

**NATION BRANDING IN THE IMAGINATION AGE:
HOW TO BUILD IMAGE, IDENTITY, PAST AND
FUTURE IN SINGAPORE AND SHARJAH**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Kund Florian", is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive style.

Kund Florian

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SUMMARY

Based on a series of in-depth, expert interviews with cultural policy makers, tourism-, marketing- and media professionals who guide the development and implementation of nation branding strategies in the Emirate of Sharjah and in the Republic of Singapore, this study explores the ‘internal gaze’, or the domestic dimensions of nation branding. More precisely, it aims to understand the ways in which nation branding may become an instrument in the production and reproduction of the internal legitimacy of a particular nation-state. For doing so, it describes how discourses and practices of nation branding invent and reinforce notions of cultural similarity and difference in the social imaginary with the ultimate purpose of reproducing hegemonic discourses over belonging and citizenship in two different regions of the Global South.

In the context of this research nation branding is not only understood as a form of national-cultural commodification within conditions of globalization but also as an ‘internal cultural policy’ measure, or an altered form of nationalism that is shaped by the logic of neoliberal market capitalism. Based on the empirical case studies conducted in Sharjah and Singapore, this dissertation describes two distinct methodologies of nation branding which target the domestic population of a particular country, and which contribute to the reconstruction of the internal legitimacy of political elites and thus reaffirm existing domestic structures of domination.

In Sharjah, nation branding is explored as an essentially culturalist practice that supports the expansion of ethno-nationalist, or ethnocentric

discursive structures of the state through discourses of cultural authenticity. In Singapore, nation branding is described as a practice that envisions a transformation of the national community around the neoliberal values of individual creativity and entrepreneurship, with a specific notion of cosmopolitanism in the core of this image. By nationalizing cosmopolitanism, nation branding in Singapore is identified to function as a culturalist discourse that aims to shore up the existing hegemony of the state.

As its theoretical contribution to critical research on the field, this dissertation argues that nation branding is not only an ideological measure that reasserts a global neocolonial hierarchy of nations within conditions of neoliberalism; but it is also a means by which postcolonial internal relations of domination are reaffirmed within the particular states.

Finally, this dissertation also aims to contribute to empirical research on how the practice of nation branding is reconfigured in the context of particular local structures and meanings and also provide a descriptive account of how the epistemic package of neoliberalism is transformed through local appropriations outside of the West, adding to the literature on the various geographies of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’.

Introduction

A personal note on a journey from East to East in search of the real story behind nation branding

This research has grown out of my fascination with the emerging phenomenon of nation branding at places outside of the Western hemisphere of global capitalism. A student in the ‘neoliberalizing’ Eastern Europe of the 1990s, I witnessed the celebration of reclaimed ownership over national identity and its representations through an endless production of colorful images of places and people, memories of past times and visions of the future, in these ‘newly independent’ countries of the former Soviet-bloc. Against the often impoverished and almost-always gloomy background of reality of the region, there was an apparent lust in circles of the local elites for explaining to the world what these nations meant and stood for. The stories and images of nation branding seemed to play a crucial role both in the self-discovery and rebirth of the region, and also in its long-awaited return onto the world-stage. Nation branding has been, it seemed, as much about re-building (or in some cases inventing) the nation as about repositioning its image by the latest place marketing techniques.

With this experience in mind I have decided to follow the triumphant march of nation branding further to the ‘East’, looking for examples of what I initially called: the ‘internal gaze’ of nation branding. More precisely, I wanted to understand the reasons behind the apparent appeal of nation branding to local political- and professional elites. As my initial hypothesis

suggested, mere economic need, or the obvious benefits of place marketing did not narrate the whole story behind the enthusiasm over nation branding at many places of what colonial geography called the Middle- and Far East(s). I suspected a different story of interest and motivation at work which pointed to reasons and arguments beyond the profits of tourism promotion, destination marketing, place branding, or the benefits of public diplomacy.

The research that unfolds below is an account of this academic journey I have embarked on six years ago to explore and to better understand the ‘inner gaze’ of nation branding at places of the neoliberal postcolony. More precisely, it is an inquiry that aims to connect practices of nation branding to strategies of nation-building through an analysis of what Lofgren (1991) calls ‘the cultural praxis of national identity formation’ within conditions of neoliberalism and postcoloniality.

Pursuing this academic endeavor took me (back) to two seemingly distant regions of Asia where I had lived, studied and worked for extended periods of time. As an undergraduate and graduate student of Arabic Language and Literature, Journalism, and International Relations, I travelled and studied in different countries of the Middle East. In the course of this research I visited Sharjah for two extended periods of fieldwork, having spent a total of three months in the Emirate in 2012 and 2013. As a postgraduate student of Communications and New Media I lived in Singapore for almost five years. The interviews on which this research has been built were conducted in the city-state throughout 2012 and 2013.

The upcoming pages are meant to be an account of an academic enquiry on discourses and practices of nation branding in Singapore and

Sharjah, in a certain period of time, based on my own experiences and drawn from my discussions with local and locally-based marketing experts, cultural policy makers, and members of the intelligentsia and elite. As it will unfold below, this research aims to understand a paradigmatic quality that I perceive to be located in the core of nation branding at these places: a sentiment that I believe is situated in the register of dignity – a term and category that is certainly difficult to theorize within the social sciences.

The conceptual framework and the objectives of this research

Developing the cultural components of the nation-state

Academic studies on nationalism in the last few decades have contributed greatly to our better understanding of the construction of modern nations and nation-states (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Chatterjee, 1986; Bhabha, 1990; Billig, 1995 etc.). According to these studies nations are cultural artefacts imagined for political consumption which transform social solidarity into political practice by building commonalities inwards and differences outward (Bolin and Ståhlberg, 2010, p. 94). Nationalism, as the major instrument of constructing nations and nation-states is interpreted as a cultural and political force that originates in eighteenth century Europe and that, through its postcolonial forms of nation-building is still around well into the second decade of the twenty-first century (Bolin and Ståhlberg, 2010, p. 94).

Theories of nationalism argue that national imagination consists of factual and invented elements which are continuously shaped and reshaped by the ideas of different actors: mostly politicians, intellectuals, poets, writers, and artists (Bolin and Ståhlberg, 2010, p. 94). According to Ernst Gellner (1983), national identity is engineered by an intellectual minority and a political elite that, in order to consolidate its control and claim to internal legitimacy, 'educates' its population into identities appropriate to its political agenda.

A particular composition of a set of attributes perceived as national identity is always the subject and the outcome of social contestation. In their

attempts to achieve ideological hegemony and maintain political legitimacy states need to draw on a range of ideological apparatuses. Nationalism has for centuries served as one of the most powerful resources for creating ideological systems which legitimize the nation-state, its elites, their rule, hegemony and domination.

For doing so, states need to draw upon locally meaningful symbols and narratives, necessarily embellishing nationalism with cultural qualities. In addition to civic-instrumental dimensions, cultural expressions and practices are major ingredients of the process of constructing nations (Bolin and Ståhlberg, 2010, p. 81). In order to create the cultural-symbolic capital in a society, nation-building involves techniques of cultural engineering through which a nation-state generates a ‘common cultural mode’ (Benjamin, 1988 as cited in Hill and Fee, 1995, p. 34), a ‘shared national habitus’ (Lofgren, 1989 as cited in Foster, 1991, p. 237) and which provides crucial elements for personal identity building, too.

As the study of nationalism has long been dominated by approaches that originate from the political sciences, the ideology and politics of nationalism are far better understood than the actual ‘praxis of creating national identities’ (Lofgren, 1991, p. 101). In this dissertation, I will try to address both dimensions by locating the role of nation branding in the context of the endeavour of reconstructing national identities within conditions of neoliberalism and postcoloniality, and with a focus on exploring how states invent, recreate and manage the cultural component of national identity in their attempts to maintain ideological hegemony and internal legitimacy.

Global public stage, place reflexivity, and wannabe world cities

Jonas Larsen (2004) writes that from the nineteenth century onward the ‘world as exhibition’ has been established – a phenomena that is connected to the development of ‘new technologies of the gaze’ which produced and circulated it as “postcards, guidebooks, commodities, arcades, cafes, dioramas, mirrors, plate-glass windows and especially photographs” (as cited in Urry, 2007, p. 258). In parallel to this “specific seeing of the world as picture”, John Urry (2000) continues, the recent period has seen the development of a ‘global public stage’ that consists of “images of events, spectacles and personal performances” (p. 180), and on which nations have to appear, compete, and articulate themselves as spectacle (p. 151). These processes have contributed to a “restructuring of places”, as cities and states have to perform on the global stage in order to attract global cultural flows (p. 265).

All of these developments, however, presuppose a new ability for ‘place reflexivity’ that Urry (2007) defines as a “set of disciplines, procedures, and criteria” that enable places to “monitor, evaluate and develop” their potential within the context of global flows. This ability for place reflexivity is concerned with identifying a particular place’s actual and potential material and symbolic resources, and it consists of technologies, texts, images, and social practices that enable places to expand and to be reproduced across the globe in their quest for entering the global order (p. 266).

In the urban studies framework John Rennie Short (2006) describes these processes as the ‘reimagining of the city’, suggesting by this term a striving of places to represent and reconstruct themselves in the new

geographies of global capitalism, imagined or real (p. 112). Considering the intensity of the applied branding, marketing, and advertisement campaigns, he describes these urban rivalries as ‘place wars’ (Haider, 1992 as cited in Short, 2006, p 112).

Short also argues that the currently dominant metropoleis face increased competition from the part of what he calls ‘wannabe world cities’ (p. 113). In their attempts to project all required attributes of a ‘global city’ and to successfully compete for more command function, ‘wannabe world cities’ become cities of spectacle, characterized by ‘cultural boosterism’ and a powerful rhetoric of growth – attributes that are seen to help in combating the insecurity about their roles and position in the global order (p. 115).

In this intense intra-urban competition for global capital and growth, T.C. Chang (1997) notes, place attributes and local cultural identities are often mobilized as forms of ‘cultural capital’ to project an “alluring image” for locals, tourist and investors (p. 544). These cities become the centres of “enormous political investment, economic growth, and cultural vitality”, and while they compete for instantiating their countries’ claims to global recognition and significance, they turn themselves into ‘world-aspiring projects’ – as Aihwa Ong (2011) explains (pp. 2-4).

David Harvey (2005) notes that this competition increasingly extends to all territories, cities and states as they compete for offering the best business climates and economic development models in the context of the general progress of neoliberalism (p. 87). As the processes of uneven geographical development catalyses the spread of neoliberalism, he argues, successful

states, regions and cities put increased pressure on each other and everyone else to follow their models and lead (p. 87).

The neoliberal state and its nation

Neoliberalism on the following pages will be understood along Harvey's (2005) notion of the term as a theory of political economic practices that puts free markets, free trade, and the liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills into the core of human well-being and development (p. 2). As he explains, neoliberalism elevates market exchange into an "ethic in itself" that can guide all human action without the need for any previously held beliefs (p. 3). As such, neoliberalism suggests that all human action can be brought into the domain of the market as states and populations strive to maximize the social good (p. 3).

Aihwa Ong (2006) adds that neoliberalism brings about a new relationship between government and knowledge by redefining statecraft as a "non-political and non-ideological" problem that needs "technical solutions" (p. 3). For her, neoliberalism should not be interpreted as a 'culture' or 'structure' but rather a "mobile calculative technique of governing" (p. 13) that can be contextualized in, and adjusted to any particular location in the management of populations and spaces (pp. 3-4). Neoliberal rationality informs the government of free individuals by market-driven truths and facilitates self-management along the "market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness" (p. 4). In this context, the role and

responsibility of the state remains the creation and maintaining of frameworks that are conducive of such practices (p. 2).

Harvey (2005) argues that the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s have fundamentally changed the relationship between the state and the nation. While the neoliberal state is expected “to take a back seat and simply set the stage for market functions”, it also needs to be active in creating good business climates and remain or become competitive in global politics (p. 79). Acting as “collective corporations” in the world market, however, states increasingly face the problem of securing citizen loyalty and creating national attachment (p. 79). While nationalism has for centuries served as a successful motivational ideology, in the contemporary context, Harvey argues, it seems to be “profoundly antagonistic” to the neoliberal agenda and logic. Although the intense competition for a state’s position and influence in the global economy produces winners and losers that necessarily invokes nationalist pride or “soul-searching”, the neoliberal state needs a new form of nationalism that is able to motivate and mobilize citizens in ways which do not hinder the unfolding of the market (p. 84).

Global cultural flows and the transformation of the work of imagination

Elaborating on these processes at the level of the particular nation-states, Arjun Appadurai (1996) writes about how global cultural flows transform the work of imagination today. According to him, as imagination turns into a “collective social fact” that leaves the conventionally designated

realms of fantasy, art, myth and ritual and enters the “logic of ordinary life deployed by ordinary people”, self-imagining becomes an everyday social project that is able to tap on a greater and greater variety of resources and disciplines for constructing new forms of imagined selves, worlds and communities (pp. 3-5).

Moreover, imagination as a social practice no longer remains a cultural fact but through new ways of individual attachments, interests, and aspirations it fuels political action (p. 10). By crosscutting the realms of the nation-state it is elevated to a level of becoming a key component of the new global order (p. 31). This work of imagination, Appadurai argues, is a space of contestation between individuals, groups, states and global flows (p. 4) that works no longer by large-scale social engineering projects organized by elites, rather, it challenges those through its everyday cultural practice (p. 9). Thus, Appadurai concludes, states increasingly “lose the monopoly over the idea of a nation” (p. 157) and at the level of any given nation-state there is “a battle of the imagination” where state and nation seek “to cannibalize each other” (p. 39).

This battle whereby nations try to capture state power, and states strive for monopolizing ideas of nationhood (p. 39) is fought within the conditions of globalization, where these states are increasingly dominated by elites who are transnational cultural producers and consumers and owe few real cultural allegiances to any nation-state. Moreover, these elites rule over populations who are themselves exposed to the cultural regimes of other nation-states through the global flows of people, ideas and commodities. Thus, the cultural forms in which states and people imagine and represent themselves, such as

nationalism, increasingly take on a “global flavor” (Breckenridge and Appadurai, 1988 as cited in Foster, 1991, p. 248).

The ‘internal gaze’ of nation branding

Somogy Varga (2013) suggests that nation branding represents “par excellence the kind of altered nationalism that is sufficiently empty and de-historicized” to fit the neoliberal agenda (p. 833) of the global condition. According to his seminal article on ‘The politics of Nation Branding: Collective identity and public sphere in the neoliberal state’, as nation branding empties national identity and replaces it with a “flexible and capitalizable entity”, it reproduces a neoliberal cultural logic that makes it possible to imagine a community gathered around the values of neoliberalism in an era of globalization (p. 833).

Similarly, Göran Bolin and Per Ståhlberg (2010) argue that nation branding can be understood as a “historically specific form of producing images of the nation”; a way in which nations are constructed culturally and ideologically today, in the era of neoliberalism (p. 79). According to their study ‘Between Community and Commodity: Nationalism and Nation Branding’, the nationalists of today need to remain within the logic of neoliberal capitalism to imagine and articulate the nation. In such context, the separate logics of nationalism and nation branding exist simultaneously, sometimes competing, in other cases reinforcing each other (p. 97).

The studies of Varga (2013), Bolin and Ståhlberg (2010) represent a handful of works that scholarly discuss the potential conceptual and

methodological connections between nation branding and nationalism. However, they disagree on crucial points.

For Bolin and Ståhlberg (2010) nations are not branded for political capital, but for their value on the market, and as such, nation branding is essentially a phenomenon of economic logic and not that of political ideology (p. 95). As they argue, while traditional nationalism attempts to unify a population and build social solidarity by targeting its domestic audience, nation branding turns to the outside world, towards an international audience (p. 80). Nation branding consultancies, they suggests, are not hired to build social solidarity, for nation branding is essentially about producing commodities and not a means of imagining communities.

According to Varga (2013), however, in contrast to these assumptions and to the widely held notion that nation branding is an instrument of producing images for external consumption, nation branding is “essentially an inner-oriented cultural-political measure that targets the citizens of the national state” (p. 826). For him, nation branding should be interpreted in the context of implicit cultural policy measures that take on the forms of identity politics (p. 826). More precisely, he explains, nation branding should be understood along Raymond Williams’ (1984) term of cultural policy measures that function as ‘display’.

According to Williams (1984), cultural policy as ‘display’ can be differentiated from cultural policy ‘proper’, the former being a socio-political tool that aims to uphold the symbolic legitimacy of the nation-state and its social order (see in Varga, 2013). Cultural policy in a sense of ‘display’ is a form of identity politics that aims to shape collective identities and provide

exemplary models for individuals to construct their personal identities. In this sense, Williams' notion of 'cultural policy as display' is best understood in the context of Michael Foucault's terms of 'government', and 'governmentality' (see in Varga, 2013).

Managing neoliberal ideals of belonging in the Global South: the cases of Sharjah and Singapore

This dissertation aims to explore what it sees a strategic, internal dimension of nation branding. For doing so, it situates itself within the emerging corpus of critical literature on nation branding that conceptualizes its phenomenon as a set of discourses and practices which are connected to particular agents who are historically and politically situated (Dzenovska, 2005; Roy, 2007; Kaneva, 2007, 2011; Jansen, 2008; Aronczyk, 2008; Volcic, 2008; Wills and Moore, 2008; Kaneva and Popescu, 2011; Varga, 2013). In this context, nation branding is understood as an ideological project, a means of promoting a particular organization of power, knowledge and exchange in the construction and articulation of collective and personal identities.

By an examination of how a national brand is "communicated to and shaped in the minds of the citizens of that country" (Koh, 2011, p. 23) this dissertation problematizes nation branding in the context of how globalization and neoliberalism function as hegemonic discourses to reinforce elite dominion over political, economic and cultural spaces (Aronczyk, 2008). In this framework, it aims to describe the particular conditions within, and the ways in which nation branding can become an instrument in the production

and reproduction of the internal legitimacy of the nation-state. More particularly, it studies and explains how discourses and practices of nation branding invent and reinforce notions of cultural similarity and difference in the social imaginary with the ultimate purpose of producing and reproducing hegemonic discourses over belonging and citizenship, in neoliberalism.

This dissertation suggests that nation branding can be understood as a measure of the 'cultural praxis of national identity formation' (Lofgren, 1991) that provides and remakes the symbolic material and develops the ideological and cultural components of the nation-state in ways that support existing political authority structures and elites. As it will empirically demonstrate, in their efforts to establish and maintain internal legitimacy states use discourses and practices of nation branding in completely different ways.

Harvey (2005) notes that the extent to which neoliberalism is able to be built into the everyday sense of understandings of particular societies and populations varies greatly and depends largely on the hold of traditions of social solidarity and collective social responsibility at a given place. The reinterpretation or overcoding of cultural traditions along neoliberal ideals, especially those that relate to forms of sociality, has always been at the forefront of the neoliberal project. Similarly, neoliberalism as a project around the restoration of the economic power of a small elite needs to appear a natural way of organizing and regulating the particular social order it targets to transform. In order to gather and maintain popular support, appeals to traditions and cultural values has always played a significant role in neoliberalism at work (Harvey, 2005, p. 40).

Building on the case studies of the Emirate of Sharjah and the Republic of Singapore, this study explores the various ways in which neoliberal ideals of belonging are created through discourses of nation branding in two different regions of the Global South.

Harvey (2005) writes about Singapore as an example of how neoliberalism in the marketplace can be combined with “authoritarian state power” while invoking moral solidarities based on nationalist ideals, Confucian values, and most recently on “a distinctive form of the cosmopolitan ethic suited to its current position in the world of international trade” (p. 86). For Aihwa Ong (2006), it is by calling upon the questioning of traditional identities and values that Southeast Asian neoliberal states try to engineer economically valuable citizens. Adding to these results, this research will suggest that nation branding in Singapore uses an ideology of multiracialism, and a form of strategic cosmopolitanism in order to support the nation-building efforts of the neoliberal state.

To the contrary, based on the case study of Sharjah this dissertation will argue that nation branding in the ‘Cultural Emirate’ uses the techniques of cultivating culture (Leersen, 2006) and nationalizing heritage (Lofgren, 1991) to provide the state with its “necessary historical depth and cultural anchorage” (Khalaf, 2008, p. 60). These results will be explained in the context of Ahmed Kanna’s (2011) writings on how in the affluent Arabian Gulf, where citizens represent only a minority part of these societies, economic value is not the main “organizing metaphor that guides neoliberalization” (p. 34). In order to shape people’s “ideological outlook about themselves and the world they inhabit” (Khalaf, 2008, p. 42)

neoliberalism in the Gulf features “themes of cultural authenticity and virtuous citizenship” in ways that align the values of entrepreneurialism and individual creativity with a notion of a national struggle for modernity (Kanna, 2011, p. 34).

Neil Patrick (2012) writes about how nationalism in the Gulf takes on an inward-facing form as national identity in the region is measured against internal demographic ‘threats’ and not against other nations. As he explains, the current drive to deepen awareness of national identity in the United Arab Emirates is in a great part caused by population inflows and does not originate from a desire of preserving cultural heritage and memories (p. 59). Moreover, the ways in which national identity is constructed is guided by the political intention of the local leadership to emphasize national level solidarities above other competing loyalties and identities so that state leaders remain at the centre of authority construction through processes of narrating the nation (p. 62).

In the context of the inward-looking and state-led nationalisms of the Gulf, the notion of ‘ethnocracy’ emerges that describes elite attempts which posit the “physical characteristics and cultural norms” of the ruling group as the essence of the nation over which the particular elite rules and from which those parts of the polity who do not exhibit these characteristics or embrace the same norms are excluded (Longva, 2005, p. 119). This dissertation will aim to situate the role of nation branding in the construction of the “civic ethnocracies” of the Gulf where, according to Anh Nga Longva (2005), the defining feature is not race, language or religion but a form of citizenship that is conceived in terms of shared descent and genealogy (p. 119).

