opens up to the outside world, the more external actors will be made aware of internal issues in Qatar and will have an increased capacity to influence going on in the domestic sphere. This is most apparent in recent concerns raised in the international community regarding Qatar's treatment of migrant workers. This issue had largely been kept under the radar of international critics until Qatar won its bid to host the World Cup in 2022, an effort that was part of a grand strategy to promote the emirate as global hub of sports and mega-sporting events. The recent deaths of hundreds of primarily Nepalese workers in the construction of facilities for the World Cup has brought with it the ire of outside observers. Increased international engagement has put Qatar under the microscope of the international community, which has pressured the country to conform to globalized standards and norms. These negative images work against branding efforts that highlight Qatar as being more progressive and a responsible actor on the global stage.

The two-way nature of international engagement has also been seen in the reactions amongst Western audiences to the growing expansions of Al Jazeera's English language news services. While the channel is directed at and largely tailored for Western audiences, it has still been viewed with suspicion of being a political tool of the conservative Gulf regime.

CHAPTER V

ABU DHABI

This section examines the specifics of Abu Dhabi's place branding projects. Abu Dhabi, like Qatar, has utilized its vast wealth as a platform from which to launch its branding campaign. The wealthy emirate has been a late arrival in the global consciousness and branding strategies, having been often overshadowed by Dubai. Because the regime has taken a less proactive approach towards international engagement until recently and due in large part to the fact that its vast oil reserves have insulated it from competitive forces of global capitalism, it has been playing catch up in terms of global engagement vis-à-vis its neighbors in Qatar, Dubai, and elsewhere.

A. Objectives and Goals

Abu Dhabi's approach towards international engagement has been much slower and more conservative relative to other city-states of the Gulf region. Whereas Dubai has had to pursue a much more aggressive diversification model – often referred to simply as the "Dubai model", the government of Abu Dhabi, thanks in large part to its secure revenue stream from oil wealth, has been able to be much more methodical and calculated its approach towards international integration and global engagement. As such, the process of image management has followed a much different trajectory than Dubai.

Abu Dhabi has sought largely to present itself as a wealthy, neutral actor internationally and one which is a responsible and contributing actor in the international arena (Davidson 2009, 145). In a 2008 letter to the US Treasury Secretary, then-Director of International Affairs of the Government of Abu Dhabi, Youssef al-Otaiba addressed concerns regarding the investment strategies of the emirate's sovereign wealth funds. The primary thrust of this letter, which is indicative of the emirate's overarching approach, sought to diminish the political nature of Abu Dhabi's international investment strategy and present the emirate as a responsible partner in international economic and financial relations.

Alongside charismatic leadership, promotion of Emirati ideals, patronage, and Islam, successful engagement with the outside world is identified by Sim (2012, 86) as one of the principal sources of regime legitimacy in Abu Dhabi. Although Sim's (ibid, 94) focus is on this engagement as a source of legitimacy in the domestic sphere, engagement internationally is additionally a source of legitimacy in the international sphere. He goes on to add that many leaders in Abu Dhabi are actively seeking to transform the emirate into a "producer, rather than a mere consumer, of globalization" (ibid, 96). To this end, Abu Dhabi has sought to emerge from the shadow of Dubai's conspicuity and "place itself on the map of 'globally significant' cities" (Sultan et al. 2011, 23).

B. Strategy and Tools of Branding

The nation branding projects of Abu Dhabi have gotten much less attention internationally than those of Dubai or Qatar. The emirate was a later arrival to initiatives to engage more actively internationally and has thus sought to find ways of distinguishing from other Gulf actors or areas where it can compete against already existing images and hubs elsewhere in the region. Abu Dhabi's less prominent position largely stems from differences in its approach to international engagement but not necessarily from its level of engagement. The emirate has largely targeted its branding campaign at different set of international actors. It is contended here that the focus of this branding effort has been carried out through the countries vast sovereign wealth funds and its engagement with international organizations with the most conspicuous example of this type of engagement being its approaches to renewable and sustainable energy.