By identifying the distinct ways in which neoliberal ideals of belonging and citizenship are constructed through practices and discourses of nation branding at two different places of the Global South, this dissertation also aims to contribute to empirical research on how the practice of nation branding is reconfigured in the context of particular local structures and meanings. Moreover, based on the expert interviews conducted in Sharjah and Singapore this research will also provide a descriptive account of how the epistemic package of neoliberalism is transformed through local appropriations outside of the West, adding to the literature on the various geographies of “actually existing neoliberalism” (Nik Theodore, 2002 as cited in Ong, 2011. p4).

The ‘twofold coloniality’ of nation branding

Based on its empirical results, this dissertation will point to what it terms the ‘twofold coloniality’ of nation branding’s contemporary practice. It will argue that nation branding is not only an ideological measure that reasserts a global neocolonial hierarchy of nations within conditions of neoliberalism; but it is also a means by which postcolonial internal relations of domination are reaffirmed in the particular states. While the first argument will be explained by an overview of how, in the studied cases, the colonially-conceived national mode of imagination of nation branding contributes to the reassertion of the neocolonial global power structure; it will also be explored how culturalist discourses within nation branding are used by the particular states to recreate their internal ideological, and ‘ethnocratic’ hegemonies.

For such arguments to be developed, it should be recalled that in the postcolonial world states were often “imposed on peoples” without a common identity to be utilized in the process of nation-building (Hill and Fee, 1995, p. 17). Eric Hobsbawm (1990) narrates it in detail how the boundaries of postcolonial states in Southeast Asia were drawn without any reference to, and sometimes even without the knowledge of their populations. Writing about Singapore, Hill and Fee (1995) argue that the formation of the state had no significance for its inhabitants except for the Western-educated native elite who, thus, had to face the task of creating a nationality after inheriting the state (p. 18).

Similarly, as Ahmed Kanna (2011) narrates, the “unitary, hierarchical, and centralized conception of state sovereignty” in the Arabian Gulf region has been the historical legacy of the British imperial period. It marked a transformation in the mode of collective imagination from “anational and culturally pluralistic” identities to ideas of a spatialized state that governs an indivisible territory with a homogeneous citizenry, a notion that has its origin in European ethno-nationalism (pp. 116-117).

This dissertation cannot give a detailed account of the history of nation formation in these regions. Neither would it discuss the extensive body of scholarly literature on the development of postcolonial nationalisms in various parts of the world. It is not among the objectives of this research to contribute to the academic literature of nationalism. However, in order to better understand the nature of the contemporary phenomenon of nation branding and its appeal to local political elites in large parts of the postcolonial world, it suggests to situate the discourses and practices of nation branding in the

context of Charles Taylor's (2011) notion of postcolonial nationalism as 'a call to difference'.

According to Taylor, in the wake of the institutional changes that postcolonial modernization necessarily brings about after independence, local elites who champion these changes invent a strategy of "creative adaptation" that is characterized by the "drawing on the cultural recourses of their tradition that would enable them to take on the new practices successfully" (p. 95). This process, Taylor argues, translates to a "call to difference" felt by these modernizing elites in face of the wave of modernization and the task of postcolonial nation-building, that is "lived in the register of threatened dignity", and which becomes a mode of "constructing a new, categorical identity as a bearer of that dignity" (pp. 101-102). The development of this consciousness and sentiment is also connected to the establishment of the world public scene, Taylor argues, which is not only a space of recognition but also a sphere "dominated by a vocabulary of relative advance" on which these elites and people see themselves standing and rated (p. 97).

In order to connect these understandings of nationalism and postcoloniality to the contemporary conditions of globalization and neoliberalism, this dissertation defines 'culture' along Arjun Appadurai's (1996) notion of it being a 'concept of difference', which is a "contrastive rather than a substantive property of certain things" (p. 12). As Appadurai argues, when we "point to a practice, a distinction, an object, or an ideology as having a cultural dimension (...) we stress the idea of situated difference, that is, difference in relation to something local, embodied, and significant" (p. 12). According to this "adjectival approach" culture should not be regarded as

a substance but rather a dimension that attends to situated difference (pp. 12-13). It is by an emphasis on this dimensionality of culture, Appadurai writes, that can make us think of culture not as a property of individuals or groups but more like a “heuristic device” that enables us to talk about difference (p. 13).

In this context, Appadurai coins the term of ‘culturalism’ to refer to the “conscious mobilization of cultural differences” as a form of identity politics, utilized, most often, at the level of the nation-state (p. 15). By highlighting its comparative dimensions Appadurai reorients our understanding of culture as difference and culturalism as a “process of naturalizing a subset of differences that have been mobilized to articulate group identity” (p. 15). Culturalism, thus, is the form that cultural differences take in the era of globalization (p. 16), a condition in which contemporary nation-states need to fight their battles over ideas of belonging against individual forms of attachments, group solidarities of all sorts, and transnationally imagined communities. As Appadurai argues, states do this by creating various kinds of difference and by exercising taxonomic control over those in while seducing their population “with the fantasy of self-display on some sort of global or cosmopolitan stage” (p. 39).

As this dissertation argues, it is in the context of Taylor’s notion of postcolonial nationalism as a ‘call to difference’ that Appadurai’s more contemporary concept of ‘culturalism’ connects the postcolonial sentiments of dignity and pride to discourses of difference in the practice of nation branding, within the conditions of globalization and neoliberalism. The research that unfolds below is an attempt to locate this connection between the competition

for global recognition and local structures of exclusion based on class or ethnicity, in discourses and practices of nation branding.

The structure of this dissertation

The introductory chapter of this dissertation will present the goals and objectives of the research, in addition to providing an outline of the conceptual matrix in use, based on the broad frameworks of globalization, neoliberalism, and processes of national identity building. The first part of the Literature Review will provide an analytic assessment of the writings of the leading practitioners and theorists of nation branding. The presented definitions and interpretations of the practice and the descriptions of its implementation strategies are derived from interdisciplinary sources containing accounts of experts coming from epistemic backgrounds and fields of practice as varied as branding, marketing, tourism, international relations and public diplomacy. The second part of this chapter, then, will introduce the main threads of critical literature on nation branding ranging from cultural studies perspectives, in this case dominated by the writings Michel Foucault, to an emerging postcolonial criticism of the practice along the conceptual frameworks of Nicolas Rose, David Scott, and Partha Chatterjee.

Following the overview of existing literature on nation branding, it will present those methodological approaches and measures that guided the fieldwork and case studies in Sharjah and Singapore. More particularly, the Methodology chapter will introduce the instrument of theory-generating expert interviews and a critical approach that focuses on the local embeddedness of

the applied concepts and perspectives, paraphrased as a method of ‘learning by unlearning’.

The Results Chapter consists of two parts. It will begin with the presentation of the interviews conducted in the Emirate of Sharjah, then it will introduce the collected data from Singapore. Both accounts of the results will be structured around a description of the perceived brand attributes of the particular place first, followed by a reconstructing of those understandings of the particular practices of nation branding that emerge from the in-depth, expert interviews. In this framework, the nation brand of the Emirate of Sharjah will be introduced along the perceived attributes of a cultural focus on heritage, of being the most authentic emirate of the UAE, of being a place where local tradition and global modernity exist by complementing each other, and as a family destination.

Nation branding in Sharjah will emerge as a practice that is new to the region, that follows the local priorities and preferences of its people in contrast to the glamour- and prestige-driven approaches of its neighbors, a strategy that is connected to nation-building through its embracing of heritage preservation and support for local contemporary art, and as an educational device that by presenting a culturally-focused international image of the place to a global audience inculcates the values of remembering and learning in the host population in order to shape national identity.

Singapore will be presented as a place with its image and identity in flux and characterized by a brand lag situation. As the interviewed experts will argue, while the city-state still carries a global reputation for being safe, clean, reliable, but ultimately a boring place, Singapore has changed in the last

decade and it is becoming an innovative, vibrant, global city of the arts. In this context, the practice of nation branding will emerge from the interviews as a strategic, discursive measure that, through its inspirational portrayal of Singaporeans as creative, entrepreneurial, cosmopolitan citizens, contributes to the nation-building objective of the neoliberal state that aims to transform its population along such values and logic. This part of the chapter will also give a detailed, insider-account of Singapore's paradigmatically public sector driven, top-down approach to nation branding that is, in the view of the interviewed practitioners and experts, backgrounds any distinctive cultural content in order to construct and maintain a message of openness and pragmatism along the logic and symbolic of a state-managed cosmopolitanism and an instrumental economic rationality.

The Discussion chapter will start with the contextualization of Sharjah's perceived brand image and its practice of nation branding in the literature of the political history of nation-state formation in the Arabian Gulf. It will suggest that nation branding in the Emirate of Sharjah is part of the ideological apparatus of the family-state by which this traditional polity reaffirms the cultural resources of its internal legitimacy formula. In this framework, nation branding will emerge as a measure of the ruling bargain that, through its culturalist discourses around Emirati tradition and heritage, is linked to the establishment of the 'ethnocratic' socio-political structures of the state by which it aims to safeguard the perceived interest of the national, or indigenous minority population. In the same time, by its celebration of Sharjah's rapid economic progress, the development of its urban landscape and infrastructure, its social transformation into an educated and affluent

population, and its vibrant, cultural boosterism – nation branding in Sharjah will be suggested to be understood as a measure through which the traditional polity reconstructs its image as a pioneer and guardian of modernization, and a confident competitor in global capitalism.

The second part of the Discussion chapter will begin with a historical overview of Singapore's tourism promotion efforts. The transformation of its tourism brand proposition will be discussed in the context of the city state's major ideological revamps, from the hegemonic discourses of pragmatism and multiracialism in the 1950s and 60s, to that of Asian values in the 1990s, and finally its most recent, specific interpretation of a form of strategic cosmopolitanism. Bringing into the discussion of nation branding Singapore's major national policy visions from the last two decades, the dissertation will point to the discursive mechanisms through which nation branding in Singapore becomes an ideological instrument of a targeted social transformation along a set of neoliberal values that reaffirms the hegemony and domination of the ruling class.

Based on a comparative analysis of the described practices, the third part of the Discussion chapter will argue that it is by identifying the processes of 'mimicry' and 'hybridization' as the *modus operandi* of a postcolonial governmentality behind nation branding that enables criticism to connect the investigated practice and narratives of nation branding to the objectives of maintaining hegemony and internal domination by the state and its elites, in the postcolonial context. As its theoretical contribution to critical research on the field, this chapter will point out that as culture in its various understandings and manifestations becomes a discursive site that reaffirms

difference towards others, it also functions as an aspirational quality that justifies elite intervention along strategies of creating citizens culturally-primed for success. However, as in the course of articulating difference against near-, and similarities with distant Others nation branding emerges as a site of learning about the nation, its nature is unmasked as a process of Laconian ‘misrecognition’ and as a process that is built on Bhabha’s notion of ‘colonial difference’, instead of a concept of ‘cultural diversity’.

In its Conclusion, this dissertation will highlight some of the major similarities and differences between nation branding practices in Sharjah and in Singapore. In particular, it will identify the particular ways in which the notion of culture is used in constructing the portrayal of the ideal citizen who fits the political agenda of the respective state. Finally, based on the presented results nation branding will be conceptualized as a neoliberal practice that reaffirms an image of a comparative positioning and hierarchy of nations, and also the particular, colonially-conceived internal structures of domination within the investigated cases.

Literature review

The rise of the brand state

The reality of globalization

Theorists and practitioners of nation branding argue that globalization, political democratization, and the spread of information and communication technologies pose fundamentally new challenges to the nation-state (Olins, 1999; van Ham, 2001; Anholt, 2005, 2007; Dinnie, 2008;). Within this environment of increased global market competition, political and cultural homogenization, and a networked information ecosystem, the power of the nation-state is waning, and in order to address these challenges, they argue, nation-states should turn to those marketing and public relations strategies that corporate entities have been successfully using for decades.

In their view, the world is one market today and countries must compete with one another for their share of its consumers, investors, loyalty, attention, and reputation. In this global market of resources, products, images and ideas increased cultural and political homogenization require nation-states to differentiate themselves from each other as the basis of competitive advantage both in economic and political terms. As Peter van Ham (2001) puts it, states know that many of them offer similar ‘products’ in terms of territories, infrastructure, educated people, and political governance (p. 3). To stand out in the crowd, he suggests, “assertive branding is essential” (p. 3). In order to attract tourists, talent, labour, investment, and global media-attention, nation-states are required to re-articulate their image and identity as unique propositions.

National image and competitive advantage

Underlying these assumptions there is a perceived “shift in political paradigms from the modern world of geopolitics and power, to the postmodern world of images and influence” (van Ham, 2001, p. 4) which makes information, knowledge, beliefs and ideas the crucial sources of power, and which increasingly replace territory, military power and natural resources (Bollier, 2003, p. 4). Across these narratives the concept of ‘soft power’ (Nye, 1998) emerges as the ultimate modus operandi of the new world. Pointing to the growing role of ideas, values and norms in attracting, persuading and co-opting others (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1999) ‘soft power’ connects image, reputation and influence to the economic and political hard currencies of competitive advantage and power. It gives reputation a determining role in a country’s economic and social progress, and a direct and measurable impact on almost every aspect of its engagement with other states (Anholt, 2007, p. 9). It matters in international interactions and transactions (Wang, 2006, p. 92) for it creates either an enabling or a disabling environment for those (Leonard, 2002, p. 9).

It is in this context that the notion of the ‘brand state’ arises with national image and reputation as essential parts of its strategic equity (van Ham, 2001, p. 3) and as crucial instruments of power (Wang, 2006, p. 91). The concept of the brand state consists of “the outside world’s ideas about a particular country” (van Ham, 2001, p. 2), it is the sum total of “willed and unwilled perceptions, imagery and emotions associated with a geopolitical unit” (Butnar, 2008), it is “others summary construct of one nation’s culture,

policy, and conduct” (Wang, 2006, p. 91). When a nation brand is defined as a “unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (Dinnie, 2008, p. 15), nation branding in this context is the “strategic self-presentation of a country with the aim of creating reputational capital through economic, political and social interest promotion at home and abroad” (Szondi, 2008).

‘Smart states’ are said to build their brands around reputations and attitudes in the same way as ‘smart companies’ do (van Ham, 2001, p. 3). As van Ham (2001) predicts, future politicians will need to “train themselves in brand asset management” as their task will include “finding a brand niche for their state, engaging in competitive marketing, assuring customer satisfaction, and most of all, creating brand loyalty” (p. 5). By carefully managing a nation’s brand assets and equity, nation branding can create greater global visibility for a state, it can repair damaged reputation, it helps to attract foreign investment, to expand exports, and to facilitate tourism. Moreover, as nation branding practitioners argue, it can also generate national pride, foster social cohesion and internal solidarity.

Managing national identity, building pride, loyalty and self-esteem

In addition to the need for repositioning themselves within the ‘reality of globalization’, some theorists of nation branding argue that the supposed global convergence of political and cultural forms, the challenges of migration, and new forms of transnational and corporate loyalties require

states to compete for the loyalty of their own citizens, too. “States need to justify their existence” - van Ham (2002) explains, and therefore “embark on a renewed quest for the hearts and mind of their people both at home and around the world” (p. 250). For David Bollier (2003), “there are new battles every day in this Era of Complexity for the citizen’s attention, affinity, and loyalty” and this quest, he continues, increasingly “implicate[s] identity, meaning, grand narratives, legitimacy, participation, rights, and access” carried out over a series of networks and through a variety of media (p. viii).

Thus, beyond the cultivation of external image and reputation, for some of the experts and theorists nation branding is also seen to be about the managing of internal identity, loyalty and image (van Ham, 2002, p. 255). A successful nation branding campaign is said to “enhance the cultural stability of a nation, to ameliorate social integration and cohesion by advancing national confidence, and to bring together local and national interests” (Varga, 2013, p. 829). It is said to generate national pride and internal solidarity by enhancing the citizens’ sense of belonging and by providing them with a clear self-concept (van Ham, 2002, p. 253). Moreover, by projecting a future-oriented vision of these countries, this aspirational element is supposed to work as self-fulfilling prophecy.

Writing from a tourism studies framework, T.C. Chang (1997) notes that “so-called place-image” constructs are always designed to function as tools that foster a sense of community and belonging in residents, as well as to portray “an idea of their city as successful” (p. 545). As he emphasizes, imaging strategies almost always relate to socio-political objectives that target

the local community and are intended to communicate particular meanings and ideologies to it (p. 545).

For Hall (1995), urban imaging techniques are inseparable of the “interest, values and power of those who formulate them” (as cited in Chang, 1997, p. 546). Bringing into discussion Daniel Boorstin’s (1992) notion of the image as a “pseudo-ideal”, Chang (1997) argues that rather than being only statements about the present offerings of a city, tourism imaging strategies may also provide goals “to which the city and its people can aspire” (p. 546). In this sense, advertising images might be understood as goals to be achieved rather than as embodiments of what already exists. As he concludes, tourism images in this sense might represent “a search for self-fulfilling prophecies” (Boorstin, 1992, p. 198 as cited in Chang, 1997, p. 546).

Branding practitioners like Wally Olins and Simon Anholt agree with political scientist Peter van Ham that the brand of a nation is functionally equivalent to what we usually refer to as national identity, since the latter always already entails an image and a projection of attributes to a national and international public of ‘consumers’. For them, “the difference between the way nation-states have historically attempted to maintain and project a national identity to further national interests and create sense of belonging, and the way nation branding works is merely a difference of more refined techniques” (Varga, 2013, p. 831).

For Simon Anholt (2006), nation branding is an “inherently peaceful and humanistic model for the relationships between nations” especially when compared to “statecraft based on territory, economic power, ideologies, politics, or religion” (as cited in Kaneva, 2009, p. 12). Thus, as van Ham

argues, a market-based model of national identity formation presents a less dangerous alternative to modern nationalisms. It is seen as a tool that can “defuse the antagonisms of nationalist agendas” (as cited in Aronczyk, 2007, p. 121) and due to “its ability to assemble diverse motifs of heritage and modernization, domestic and foreign concerns, and economic and moral ideologies in the projection of national identity” it appears to him (van Ham, 2001) as a “benign way to communicate national interest (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 43).

According to these views, the nationalism that has been turned into a “possible asset for ‘place sellers’” is markedly different from the conventional readings of the concept (van Ham, 2002, p. 268). As van Ham (2002) suggests, location branding, public relations and marketing increasingly “become contemporary equivalents of military doctrine” (p. 265) and “emasculate power oriented geopolitics” (p. 252).

Creating miracles of prosperity for the South

According to its own discursive legitimizing apparatus, nation branding does not only create competitive place propositions, builds national pride and fosters social cohesion, but it can also become an instrument of global social justice (Anholt, 2003, as cited in Jansen, 2008, p. 133). As its advocates argue (Anholt, 2003, 2007; Dinnie, 2008; Olins, 1999; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002), nation branding has the potential to become a new panacea for smaller, poorer countries in need of a competitive advantage in the global marketplace. As small and poor nations are

increasingly in need of re-establishing their identities as unique propositions that can be encapsulated in a slogan, nation branding can help in cultivating niche markets as it allows emerging or less-developed nations to establish themselves as niche brands (Dinnie, 2008). Van Ham explains that the very idea behind branding is that the right brand can surpass the actual product as a company's central asset (van Ham, 2001). Building on such intangible assets as their cultural, historical, geographical, human and intellectual capital, Anholt continues, nations can build virtual niche brands and exceed their actual rankings in the indexes of economic performance and political influence (Anholt, 2005). In an information economy, he concludes, ideas only need branding and marketing to be turned into wealth (Anholt, 2007).

In Anholt's own words: "My proposal is to take this sword called branding and place it in the hands of the people who actually need it and can make the best use of it. It's a good and a powerful sword, and in the right hands can continue to create the same miracles of prosperity for the South as it has done for the North" (Anholt, 2003, p. 1 as cited in Dzenovska, 2005, p. 176).

This sword, he suggests, should be taken up without any moral hesitation. As he explains, he gets far more "scepticism and negativity in rich countries, where people are often disturbed by moral and philosophical thoughts about whether it's right to brand a country, whether it's possible to 'reduce a country down to the level of a brand'" (Anholt, 2004, as cited in Dzenovska, 2005, p. 178). These first-world concerns about nation branding, however, almost never appear to Anholt at less developed places where, as he sees it, "people are generally united in their desire to improve the image of the

country and try anything which will increase their earning power and status in the world” (Anholt, 2004, as cited in Dzenovska, 2005, p. 178).

A series of books and articles in such journals as the *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* and the *Journal of Brand Management* provide us with a wide portfolio of desirable strategies for poor African countries to fight global public ignorance and negative continent branding effects by creative differentiation (Anholt, 2007). Transition economies are called to change and renew outdated images of past eras that hindered their present political and economic ambitions (Szondi, 2007). Evil and rough states that suffer under negative propaganda or negative global public opinion are urged to pursue image repair campaigns and create alternative perceptions of their messages (Zhang and Benoit, 2004).

Across these narratives assertive branding becomes not only a potential but almost an unavoidable necessity, sort of a duty of governments. In Wally Olins’(1999) words: “Countries with a chaotic, wretched or turbulent past which are attempting to emerge with a new social, political, industrial, commercial and cultural persona must eventually realize that in order to be noticed in the world at large, and to be assisted in the process of change, rather than lumped together as bunch of corrupt, useless self destructive basket cases, they too will have to take active steps to create a positive identity” (Olins, 1999, pp. 21-22, as cited in Mehta-Karia, 2011, p. 66). “If they don’t launch such programmes”, he concludes, “it will be increasingly difficult to attract assistance” and “to help themselves and they will remain trapped in a morass” (Olins, 1999, pp. 21-22, as cited in Mehta-Karia, 2011, p. 66).

In these narratives marketing comes to be “at the heart of what makes rich countries rich” (Anholt, 2003, p. 28, as cited in Roy, 2007, p. 569). Development, thus, becomes as much of an issue of positioning as anything else (Anholt, 2003, p. 29 as cited in Roy, 2007, p. 570).

A cultural studies criticism of nation branding

Naturalizing market fundamentalism

Critical scholars argue that it is nation branding’s axiomatic assumption of a global market competition between nations that should be called into question at the first stance (Kaneva, 2009, p. 6). As they point to it, nation branding’s overarching argument about ‘the reality of globalization’ is in itself a narrative that aims to align nations along a particular political rationality, that is neoliberalism (Dzenovska, 2005, pp. 175-176). The unavoidability and the consequent necessity of nation branding is a founding myth, or ontological axiom of nation branding’s theory and practice.

In Anholt’s (2003) world: “All consumers, without even realising it, see other countries according to an unspoken, but nonetheless very real hierarchy: some countries are perceived as having lower status (usually because they are poorer or less stable or less attractive in some way); some are equal and some are perceived as aspirational country brands, usually because they are richer, happier or more attractive’ (Anholt, 2003, p. 79, as cited in Dzenovska, 2005, p. 174). As Fan (2005) argues, “a nation’s ‘brand’ exists with or without any conscious efforts in nation branding, as each country has a current image to its international audience, be it strong or weak, clear or

vague” (Fan, 2005, p. 12, as cited in Mehta-Karia, 2011, p. 43). Or, as Wally Olins (1999) puts it: “Politicians everywhere in the world now realize that every nation has an identity — they can either seek to manage it or it will manage them” (Olins, 1999, p. 26, as cited in Dzenovska, 2005, p. 176).

One of the basic assumptions that almost all nation branding theorists and practitioners share is that “nations are already de facto brands” and project their attributes to global and domestic publics, whether intentionally or not (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 49). Thus, nation branding professionals do not moralize about their practice and the world as such. As Anholt (2003) suggests, brands will soon and unavoidably become the dominant platforms of articulating national identities (p. 139) as “an immutable law of global capitalism” (p. 145, as cited in Jansen, 2008, p. 134). All what states and nations can do “to meet the requirements of the contemporary context” is to facilitate and manage this process with the help of branding professionals and by applying the “tools and techniques of their trade” (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 49).

Building on Vincent Mosco’s (2001) criticism Jansen (2008) argues that globalization can be interpreted as the “controlling myth or master narrative into which individual nations (...) project their respective micro-myths and articulate their aspirations for wealth, power, and enhanced visibility” (Jansen, 2008, p. 122). As one of the “master myths of our time”, Mosco argues, globalization “informs the world with a story about how different people come together to transcend their messy differences” for advancing a universal good (Mosco, 2001, p. 3). “If globalization brands the world and explains the new cosmological order”, Jansen continues, “then nation branding mythologizes the component parts of the new order” (Jansen,

2008, p. 122). The power of myth, according to Mosco again, is not based on its “ability to reflect reality, but to live on in the face of, or in spite of, what a positivist may judge to be real” (Mosco, 2001, p. 3).

Within this framework, nation branding does “not only explain nations to the world but also reinterprets national identity in market terms” (Jansen, 2008, p. 122). As Jansen writes, “once market fundamentalism establishes itself as the ruling cosmology and globalization becomes the controlling metaphor of geo-politics” nations are “pressured to participate or face futures of economic and political marginality and cultural invisibility” (Jansen, 2008, p. 131). Thus, Jansen concludes, nation branding is not only an “engine of neoliberalism” that privileges market fundamentalism in its reductive articulations of national identity (Jansen, 2008, p. 121) but it also contributes to the “naturalizing” of market fundamentalism by a “feel-good illusion” it cultivates, and by which it “ideologically” position itself as a “pro-social force”. It is its “apparent triviality and innocence”, in Jansen’s words, that most powerfully enhance its effectiveness as an “agent of neoliberalism” (Jansen, 2008, p. 132).

Making neoliberal subjectivities

Critical scholars build on Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’ to point to the discursive nature of nation branding as a ‘practice of government’ that aims to shape the conduct of individuals through the articulation of a particular political rationality with corresponding technologies of government (Dzenovska, 2005, p. 176). It is portrayed as promoting a “particular

organization of power, knowledge and exchange in the articulation of collective identity” (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 46), and a particular way of thinking about and “practicing nationhood” – an instrument through which nations are ultimately “reconfigured” (Dzenovska, 2005, p. 174).

When situated within a neoliberal perspective of globalization and a competitive world market economy, nation branding can be understood as a neoliberal discourse that necessitates a “re-articulation” or “over-coding” of identities in ways so that they better fit with competitive, capitalist economic meta-narratives (Wills and Moore, 2008, p. 251). Critical scholars also point to nation branding’s self-claimed identification with the ‘social good’, ‘political necessity’, and ‘good governance’ (Wills and Moore, 2008, p. 255) which claims are seen ultimately to uncover its real nature as a form of technologies of government, manifested as a form of “corrective nationalism” (Dzenovska, 2005, p. 181), or a “pedagogical device for self-formation” (Dzenovska, 2005, p. 176).

However, it is the totality of nation branding’s suggested implementation strategies that most apparently uncover its real nature as a form of social engineering. Varga (2013) notes that “the aim of nation branding is not exhausted in merely attaining visibility by way of creating and circulating logos and slogans” (p. 836). Rather, he continues, “the ultimate goal is to create brands that become integrated into the collective social imagination and function as ‘popular ideas that people live by’” (p. 836). Thus, citizens are “called upon to ‘live the brand’ and hence to act and think in ways that are well suited to the general contours of the national brand” (p. 836). Moreover, they are “called upon to take the role of a ‘brand

ambassador’, which consists in always carrying the ‘microbes’ of the brand identity and spreading it by ‘infecting’ those with whom they come into contact (Aronczyk, 2008, as cited in Varga, 2013, p. 836). Nation branding, for Anholt (2009) a “sacred duty of governments”, should work as “magnet under a piece of paper”, as “guide that creates order in the chaos”, as a “decision-making instrument by which people become more themed and organized day-by-day” (Anholt, 2009).

As he further explains, “country branding occurs (...) when a substantial proportion of the population of the country — not just the civil servants and paid figureheads — gets behind the strategy and lives it out in their everyday dealings with the outside world” (Anholt, 2003, p. 123 as cited in Dzenovska, 2005, pp. 178-179). For Anholt, “the ultimate aim towards which nation branding should aspire is creating such a sense of pride and purpose that the entire population begins, almost by instinct, to perform such acts of conversion, every day of their lives: an impossible target to attain, of course, but the direction in which one should strive could not be clearer” (Anholt, 2003, p. 124, as cited in Dzenovska, 2005, p. 179). As Janine Widler (2007) quotes a Romanian branding agent, “a nation’s branding is not only design and advertising. It’s not only imagery. It’s a program where every member of the nation is involved, more or less” (p. 146).

The suggestive terminology is further strengthened in the brand messaging books where strategies are often described as ‘hymn sheets’ or ‘song sheets’ that are expected to “harmonize and unify the communication for the nation brand among the diverse members of the population” (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 54). These hymn sheets are usually collected in a ‘brand book’,

Aronczyk (2008) explains, that is intended to “convey the principles of the brand essence, its core ideas, and its vision or strategy” (p. 54). This brand book, then, is “reproduced on a mass scale and distributed among citizens through a variety of channels” (p. 54).

Successful nation branding requires that “individuals conduct themselves in ways that communicate an attractive image of the country to potential tourists, investors and consumers (Anholt, 2003, p. 13). Anholt admits that “one knows from experience that getting many independent people and organisations (all with different interests, opinions and agendas) to speak with a single voice is a hard thing to achieve through consensus”. As he warns, however, “unless a government can find a way of achieving in its committees the same single-minded sense of purpose and control which the crazy brand visionary achieves within a privately owned company, nothing will come of the national brand programme and it’s doomed to fail” (Anholt, 2003, p. 135, as cited in Dzenovska, 2005, p. 182).

Nation branding, Anholt (2007) advises governments, should be treated “as a component of national policy, not as a discipline in its own right, a ‘campaign’, or an activity that can be practiced separately from (...) statecraft”. If it is “put into a separate silo of ‘communications’, ‘public affairs’ or ‘promotion’, then there is very little it can do” - he explains. But when it “becomes implicit in the way the country is run – almost, as it were, a style of policy making rather than a method in its own right – it can speed up change in the most dramatic way” (Anholt, 2007, p. 33, as cited in Mehta-Karia, 2011, p. 49).

In Jansen's (2008) words, it is this apparently totalizing logic and methodology which makes nation branding "profoundly anti-democratic" (p. 121). It implies an understanding of its practice as a "monologic, hierarchical, reductive form of communication" that "require[s] all voices of authority to speak in unison" thus unavoidably marginalizing and silencing dissenting ones (p. 134). Nation branding's paradigmatic calculative approach does not only reduces "designer" or "boutique nations" to their marketable aspects (p. 122) but its paradigmatic understanding of nations as "homogenous" units and single publics whose boundaries thus "not easily permeated by alternative visions of either membership or autonomy" entirely "ignores the creative and evolving potential of publics in space and in time, too (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 55). For Aronczyk (2008), such a course of implementation "cannot account for the plurality of voices, legacies and competing visions" of any nation-state (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 58).

Jansen (2008) points to an additional concern regarding the practice and implementation of nation branding. Nation branders, she writes, do not recruit "teams of sociologists, anthropologists, historians, literary scholars, street poets, graffiti artists, or others who might be able to excavate multiple layers of local knowledge, and identify the national *Zeitgeist*" (p. 135). Rather, the "myths (stories and straplines)" they invent are "based upon their 'gut feelings', their practical experience, and individual visual and semantic fluency". Nation brands, thus, are "the hodgepodge result of the cultural intuition' of creative people who informally 'sneak' cultural content into the branding process". The "resonance of this fugitive cultural content (local knowledge picked up informally and processed intuitively)", Jansen continues,

“is what makes or breaks a campaign; yet, this content is, at best, a function of the tacit knowledge of a small number of creative individuals” (p. 136).

As Aronczyk (2008) concludes, the “ideologies and practices by which nation branding operates alter the cultural context in which national identity is articulated and understood” (p. 43). In her words, “by transposing authority from elected government officials to advertising and branding professionals, by replacing accountability with facilitation, and by fitting discussions of the nation into categories that privilege a particular kind of collective representation over diverse expression, nation branding affects the moral basis of national citizenship” (p. 43).

Developmentalism and neocolonial governmentality

However benign it seems to be, critics argue, nation branding is a practice that “symbolically reinforces” the notion of a hierarchy of nations in which they are ranked along their economic and political weight (Roy, 2007, p. 570). As such, it is built on a “comparative positioning of other nationalisms vis-a-vis one’s own” which necessarily turns it into a “strategic act” that aims to “secure ideological terrain in the global/national cultural imaginary” through notions of “difference and superiority” (p. 572). When it does so, these critics argue, it has to do so within existing power relations of all sorts, thus generating “a neocolonial visual mapping of nations, enabled by technologies of the gaze” (p. 572).

Sheetal Mehta-Karia (2011) conceptualises these processes in postcolonial terms. As she suggests in her critical analysis of Brand India,

nation branding is first of all an ideological intervention that “facilitates the creation of conditions that introduce, promote and naturalize ‘market solutions’ and ‘enterprise culture’ for all aspects of society” (p. 4). When nation branding does so in postcolonial conditions, however, it works on “colonial registers, reinscribing colonial logic and propagating colonial power relations” as a form of imagination that is “dictated by the discursive frameworks of western neoliberalism” (p. 4) – Mehta-Karia argues.

Critical scholars also note that by prescribing the models of progress and development for poor, postcolonial nations of the Global South, nation branding (re)constructs those places as “nations in need”. In the same time it also elevates “the rich, colonizing nations of the Global North” into the position of “nations in the know” (Roy, 2007, p. 570). Nation branding, thus, reinscribes “the colonial binary of Superior West and inferior East” and also helps to perpetuate “the myth of the western (economic) civilizing mission” (p. 570).

Moreover, Roy (2007) argues, when postcolonial countries are represented and positioned as ‘cultures’, those countries that have the power to define and consume these ‘cultures’ can establish themselves as the ‘masters’ of globalization and as modern nations (p. 570). Such a positioning “infantilizes” the South where nations look for the guidance and models Western brand gurus.

The models that nation branding prescribes for the developing nations of the South, Mehta-Karia (2011) argues, require the reimagining of these countries “through the language of capital and within the framework of western neoliberalism” in order to succeed on a competitive global stage (p.

70). When neocolonialism is understood as a “colonial logic of bringing the postcolonial independent states into global modernity”, this context unveils “nation branding as a dominant developmentalist strategy of globalization” that preserves certain “asymmetrical power relations” within the global order (p. 101). As such, nation branding “repeats and perpetuates the (neo)colonial civilizing mission” that aims to bring the postcolonial nations into global economic modernity (p. 67).

To unveil how nation branding “facilitates the enterprise of neocolonialism” (Roy, 2007, p. 570), it is necessary to identify the exact modus operandi of its practice. As Mehta-Karia (2011) explains, imagining India as a brand does not only locks the nation into a market paradigm, “thereby hollowing out the national imagination to fit in with the demands of the global market and transatlantic capital” but it does so “in a language and through a framework always-already constituted (...) by the West” (p. 67). The “offer” of nation branding for “prosperity and economic empowerment” is a model with “a predetermined script for development and a predesigned trajectory of progress” which has been created by the former colonial masters (p. 67). It “legitimizes only a particular way of imagining the nation – an imagination that is bound by market expectations and locked with the neoliberal version of development and progress” (p. 67). The “always-already constituted model of nation branding” decrees that, in Chatterjee’s words (1993), the postcolonial world shall always remain “the consumers of modernity”, nation branding thus “(re)colonizing the postcolonial imagination” (p. 67).

Mehta-Karia (2011) introduces Nikolas Rose (1996, 1999) into a criticism of nation branding to describe how its actual practice functions as a form of neoliberal, neocolonial governmentality. Rose describes neoliberalism as a rationality that aims to govern conduct, in Mehta-Karia's interpretation, by "creating conditions that naturalize market solutions and enterprise culture for all aspects of society" (p. 24.). This conceptualization, Mehta-Karia argues, resonates with David Scott's description of colonial political rationality that operated through a systematic material and symbolic destruction of conditions within which the colonized people lived, in order to replace those with new conditions that 'enabled', or 'obliged' the development of "new forms of life" (p. 23). In sum, colonial power established its hegemony and domination through a reconstitution of "the very terrain on which the colonized lived their lives" (p. 23).

Drawing on this framework Mehta-Karia (2011) argues that neoliberalism "as a globally valorized set of practices for governance" works in a very similar manner for it displaces the 'old' understanding of the postcolonial present with 'new' categories, in ways that the notions of modernity, freedom, progress, and the very way of life "can now only be imagined through a pre-formed language and through a set of structures 'always-already' constituted" by others (p. 25). As she concludes, neocolonial governmentality operates through a dismantling of the existing forms of life and a replacement of those by "new, neoliberal conditions within which the postcolonial subject must now live and define itself" (p. 25). In this context, Mehta-Karia concludes, nation branding becomes a practice that "seeks to legitimize and naturalize the economic rationale of the western neoliberalism"

(pp. 24-25) and that facilitates the “rethinking of the entire social through the lens of the economic” (pp. 27-28) as a “universal practice of good governance” (p. 100). As such a quality, neoliberalism in the postcolony can be understood as a form of neocolonialism and nation branding, a tool of neocolonial governmentality.

In this context, it is interesting to note what Kaneva and Popescu (2011) write about national branding campaigns in the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe where the significance, meaning, and objective of such practices pointed beyond being just instruments of investment and tourism promotion. Nation branding campaigns in these countries, they suggest, “tap into local struggles over the meaning of nationhood after communism”, signalling “an ontological aspiration beyond the profit motive” (p. 195). They identify “two interconnected identity-building projects: one aimed at reconstructing national images for the outside world; the other inventing new narratives of national unity and purpose for domestic use”, this latter aiming to facilitate the reconstruction of national subjectivities (p. 195). Nation branding, they write, promises to help in both.

Volvic (2008) complements these accounts by elaborating on how the transformation of the global economy has led to “anxieties and fears” in these post-Communist states about their potential, new positions in the changing world economic order (p. 397). In that context, he argues, the “seductive and powerful appeal” of nation branding that also fit the increasingly stronger expectations of a global neoliberal logic, seemed to offer a powerful panacea for the internal identity crises of these nations in “search for a coherent and

clear (national) identity of belonging” after the collapse of Communism (p. 397).

In this context, Volcic brings into discussion Savigliano’s term of ‘auto-exoticism’ to describe what he calls the commercial exploitation of stereotypes “that Others have about you” (p. 409). He quotes Savigliano to reapply the term in the context of nation branding as a practice of how “exotic others laboriously cultivating passionate-ness in order to be desired, and thus recognized in a world increasingly ruled by post-modern standards” (Savigliano, 1995, p. 212 as cited in Volcic, 2008, p. 409). The images, stories, and histories that appear in the discourses of nation branding, however, “do not resist the global order” and “do not present any force for altering western dominance over representation, knowledge production or material reality” (p. 409). Rather, Volcic argues, these self-representations adopt the logic of this order and reproduce themselves along the “stereotypical and exoticized” expectations of Western audiences, to whom these “familiar and comfortable images and narratives are continuously sold back (p. 409).

Before introducing its results and critically discuss those in the context of the above framework, this dissertation now turns to a presentation of the methodology of the research.

Methodology

In-depth expert interview

This research is primarily built on a series of in-depth, semi-structured expert interviews with government officials from different levels of cultural policy making, heritage conservation, and nation-building; with nation branding professionals at government-related agencies from the fields of investment promotion and tourism development; with brand consultants from the private sector; with marketing professionals at art galleries; with media professionals; and with academics. A total of almost 40 interviews have been conducted in Singapore throughout 2012 and 2013; and in the Emirate of Sharjah in a period of 3 months in July and August in 2012 and in December and January in the turn of 2012 and 2013.

Following Meuser and Nagel (2009) this research defines expert knowledge as “a knowledge *sui generis* with its own characteristic traits” that necessitates a particular methodological approach (p. 17). Consequently, this qualitative research project uses in-person and in-depth expert interviews as its primary method for data collection.

Along the typology of Bogner and Menz (2009) expert interviews are understood here as ‘theory-generating’ with the goal of the “communicative opening up and analytic reconstruction of the subjective dimension of expert knowledge” (as cited in Meuser and Nagel, 2009, p. 48). Distinct from ‘exploratory’ expert interviews which are used for developing initial orientations in an unexplored field; or ‘systematizing’ expert interviews which aim to gain access to ‘exclusive knowledge’ derived from the practices of

experts; ‘theory-generating’ expert interviews represent a research approach by which the interviewer tries to articulate a theoretical conceptualization of (often) implicit knowledge, ‘conceptions of the world’ and routines which frame expert practices and which are “constitutive for the functioning of social systems” (pp. 46-48).

Hitzler, Honer, and Maeder (1994) define experts as people who possess “institutionalized authority to construct reality” on a particular field of practice (as cited in Meuser and Nagel, 2009, p. 19). Based on a specific set of knowledge derived from experience, experts are recognized to possess interpretations which are able to meaningfully guide the actions of others on a certain field (p54). Based on this definition expert knowledge has the ability to become hegemonic in a given functional context by structuring the conditions and ways of action for others (Bogner and Menz, 2002, as cited in Meuser and Nagel, 2009, p. 19). These “action orientations, knowledge and assessments”, Bogner and Menz (2009) argues, have a socially relevant dimension (p. 54). Thus, as they explain, it is not the exclusivity of expert knowledge that makes it relevant for theory-generating interviews that seek to produce interpretive knowledge, but the authority and power of expert knowledge to “produce practical effects” (p. 54).

In this context, expert knowledge does not only refer to systematized knowledge relating to a specialized field, but it also has the character of practical knowledge that “incorporates a range of quite disparate maxims for action, individual rules of decision, collective orientations and patterns of social interpretation” (pp. 54-55). The ‘interpretive knowledge’ what the theory-generating expert interview seeks to gather consists of the expert’s

“subjective orientations, rules, points of view and interpretations” (p. 52). Instead of being a reference to application routines and bureaucratic competences, it says about the “sphere of ideas and ideologies, of fragmentary, inconsistent configurations of meanings and patterns of explanation” that constitutes expert knowledge as “a heterogeneous conglomeration” (p52.) Expert knowledge as interpretive knowledge, thus, is necessarily an ‘analytic construction’ that has to be constructed by the researcher through acts of abstraction and systematization (p. 53).

According to Meuser and Nagel (2009), the data collection and analysis of expert interviews should focus on: the socio-cultural conditions of the production of knowledge; the practices of communication and organization; the topics and aspects that highlight the ‘socially constructed’ nature of expert knowledge. The socio-cultural conditions of the production of knowledge draw attention to “the embeddedness of the expert in circumstances and milieus” (p. 26). What needs to be explored, then, is the ‘open awareness’ of the expert of the contexts of knowledge production, and those ‘private relevances’ that guide expert behavior (p. 26). As knowledge production increasingly happens through heterogeneous discourse communities and networks of experts, it also becomes important for the analysis of expert knowledge to identify those ‘patterns and practices’ of expert communication through which the “bargaining over definitions and solutions” is practiced across institutional and professional boundaries (p. 27). Consequently, what has to be explored is, in Knorr-Cetina’s words, “the construction of the machineries by which knowledge is being constructed” (p. 28). Finally, as expert knowledge is understood as ‘socially created’, that is, as

the result of collective practices of producing knowledge “by way of negotiation, cooperation, networking and teamwork” (p. 28); and also as an orderly practice that produces “favorable and unfavorable” patterns of meanings and that legitimize and delegitimize potential speakers (p. 29) any analyses of expert interviews should draw attention to the expert’s awareness, ‘habitus’ and practices of controlling these contingencies (p. 29).