The development of the image of Abu Dhabi as a global hub for alternative and sustainable forms of energy has been a key component of Abu Dhabi’s national (re)branding as it attempts to move beyond its one-dimensional reputation as an oil exporter (Sim, 2012). The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), an intergovernmental organization founded in 2009, focused on helping countries transition towards renewable and sustainable energy sources and to be housed in the now famous Masdar City, is an example of how Abu Dhabi’s sustainable energy image promotion has taken hold within the international community and gained certain level legitimacy. By focusing on climate change, Abu Dhabi has found a branding project, which has broad global appeal at both the level of governments and civil society. Additionally, a focus on sustainable energy had the added benefit that the increased use of renewable energy sources would free up more oil and natural gas from domestic consumption that could be exported abroad.

An additional component of Abu Dhabi’s branding initiatives have been in the arts and education. High profile (and financially costly) ties with western museums have brought satellite branches of the Guggenheim and Louvre to Abu Dhabi. Additionally, Abu Dhabi, like Qatar, has built its own Education City, which now houses branches of prestigious western universities like NYU, the Sorbonne, and INSEAD. Again, the presence of these globally recognizable brands in the emirate serve little immediate, profit-seeking, but are best viewed as part of a long-term strategy of developing an image of sophistication and modernity in Abu Dhabi.

C. Abu Dhabi's Sovereign Wealth Funds

Abu Dhabi controls nearly 8 percent of global oil reserves and its sovereign wealth funds have an estimated $1 trillion in assets (Davidson 2009, 1). The most important vessel through which Abu Dhabi's image management has been carried out is through its various sovereign wealth funds. The investment strategy of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA), the emirate's largest SWF has traditionally maintained a conservative investment portfolio, holding most of its assets in index-linked blue chip investments, western real estate, and relatively safe acquisitions in emerging markets (ibid, 74).

The two most prominent SWFs in Abu Dhabi are the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, the largest SWF in the world in terms of its assets under management (AUMs), and Mubadala, which has been responsible for some of the most high profile investments carried out by Abu Dhabi funds. These two funds function quite differently in the global arena. The ADIA has focused primarily on long-term wealth preservation and accumulation, although this has not necessarily meant that it has shied away from high-profile investments. Its 5 percent stake in Fiat-controlled Ferrari certainly helps to develop the high-class and luxury image the emirate is projecting towards a global audience.

Although being much smaller in size than the ADIA, with AUMs estimated to be around $10 billion, the focus of Abu Dhabi's highly visible Mubadala has largely been on investments to diversify the economy. As it is now entirely self-funded, unlike the ADIA which still receives money from oil revenues, Mubadala is an example of successful move towards diversification and the level of sophistication of financial instruments in Abu Dhabi. Despite its size the investment strategy of Mubadala has sought to help foster growing ties between Abu Dhabi and prominent international business actors, and to create global and domestic partnerships with high technology and high profile firms, most notably with GE and European and American aerospace companies (Behrendt 2008, 8-9). The purpose of these kinds of investments is not purely diversification but also to link images and brands of these firms of modernity and high technology with the brand of Abu Dhabi.

Additionally, by taking on an active role in the governance of sovereign wealth funds, Abu Dhabi has sought to project itself as an active and central actor in global finance. It co-chairs the International Working Group of Sovereign Wealth Funds and played a central role in developing the Santiago Principles, a set of guidelines designed to increase transparency of SWF investment and to reassure the international community that investments from these funds were not be used for political purposes (Behrendt 2008, 10).

D. Strengths, Weaknesses, and Constraints

One cannot look at Abu Dhabi's brand without understanding it vis-à-vis Dubai and within the Emirati federal system. The fact that Dubai now enjoys one of the most recognizable city brands in the world (Gover 2012, 1) works both for and against Abu Dhabi's branding projects. On the one hand, the dominance in reputation by Dubai has made it more difficult for Abu Dhabi to distinguish itself from its more recognizable neighbor. On the other hand, Dubai's strong brand has paved the way for Abu Dhabi's branding initiatives, raising international familiarity with and perception of the UAE as a whole (Davidson 2007, 43). The formulation of an Abu Dhabi ‘brand’ did not have to start at square one as most international business actors were already associated it with Dubai and the UAE as a whole. Davidson argues that the different strategies of Dubai and Abu Dhabi allow the UAE to taken more roles with greater flexibility in the international sphere (ibid). Dubai is able to actively pursue policies aimed at diversification, while these riskier investments enjoyed a certain level the financial backing and support of Abu Dhabi, which was apparent following the 2008 financial crisis (ibid).

Abu Dhabi’s need to bail out Dubai during the 2008 financial crisis fundamentally changed international perceptions of the UAE as a whole. It showed international business and finance actors where the real hub of power and wealth in the UAE is, and many corporations have moved or are considering moving large parts of their Emirati-based operations from Dubai to Abu Dhabi (Sultan et al. 2011, 33). This is indicative of Abu Dhabi’s emergence as a significant player on the global stage.

Additionally, Abu Dhabi’s efforts to label itself as hub of renewable and sustainable energy have additionally opened it up to criticism from the international community concerning its environmental track record. Sim (2011, 5) argues that its decision to pursue and focus on the climate change issue was an effort to preempt criticism of the emirate’s disproportionately high environmental footprint. Additionally, like Qatar, Abu Dhabi has faced increasing criticism of its treatment of migrant workers. Much of this criticism centers on the externally oriented elements of Abu Dhabi. For example, in 2013, the *Guardian* newspaper and *Humanity United* centered their joint report on human rights abuses and the exploitation of migrant labor in Abu Dhabi on abuses observed during the construction of its globally renowned cultural institutions like the Guggenheim, NYU, and the Louvre (see Carrick & Batty 2013).

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

A. Comparison of the Cases

Qatar and Abu Dhabi have not been forced by the exigencies of dwindling hydrocarbon reserves to subordinate national political calculations to prescribed neoliberal economic models. For this reason they have been able to be calculated in opening up their economies to world markets, selectively determining sectors where political and business elite will benefit from increased openness. The emerging economic roles of both Qatar and Abu Dhabi do not fit categorizations of either a simple oil economy or diversified economy, as both have taken steps to alter their economic structure but are still heavily reliant upon hydrocarbons to carry out this change (Gray 2013, 8). Promoting themselves as being engaged internationally and with an eye towards the international sphere makes them appear more progressive or cosmopolitan towards both foreign actors and their domestic polities.

Both Abu Dhabi and Qatar have been plagued by negative images, which limit their ability to formulate good reputations and perceptions in the global sphere. In the case of Qatar, criticisms have focused on it s hosting the 2022 World Cup. Allegations of corruption in the bidding process, deaths of Nepalese workers who are working on construction projects for the games, and concerns about environmental impact of holding the games in such a hot, arid country in the middle of summer have often dominated media coverage. In the case of Abu Dhabi, the most difficult aspect of its branding initiatives have been that promoting itself as a hub of renewable energy while having one of the worst per capita carbon footprints in the world have brought accusations of hypocrisy.

Furthermore, both city-states have at different times attempted to play the role of regional mediator, although this image is today more closely associated with Qatar. Abu Dhabi and Qatar have both presented themselves internationally as neutral actors (Davidson 2009, 145-7). In Qatar, this has manifested itself as a willingness to engage with opposing political forces in the Arab world. Although it is a member of the GCC, it largely views itself as an independent member, willing to act in its own interest even much to the vexation of other member states. Recent roes between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain regarding Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood are a symptomatic consequence of this willingness to disregard concerns of fellow member states. Qatar has often acted independently of the GCC and been subjected to criticism from fellow member states, as was seen recently when Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain recalled their ambassadors to Qatar over the Qataris support for the Muslim Brotherhood.