Based on the above aims and objectives, Meuser and Nagel suggest that the expert interview should be understood as an ‘open method’ that is not guided by a preconceived script or sequential order but by a set of interview topics to be covered. As they argue experts reveal more about “relevances and maxims connected with their positions and functions” when they are asked to talk about their activities (p. 31). In this way, the open interview method helps to avoid the repetition of semi-official statements and helps the articulation of own outlooks and reflections (p. 31). In order to facilitate such an outcome, the interviewing should be based on general topics and avoid closed questions (p. 31). The authors suggest the using of the interview schedule as a flexible thematic guideline, not as “a questionnaire to be administered” (p. 33). What should be explored, they suggest, is narratives from the expert’s professional activity that help to identify and reconstruct ‘general principles and maxims’, logics that underlie decisions, and orientations that guide conduct (p. 33).

As of the analysis of data collected, instead of focusing on the sequentiality of statements within a single interview, Meuser and Nagel suggest the attention to be focused on thematic units or passages with similar topics which are scattered around in the interviews (p. 35). In addition to the use of the interview topic guide, the context will also ensure the comparability

of the interviews (p. 35). Although Meuser and Nagel suggest only a partial transcription of the recorded material and the use of paraphrasing as a second step in data analysis, this research is built on a full body of transcriptions. The 400 pages of transcribed interview material then has been coded adopting the terminology of the interviewees. In the following step, thematically comparable passages have been identified across the different interviews, followed by Meuser and Nagel call the “sociological conceptualization” of the data, that is a categorization of the shared and differing features of the interviews based on the theoretical knowledge base (p. 36). In order to identify the ‘structures of expert knowledge’ the specific characteristics of the commonly shared elements of the interviews have been arranged into categories (p. 36). In the final step of theoretical generalization, the “empirically generalized findings” have been framed by a “theoretically inspired perspective” by which “the meaning structures of the field of action under study” were identified along typologies and theories (p. 36).

The researcher’s notes: Learning by unlearning

This research has not meant to be a polemical or normative critique of nation branding practices in Sharjah and Singapore. Rather, it is an attempt to be a critical, social scientific account and analysis of those approaches, interpretations, and representation practices that are used in strategies and products of nation branding in these countries.

This predicament, however, has been questioned by the approached experts throughout the fieldwork process both in Sharjah and in Singapore.

While in Singapore, it was the academic nature of my research that the targeted experts most often called in question – implying hidden, politically critical intentions and agendas behind my research interest –, in Sharjah it was suggested several times that as a European researcher I bring ‘Western’ or even Orientalist preconceptions into my query and interpretation.

It also has to be noted that my Eastern European origin significantly helped in easing these concerns. Similarly, the fact that I came from a Singaporean university was also perceived as a trust-building factor in the Emirates.

One of the most often used phrases the interviewed experts brought up in criticizing what they perceived my ‘preconceptions’ was their references to “people from the outside”. As one of my Sharjah interviewees puts it,

when people look in from the outside, they always concentrate on one or the other of their preoccupations with the region.

Beyond the suggestion that Western researchers necessarily thematize their inquiry and structure their research along historically-loaded perspectives about the region and its people, it has also been argued that these preconceptions are seriously essentializing and stereotypical.

The reality is always much-much more complex and cannot be explained with just one tagline (...) There are so many impacts that come to play at the various intersections within society, but then also the various intersections between regions, countries, economic,

political, social systems, and so on, you could write a thesis only on that. (...) It is a very-very complex, fluid, multifaceted state of being that can be found in all other countries as responding to the relevant realities that countries face. So I think you can't really put one point on it, because if you do that, you will falsify it, and you will in many ways reiterate the stereotypical interpretations of this region that prevailed since Orientalist times.

As the interviewed expert in Sharjah emphasizes, in order to leave these 'preconceptions' behind, the researcher, as well as the expatriate expert, has to question the applicability of existing concepts in the particular local context and let new methodologies emerge 'from the ground'.

Everything has to be negotiated, and in a sense that is really exciting as well. And the crucial issue is, and I see that every day, if you allow yourself, if you let yourself, if you leave your conditioned baggage at the door, and you allow yourself to approach any project as a completely blank sheet, in discussion with your colleagues here and you acknowledge where they are coming from, whether you agree with that or not agree with that is irrelevant. It's their country, it's their dreams, it is their right to realize these dreams on their terms. So if you allow yourself into this process and you acquire a genuine skill of empathizing with where they want to go, and then bring your skills to the table, then you will be able to adopt, adapt, reject, reinvent, or newly invent as

is needed on the ground. And out of that eventually, and it will take as much time as it ever did in the same contexts in other countries, in their own term, new methodologies, new structures, new procedures, that are relevant to this place will emerge and will then be immanently successful in this context where they are needed.

As she terms it, it is 'learning by unlearning' how the researcher can look behind its 'conditioned baggage', 'deconstruct' his existing preconceptions, and open up for local perspectives and interpretations.

Once you start learning by unlearning you will find some very-very fascinating new avenues. And it is those avenues that you should carry back to your supervisors and afterwards when you publish in the public domain. Because most people take the easy road, and just reiterate what others have written already, and kind of based on that just try to reaffirm whatever they know. Without the ability to actually say 'stop, I am actually going to look, I am not only going to see, but I am going to look, and I am going to ask questions, and allow myself to be deconstructed in the security that I have so far felt in my judging this place'. And if you allow yourself to do that, of course, you are alone, as a non-local, I don't want to say Westerner, because that has now become irrelevant as well, because you are coming for Singapore and what does that mean anyway in a globalized world, a non-local locally embedded

researcher. If you allow yourself to acquire the tools to assess this place from within, you will make a real contribution.

One of the most often mentioned examples of what are perceived to be ‘the preconceptions of the Western researcher’ about the region is the tendency of searching for the ‘indigenous elements’ in the practices of local experts. As one of the interviewed experts suggests, such an approach necessarily ‘exoticizes’ the object of the research.

Do keep in mind that what you might find noticeable here, and you might want to critique here, you will find it not that different in the way other countries approach their projecting of nation themselves. So do not fall into the trap of stereotyping something that we all have in our own backyards. (...) So that is what I am saying, do not stereotype what we have at home as well. Keep an open mind. Don’t be tempted to not unlearn what you have learned. Don’t be tempted not to deconstruct your conditioning from back home that we all have, as part of your study. Because it will affect the validity of your study.

As she continues, the interviewed expert points to my problematization of the narratives of authenticity at the core of Sharjah’s nation branding exercise – as an example of such exoticizing practices.

Don't you think that looking for the indigenous element is again something that outsiders are obsessed more about than people who actually are the indigenous ones? How often do you go to the Folkloristic Museum in Budapest? Have you ever been? You know what I mean? If you turn this question around it makes no sense. There are elements where you long for your past and, of course, this past is always the past that you want to see the way nostalgically and idealistically. We all have that element in our culture but in our contemporary reality this element is a limited element. And I am always absolutely amazed at how fascinated people are with whatever is offered to them.

As she continues, she further criticizes my search for uniqueness in Sharjah's nation branding exercise.

The approach is always specific to every localities, realities, challenges, and aspirations, and views, and so on. That's nothing weird or exotic. That is the natural. Come on, why are we noting in here and we don't note it when tourists in Scotland are received by a guy playing the bagpipe and in Hungary where a lady in her folkloristic outfit sales salami? It is the same desire, to project your country in a certain way. So again, this is not a unique thing, this can be found all over the world.

Pointing to another example of what she sees as ‘the Western researcher’s preconception of the region’, one of the interviewed experts in Sharjah suggests that my interest in Orientalism in the context of this present research might not carry the suggested relevance to locals who are themselves supposed to be the target of such objectification.

Orientalism, you have to look at it again... you have to look at this whole manifestation not as a black and white thing, to start with. Second, you have to remember that Orientalism impacted on some countries but did not impact on other countries. So where Orientalism does not have a historic legacy and has not carved itself bitterly into the minds of people, the angst that Western scholars yet again extend to those subjects is just not relevant. So again, in everything you bring to the table when you research this region you actually have to start by questioning yourself.

Ms. Manal Ataya, Director General of the Sharjah Museums Department points to my suggestion about a potential link between tendencies of heritage conservation and cultural revival in the region, and increasing immigration statistic as another example of what she sees a typical Western interpretation about the regional dynamics. In her words:

It probably comes from people from the outside, because I actually would say that more than anything, it is not the threat of globalization, or other people, I would say it is actually a country’s

own need to ensure that its own indigenous identity, or whatever, that its nationals, let's say, do have a sense of loyalty and understanding and love for their country. Because, I think in a normal national narrative, regardless of whether you have an expat community or not, it is something that any country in such an early stage worries about...

My attempt to contextualize Sharjah's culturally-thematized nation branding exercise within an analysis of state efforts to strengthen national identity has also been challenged by Dr. Zaki Aslan, Founding Director of the Sharjah-ICCROM ATHAR Regional Centre (Archaeological-Architectural Tangible Heritage in the Arab Region). As he argues, the significance researchers attribute to such tendencies might be severely essentializing and reveal more about existing hypotheses behind current research projects on the region than about local realities. As he notes,

this question of the why, you know, why we do this, and then you answer about identity... Here, I think there are different intentions. And you have different people thinking, or answering the why in different ways.

Finally, as another interviewed expert points to it, specific local meanings and interpretations of the key concept of the research should also be taken into consideration in order to achieve a valid understanding of processes in the

region. Otherwise, she suggest, the researcher might fall into the trap of what she sees as trying to ‘force realities into an alien matrix’. In her words:

We use the same definitions sometimes that we fill in with completely different meanings. And sometimes we don’t feel them with meaning at all. And that is something really-really dangerous. And you have to be, again, aware of how people here would understand and apply and work with the definitions that you understand in a certain way or they might understand it in a different way or not think of at all. (...) So keep that in mind because otherwise you will again fall into the trap where you are trying to force realities here into an alien matrix. And by that you falsify it. (...) You have to ask the locals for that. I mean, I may have a hint, but hint may be distorted. So you will have to address that with a local. Because how does the nation see itself, does it see itself in its entirety or only in terms of its local element, and so and so? This will start unraveling once you start digging. And if you want to do a genuinely appropriate and applicable study, you have to start with thinking about this and asking locals about their perception of this very thing. Sorry. (She laughs.)

In Singapore, criticism about my research most often manifested in a lack of trust about the real intentions of the research, or in the ‘objective’, ‘truly’ social scientific nature of its interpretations, and in suppositions of a covert political agenda behind the enquiry. Most of the approached experts

also worried about the publicly accessible nature of the dissertation. Refusing a requested interview has most often been explained by the confidentiality of public sector work in Singapore. Trying to better understand this argument I couldn't formulate more than subjective impressions at the end. What I 'sensed' behind these refusals was an attitude that has most precisely been articulated in a different context by one of the interviewed experts, stating that 'people are just not ready, yet' to get exposed to the details of such projects. Still, I would like to emphasize it once again that I only 'feel' this attitude to be a partial explanation of the reluctance of going public with the workings of nation branding in Singapore.

It should also be noted here that both in Sharjah and Singapore, personal recommendations have been the primary, or almost the only way of getting access to experts and having them talk to me in the course of this research. Once the initial trust has been achieved, however, the level of openness and help has been much beyond my initial expectation that has been based on the difficulties other researchers narrated with regards to public sector related enquiries in Singapore and the Gulf.

Addressing the concerns about the applied research methodology, it should be emphasized once again that the results and conclusions of this research do not suggest in any sense that I as an academic researcher and a student who comes from Europe has any 'objective', 'special', or privileged access to the 'correct' interpretations of the researched Singaporean or Emirati realities. To the contrary, my background in the humanities and the social sciences – both are areas often critical towards business and political practices

– , and also my personal experiences of living and travelling in these regions might actually point to the limitations of this research.

However, borrowing a note from Edward Said from Ahmed Kanna's (2011) methodology chapter, I meant to take it seriously what Said writes in *Orientalism* (1978) that “the way to move beyond these stereotypes is not by simply trusting the official judgments made by Arab regimes about themselves but rather through a close attention to the historical processes and (in my case) social processes (...) of particular Arab societies, as well as to their interconnections with other parts of the world (not least and imperial and hegemonic West” (as cited in Kanna, 2011, p. xi) This approach, I believe, could also entirely be applied in the Singapore context.

As of the attention that some of the interviewees suggested should be given to locally-relevant structuring of the research focus and to locally-rooted conceptualization of the phenomena researched, I couldn't agree more with the experts. This research, through a methodology of open, expert interviews aims to explore – as one of its main objectives – those local understandings of nation branding that are attained to its practice in the local symbolic and epistemic structures. By doing so, this dissertation aims to contribute to a mapping of local rationales, logics, and practices of representation that might either support or resist the hegemonic language of nation branding. Then, as my reply to these experts critical of my questioning: although this research ‘hopes’ for alternative, counter-hegemonic representational frameworks to emerge that could contribute to a critical remapping of the imperialist cartography of the world – it can only look for those, it cannot create such where those do not exist.

Results

The following chapters will provide an account of about 40 interviews I conducted during my fieldwork assignments in Singapore throughout 2012 and 2013, and in the Emirate of Sharjah in July and August of 2012 and in December and January of 2012 and 2013.

The first chapters of this part of the dissertation will discuss the organizational nexus, the perceived brand attributes, and the methodologies of nation branding in Sharjah, then it will turn to introduce the practice of nation branding in Singapore, based on the interviews conducted with policy makers, marketing and branding practitioners, and artists involved in these efforts, or with an insight over those processes at these places.

In order to explore the suggested relationship between the state's nation-building efforts and its nation branding activities, beyond the aim of providing an account of these activities, these chapters will also try to explore and identify those understandings that shape the particular nation branding practices of the experts involved in the formulation and implementation of these directly or indirectly related policies and strategies.

The Sharjah interviews

Branding Sharjah

As of the time of writing, the Emirate of Sharjah does not have a designated governmental office to oversee and coordinate its nation branding efforts. Thus, one of the primary goals of the following chapter is to map and

reconstruct the nexus of those institutions and organizations that are explicitly and systematically involved in shaping Sharjah's national image for global and local audiences. It will also try to describe those mechanisms that shape the formulation, coordination, and implementation of these strategies. In addition to identifying the actors and the ways in which they operate this chapter will also describe how these policy makers and practitioners themselves perceive the main attributes of Sharjah's national brand.

Mapping the institutional nexus of nation branding in Sharjah¹

As Sharjah does not have a specific governmental office to oversee and coordinate its nation branding efforts, according to most experts interviewed in the course of this research, the Emirate's nation branding activities are formulated in the nexus of a few departments, institutions and organizations from the fields of tourism- and investment promotion, cultural policy making, heritage conservation, art, and the media.

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) is one of the main agencies identified as principal actors in shaping Sharjah's national image. The SCTDA was established in 1996 by with the objective of promoting commercial and tourism activities in the Emirate of Sharjah. According to its website, the Authority "endeavors to develop these sectors through various events, activities and issuances, and promotes the emirate at all local, regional and international levels". The Authority "carries out all the work and activities necessary to achieve their goals by way of

¹ Unless cited otherwise, all quotes of this chapter originate from the websites of the respective organizations.

planning and drawing up strategic plans to further development and to promote the tourism industry in all its forms; in addition to conducting related social and economic studies”. In addition to compiling “the policies for participating in the local, regional and international exhibitions, the Authority also aims at marketing and promoting Sharjah to attract foreign investment”. The Authority aims “to raise public awareness locally, regionally and internationally of the unique features Sharjah offers as a special tourist destination”. In its strategy “to promote the emirate as a unique tourist destination”, the Authority “focuses on the factors of distinction and exclusiveness”. In its function to promote the tourist and historical attractions in the Emirate the SCTDA works in coordination with “concerned departments”.

According to its website, the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority, also known as Shurooq, as “the driving force behind the transformation of Sharjah” is committed to enhance “Sharjah’s appeal as an investment, tourism and business destination”. An independent government entity, Shurooq facilitates, partners and connects investors, corporations and entrepreneurs with the right opportunities. To achieve its mission, Shurooq seeks to evaluate and follow-up on tourism, investment and heritage-related infrastructure projects, participating in the comprehensive construction and development processes both within the emirate of Sharjah and in the UAE as a whole. Guided by traditions and inspired by innovation, Shurooq is committed to the future of Sharjah. Its development strategies “maintain the traditions of the emirate at heart” and aim “not to re-create or replicate another city or destination in Sharjah, but to seamlessly add to the cultural and architectural

fabric of the emirate”. As Shurooq’s Chairperson Bodour bint Sultan Al Qasimi puts it, “whether it is training a young Emirati to reach his or her full potential or developing a new destination that diversifies Sharjah’s tourism offerings, Shurooq aims to redefine the very meaning of an Arab city” and to transform Sharjah “into a shining beacon of inspiration”. Shurooq envisions “a modern city that embraces progress while staying true to its values and traditions” and “committed to enhancing the quality of life for every citizen and resident”. For its CEO, Marwan bin Jassim Al Sarkal, Shurooq strives to create a business friendly environment in Sharjah, “the industrial centre, cultural capital and education hotspot of the United Arab Emirates” by “identifying new investment opportunities across different sectors, developing breathtaking destinations and managing some of the emirate’s most recognisable landmarks”.

As “the speaker and listener on behalf of Sharjah on the local, regional and international media landscapes” the Sharjah Media Centre is “the official conduit responsible for all media and communication activities related to Sharjah’s governing bodies and the emirate as a whole” – its website states. “An independent body”, the Centre “empowers government communication and encourages the communication of uniform messages”. As its ultimate functions, the Sharjah Media Centre aims to “enable a balanced portrayal of Sharjah in the local, regional and international media” and to highlight “the emirate’s ongoing progress and development as the region’s media and cultural hub” thus contributing the goal of “placing Sharjah on the global map”. According to its core values of “educating” and “inspiring” the centre aims “to introduce Sharjah and its ethos to the whole world through its people

by inspiring them to be the ambassadors of their unique culture and encouraging them to work towards positive change and growth within Sharjah and beyond". The Centre adopts a responsible strategy which is "consistent with the UAE's federal media policy and regulations, and adherent to the emirate's authentic culture". As the Chairman of the Sharjah Media Centre, His Excellency Sheikh Sultan Bin Ahmed Al Qassimi writes in his message on the website, "the collaborative efforts of the government and private sector have played a significant role in highlighting Sharjah's civic and historic accomplishments on the global map". He lauds "the crucial contribution of Sharjah's media outlets" in this achievement. For Mr. Osama Samra, Director of the Sharjah Media Centre, while "showcasing the emirate's cultural and economic development" the Centre "ensures a qualitative and systematic delivery of the emirate's key messages to the world". Its headquarters inaugurated in October, 2011, the Sharjah Media Centre operates through three sub-units: the Media Office, Government Communication Unit and the Press Club.

Putting Sharjah on the map

In order to explore and identify the specific approaches and mechanisms at work behind Sharjah's nation branding strategies and products, a substantial part of the interviews discussed the subjective, personal understanding of these practices by the professionals involved. The notion of strategic national marketing being a new concept in Sharjah and in the UAE is a recurring theme in the interviews. As Mr. Bobby Koshy, Manager of the

Overseas Promotions Department at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority explains it:

Branding is (...) new for us, and it is still very-very young, and I think it answers your question why when you Googled about it you didn't get to hear much about it - is that the other cities you spoke about had many years to work on it and early work on it and put it out in the market. We ourselves have just started. The concept of, if you look at the Islamic style that we have only sailed out to be, the different colors, is a total city destination. It is where different government authorities are actually merged together to make it happen. Now if you look at it, we have just started, the Sharjah Media Centre has just started their branding, you have Shurooq Investment and they have started their branding, so eventually in the future, whether it is 5 or 10 or 15 years, all of these should fall in their place like a jigsaw puzzle, and eventually you should have a proper brand of your destination.

The lack of coordination between the different agencies involved in national branding is also highlighted by Ms. Bahar Erdogan, the International Coordinator of the Sharjah Media Centre.

The UAE is not that far at the moment. At the moment we are at a stage that every emirate has its own media departments and it is highly involved in branding and promotion and imaging. The next

step would be to unify, to have a high committee where the board directors of the branding and development of the UAE and every single emirate sit together and do the overall branding of the United Arab Emirates. For the time being you wouldn't see a big branding for the United Arab Emirates. You always see the branding of the emirates, like Abu Dhabi, or Dubai, or Sharjah, it is not the United Arab Emirates.

The interviews also aimed to explore the specific understandings major institutions and organization involved in national branding hold of their respective roles in this national endeavor. As Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager of the Destination Development Department of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority narrates it,

the structure is that we have a Director General here for the Authority, above whom sits the Chairman, who has much more of a leadership role, supervisory role rather than being involved in daily logistics, and he reports to an Executive Council, so that is sort of a committee that consists of government advisors. Now they are all directly related to the Ruler. To give you some examples, when it comes to the Light Festival for instance or even the Formula 1, the powerboat race which we recently held those events are either opened or attended by the Ruler himself or if doesn't then he sends the Crown Prince and he always hears of what is happening and then he always comments on such things and he

actually sends his feedback to us. (...) we received a letter saying how pleased he was with the arrangements of the Formula 1 Powerboat Race, for instance. So he is actually very much involved. (...) Tourism follows the general vision of the Emirate, I would say, which is to focus on culture and heritage, and education, in that sense, also. And then you take tourism and wherever it fits it kind of follows suit. But we would never go off the beaten track, or do something that would be totally contradictory to the overall vision of the Ruler for his emirate.

As Mr. Marwan Bin Jasem Al Sarkal, the CEO of Shurooq, Sharjah's Investment & Development Authority continues, their work complements the destination branding strategies of the Tourism Agency.