Competition amongst GCC states for similar economic sectors and similar potential roles in the world economy is high and continues to increase as they increasingly look to diversify their economies. Competition extends to numerous fronts including as hubs for foreign universities, as bases for military operations by outside western powers, as an investor in beleaguered western economies and as the preferred partner of the West for regional peace and stability" (Sim 2012, 88; Peterson 2006). This competition and the desire to be the 'hub' of a particular sector means that branding in the Gulf context requires the economy to be first to establish itself as whatever 'hub' it is intending to be and to consolidate this position quickly. Nation branding in Abu Dhabi, Qatar, and in general is linked to establishing the economic centers of these states as hubs or centers of interconnected global economic activity. In Abu Dhabi and Qatar, the concept of an international 'hub' of global economic activity is a critical one. These 'hubs' are globally connected centers of economic activity and capital, which are increasingly diminishing the role of the state and subverting national considerations to major cities.

Furthermore, Anholt (2004) describes 'continent branding effect' whereby all states of a particular region are lumped together according to negative perceptions of highly visible states in the region. In the Gulf context, the most visible example of this effect emerged in the post-9/11 era when the Middle East as a whole came to be widely associated with terrorism, especially in American audiences.

B. Place Branding and SWFs

Commodity-based sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) are state-owned investment funds established from balance of payment surpluses stemming from commodity exports and the government revenues garnered from taxes and royalties on these exports.[4] Although many SWFs have existed since the 1970s, they have increasingly been brought to the forefront of international discussion over the past decade as their significance in global financial markets has grown exponentially. This particularly true in the case of the Gulf SWFs since 9/11 and growing concerns in the West that investments from these funds will potentially be used for political purposes. A principal argument of this paper however is that on top of being used for further wealth accumulation, investments from these funds have been used to improve the reputation and perception of Abu Dhabi and Qatar, and as

[4] See the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, http://www.swfinstitute.org/sovereign-wealth-fund/.

such serve to complement over-arching branding initiatives. Examination of the practice of nation branding provides a means to reconcile differences and concerns regarding investment strategies of Gulf sovereign wealth funds. While it is clear that these funds serve profit-maximizing goals, they simultaneously serve reputation creation aims as well.

The SWFs investment strategies of both cases have become increasingly sophisticated and diverse. Karake-Shalhoub maintains that higher focus on finance-related sectors has stemmed from increased competition between Qatar and Dubai to become the financial hub of the Gulf region (2011, 63). Shifts within the UAE away from Dubai towards Abu Dhabi and major investments by Abu Dhabi's SWFs in finance and banking sectors mean that Abu Dhabi is increasingly becoming a new player in intense regional competition for primacy in financial sectors. Investments from these funds have been met with much skepticism and misgivings from outside actors, who fear the potential political role these funds serve. In order to allay such concerns, Gulf governments have sought to develop more favorable images of themselves abroad while simultaneously reiterating and demonstrating the profit-seeking nature of SWF investments.

In a somewhat ironic turn of fate, following the 2008 financial crisis, Western governments and businesses, from where much of the criticisms originated, turned to Gulf SWFs as a source for increased liquidity for struggling sectors and companies. The most notable example of this was then-British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's 2008 trip to the Gulf region, after which several Gulf SWFs invested heavily in British banks. This event was indicative of the extent to which the relationship between the Arab Gulf states and core economic powers had fundamentally shifted. The narrative of funds from the Arab Gulf region being used for nefarious political rationales quickly died out when it became apparent that these economies would need all the capital injection they could get.