Shurooq is the Investment and Development Authority of Sharjah. It was created, first of all, to attract investment, develop projects, and manage projects. The question is why Shurooq was created. Shurooq was created basically to be more like the ambassador that invites and deals with investors, whether they are foreign investors, or local investors. What is our role is, basically, to show Sharjah's image internationally in a different way. Sharjah is not a conservative city, like how people are trying to brand it, it is a modern city, it has a very unique identity, it's a very safe city, it is open for business, we are happy to see people living here who are coming from over 200 nationalities, we are there to promote it in a

different way. We are there to be attending international conferences, exhibitions, it complements what Sharjah Tourism does. Because Sharjah tourism promotes Sharjah as a tourism destination. We promote it as an investment destination. Where you come and invest in Sharjah. And we use best practices. So we come up with companies that have been doing well, and they have been here for the past thirty years, and we use them as brand ambassadors for Sharjah. On the other hand we are also developing very unique projects.

As another major player in Sharjah's national marketing exercise, Mr. Osama Samra, Director of the Sharjah Media Centre explains it, his organization takes responsibility for the gradual harmonization of all internal and external government communication.

Since we were established as the Sharjah Media Centre as part of the city, we are doing all needed efforts to create better communication. (...) There is Shurooq, the investment arm of the Emirate of Sharjah, there is the Tourism Authority, there is the Media Centre, there is the Free Zone, there is the Chamber of Commerce, there is the Economic Department, the Municipality, the Electricity and Water Authority all together. Just the meeting that I came from had a representative from 50 government authorities from Sharjah. Fifty. This is very important.

The need for strategic coordination is also emphasized by Mr. Bobby Koshy, Manager of the Overseas Promotions Department at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority. As he says in relation to the Department of Culture & Information of the Government of Sharjah:

The Cultural Department, as its name says, it focuses on culture, both locally and internationally. Their main job is to make it sure that the existing culture that we have is maintained and restored, and on whatever level they can look into new areas to promote they would. That is their focus. As our focus is more of marketing what they do.

One of the major themes that emerge out of these narratives necessitates nation branding by a perceived global lack of awareness and ignorance about Sharjah. As Mr. Osama Samra, the Director of the Sharjah Media Centre explains it,

for us, meanwhile working in tourism, the first challenge we had was to get people to know where Sharjah is on the world map. Where is it?

For Ms. Shaikha Al-Mazrou, it is also an everyday experience that Sharjah is globally unknown. As she puts it: “Literally, if I say Sharjah, no one knows”. Ms. Mandy Merzaban repeats the same narrative that seems to be a common perception among the interviewed experts about Sharjah’s irrelevance in

global public awareness. In her words: “I think Sharjah is sort of like a blind spot most of the times”. In the interviews, the notion of being globally unknown is also often extended to other places in the United Arab Emirates. As it will be discussed later in this dissertation with regard to the Abu Dhabi museums-debate, building a Guggenheim and a Louvre in Abu Dhabi is often solely understood in terms of a perceived need of getting the Emirates globally recognized, or recognizable. As Ms. Shaikha Al-Mazrou explains it:

I would say it is all about trying to... it is all about putting Abu Dhabi on the map. That is very obvious.

For some, Dubai’s whole economic model should be understood as an exercise in place branding.

...now they are back to putting up all these billion dollar... we are going to do this, we are going to do that... I think this is what put Dubai on the map, this is what put the UAE on the map (...) before people didn’t know what the UAE was, really, nobody knew. But after all of that people know Dubai, and now people know Dubai more than the UAE, more than anything else. They don’t know Qatar, they know Dubai, they don’t know the UAE, they know Dubai. So really, it did put it on the map. And that might have been the motive all alone. Just to put it on the map, make it into an attractive destination, bring people in, bring money in, bring tourism, boost the economy.

Dubai's relative success in positioning itself on the global map is often mentioned as a challenge for Sharjah's own place branding exercise. As Mr. Osama Samra explains it:

Even the United Arab Emirates wasn't as famous as Dubai. Even in the Arab world, even in that narrow circle. When you say United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, it is like: where is this? Dubai? Yes, OK, Dubai.

For Mr. Samra, however, the challenge Dubai's marketing success presents can also be an opportunity for Sharjah.

The seven emirates, we always, when we promote Sharjah we always say we are one of seven emirates and we complete each other. We don't compete. Once I told them... the whole world is looking at Dubai, OK, we are 10 minutes away from Dubai, why don't we use Dubai as our advertising agency? Why not? No problem at all, if you say I am 10 minutes away from Dubai. (...) You can come to Sharjah and the evening you can visit Dubai. And the second day in the morning you can drive to Abu Dhabi, it is a one hour drive. Why not? For me, when I used to travel, if I am going to Singapore, I am very close to Malaysia, why not just going over for 2 or 3 days? (...) So we don't attack. I don't go and say 'Ah, Dubai, alcohol, bars, artificial buildings, expensive...',

no, it is a very nice destination, whether you like it or whether you don't like it. So you don't compete with Dubai. You complete Dubai. You get better from people visiting Dubai. And get Dubai to benefit from people visiting Sharjah, why not?

As Mr. Samra concludes, Sharjah's nation branding exercise has been successful in building the Emirate's increasingly global recognition.

In less than two years, I am very satisfied with what we have had achieved and the whole government sector in Sharjah is very happy with Sharjah Media Centre, the messaging, and how we are positioning Sharjah on the world map.

Acknowledging Sharjah's successes in positioning the Emirate for global audiences, many of the interviewed experts call for a more holistic approach to branding. As Ms. Conny Bottger explains it:

I think it is creating an identity (...) as opposed to just looking at what Sharjah has to offer using a couple of fancy colors, and there you go, you came up with a logo. And it gives ownership, that is I think is also very important. Before it was only how we perceive the destination, how we want to be perceived by others, whereas creating an identity is a lengthy process and it involves many more people, many more stakeholders from within and as well as externally. So that in itself grows organically and then people feel

more... yes, it gives that sense of ownership to the identity. And that is also part of the opportunities.

As Ms. Randa Nasri Moshtaha, Manager of the Media & Communications Department at Sharjah's Commerce and Tourism Development Authority narrates,

in the beginning of the 2000s everybody started to work on new branding. And I said, yes, we have to use this logo, and they said, no, no, no, it is not logo, it is the whole brand. So they stopped using the word logo, it is the look-and-feel for the whole place, for the whole organization, and how people receive it. (...) you will never forget the image but if you ask me, I work with SCTDA and I couldn't even remember the logo that was there four years back. It just goes because we keep changing it. (...) It is an image, it is there.

Ms. Conny Bottger puts Sharjah's brand development into a more historical perspective. She explains how the Emirate's destination brand has started off as a Sea, Sun, and Sand (SSS) destination in the sixties and seventies.

I think it also depends on how Sharjah started off as a destination, I think it is also part of where it came from. Because historically Sharjah's destination development goes back to the '30s when the first airport opened, and then the late '60s, early '70s when the first

hotels were built, and at that time it was a proper SSS destination, normally catering for German charter flight tourists, looking for Sea, Sun, and Sand. So I think the Sea, Sun and Sand was there at the time when the Authority was established and it reflected Sharjah's situation as a destination at that time. And (...) in the early '90s, the understanding of the brand itself and the concept wasn't as developed over here yet as it is nowadays. So at that time people were looking at it from an Authority perspective, people were looking at it from what could be offered for tourists as opposed to looking at it as a whole. And also considering how the host community would feel about it as opposed to just advertising the USP for the visitors.

As she continues to elaborate on the social and cultural context of Sharjah, Ms. Conny Bottger points to the particularities of local attitudes to tourism and branding. According to her, one of the reasons behind the host community's reluctance to participate in tourism related activities is a lack of financial need for such revenues.

The UAE as a whole and maybe the entire region as a whole is quite wealthy in general. So if you compare this region, let's say to Syria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, or to many other Arabic countries, to stay within the Arabic context, not to move even to other developing countries, this region here does not really need tourism to the extent that maybe other countries needed it. Egypt, maybe, or

the Levant has a long history, the UAE is nothing in comparison to those countries in when they tourism development really started. The point is that those countries heavily depend and depended on it, so they have always seen tourism as a major source of income for them. Whereas over here, it is something that they hopped up pretty much recently, it has become fashionable, it has become something to diversify with...(…) If you compare it host-community-wise, the UAE national community, if you like, maybe they have not been involved to the extent yet. (...) It is new and there wasn't a need for it. Let me give you an example, just a very brief one. We always encourage programs that we call 'Meet the locals', 'Meet the local people'. It is quite popular in other countries around the world, in whatever country it exists. The less developed, or the poorer the country is, let's see you have a very poor host community, there is a need for them to contribute, and the willingness to work in tourism, if you like, is much greater than in a place which for a lot of other reasons, other than economic reasons, there are a lot of social, cultural reasons also as to why here it may not be, that the local, the host community is not that inclined towards this industry as you may be find it in Morocco, for instance, or Turkey, or other countries, I think.

Often explained by the disinterest of the local population, nation branding professionals admit – at least in between the lines – that national marketing strategies in Sharjah do not involve extensive and wide-scale

research in relation to domestic perceptions of the Emirate's image and image-making processes. As Mr. Bobby Koshy of the Tourism Agency explains it in replying to a question about any perception analysis conducted in domestic audiences:

I am sure that must be. You see the projects that are coming up, like the Heart of Sharjah, I am sure that they have looked around and they have asked around what would you really like to experience in the city? I am sure that they have done a survey on this, I am sure that they have brought in qualified teams who have actually analyzed and dissect this and see how and what actually help a city progress, number one. And two, when tourists come in, and you want to be a tourist destination, what would they like to experience: are they just looking for shops, are they looking for 5-star hotels, are they looking for beaches, or is there a completely unique experience that they would like to have? I am sure that they have done researches on that.

As Mr. Koshy continues, it can be suggested that there has not been any structured research conducted as part of the development of the brand strategy.

I think we did something some time back and we got a very positive reply on the logo itself, on the very fact that it is something new and something different. But I don't have the numbers. (...) See, there are different levels of input. One was that we took input

from the travel industry, that is the hotels, and the tour operators, who actually bring in the tourists, to see how they felt about it, and all of them had a very positive reply. With regard to the tourists itself, I am not sure whether we have done it or not.

Mr. Hazem Al Sawaf, Marketing Director of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority acknowledges the lack of an extended research methodology behind the practice.

Well, we don't have like a big research team, but we do have our team here, we do our own research, we have our own findings, we go around and just look.

It is in the context of the high percentage of expatriate professionals who work in and constitute a large part of Sharjah's tourism development and marketing industries, that the low level of local involvement and a relative lack of local input mechanisms should be emphasized.

Kund Florian (KF): Whenever you say cultural input into a project, who decides about it? I mean, if I look around here...

Sharjah Interviewee (SI): I do.

KF: ...most of the people here are creative experts, most of them are actually not Emirati...

SI: When it comes to products, I do, at the moment.

KF: So how do you identify what is an Emirati tradition?

SI: OK, for the local aspect to it, I have my [colleagues] working with me, who would recommend. But after living here long enough to have sort of a general idea; and then I am taking the touristic demand, perspective. So I am looking at what people would actually want to experience, would want to see, that becomes the hook, and then we see how we can incorporate those. If there is a piece or product that we could tweak, or build around that demand, or the other way around, so it is both sides.

KF: But your gaze is still like a Western gaze.

SI: Yes of course, absolutely. And if I am wrong, if I am gazing at the wrong direction, [my colleagues] are telling it to me that you are going at the wrong direction, and come back here in this direction.

KF: But otherwise there are no...

SI: There is no local input, at the moment.

Ms. Randa Nasri Moshtaha, Manager of the Media & Communications Department of Sharjah's Commerce and Tourism Development Authority confirms the lack of local community involvement in the tourism development and promotion processes. Asking about any input mechanism applied to receive the feedback of the local community she replies:

(...) referring to the host community, the people who live here, the residents, (...) no, we didn't.

However, Ms. Conny Bottger points to the difficulties of involving the local resident community in the tourism development or branding process, since it contains the members of almost 200 nationalities. This lack of homogeneity, she suggests, might mean a problem in terms of ownership of the brand.

It is also a bit tricky, more difficult to conduct it than in other destinations or countries, if you like, because the host community is not homogenous. You have this vast percentage of expatriates living here. And how big their say would be, and much would they feel part of the brand itself if they were to be questioned, for instance, it would throw other questions up... who do you then question, or target with your questions? Are you only looking at the UAE nationals who live here because it is their place, it is their identity, so ultimately it is their say, how they feel about the brand, or you also include others. And then it is maybe less than 20 percents of the total population of Sharjah who are actually UAE nationals, the majority is not.

After a review of how the interviewed experts interpret Sharjah's nation branding efforts, on the following pages this chapter will turn to describe how these practitioners perceive the composition of the national brand image of Sharjah. In addition to identifying the major brand attributes of the Sharjah brand, the chapter will also explore what the interviewed experts think about the development of these characteristics, and how they interpret their function in the context of the supposed interplay between the Emirate's

nation-building imperatives and policies and its nation branding strategies and activities.

The Sharjah Brand

When asked about the major brand attributes of Sharjah, the interviewed policy makers, experts, artists, and academics all agree that it is a bold focus on ‘culture’, ‘heritage’, ‘art’, ‘education’, ‘safety’ and ‘family’ that characterises Sharjah’s national brand image.

Out of this matrix the vision of Sharjah as the ‘Cultural Emirate’ emerges as a programmatic mission that positions Sharjah both within the UAE and also in the region. This characteristic of the place is perceived as an ‘inborn’ quality of its people. Thus, highlighting the cultural tones in Sharjah’s image through nation branding appears as the ‘natural’ way of reflecting local realities and identities. It is clearly emphasized in the interviews that the cultural focus of the brand is not the result of any marketing strategy or positioning, although the Ruler’s vision of a nation rich in culture and proud of its traditions is often mentioned as the main factor behind the current place identity and image. Also, as most interviewed experts also note, Sharjah’s culturally-focused nation-building strategies have set a trend in the region, a model that other emirates and countries increasingly try to follow, at least, in their national image building exercises.

Sharjah’s regional pioneering role in economic and social development is also articulated as a major national brand attribute. Many of the interviewed experts recall the facts that the entire Arab Gulf region’s first airport was

established in Sharjah in 1932, that Sharjah's Port Khalid was the first operational container terminal in the region when opened in 1975. Similarly, the first school in the United Arab Emirates was established in Sharjah in 1907, the first library in the UAE was opened here in 1933, and in 1942 Sharjah became the first emirate to provide education for women. 'Modernness' – understood as mindset and mentality emerges as an additional distinguishing characteristic of Sharjah and its people in the interviews. As the interviewed experts emphasize, however, modernity in Sharjah always comes in a unique blend with respect for tradition and history, and this parallel presence of old and new is a major brand asset of the Emirate. As some of them note, the rapid transformation of the society and the urban landscape in the last decade did not initiate major critical discussions in local public thinking and debates.

Beyond the notions the 'Cultural Emirate' and a pioneer of economic and social modernization in the region, Sharjah is also characterized as 'a family destination'. As it is revealed from the interviews, however, Sharjah as 'a family destination' brings about diverse connotations and meanings. First, the term emphasizes both political stability and individual safety, this latter is understood in terms of a low crime rate. The notion of Sharjah as a family destination, however, also embodies a morally modest and conservative atmosphere and attitude that are perceived to be characterizing the place. Moreover, it also becomes a reference to the Emirate's Islamic values.

These broader categories and brand attributes are usually further qualified in the interviews by a notion of 'authenticity'. Once again, as the interviews reveal, the realm of meaning of this concept includes multiple

understandings ranging from: ‘purity’, ‘modesty’, ‘humbleness’; a sense of being ‘true’, ‘organic’ or ‘locally embedded’; to being ‘unique’ or ‘different’, especially when Sharjah is defined against the neighbouring emirates and other countries in the region. While these categories will be further described and discussed in this chapter, it should be noted here that no other perceived quality carries more relevance to a discussion of Sharjah’s socio-political realities than the notion of authenticity. As this chapter will suggest, given the multicultural composition of Sharjah’s population, authenticity as a brand proposition should be discussed in the context of the Emirate’s ethnocentric tendencies.

The ‘Cultural Emirate’

According to the interviewed experts, out of this matrix of brand attributes, notions of ‘culture’ and ‘cultural’ capture absolute hegemony in the narratives about Sharjah. Articulated as ‘heritage’ or ‘art’, referred to in processes of ‘preservation’, ‘cultivation’, or ‘appropriation’, used for ‘self-referencing’ in the characterization of the population, or as the basis of ‘differentiation’ against the neighboring emirates – ‘culture’ emerges in these interviews as the ‘keyword’ in imagining Sharjah.

It is being ‘cultural’ that provides Sharjah with a unique value proposition in the market of nations. Moreover, identifying with the role of being a ‘cultural pole within the UAE’ provides Sharjah with a programmatic mission by which the Emirate strategically positions itself in the region. As

one of my interviewees summarizes it, the potential of Sharjah's dynamic, intense, and condensed cultural focus is the Emirate's greatest asset.

It [Sharjah] is the 'Cultural Emirate' within the United Arab Emirates and of course, its greatest asset vis-à-vis the rest of the emirates and, of course, the outside world is its cultural potential. Because we have so many museums, we have a wonderful heritage area, and of course, it is not only the material heritage but it is also the intangible heritage which is, for example, we have a lot of events that emphasize the history and heritage of Sharjah, in particular the Heritage Days which happen in April and which are really a unique opportunity to kind of mingle with locals, and to get the feel of the traditional ways and pursuits that they wish to remember and perpetuate within that context. Then, of course, you have the museums, which address all sorts of different aspects, not only specific to Sharjah but also going beyond that, and reaching out to the wider world. (...) So, it is a very dynamic and very condensed cultural focus that, perhaps in its intensity and focus is quite exceptional with regards to the priorities that other emirates are setting, and in that respect, they very beautifully complement each other.

Emphasizing the same point, Mr. Hisham Al Madhloum, Director of the Directorate of Art in the Department of Culture & Information in Sharjah notes the relevance of the awards received by Sharjah as the Arab Capital of

Culture (UNESCO) in 1998 and as the ‘Cultural Capital of the Islamic World’ in 2014. As he says:

In the whole world, Sharjah would get only this point. You know (...) this is the only city in the world that got two cultural capital [awards]. This is very important.

Mr. Osama Samra, Director of the Sharjah Media Centre adds Sharjah’s several museums and its long historical record as additional facts that put culture in the very core of the Sharjah brand:

[We] promote Sharjah as a cultural city (...). We have 22 museums, not artificial ones, museums. We talk about our history being 5000 or 6000 years of establishment when the Portuguese came to the Gulf of Oman, so we give this history to the world, we talk about what we have. That is the way we promote Sharjah.

As Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager of the Destination Development Department of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority continues:

Our strength is in culture and heritage, we have over 21 museums, which is more than the fifty percents of the museums of the UAE. (...) So this is what we are focusing on, that we are a culture and heritage destination.

The interviewed experts all agree that sustainable image making has to be built on existing characteristics and capabilities of a particular nation or place. While brands can certainly be ‘aspirational’, there are serious limitations to a ‘groundless inventing’ of attributes. As they agree, the qualities offered as unique selling propositions have to be ‘real’. The embeddedness of Sharjah’s brand in local realities is another recurring theme in the interviews. Introducing this argument, Mrs. Jawahir Saeed Al Jarwan, Head of Brand Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority brings Sharjah’s logo as an example.

We have done the branding based on what we have in Sharjah. I don’t know if you have seen our logo? We created a triplex: Islamic, culture, Arabic calligraphy, and each color were reflecting a sector in Sharjah. So based on the logo, there is the retail, there is the education, East Coast, the heritage and culture.

However, it is this reflection of local realities that makes Sharjah’s brand to be more than just a logo. As most interviewees agree, the Sharjah brand ‘resonates’ with the identity of the place by linking its cultural image to existing local preferences and capabilities. As Ms. Randa Nasri Moshtaha, Manager of the Media & Communications Department at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority puts it:

We were trying to promote the city as a destination, so even the logo itself has nothing to do with tourism, it has to do with Sharjah

as a city, (...) it is Islamic design in a way, using different colors representing different sectors that we have. So at that time we started to say that it is the brand of Sharjah. It is not only a logo, it is a brand, it is the identity of the city.

As Ms. Bahar Erdogan, International Media Coordinator at the Sharjah Media Centre explains, reputational capital can only be built around brands that are based on the local history and culture.

(...) we talk about image, and the reflection of image is reputation in public relations terms (...). The flow of Sharjah is natural. (...) I just mirror what I am doing. So it goes to the people, I don't create an image, I only reflect who I am. So image and reputation comes convert. That is the ideal situation of how you can build and reputation. (...) I can do that, I have history.

Mr. Osama Samra, Director of the Sharjah Media Centre emphasizes the adjective of "smooth" to describe the cultural-rootedness of the Sharjah brand construct in the cultural context of the place:

The most important thing for me in what Bahar said was things like the flow. It is very smooth.

Ms. Erdogan points to the differences between the branding of products and place- and nation branding to further explain on the relevance of reflecting

local identities in the Sharjah national brand in order to create a credible and sustainable proposition.

In organizations with products like Pepsi, Cola (...) I claim for myself that I taste good, and then people tell me if I actually taste good or not. Because the people can say it is not. It is very individual, it is subjective. But what I do as Sharjah, it stays objective because I just reflect what I am doing. I don't go and create an image, I just do it with the flow of the history, and I just reflect it, and people start understanding and knowing the nation of the Emirate of Sharjah. That is a big difference in how we work here and do it. (...) It is very nice, you can see its self-reflection with humans. But it is a self-reflection. So they don't brought up a new image, they just use what they have to make it a trend, which is different than creating an image...

Ms. Erdogan identifies a focus on local preferences and priorities as the key of the success of the Sharjah nation branding exercise.