Foreign governments have expressed much concern regarding the potential political nature of investments from Gulf SWFs. Although several studies have demonstrated that investments from these funds do largely follow profit-maximizing strategies, it would appear that there have certainly been investments that serve ulterior motives simultaneously. Rationales behind these ulterior motives are intimately linked to nation branding projects. Investments by the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority in ownership stakes in the Chrysler Building or Ferrari serve a dual purpose of both garnering sizable returns as well as promoting their countries-of-origin to the international business community. The Qatar Investment Authority has made similar investments in such globally recognizable, global brands as Ferrari and the British icon, Harrods.

In regards to the investments of Abu Dhabi and Qatar, I argue that examining their investment behavior through the lens of nation branding serves to mitigate concerns about the political use of these funds. On the one hand, they serve profit-seeking goals, while often serving the quasi-political goals of improving the image of these states in the international sphere. The nature of the criticism has been centered on the concern that Gulf governments will leverage international investments in foreign companies to gain political favor.

C. Limitations of the Study

This study has two striking omissions which have largely been ignored or not elaborated upon fully and which need to be addressed. Firstly, the study has been statecentric in its ontological approach to the societies examined, focusing primarily on Abu Dhabi and Qatar's ruling regimes and the political and business elite with whom they have surrounded themselves. It has largely ignored the impact nation image building and branding strategies have on national identities in their home countries. In Barr's (2012, 92) examination of the interrelationship between Chinese domestic and international policy-making, he argues that it is essential to look at both domestic and international elements of image management in order to create a complete picture of the relationship between externally oriented nation branding and domestic nation building. Although I certainly accept Barr's assertion and recognize the interplay between the domestic and international spheres in nation branding, a detailed examination of the domestic factors affecting place branding was deemed to be outside the scope of the current project.

Secondly, this paper has focused primarily on Abu Dhabi and Qatar's international engagement towards a western audience. Emerging ties between these states and the developing world, most notably with China, will radically alter the nature of branding campaigns. Gulf governments have increasingly looked towards the developing world and emerging markets as investment opportunities, with notable examples of QIA partnerships in Indonesia, the Philippines, and other emerging markets. The COO of Abu Dhabi's Mubadala, Waleed al-Muhairi, has stated that the fund is increasing its exposure to the developing world and that it sees emerging markets as a source of growth opportunities (in O'Neil 2011). Branding towards these developing economies will inherently need to be tailored towards the specific context in which they operate and will steadily shift the image created away from the current status quo. However, as these deepening economic ties are still developing and coalescing, the orientation of place branding projects from the Gulf towards audiences in the developing world is still very much in its infancy.

D. The Future of Place Branding in the Gulf

Moving forward the key concern for officials in Qatar and Abu Dhabi will be to further consolidate and further expand upon the images they have developed. The wealth of the region means that competition for the establishment of particular images is fierce. For example, Abu Dhabi's primacy towards climate change and renewable energy is being challenged by Saudi Arabia with Saudi Arabia having made efforts to established itself as a hub of renewable energy with the construction of the King Abdullah City for Atomic & Renewable Energy (Sim 2012, 88). As branding practices continue to evolve in the Gulf region, the concentration of similar domestic economies could lead to increased competition. On the one hand, certain brands and reputations will become entrenched to the point that other regional actors will not be able to viably compete for primacy in a given sector. On the other hand, those brands and images that are unable to dominate external perceptions will continue to be open to rivalry and competition.

It is additionally of note that brands are subject to reversal if the domestic stability is threatened, either politically or economically. Both Dubai and Bahrain have been viewed as financial hubs of the Gulf region, but this primacy is under threat from financial concerns in the former and political concerns in the latter. In Bahrain, the political instability in the country has lead many financial institutions to shift the focus of their operations to other comparable city-states in the region. In the case of Dubai, the 2008 financial crisis demonstrated the fragility of the ‘Dubai Model’ of development and the weakness of many of its financial underpinnings.

Additionally, there consideration must be placed on the impact the image of the region as a whole has on the individual cases studied. The Gulf has increasingly come to be viewed as distinct sub-region of the Middle East. As this analytical distinction is increasingly employed, the more events in the Gulf will influence perceptions of individual states or cities within the region. While Qatar has arguably been the most successful in distinguishing itself from the rest of the region by promoting a more neutral image, it is impossible for it to entirely distance itself from its geography and its neighbors.