Most countries in nation branding misunderstand one thing. When somebody attacks them, which can be a tag, or it can be a criticism, they start attacking others. So they forget themselves. Because they start shouting that these people are like this, and we do it because of this, look what they do wrong etc. What we basically try to do here, this is a better way. (...) I focus on myself. I tell (...) how I

implement, how it goes with my philosophy, how it comes with my culture. Because everything I do is connected to my culture, it is not just some justification why I am doing that. That is a better way than attacking others, than comparing yourself with others.

Mr. Samra also points to the relevance of the total convergence of image and identity in nation branding:

Nation branding is what you are. It is you. (...) Your strengths, your weaknesses, everything. (...) now others should see you exactly how you are. (...) Venice-style does not work anymore, those masks don't work anymore. Be yourself.

For Ms. Erdogan, while tourism promotes only a facade, nation branding should reflect and communicate the identity of a place in its entirety.

In tourism we embrace attractions, we highlight attractions (...) Tourism is one facade, one face of yours, one side. You have it, everybody has it. (...) [nation branding is] everything, from A to Z. Everything you face from complications, from challenges, from experiences, from heritage, from positivity, everything, modern, technology, improvements, cultural changes, from new to old. (...) It is like a human, like a person.

It is this perceived cultural resonance of the national brand that can make locals into the ‘ambassadors’ of Sharjah. As Mrs. Jawahir, Head of Brand Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority explains it:

(...) our brand already represents the people of Sharjah. It is an Islamic and cultural brand. If you can say so, almost all of them are into this kind of things. We are also planning to train people to be the ambassadors of our brand. We are working on a campaign...

It is this perceived convergence between identity and image, concludes the arguments about Sharjah’s culturally-embedded nation branding efforts Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager at the Destination Development Department of the Tourism that makes both nation-building and nation branding successful and sustainable.

If you find your host community to be content with, and to be happily living their identity, and this is maybe something that the Ruler of Sharjah is trying to instill, encourage, and preserve, to conserve the local identity, and this is maybe one of the reasons why he is so much involved in preserving the arts and the culture... So if you think that it is working for your community (...) capitalize on it and maybe highlight it, and bring the best out of it, and include and involve your community, giving them a fair share of how much they can see and contribute?

In the interviews, the embracement of ‘culture’ as a fundamental characteristic of Sharjah is perceived and projected as an ‘inborn’ quality of the place and its people. This notion is elevated almost to the level of myths whose origin fades into history. As Ms. Manal Ataya, Director General of the Sharjah Museums Department argues, Sharjah’s cultural reputation is necessarily based on the ‘nature’ of the place.

[Our] reputation culturally sort of happened just on its own. People started referring to us as the ‘Cultural Emirate’ without us even branding ourselves that way. So it is something that came out later on, we said, well, since he had already established ourselves that way, due to the interest and the support of His Highness for these particular aspects then we might as well sort of continue to utilize this sort of brand that has been sort of attributed to us...

According to these accounts, the branding of Sharjah as the ‘Cultural Emirate’ only follows the recognition and acknowledgment of its achievements by its external audiences. Mr. Osama Samra, Director of the Sharjah Media Centre introduces this argument with utmost directness and clarity.

I don’t know how to explain it but everything, everything in Sharjah speaks culture, by nature I would say.

Sharjah's reputation for culture is exceptionally 'self-understood' for Mr. Marwan Bin Jasem Al Sarkal, CEO Shurooq, Sharjah's Investment & Development Authority.

This is why Sharjah is different. Sharjah doesn't spend a lot when it comes to branding itself, but it is being branded by others as being a culture. Sharjah has never said that we are a 'cultural capital'. We were given the cultural capital [title] by UNESCO. And this is something that is different. We are not seeking to become the capital, we are known for being a culture.

Mr. Bobby Thomas Koshy, Manager of Overseas Promotions Department and Acting Manager of Domestic Promotions Department at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority extends the same argument from the field of international recognitions for Sharjah's cultural policies and efforts to that of its tourism promotion.

(...) we have just started to go out and promote what we have. Prior to this we didn't need to promote Sharjah because Sharjah was (...) always considered something that is rich in culture, rich in heritage as a destination.

Ms. Manal Ataya, Director General of Sharjah's Museums Department brings in a historical perspective to narrate a story about Sharjah as a place that has always been known for its traditions and for being 'artsy'.

(...) it was even in the days of the early 90s, I do remember when people would talk about informally about the Emirate they always said that Sharjah was the ‘Heritage Emirate’, the ‘Cultural Emirate’, it already had that kind of feel for it... In our case, it already had happened prior to anyone branding it, but I think what has been good about the sort of branding exercise that came later is to say that we already have this great strength, we should utilize it, and not let it, sort of not taking it seriously because we didn’t think about it or strategize to make it happen, we are actually lucky that it is something that already exists and we just need to further strengthen it (...).

In her conclusion:

(...) when we were given the award for the Arab Capital of Culture [UNESCO, 1998] that was probably one of the most formal ways of really recognizing the emirate that I think only heightened our reputation for being a ‘Cultural Emirate’. You don’t get an award like that unless you have been doing a lot of work in that area for a quite a while to show for having had that form of accomplishment. And I think that maybe that particular award and the subsequent media attention about it might have coined it even further.

When trying to reconstruct the historical and structural reasons behind the development of Sharjah's image as a cultural emirate, the interviewed experts almost exclusively refer to the Ruler and his vision as the primary reason that has been shaping this course of direction. For Mr. Marwan Bin Jasem Al Sarkal, the CEO of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority, the Sharjah brand as a whole cannot be separated from the Ruler himself.

For the brand attributes, what I believe, in Sharjah, first of all, His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan by himself is a brand ambassador. (...) a lot of things that His Highness does is actually now part of Sharjah's DNA, I would say. Whether it is the green spaces, whether it is the Islamic buildings, or Islamic architecture, the government departments, or the number of mosques around the city, the way how he deals with people, the way how he interacts with issues that are happening in the Arabic world, and the involvement of Sharjah, and on the international level that he supports publishers, he supports readers, he supports literacy, this all comes to Sharjah's package, I would say, what makes Sharjah different, of how can Sharjah be different than other cities.

When asking specifically about Sharjah's culturally-focused course of development and its potential relevance for its nation branding efforts, one of the interviewed experts argued that

(...) is a very genuine initiative that is driven very much by the Ruler.

As Ms. Manal Ataya of the Museums Department puts it:

(...) this has been our path and it should be our path and we should continue to do everything that at the end goes back into that one vision which has always been His Highness' vision in place since the 70s basically, when he was originally concerned with not just history, but at that time with a lot with archeological excavations, and later all the (...) museums that were built over the last two decades.

Mr. Marwan Bin Jasem Al Sarkal, the CEO of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority further strengthens the argument about the almost absolute relevance of the Ruler's cultural vision in shaping the main tenets of the national brand for decades.

I think 80% of the Sharjah brand is His Highness. He has been supporting culture, art, literacy, poetry since day one. Even before becoming a ruler, he used to do a lot of events, he used to support culture in a different perspective.

Ms. Shaikha Al Mazrou, artist and lecturer in the College of Fine Arts & Design of the University of Sharjah extends the argument to the wider family

of the Ruler. As she argues, the immediate relatives of the Emir have contributed significantly to shaping the Emirate's culture- and education-friendly policies.

I would say it is the Cultural Emirate because of Sheikh Sultan and the Ruler's family. Absolutely because of him and his direction. And the fact that he is a big pursuer of education, I don't know if you have been out in the University campus, he has really gone behind that, and actually, if you look at all his family, masallah, all of them have got really good positions and they are very much into the world of the art, and reading. They are a very active family actually, especially the women, they are very strong. And you have got the Sharjah Literary festival, the Sharjah Children's reading Festival, and you have got all the Museums Department and it is all headed by them, and you have got one of his daughters Sheikha Hoor at the Art Foundation (...).

Ms. Manal Ataya, Director General of the Sharjah Museums Department emphasizes the personal guidance and interest of the Ruler in developing the concept and agenda of Sharjah's more than twenty museums. Ms. Ataya's comments also highlight the strategic influence of the Ruler on shaping the Emirate's image and reputation through its museums.

It all comes from his interest and his directions. All of the museums that we have in Sharjah, even the Museums Department,

the whole vision comes from His Highness and of how he wanted or wants Sharjah to be and perceived as. Whether it is through his collections we keep on displaying every now and then, or through our exhibitions, even the exhibitions which come to us from the Department of Culture, all of them are through his directions.

Through the recalling of the long history of Sharjah's internationally recognized cultural activities, Ms. Nawar Al Qassimi also explains Sharjah's cultural commitment and reputation by the importance the Ruler has been attributing to an embracement of arts and education as a measure and instrument of nation-building. Ms. Al Qassimi also notes that these efforts by now have successfully transformed the values of Sharjah's residents who give further encouragement to such policies.

In Sharjah it is actually the vision of the Ruler. (...) That is what people say and that is actually very true. For example, the cultural activities here in Sharjah are over 20, maybe 22 years old. That is when the first Biennial happened. But then you have the Sharjah Book Fair that happened even before, the theatres as well, in that same age of bracket, so about 20 years ago. And if you think about it, the Emirates was so young at that time, there was nothing going on, but there was a need for it, so basically the Ruler recognized the importance of art and culture, and that was out of his personal vision, basically. And until today you can see it in Sharjah, the importance that has been placed on art and culture, rather than on

tourism or leisure or business, or anything else. You can see it with the universities, the schools, and I think even just the values of the people here, it is different. (...) it has been on forever (...).

As one of the interviewees from the American University of Sharjah argues, the Ruler's commitment to education should also be interpreted in the context of this vision and mission.

(...) it is the interest of the Ruler (...). I think it is partly this that he is very interested in leaving his mark on education and academia, and in the culture itself.

The Ruler and his daughter's personal interests in education and arts have also been mentioned in the interview with Ms. Ebtisam Abdulaziz, writer and art curator, and an iconic figure of Sharjah's art scene.

I think Sharjah is well known as a cultural capital. Sheikh Sultan himself he is a doctor and he is also teaching at the University the history of art. So you have this Ruler who is really into art and he is really trying his best to push it until the end, because he wanted it to be the place where you can see everything in terms of heritage. And they have festivals, not only for art but the Islamic festival, and they have also a larger number of museums, I don't know how many, we have a lot of museums here in Sharjah. So he is focused on this. Also, Sheikha Hoor [the daughter of the Ruler and the

President of the influential Sharjah Art Foundation], she had this degree in art (...) so I think the whole family is supporting it so much.

Ms. Bahar Erdogan, the Global Communications Coordinator of the governmental Sharjah Media Centre continues to draw a direct relationship between the personality or personal preferences of the Ruler and Sharjah's reputation as 'the Cultural Emirate'.

No, it is nothing historical. You know, what I believe is that when you have a system like the United Arab Emirates where you have rulers, it is always, it is a little bit of the preferences of the Ruler himself. His Highness, the Ruler of Sharjah, he is a very educated personality and his heart goes for education. His heart is to build a nation that is educated, where the rate of analphabetism is just decreasing... Another Emirate would be focusing on something else. Our Ruler in Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed al Maktoum, he is focused more on economic growth. He takes care of his people as well, but his heart goes for growth and investment and as he says himself: to be number one this is what he loves. And Abu Dhabi, it would be more industries, more the security of the UAE, because they are responsible as the President sits there, he is responsible for the whole security of the UAE. So they care more about the whole than rather too much on one focus only.

As for Sharjah, Ms. Sherifa Madgwick, Manager of Development and Communication at the Sharjah Centre for Cultural Communication concludes the same argumentation:

(...) each emirate is offering something different, like Sharjah is Capital of Islamic Culture, very much known by the ruler, Sheikh Sultan, mashaallah he is really into promoting culture and education, he is a big advocate for that, he like his books...

For Ms. Alya Rashid Burhaima, Manager of the Education and Interpretation Department at the Sharjah Museums Department, the Ruler's strategic emphasis on culture and education has left its mark on the social and human development of Sharjah's population.

It is the vision of the Ruler. It is all driven by the Ruler, Dr Sultan al Qassimi. (...) we are his reflection. I think we are his reflection and this is what interests him and I think this is what interests us as well. And I think this is because we want to save the place and to carry it to the next generation. And I think it is all driven from His Highness. It is not about a marketing strategy, having outsourced companies to do that.

After a review of the arguments about the paradigmatic role of the Ruler's cultural vision and guidance in shaping Sharjah's model of identity and image building, it is interesting to note that questions about a potential

marketing choice and strategy behind Sharjah's culturally-thematized image-making model are consequently refused in the interviews. As Mr. Osama Samra, Director of the Sharjah Media Centre puts it:

No, it is not a marketing choice. His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah, he is a holder of a number of PhDs, he is an author, and he is very much into education and into culture, so if you go around in Sharjah you will see the largest university city in the Middle East, you will see the Cultural Palace, you will see the museums, that is how Sharjah it became Sharjah, it is absolutely not a marketing choice.

As one of the interviewed experts further elaborates on this argument:

Because the Ruler is a scholar, and personally pursues research in history, and is an intellectual and also from that angle already he is actively involved in these cultural, intellectual, academic, and artistic projects. (...) he is very genuine in combining obviously the pragmatic benefits of this approach with the idealistic benefits of this approach, and that is a very beautiful thing here. You know, it is not just a cold marketing strategy that is meant to bring so many million dollars into the country. No, it is not like that, it is much more idealistic and holistic, if you like, that gives us here I think a very special feel as well.

Mr. Peter Jackson, the chief Architect Advisor in the Ruler's Office also refuses the suggestion that the cultural thematization of the Sharjah brand could primarily be the result of a marketing choice or strategy. Rather, he draws a parallel between the values of the Ruler and the direction of Sharjah's cultural policies, enlisting a long-history of cultural initiatives. Mr. Jackson also points to the differences between Sharjah's nation building strategies which created a cultural reputation for the Emirate, and Dubai's successful nation branding exercises which use cultural themes for promoting the place.

I don't think that branding is something that you just create. I think the values that Sharjah holds in the UAE, and holds very dear, are very much the values of the Ruler, Dr. Sheikh Sultan, his concerns for education, his concerns for history - he is a historian, his concern for tolerance and global understanding, his concern for culture, I worked with him now for six years, and I see somebody who is constantly, who sees all the links, and not the differences and divisions in the society we live in, and between the arts and the sciences, and for instance the museums program, Sharjah has always had lots of museums, before Dubai started building them in the 90s and 2000s. And we had those museums because it is part of an education program, it is part of a cultural policy, similarly with the theaters, and the art Biennial, and so on. These are not things that have been set up to sell Sharjah but they have come from real internal concerns, real closely held values from the Ruler and his family, and shared values in the leadership of Sharjah. So I think it

is no coincidence that we have those museums that we have all the archeological research going on along with the scientific research, the establishment of the universities, the links between schools and the museums, putting science museums next to art museums, trying to inculcate a sense of culture and science. (...) As opposed to Dubai what I see very much as a brand, and Sharjah in many ways tries to emulate Dubai's successful brand selling, but I think inside is that the brand already existed and it is very much based on culture that includes education and includes welfare as well.

As most interviewed experts believe, Sharjah's long-term cultural commitment has set a trend in the region. As Mr. Peter Jackson argues, Sharjah's model has been increasingly emulated by Dubai and Abu Dhabi. In these narratives, Sharjah's focus on culture as a fundamental and historical truth about the city and its people elevates the emirate to a position of exceptionality. It also becomes a source of pride that is based on a self-referential differentiation against other countries in the region. In the words of Mr. Jackson:

I think it is being emulated by Dubai, I think it has set a model, and I think that is a very good thing that it set a model that it is making other people very conscious, other emirates very conscious about the importance of this heritage and of culture and education. But I think Sharjah is taking over, it has always sort of led it, much earlier than the others.

Ms. Nawar Al Qassimi emphasizes the relevance of this trend, and thus Sharjah's model, for the development of art venues in the region and for changing attitudes towards cultural activities in general.

(...) now I think other people are... because as you said there is a cultural boom in the Gulf, other people are catching on, you have all these cultural activities that are popping up everywhere, you have the museums that are coming up in Abu Dhabi, you get the Art Fairs in Dubai, so there is an importance or, people are aware of the importance of art.

As this has been argued in this part of the chapter, an embracement of culture and art is seen by the interviewed experts as one of the most important attributes of the Sharjah brand. It is perceived as a characteristic of the place and its people that originates from the specific development model of the Emirate based on the cultural vision and nation-building efforts of the Ruler. Although most practitioners accepted the relevance of cultural thematization for brand building and promotion, they refused to interpret it only as the result of a specific place marketing model. Some of the interviewed professionals have also suggested that Sharjah's culturally-focused communication about itself has set a regional trend that other emirates have recently started to follow. In the following part of this chapter I will discuss another major brand attribute of Sharjah as it emerges from the interviews.

Proud of a history of modernness

As the interviews show, in addition to notions of culture, heritage, history and art, stories of successful social development and economic modernization play an equally important role in the making of the Sharjah brand. Moreover, the history and development of Sharjah and the UAE as successful stories of nation-building also serve as sources of patriotism and pride that are prevalent in the narratives about the national brand. Mr. Bobby Thomas Koshy, Manager of the Overseas Promotions Department and Acting Manager of the Domestic Promotions Department of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority highlights those historical references that prove Sharjah's pioneering role in economic and social development in the region.

(...) we are very proud of our history and culture. And we want to showcase the fact that, for example, Sharjah had the very first airport in the UAE, so the very first airline came into Sharjah in 1932, the first hospital, the first school, so there are so many things we are proud of when it comes to what we had before. We don't want to erase it or eradicate it, we want to show it.

As Ms. Sherifa Madgwick, Manager of Development and Communication of the Sharjah Centre for Cultural Communication continues, the founding father of the UAE and the ruling family of Sharjah are both richly credited in these narratives of success. As she argues, their leadership qualities and vision are

highlighted as the bases of the success of the country and its course of nation building and development.

There is that general pride of the whole concept of the country, you know, ‘Sheikh Zayed was our forefather’, they are very proud of Sheikh Zayed.

While acknowledging the scale and depth of social and economic development in the UAE and Sharjah in the last three or four decades, Ms. Madgwick also points to the role of the ruling elite in cultivating a sense of pride in the population over these achievements.

I would tell you that Emiratis are incredibly patriotic. Very patriotic. (...) It has been very installed on them from the leaders, I think, to be very proud of their achievement. (...) it is a very young country. Forty one years, and I have been here for more than half of that, what a massive change!

Mr. Peter Jackson, advisor in the Ruler’s Office puts this general sense of pride over progress into historical perspectives. As he argues, it is centuries of achievements that serve as the basis of an inbuilt, national self-confidence in Sharjah.

I think the West completely underestimated the profound, core importance of Islamic science, thinking, architecture, in cultural

terms, that bridge, that link from Romans and the Greeks through to the Renaissance. And in a way, I think, His Highness just implicitly understands that. And he has a great sense of the cultural aspects as well as the religious aspects of Islam. (...) Sharjah sees itself as part of that and I think it is celebrating it but at the same time in a completely tolerant way. (...) It is very different here, certainly than it was in Zimbabwe where there was a huge amount of insecurity about cultural identity. Here it is just an inbuilt self-confidence.

In addition to a general sense of pride over achievement and development, the interviewees also recognize the parallel presence of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ elements in Sharjah’s urban landscape, attitude to culture and art, and even in the mentality of its people. The notion of Sharjah as a ‘unique blend’ of these different references of ‘old’ and ‘new’ seems to be built into the very core of the perception of the place, also serving as a unique selling point of its brand image. As Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager of Destination Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority notes:

We have been marketing ourselves as an amalgam of come and see Sharjah and meet or experience the authentic within a modern framework.

Ms. Jawahir Saeed Al Jarwan, Head of Brand Development at the Media & Communications Department of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority further elaborates on the brand proposition of Sharjah as a place of 'old' and 'new'. She highlights the marketing motivations behind the construct and its relevance for place promotion.

When we started the branding all of them had the idea that Sharjah was only a cultural destination that targets only people who like culture and art and these kinds of things. But we wanted to develop this idea and make it wider. Like it is a place for education, and we have the East Coast, we have new things coming up, we also have new malls, shopping centres. We want to mix the old and the new, so that we have two different things that we offer. (...) we have the old souqs and we have the shopping malls.

Highlighting the infrastructural element, Mr. Bobby Thomas Koshy, Manager of the Overseas Promotions Department and Acting Manager of the Domestic Promotions Department at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority provides a detailed explanation of this brand positioning.

What we want to do is that we want to ensure that there is a perfect blend between the fact that we have a lot of history and culture, it very much exists in this city, and at the same time we are a very modern city. We have a modern network when it comes to roads, when it comes to airport, infrastructure, so there is a bit of both. It

is not like we are building on the new and you don't see the old anymore. We want to make it sure that when you see the city of Sharjah, when you see the Emirate of Sharjah, a good part of the old still reflects, but in the same time it is a very modern city. So that is what we have. We have both. We have got the best possible educational system, the local transportation is very high, infrastructure when it comes to water and electricity is very high, we have a fantastic airline that is doing phenomenally well. So that for the tourists who come, they will see it is a modern city and they don't lack anything in the modern world, and if they want to see and experience some of the old Sharjah, we have an area that is dedicated just to represent that old Sharjah. So that is very strong with us.

As he continues, Mr. Koshy puts a further emphasis on what he perceives 'a sense of uniqueness' of Sharjah as a destination due to the parallel presence of 'traditional' and 'modern' offerings. In his narration, tradition, culture, museums, family and safety take one side of the offering while the other end is characterized by modernity, vibrancy, leisure and shopping.

We want to be unique when it comes to what Sharjah represents. And that is rich traditions, rich culture, rich in hospitality, it is a family destination, it is a safe destination. And at the same time we have beaches, we have shopping, we have museums that people would like to come and visit. What we want to show out in the

market that it is a modern, vibrant, and at the same time rich in culture destination. And this is what I think we are doing very well.

Ms. Ebtisam Abdulaziz, artist, writer, curator, and an editor of the 'Al Tashkeel' Magazine of the Fine Art Society in Sharjah argues that this unique mix of 'traditional' and 'modern' approaches is also present at the art scene of the Emirate.

(...) they are taking care of the heritage part, but also the very modern, the conceptual part of art, too. So I think it is good because if you are very traditional and you have this taste that you love it, you can see it. And if you are very modern... so you have both, they are focusing on both.

As Ms. Abdulaziz continues, the notion of 'modern' becomes associated with the idea of an urban landscape that is based on a 'fantasy image', and 'tradition' is referred to as a respectful approach that embraces culture.

I think Sharjah has kept this image of a very respectful city in terms of taking care of the mentality and the culture and again trying to keep that image of the heritage and very traditional city but there is another part of Sharjah that is completely different, like the Khalid Lagoon, there are hundreds of restaurants and a very fantasy image of Sharjah. So I think this is what I like. I think Sharjah is quite, yes, sometimes it gets busy and the traffic is bad,

but again, you still have this feeling of an inspiring city. (...) I think it is important to protect the heritage and also to protect the traditions, and focus on both... to keep this, and to keep doing the buildings, the fantasy things because again, if you are thinking about Dubai and Sharjah you see a lot of people visiting, and they focus on different things, so it is nice to have all of it together in one place.

Mr. Hazem Al Sawaf, Marketing Director of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority further connects this attribute of the brand to the Emirate's urban landscape.

Modernity is of course always there. But again, not always modernity. If you have noticed, one of our projects, the Al Majaz Waterfront, it is completely new in terms of design elements and architecture. And even in terms of activations, like events, or marketing promotion. But let's look at the other project, which is the Heart of Sharjah project, it is a restoration project, going back to tradition and going back to roots. Yes we are going forward, modernity, but again, we doing some conservation and restoration work based on that as well.

As Mr. Al Sawaf emphasizes, however, notions of 'tradition' and 'modernity' often point to qualities which are beyond the objects of culture, arts, and the urban landscape. As he suggests, these terms should also be

understood and highlighted as characteristics of a distinctive mindset, or mentality that characterizes Sharjah and its people, and also as a register in which Sharjah is portrayed as a multifaceted identity and place.

(...) moving forward doesn't mean modernity, always. It means the improving of the lifestyle, improving the ways how we look at things, that's it.

Mr. Marwan Bin Jasem Al Sarkal, CEO of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority also emphasizes that Sharjah's 'modernness' points beyond the city's urban skyline. As he argues, 'traditional' and 'modern' elements in Sharjah's identity should be interpreted almost as particular kinds of mental and behavioral patterns. It is interesting to note that in his narration the terms 'Arabic' and 'Islamic' become associated with notions of 'truthfulness', 'honesty' and 'respect', while 'modernness' is defined through the effective corporate culture of his organization, Shurooq, and by a lack of "very poor manpower".

(...) in Shurooq we always want to say proudly that we are a modern, Islamic, and Arabic city. We don't want to be seen in a different way. And when we say modern I mean modern in the way how we deal with people. With the attributes of being an Islamic city, that you have to be truthful, you have to be honest, you have to respect everyone who comes to you, to respond people's inquiries... And that is why we say modern, Arabic, and Islamic,

we don't want only be known as an Arabic, but we have a pride in our religion being an Islamic, but in the same time we want to have our identity. Yes, you might see that we have Islamic design but we don't want to be known as having a nice city but a very poor manpower.

Although most interviewed experts agree on the marketing value of the parallel existence of 'traditional' and 'modern' in Sharjah, as Ms. Nawar Al Qassimi argues it is the heritage element, especially in its authentic form, that brings visitors closest to the identity of the place.

(...) it is also another vision of His Highness, to preserve... because as beautiful as the skyscrapers and the towers are that is not the identity. People don't want to get on a plain and leave their metropolitan city to come and see another one, especially, if it is not original, authentic. People want to see this. And people are always surprised when they come and see all these buildings and they say 'Oh my God, how do all these buildings pop up?' So it is important to preserve the heritage even it resorts into a more modern approach. It is part of the identity.

The apparent sense of 'pride' for progress has also been criticized by some of the interviewed nation branding practitioners themselves who would prefer less from the modern references in the Sharjah brand. As one of my interviewees argues, however, the general pride of the local, Emirati policy

makers and practitioners over the country's achievement overtakes the criticism.

(...) the decision will always be taken by them. Hence you have that cultural influence and the way how they see their own nation, and how they look at themselves. And (...) especially, because this generation is so young and their workforce is so young, and the country is so modern, they themselves highlight those modern aspects and things. So I think it actually comes from higher management, from Emirati management, that in lot of our promotional collateral we have phrases that say come to Sharjah and experience the authenticity within the modern infrastructure for example, and then you have all those buildings and skyscrapers, they are very proud about it...

As one of the interviewed professors at the American University of Sharjah concludes, however, these stories of successful development are apparently uncritical of the modernization or development course of the nation.

I think they are proud of what they have achieved, I don't think they had the time to see the implications of this, I think with time you will feel, when things settle down people usually start thinking about what happened, how it affected or didn't affect... perhaps the family structures and all of this. But right now people are still going through

the process, it takes a longer time, they don't actually stop to pause and see what is going on.

As this part of the chapter suggested, in addition to its bold cultural references, a sense of pride over the successful economic and social development of the Emirate features strongly in the Sharjah national brand. More precisely, the 'modern' elements of the brand are perceived to appear along those of the 'traditional', mostly heritage-related ones, creating a unique value proposition of the Sharjah blend of 'old' and 'new'. As the chapter explained, in these narratives the traditional elements are mostly understood and represented as forms of historical architecture, heritage-related institutions, museums, while modernity is embodied in a developed urban landscape and infrastructure, and as opportunity for leisure and commercial activities. However, the interviews also highlighted that 'tradition' and 'modernity' represent particular mentalities, too, which in a balanced manner form an integral part of the Sharjah identity and brand.

On the following pages I will discuss how the brand attribute and tagline of Sharjah as a 'family destination' becomes a reference to the Emirate's relatively conservative atmosphere as compared to its neighbors. The chapter will also introduce the arguments that will aim to connect nation branding to those ideological strategies of the state that are seen to be reflecting on Sharjah's sociopolitical realities.

A family destination

Sharjah is often portrayed as a ‘family destination’ in the interviews. On the following pages I will try to explore the different understandings of this tagline. As it will be argued, the notion of Sharjah as a family destination does not only refer to a place that is safe, clean, and children-friendly but it also suggests an attitude that is morally conservative and in many ways adhere to Islamic values, and that is perceived to characterize the Emirate’s identity. The results presented on the following pages will be discussed in the next chapter in the context of academic literature on the sociopolitical realities of the Emirates, with a focus on the multicultural composition of Sharjah’s population, and on the government’s ethnocentric nation-building policies. As it will be argued, the particular notion of the patriarchal and Muslim ‘family’ portrayed in these narratives may function as an ideological construct of the ethnocentric state and thus, nation branding can be seen an instrument that supports the government in its contest for hegemony over interpretations.

As Mr. Osama Samra, Director of the Sharjah Media Centre states, if Sharjah was a car, it would be a Land Cruiser:

When five or six years back we announced the branding of the Emirate of Sharjah (...) we used to work with (...) a USA-based branding company, one of the largest, actually, in the US. I remember (...) I had one of the branding agencies with us asking questions. He said ‘Mr. Samra, if Sharjah was a car, what would it be?’ (...) I said ‘Excuse me?’ ‘If Sharjah was a car, what would it be?’. I said ‘4x4’. Just like that. He said ‘What 4x4?’ I said ‘Land

Cruiser, maybe'. He said 'Why?' I said 'Because it is a family car'. He said 'Yes!'. Sharjah is a family destination, if Sharjah was a car, it would be a family car. (...) I said it because I felt it, I didn't say it based on a study, no, I just felt it and I said it.

The notion of a family destination reveals multiple characteristics of the place. According to Ms. Bahar Erdogan, Global Communications Coordinator of the Sharjah Media Centre, the term of a family destination describes Sharjah as a place of both political stability and individual safety. In her narration, Sharjah is a family destination because it offers safety for the visitors in contrast the the political turmoil of the wider region, and also in terms of a low crime rate.

Another thing is (...) the safety of the country. (...) Both political stability and individual safety. When you visit, it is safe, when you go out, nothing happens to you. To feel this (...) in any country (...) it is rare. (...) the UAE (...) is one of the safest countries in the world. It is proven. (...) it is a family destination, it is very well known and promoted.

Mr. Samra provides further clarification and support for a perception of safety in Sharjah:

(...) when we promote Sharjah internationally we promote it from a tourism perspective, we go and we promote Sharjah as a family

destination, because it is a family destination: it is very safe, the crime rate is less than 1% (...).

In addition to safety, being a family destination is also often mentioned in the context of Sharjah's children-friendly cultural and entertainment facilities. Ms. Mandy Merzaban, Collections Manager and Curator of the Barjeel Art Foundation points to Sharjah's many museums which are planned to host and entertain families as their primary function.

I think that is mostly the intention... if you look at all these developments like the Al Qasba, Al Majaz, the Heritage Area, yes there is a family aspect and that it very much a cultural destination (...). (...) the intention seems to be more like family-based. You go to the Aquarium and all these places with a lot of families... And lot of the museums in Sharjah is very family friendly, whereas if you go to other places the museums are focused on prestige. So I think with Sharjah, it has more of a down to earth...

Beyond the idea of a safe and children-friendly place, the notion of Sharjah as a family destination also describes an atmosphere and attitude that is 'morally conservative'. As Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager Destination Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority summarizes this meaning of the term:

(...) we are a little bit conservative. That is why we call ourselves a family destination.

As she continues to elaborate on this layer of meaning of the notion, she puts Sharjah in contrast with the perception of the more liberal Dubai in the context of their entertainment and leisure policies.

We are not like Dubai, we don't have nightlife, we don't have clubs, we don't have alcohol to offer to our tourists, it is more conservative, it is a family destination.

The contrast with Dubai in this context is further strengthened by Mr. Osama Samra, Director of the Sharjah Media Centre.

We believe in Sharjah, we believe that we have something for everyone. But if you are looking for towers and shopping malls, if you are looking for nightlife... then one of the most amazing cities, I would say, in the world from that prospective, for you, is Dubai.

Ms. Jawahir Saeed Al Jarwan, Head of Brand Development at the Media & Communications Department of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority points to an additional layer of interpretation of Sharjah's morally conservative stand as a family destination. As she implies, Sharjah is not a place for youthful romance.

It is a family and business destination. (...) whatever we are doing it is mainly for families, so for people who want to plan their vacation with their family. It is not like for couples...

From this angle of the notion of a family destination as a morally conservative and modest place, the circle of Sharjah's brand attributes are further enriched by the often mentioned fact that the sale and consumption of alcohol is banned in the Emirate. As Mr. Osama Samra, Director of the Sharjah Media Centre argues:

Because the Emirate of Sharjah, what is the word... because you don't get alcohol in Sharjah, because the Emirate of Sharjah is more family-oriented (...) It is a family destination. (...) Alcohol is banned in the Emirate of Sharjah because it is a family destination. That is it. It is a safe destination. Everywhere in the world alcohol is one of the reasons that the crime level is up there.

Ms. Jawahir Saeed Al Jarwan, Head of Brand Development at the Media & Communications Department of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority further strengthens the argument about the relationship between Sharjah's strict stand on alcohol and nightlife and its perceived status as a family destination that is favoured by the morally conservative visitors from the region.

(...) in Sharjah we don't have alcohol, we don't have shisha, it is not allowed in Sharjah. I think the Saudis like to come here because they think it is a family oriented place so I that is why they are more attracted to come to Sharjah.

It is interesting to note, however, as Mr. Hisham Al Madhloum, Director of the Directorate of Art at the Department of Culture & Information in Sharjah emphasizes, that being a conservative and modest place does not make Sharjah a culturally closed destination. As he argues:

They are open for their culture (...) but in our ways. They make control of it in the same time. There is no alcohol and there is no cigar or shisha outside.

As Mr. Samra continues to argue for the role of the ban of alcohol in strengthening Sharjah's status and perception as a safe place and a family destination, he brings what he sees is, the region's cultural preferences into the discussion.

And that is why you see visitors from the GCC are around 50 percents of the total tourist flow to Sharjah. Why is that? We have done a research. We have asked a Kuwaiti guy, or a Saudi guy, or a Qatari guy... He prefers to stay in a hotel in Sharjah with his family because for him it is safe. He is not worried that his wife or his daughter or even his son would bump into the wrong guy in the

lobby of the hotel or in public. Maybe it won't happen but for them it is safe, for them it is family oriented. It is within their culture. It is the culture of this area, of this region.

For Ms. Nawar Al Qassimi this conservative quality of the Sharjah brand is connected to the cultural values and even laws of the place. Still, she joins other interviewed experts in that none of them would try drawing a direct and bold connection between Sharjah's perception as a family destination and it is being a majority Muslim place.

The Sharjah brand is culture, definitely (...) and it is family-oriented. It has... I don't want to say religious but modest values. It goes by the Islamic values, the Islamic law (...) it respects the laws.

It can be argued that according to the perception of the interviewed experts, the Sharjah brand remains short of any direct emphasis on the Islamic character of the place. Ms. Jawahir Saeed Al Jarwan, Head of Brand Development at the Media & Communications Department of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority explains this characteristic of the brand by the sensitive nature of talking about Islam in the context of marketing and tourism promotion.

Usually we don't sell these kinds of ideas. We concentrate on how people used to live and to give information only about this kind of things. Because it is a little bit sensitive to talk about Islam and

tourism. Some people will not accept this kind of things. So what we do usually is that we give information about what we have but not necessarily about Islam. It is how people used to live, the buildings, the architecture, things that people will accept. For me, I can see a building about other religions, to know about it, but I won't try to do things that are related to religion or culture, maybe some people they will not accept it.

As Mr. Bobby Koshy, Manager of the Overseas Promotions Department at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority further explains it, highlighting the Islamic character of the Emirate might interfere with its intended perception as a tolerant and multireligious place.

We have never hidden the fact that we are an Islamic state, or a country. We have been very proud to be an Islamic state or country. At the same time, we are very tolerant with all other religions. We have churches here, we have temples here, we have various other forms of worship that are actually allowed in the UAE. So we have never used religion as a way for tourism.

This part of the chapter has discussed the multiplicity of meaning behind one of Sharjah's major brand attributes: being a family destination. As it has been revealed based on the interviews, the notion of family carries a wide realm of references to cultural, moral, and even to religious attitudes which are seen to characterize Sharjah. In the discussion part of these results

we will argue that this ‘culturally sensitive’ atmosphere can, and often does become associated with a sort of ethnic exclusivity. As it will be suggested, the notion of ‘family’ as a place of ‘moral purity and safety’ can often carry the connotation of a place where national home resides in the context of the reality of an extremely multicultural environment. Before turning to the discussion of the results and the developing of these arguments, the following pages will introduce the most important characteristic of the Sharjah brand, that is a quality referred to through the notion of authenticity.

The most authentic of the seven emirates

Across all major brand attributes discussed so far, a qualifier notion of ‘authenticity’ emerges in the interviews as an overall, and in this sense, paradigmatic characteristic of the Sharjah national brand. It is by ‘authenticity’ that Sharjah’s cultural focus and its attitude to heritage and contemporary art are differentiated from similar tendencies in the region, and it is its moral and cultural ‘authenticity’ that secures Sharjah as a safe environment for families. The notion of authenticity, however, attains a complex structure of meaning in these narratives.

As Mr. Hazem Al Sawaf, Marketing Director of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority summarizes the proposition, it is connected to Sharjah’s qualities of both being a cultural emirate and a family destination.

Looking into the fabrics of Sharjah... It is based on culture, it is based on authenticity, it is based on purity, family ties, relationship. It is a very, I would say... it is a humble city. It is a really humble city. Our Emirate, let's put it this way, has a lot to offer, it takes care a lot of the family fabric and the families, the society, and the community as a whole. The focus on culture, the focus on authentic experiences were not driven by commercial needs but by the need to develop the community and the society.

Before we begin to explore and understand the rich realm of interpretations and references that will gradually reveal themselves from these narratives, it is important to note that in most of the interviews 'authenticity' is described as a 'feeling'. More precisely, it is generally referred to as kind of an 'atmosphere' that can be sensed when one enters the place. In this context, 'authenticity' as a feeling puts an emphasis on the credibility of the brand experience. As Mr. Bobby Thomas Koshy, Manager of Overseas Promotions Department and Acting Manager of Domestic Promotions Department at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority narrates in relation to the Heart of Sharjah project, which is at the time of writing the largest heritage restoration initiative of the Middle East – 'authenticity' is a notion of 'originality' one can immediately 'feel' in Sharjah:

I think we take pride in the fact that if you go the Heritage Area, you immediately feel the authenticity of the area, when compared to a few other areas in the neighboring emirates that I have been to,

it feels very plastic, it feels very man-made, it feels like it have been created and dumped everything to install steel-structures. While here if you go through you can actually feel it, you can actually feel that people have lived here, that people have actually experiences here.

Mr. Hazem Al Sawaf, Marketing Director of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority also recites an ‘authentic’ experience one can ‘feel’ at a place that, in his words, ‘still has its sense’:

In terms of look and feel, in terms of authenticity, if you compare it to other projects around the world, or around the region let’s put it this way, it still has its sense. You go there and you still can feel that this is how the city used to be, and it is. It is not even restored, it is as is.

For Ms. Ms. Nawar Al Qassimi, it is its cultural and arts scene in general, and its museums in particular that project a ‘feel’ of ‘authenticity’ in Sharjah – in a sense of being ‘organic’ as opposed to being ‘fabricated’, this latter is a general experience one can feel at similar places in the neighboring Emirates.

I am from Sharjah, I know that there has always been this long-term plan in art and it is very organic, you feel it. When you walk into a museum or when you walk into the cultural district you feel that it is actually authentic. Whereas when you go to some of the

places in Dubai, you feel that it is actually fabricated. It is very new, it is very different, it doesn't have the same feel to it. It is obviously not as old as the arts scene in somewhere in New York, or somewhere in Italy, Venice, but you still feel the authenticity.

In most of these narratives, 'authenticity' refers to objects and forms of cultural production that remain 'true' to the traditions of the place. In this sense, 'authenticity' carries the meaning of being 'locally-embedded' and 'home-grown'. As Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager of Destination Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority defines the concept of 'authenticity' as 'culturally true':

For me, personally, I would very much promote it as a cultural... or the most authentic of the seven emirates. Come here if you want to experience true Emirati culture.

The notion of 'authenticity' as 'originality' is repeated in the interview with Mr. Bobby Thomas Koshy. As the Manager of the Overseas Promotions Department and Acting Manager of the Domestic Promotions Department of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority argues restoration helped Sharjah to remain 'authentic' in its heritage preservation efforts and thus to retain its identity.

(...) if you look at our museums or if you look at the Heritage Area, most of it is restored (...). If you go to other places, it is

created. Now we are talking about existing which that have been restored, and there is a huge difference between being renovated, created, and restoration (...). (...) I think the Ruler of Sharjah has spent a lot of money for keeping Sharjah as much as possible to its origin, and not deviate... (...) a good part of the city has also retained its identity.

Ms. Mandy Merzaban, Collections Manager and Curator at the Barjeel Art Foundation uses the terms of ‘real’ and ‘down to Earth’ to characterize the ‘authenticity’ one can feel in Sharjah.

I think you come to Sharjah and it feels a bit more down to Earth, more real (...), you run into things that are a bit more authentic.

As a major theme, ‘authenticity’ also emerges as the identifier of an attitude to culture that embraces its communal and social values and functions instead of exploiting its commercial potentials. In this context, once again, Sharjah is defined against its neighbors who are portrayed less ‘authentic’ in their approaches to culture, heritage, tradition, and art. As Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager of Destination Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority explains it:

There is a lot of commercial aspect and economic reason to why people would offer authenticity, and then one could argue that it is not real, it is staged authenticity. The feedback that I get a lot from

external sources coming to visit Sharjah for the first time that we are maybe the only emirate out of the seven that has actually kept that authentic touch and feel to it as opposed to staging something for the needs of, or to cater for tourists. And that may be something that you could observe elsewhere in the region where, for instance in Qatar, where a museum has been built, which is beautiful but it has not been there, it is purposefully built for many reasons, one of them is to generate revenue. Probably a big reason. And it is a trend as cultural tourism as such is becoming popular over the last 10-15 years and as lot of people is jumping on the bandwagon for trying to get their piece of the cake.

Mr. Marwan Bin Jasem Al Sarkal, CEO of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority defines Sharjah's 'authenticity' through the educational value of its heritage conservation and cultural projects. As he implies, it is a function of nation-building rather than promotional value that is at work behind Sharjah's efforts in the field.

For Sharjah, it is authenticity that makes a difference. We are not going to open this historical area and open restaurants and shishas, this is not something we are ever proud of. We are proud of creating educational tours, we are proud of creating different uses of houses. Some of the houses are going to be used as hotels, so you can stay in an old house, live like an Emirati, dress like an Emirati, eat like an Emirati, and live like an Emirati. An experience

like that can only happen here. It is a nation's pride for us, rather than a tourism statement.

For Mr. Hisham Al Madhloum, Director of the Directorate of Art at the Department of Culture & Information of the Government of Sharjah, Sharjah's approach to cultural production and to the promotion of culture is defined by educational purposes and, in a wider interpretation, by the Emirate's nation-building strategies. Once again, he differentiates Sharjah from its neighbors by its perceived refusal of utilizing the commercial potentials of culture.

(...) what is happening in Sharjah, it is not for the media, not for business, not for to show, we believe it is for our people. For culture. Art for art, culture for culture. This is what we believe.

Talking about their cultural activities and institutions Ms. Shaikha Al Mazrou, Artist and Lecturer of the University of Sharjah's College of Fine Arts & Design, brands Sharjah's embracement and promotion of art as 'pure', especially when compared to the commercially-led motivation of others in the region.