As the confidence of Gulf leaders to engage internationally was greatly augmented by the oil boom of the early 2000s, the future of this engagement is left to question. The impact of the 2008 financial crisis and the ongoing era of uprising in the region has certainly led to restructuring within the Gulf region as Abu Dhabi and Qatar from both of these defining events largely unscathed, especially when taken in comparison to neighbors in Dubai, Bahrain, and Oman.

It is highly unlikely that tax-free business environments will be viable in the long term, and these Gulf States must figure out new ways to attract foreign companies and investment (Sultan et al. 2011, 37). The region has been able largely been able to attract this kind of foreign investment through direct and indirect relation to its wealth from hydrocarbons, offering business friendly tax incentives, cheap input costs through subsidized energy, and a cheap labor force brought in from the developing and underdeveloped world (Sultan et al. 2011, 10). Investment environment is not entirely about money, as firms seeking to investment abroad must consider the quality of life for employees living abroad (Sultan et al. 2011, 37).

Looking towards the future of place branding in Qatar, Abu Dhabi, and elsewhere, a key determinant of their successful implementation will be the level to which they are internalized and embodied by the societies, which they claim to represent. The focus of this study has been on the external orientation of these branding practices and brands themselves, but if the populations of these political entities do not ‘live the brand’, differences between the image and the reality will grow thereby weakening the effectiveness and legitimacy of the brand towards the external audience. Concerns have already been raised concerning potential discord between the outwardly oriented image and domestic issues of identity in a rapidly changing (and modernizing) environment.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Many theories of state behavior argue that the primary economic goal of the state is wealth accumulation.[5] But in states like Qatar and Abu Dhabi, where the state has vast reserves of wealth in proportion to the domestic population and future wealth accumulation is assured for the medium to distant future, the state has the capacity to look beyond purely accumulative functions and to begin to take on a more proactive role in shaping the nature of its role and influence in the international system. To this end, the branding of these entities represents an essential component of their public diplomacy projects and help agents of branding to improve the reputation and perception of their respective political entities.

The position of the Gulf in world economic systems continues to result in unsatisfactory categorizations of the region. In world systems theory, the Arab Gulf states fit neither into core nor periphery categories. In development categorizations, depending on the indicators, they could easily fit into classifications of developed or developing. Additionally, market analysts struggle to place the countries of the region and as such there is wide variation between various indexes. MSCI has recently upgraded both Qatar and the UAE from ‘frontier markets’ to ‘emerging markets’ although these categories seem unsatisfactory as well. Can one look at countries with some of the highest GDP per capita figures in the world and truly say they are emerging or developing? Although the region

[5] See Krasner, Structural Conflict, p. 3.

has yet to fully fit into categorizations of fully developed capitalist economies, the fact that it is playing such a crucial role in international economic relations is indicative of its increased centrality in the global economy.

While oil wealth continues to dominate Gulf economies, the ways in which this wealth have been employed have fundamentally shifted towards the development of more productive economies. This economic restructuring has required a concomitant move towards self-promotion and pro-active image manipulation through branding strategies. Although the rapid accumulation of capital to the region, brought about by rapid increases in the price of oil, has certainly facilitated these processes of integration and engagement and legitimated emerging positions, wealth from oil and natural gas exports is insufficient to fully explain the nuances of the positional shifts seen over the past two decades. Oil wealth has been an enabling factor for these actors' international engagement, one which has facilitated their branding efforts to challenge and reshape their geopolitical and geo-economic position and traditional power relations (Peterson 2006, 746). In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, one where image, perception, and reputation matter in dynamics of a globalized world economy, it is critical to understand both the material as well as the ideational factors that influence how states, regions, and cities come to position themselves in a competitive, capitalist system.

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