Not in Sharjah but in Dubai, in Abu Dhabi especially... Like if you look at Art Dubai, basically, on a very basic level, commercial. The galleries come here because they know that it is fast selling, it immediately happens, the Christie's auction, it is obviously commercial. In Abu Dhabi, I don't know if I feel comfortable with

having that recorded, there is like a competition between Dubai and Abu Dhabi, you would see the TDIC is trying... you would see this kind of competition in the art, it wants to do bigger, and I think it is also geography, they want to kind of put Dubai in the map. (...) But in Sharjah it was always purely, back then, trying to promote the culture, promote the art.

According to Ms. Al Mazrou cultural institutions in Sharjah serve the Emirate's residents instead of promoting culture for Western tourist consumption.

I honestly come to Sharjah but I actually live in Dubai. I lived in Sharjah for almost 20 years. And now being in two emirates, I worked in Dubai, I work in Sharjah, I do see a difference... (...) I always feel that Sharjah is a way much different, in the arts and culture. I always feel this. I feel like whatever Dubai is doing is more for the tourists, or Western audience, while whatever Sharjah is doing it is for their own people.

In addition to being 'pure', Ms. Al Mazrou uses the word more 'honest' to describe Sharjah's 'authenticity' in this context.

Sharjah is coming from a very pure... they want to be on the map through their culture, not through their commercial aspects. They want to bring best out of this city and introduce it to the best to

their own people, instead of other emirates. The other emirates are about tourist, commercial aspects, it is not as honest as Sharjah. Sharjah comes from a very pure...

While putting an emphasis on the complementary nature of the differences in their approaches to art and culture, Mr. Bobby Thomas Koshy, Manager of Overseas Promotions and Acting Manager of Domestic Promotions at Sharjah's Tourism Authority strengthens the argument that it is Sharjah's absolute focus on the cultural needs and priorities of its own residents that differentiates the Emirate from others in the region. In his words, it is this community-focused attitude that makes Sharjah 'authentic'.

A lot of people think that we are actually competing with Qatar and with Abu Dhabi when it comes to culture and heritage. We don't need to because it is very similar in trend. The only difference is what you are offering. We want to keep it as authentic as possible. And to be very honest we were never really dependent on numbers that much to make a difference in the destination. We will always first consider the residents themselves. (...) We are very similar in tradition but at the same time a little different for people to experience.

The differences in approach that the region's various governments' take on the role of culture and art in nation-building and nation branding are best articulated in the context of the ongoing public debate on Doha's new

museums and Abu Dhabi's new partnerships with the Guggenheim and the Louvre. According to these narratives, the authenticity of Sharjah's museums is based on their locally-rooted and culturally-embedded nature. These museums, Ms. Mandy Merzaban, Collections Manager and Curator at Sharjah's Barjeel Art Foundation argues, make sense in their locality and for their people.

Yes, there is a heavy sort of commercial aspect of it, we have Doha, and Dubai, and Abu Dhabi, the acquisitions are quite extensive... (...) I don't think it is only commercial, but yes, the art fairs and the big name museums, you have sort of a commercial... But I think securely for Sharjah, it is very home-grown and the initiative I feel it is completely different. (...) The intention here is not to create sort of a big fuzz. We want to preserve, it is trying to preserve, and also to innovate in a way. It is not as well-known in terms of the headlines but...

As she further explains, however, Sharjah's unique museums with their focus on local meanings and preferences might paradoxically provide the Emirate with a unique selling proposition, too.

I don't think that it is a competition (...) because the museums they have always been here, and there they are not. (...) it is a different approach that I don't think that it will ever be at that stage that it is a competition between the Guggenheim and... If you want to see

the Guggenheim, you go and see the Guggenheim. If you want to come to Sharjah to see home-grown museums then you come and see them.

The notion of being ‘home-grown’, especially in the context of its museums is repeated by Ms. Mandy Merzaban, Collections Manager and Curator of the Barjeel Art Foundation.

I think in Dubai it is a little bit different because there it is more of commercial-based. Here I guess in Sharjah has had more of a history of cultural initiatives, you have more museums that have been around longer than at other places in the UAE, so it has a specific... they are a very different approach than other emirates. There is also a picking up in things, in Abu Dhabi you have all these big name museums, like the Guggenheim, and the Louvre, coming together, obviously really big names. Here it is kind of home-grown, so this is kind of its different facets.

As she summarizes her overall impression of Sharjah:

(...) there is just kind of a desire to preserve what is already here [in Sharjah] and not just to import.

Mr. Giuseppe Moscatello, Manager of the Maraya Art Centre adds an additional layer to Sharjah’s more local community-oriented features. He

differentiates between the passionate involvement in cultural and art activities of the local community in Sharjah, and the attitude of Dubai inhabitants who are, in his perception, more motivated by 'glamour'.

(...) in Dubai, there is a different community than in Sharjah. Sharjah is more local, it is more community-oriented, people live in Sharjah. In Dubai there is this, it is vibrant, but at the same time it is also diverse in terms of culture and nationalities. And most of them, to be honest with you, are not really art related, not really art passionate like in Sharjah. In Dubai the system is more... (...) Commercial, but not in a negative way, it is more glamour. In Sharjah, we have different kinds of events and always the community is involved. Most of the time you see the community (...).

For Mr. Peter Jackson, it is a real sense of place making that differentiates Sharjah from Dubai, the cultural efforts of this latter is characterized by 'prestige'. Talking about the urban landscapes, design and architectural peculiarities of the two cities he identifies Sharjah's 'authenticity' in its celebration of its Islamic roots and values.

This architecture that marks the many public squares and spaces as you drive through Sharjah what ties it together that these all are government buildings. And they give Sharjah, I think, and its museums, they give it a very distinct identity but it is actually an

Islamic identity, it's not a local identity. It's drawn on Egypt, it's drawn on Morocco, it's drawn on Syrian and Iraqi architecture, all these different, you know, Damascene architecture, Cairine architecture and all blended together. Actually it is more fantasy in some ways than Dubai. But I think where it is more authentic is that it comes out of a real sense of place making and celebrating Islamic identity. Rather than prestige.

As Mr. Osama Samra, Director of the Sharjah Media Centre summarizes this same argument from a different angle: “We have twenty two museums. Not artificial ones – museums”. The meaning of ‘authenticity’ as a notion of ‘home-grown’ and ‘locally-oriented’ is further enriched by Mr. Hisham Al Madhloum, Director of the Directorate of Art of the Department of Culture & Information in Sharjah. According to him, cultural policies and development in Sharjah have been from the very beginning shaped by the people themselves. In his narration ‘authenticity’ becomes a synonym of a bottom-up model of cultural development and policy making.

The culture in Sharjah they started from the people, from the social until up. (...) they are pushing. This is my office now. Sometimes the artists come and they are sitting like in a majlis, in a home, and we are sitting and talking, and it is not like official, we can change the idea. (...) The culture here starts from down. In the same time in 1981, they established the department of Culture. This is the official. But from 1980 they established the Sharjah National

Theatre Society. And also the Emirates Arts Society is social, not government. Already from the 80s. That is why they all pushed for the establishment of the Department of Culture. That means, coming from the social, from the normal people, the culture. The government, they push it, to give them the budget.

Mr. Al Madhloum also emphasizes that in Sharjah, cultural policies are strongly connected to local preferences and needs. As he notes, although an exposure to global cultural flows can be beneficial for the local population, these forces always have to be negotiated on the basis of a strong local identity. In Sharjah, he argues, long-term educational and nation-building efforts have succeeded in balancing the effects of cultural globalization.

Not culture for business (...) they want to build this guy who lives here. That is why they start from the child. (...) Dubai, they are opening to another culture. (...) for business (...). So what is the difference? From the start we have our basic. I think today is very important, Abu Dhabi, they bring the projects like Louvre, Guggenheim, but it is very important to make balancing. It is good for make balancing for Sharjah. (...) But very good also to bring another thinking, some other view from different people. But I think, is it to change our identity or culture. Thus, it is important to build the people how to see. But in the same time, the global, it is very difficult, because opening the world, you cannot just close

your house and be inside. To keep open, but at least to make control over it.

As Mr. Al Madhloum continues, the recently built or independent cities and nations of the Arabian Gulf are necessarily exposed to global tendencies and models that might influence their own, indigenous ways of social and cultural development. According to him, Sharjah has managed to control the challenge of imitating Western urban development models, for example, and to pursue nation-building and modernization policies that are based on its own history and cultural preferences.

(...) old countries in the Arab world, Egypt, Cairo, or Iraq, or Syria, Damascus, these are very old cities. Already the identity and the history are there. (...) Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Lebanon, those cities are new cities like Sharjah, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait. (...) they take the image from outside. (...) They are opening eyes on other cities. (...) they copy the city from the outside (...) from Europe, or from America, or from different thinking. Same Dubai. In Sharjah, our Ruler, Sheikh Sultan al Qassimi, he is PhD, they grow the city from our earth. They start from our identity. (...) They are looking at our basics, our religion, we are Muslims, we are Arabic, and we have our identity. (...) When you come into the UAE, Abu Dhabi is the diplomatic capital, Dubai is the business capital, Sharjah is culture and education capital. They use two things: culture and

education. This is very important to build our people. The culture is not any culture. Pure culture.

In terms of nation branding, Mr. Al Madhloum concludes, Sharjah has also managed to remain 'authentic' by building an image that is true to the identity of the place. Once again, he points to the different strategies of neighboring Dubai in order to brand Sharjah's model as one built on 'pure' culture.

We don't have a big media, like Dubai branding, that means that we are coming for pure culture, we don't just come for... we are looking [like] what we are thinking.

The locally conceived, formulated and implemented nation branding strategies of Sharjah have also been mentioned by Ms. Alya Rashid Burhaima, Manager of the Education and Interpretation at the Sharjah Museums Department. According to her, Sharjah's image building efforts are moderate compared to those of Abu Dhabi, for example, but these strategies are shaped locally in Sharjah.

(...) in Sharjah, at least at the Department, they don't market big time, this is maybe why you thought you would do this in Abu Dhabi but then you discovered Sharjah. Because we don't go into the media, we are a small community working in the place itself. Otherwise you would have heard of us when you were back in Singapore.

The practice of nation branding in Sharjah: Elite affairs - moulding people, cultivating culture

The previous sections have described the perceived brand attributes of Sharjah as those were reconstructed from the interviews. The following pages aim to give an account of those structures and motivations at work that the interviewed experts believe are shaping the nation branding practices in Sharjah. More precisely, in the following chapters I will try to explore the role of narratives about heritage and modernity in the construction of the Sharjah brand. What we aim to understand here is how elements of tradition and contemporary art function to connect nation branding strategies to policies of nation-building in Sharjah. Thus, this chapter will discuss the perceived educational role of discourses of cultural heritage in creating a link between younger and older generations in Sharjah. It will also try to understand how these discourses as part of nation branding aim to serve an educational function through the strengthening of national identity. Beyond narratives of history and tradition this chapter also aims to investigate the role of discourses on contemporary art in relation to the governmental vision of moulding ‘cultured citizens’ in Sharjah. In addition to nurturing the attitudes of openness and creativity, however, it will be argued that the interviewed experts attribute a crucial role to narratives on contemporary art in projecting an image of modernness and progressivity as a feature of Sharjah. At the end of this chapter I will also introduce a discussion on how an embracement of

Orientalist representations connects strategies of nation branding to policies of nation-building in the context of post-coloniality.

Heritage revival: It is a nation's pride, not a tourism statement

The 'cultural ethos' of the Sharjah brand is articulated along two major themes in the interviews. The image of Sharjah as the Cultural Emirate is simultaneously built on references of history, tradition and heritage, and on elements of contemporary, mostly abstract art.

Notions of 'heritage' and 'heritage-preservation' serve twofold functions in these discourses. Heritage, both in its tangible and intangible forms is interpreted as an evidence of Sharjah's historically 'cultural' identity. However, the commitment to cultural preservation as part of the Sharjah brand also functions to provide a historical, and in a way organic embedding of its course of development.

The 'heritage-element' of the Sharjah brand is rarely discussed solely in the context of tourism promotion strategies. Actually, there is an ongoing polemic emerging from the interviews, between those experts who highlight the marketing function of these themes and those who emphasize the educational motivations behind a focus on heritage. As Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager of Destination Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority narrates in relation to one of Sharjah's major heritage conservation and tourism development initiatives, the Heart of Sharjah restoration project, the place branding and promotional value has always played a crucial role behind the initiative.

When it was first decided to kind of restore and renovate that area, it was very much done for two reasons. Number one: to preserve the heritage, to sustain the local identity and to make sure that the younger generations would also benefit from it. But if you ask around, especially within the resident and local population, you would quite often get the comment that this has been done for tourists. Which is maybe also why it is quiet, sterile place, it is not very much lively in that sense. So it is changing. When they first started to look at that area it was very much done maybe to become a tourist attraction and in one day or the other. I have even heard comments and people saying that yes we should build a fence all around it and threw all the Asian expats out of that, from the area, to make it something... almost like a bubble, or a Disneyworld kind of thing, so that is the comment I heard from some of the Emiratis who are from Sharjah. But the mindset has been changing over the time and especially people who are very influential and very close to the Ruler, who have recognized that it is actually to preserve it and protect it in an authentic way and not in an artificial way to cater for tourist needs is important. And therefore what is happening now is that a lot of those buildings which have been preserved in the wrong way, using the wrong materials are being re-restored using traditional building material.

Others, like Mr. Hazem Al Sawaf, Marketing Director of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority refuses the suggestion that the largest heritage restoration project of the Middle East has primarily been conceptualized for tourism development and consumption.

We did this project not for the tourists (...). Not at all. OK, tourists will enjoy it.

As he explains:

We have a plan for a process to start collecting those memories, and building on those memories, because I believe that this place is not about only the architecture, it is actually about this spiritual, sentimental values.

Those interviewed experts who deny the primarily commercial motivation, and especially a tourism dominated strategy behind Sharjah's heritage conservation efforts, they emphasize the educational function of these initiatives. These leaders and practitioners accentuate the relevance of heritage preservation for strengthening historical memory and the link between different generations within the community. For them, these memories should contribute to the nurturing of national identity and they see their relevance located in the register of nation-building. As Ms. Alya Rashid Burhaima, Manager of Education and Interpretation at the Sharjah Museums Department argues:

I think this is because we want to save the place and to carry it to the next generation.

As Mr. Marwan Bin Jasem Al Sarkal, CEO of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority elaborates on this argument:

It is happening now because we are within a generation that has lived in this area. (...) We can get stories from them, we can revive this area, and it is a nation's pride. It is a pride moment for me when I am taking my little daughter and show the area and say, this is where your grandmother used to stay. This is what we used to call as AC, this is a barjeel [windtower]. (...) it is an educational thing, it is a nation's pride, something that makes us think twice, as we are developing and becoming bigger and internationally well known. We need to take care of history. We always belonged to this kind of buildings. Let's protect it. So it is a nation's pride, rather than a tourism statement. Tourism comes as a compliment. It comes when people enjoy it.

As Mr. Al Sarkal continues, he draws an interesting parallel between heritage conservation efforts of the historical towns of Europe and those of the Arab Gulf region.

It is also the need of having it. Because if we miss it, ten years and we missed the whole history. (...) this is what makes this nation different. And we have seen it when we go to Europe. We go to Berlin and there is the historical area, maybe it is demolished most of it because of the wars, but you go to France and there is a historical area, Carcassonne has historical area, you go to London and the UK and you have historical areas in Bath. History means a lot, whether it is for a tourism objective, but more for a nation's pride.

Ms. Jawahir Saeed Al Jarwan, Head of Brand Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority further elaborates the argument about heritage conservation and nation-building. As she argues, because of the young demographic statistics of the whole region there is an urgent need to secure the survival of local historical memories for the younger generations.

(...) the new generation, they started losing the identity. We don't know a lot of things about our culture, even the name of the things has changed now, it became something different to what they used to use, the old people. That is why, I think, even the government they want even the youngest generation, to know more about the culture and not lose the...

As one of the interviewees further specifies the theme:

There is a spirit here that desires people to come together for educating the population, for benefiting the new generation, for reconnecting the new generation with the past and the heritage, which is important for the identity building.

She also points to the highly globalized experiences of these young people as a primary reason behind the need for strengthening cultural memory and national identity through heritage conservation. According to these arguments the bold heritage element in the cultural focus of the Sharjah brand carries, first of all, an internal, domestic, or national function of cultural transmission.

Obviously, there is the heritage element. Heritage here is interpreted as the recent heritage. Mainly that is the pre-oil heritage. So how life was before the discovery of oil and all the enormously accelerated material changes and developments that then took place at all levels. And in that respect, heritage museums are always very popular because they allow the old generation to tell the new generation about their lives. A way of life that, without any shed of a doubt, is disappearing very-very fast, and that the new generation already can hardly empathize with. Because the new generation, people your age for example, are solidly globalized, and that is another thing that nobody believes just looking at from the outside. Because what they see is people in traditional dress, whatever that means. But the people ticking out from these traditional dresses are thoroughly globalized, thoroughly

aware of what is going on in the world to the same degree that you are aware of what is going on in the world, using the latest technologies, participating in global dialogues, etc. And that of course already building on the fact that probably very few places in the world have exposure to internationalism at so many different levels as our people here have in all aspects of their lives.

Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager of Destination Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority also identifies the perceived threat that global influences might mean to local identities, especially within the younger generations, as the main reason behind the bold cultural focus.

I think the entire initiative of preserving and sustaining local identity is very much to be seen from a global level. That maybe the Ruler thinks: ‘Oh gosh, the younger generation these days, they have forgotten all about the traditional games, even dresses, because they have never encountered, they have never come in touch with such things anymore.’ To mind them of their own cultural roots that is kind of why they are doing it, I think.

Basically all interviewed experts believe that the vision of Sharjah’s Ruler about the role of heritage preservation in nation-building is one of the major driving forces behind Sharjah’s cultural policies. In the words of Ms. Alya Rashid Burhaima, Manager at the Education and Interpretation Department of the Sharjah Museums Department:

We have a very big mission. We work under the guidance of the Ruler of Sharjah, His Highness. And he believes and we believe that heritage and culture are the most, or one of the most important things in nation-building. It is not only about transportation and infrastructure, it is all this, but learning about culture and our roots are also very important. And also investing in the people of the UAE and Sharjah as well, by looking at their culture and understand it, especially nowadays when we have children and we don't know as much as our grandparents. (...) we are all driven towards this image (...) where we are going to the museum and learn and not cutting the links forever with the heritage, we don't want this to happen.

Mr. Bobby Thomas Koshy, Manager of Overseas Promotions and Acting Manager of Domestic Promotions at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority points to the relevance of historical and cultural awareness in nation-building.

(...) he has paid more attention to the history of the Emirate, realizing that we can learn more from our history to go forward. And this is exactly what he has done. He wants the people of Sharjah and even the residents of the UAE to not to lose touch with where you come from. Because you have to always remember of

where you come from. Because where you come from is what makes you a better person.

Building on the above arguments, Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager of Destination Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority connects the vision and directions of the Ruler's nation-building and cultural policies to the Tourism Authority's heritage-driven, culturally-thematized nation branding strategies.

This is why the Ruler of Sharjah is so keen on preserving all those traditional places, as well as why he placed so much emphasis on either enhancing existing museums, or even he looks into developing new ones. It is very close to his heart and he by all means is doing this first and foremost for his own people and only for whoever else may benefit from it.

According to his experiences, Mr. Bobby Thomas Koshy argues, this model often is in contrast with the advices and models of Western nation branding agencies. Moreover, he continues, it is only through embracing a nation's own cultural heritage that can enable countries to articulate images that are not mere imitations of strategies originating from the West. These locally-originated and culturally-embedded representations can only be produced based on a historic awareness of a place.

Western companies have this impression that everybody wants to go forward. And if everybody all needs to go forward, they need to capitalize on what the future has to give. But what they miss out, I think, is that if you don't experience your past, if you don't understand your past, if you don't embrace your past, you will not be able to go forward. Because you will be going blank forward. You are not going forward with a purpose. You are just going forward. You are just trying to be modern, to be another New York, or another Paris, or another London, but you are not really going about it keeping your heritage and culture, or your richness that you have in mind. That is what I would feel.

As he further elaborates on this argument by connecting it to the globalized experiences of the massive youth population of Sharjah.

I would think that the Rulers of the UAE are very proud of their history and very proud of their Arabian heritage. And I think in every modern city, in every city that is going through a modernization, they feel that their younger generation is losing touch with their heritage. It is getting more involved in the Westernized world of fast cars and satellites, Internet and mobile, and everything is quick, quick, quick, nothing is valued any more, nothing is experienced any more, everything is just going so fast that they themselves don't understand what they are doing. So I think the wise aspect of the Ruler of Sharjah of the UAE is that

they want their residents, they want their future nation-builders to know their past, to experience their past, to not forget where they come from. And this is what they are doing.

It is this historical and cultural awareness, embodied in heritage preservation and an embracement of tradition that connect nation-building to nation branding in Sharjah. As Mr. Peter Jackson, Architect Advisor in The Ruler's Office argues, the vision of Sharjah's nation-building model is in contrast with other strategies in the region.

While in other areas their focus is on the highest buildings, and the biggest this and biggest that, Sharjah has been quietly getting on in exploring its own identity through its history.

Mr. Marwan Bin Jasem Al Sarkal, CEO of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority further elaborates on the differences between Sharjah's development model and those of others in the region. As he argues, while some development strategies in the region have been dominated by marketing and place branding priorities, Sharjah has put nation-building, and especially education in the middle of its long-term development policies. Nation branding in Sharjah, thus, is guided and shaped by the overall aims of nation-building. Mr. Sarkal also highlights that these strategies in Sharjah are formulated and implemented by locals.

His Highness is different than everyone else. He is not looking to get an image because of a host. He wants to build people with knowledge. He want a nation to be evolved based on their knowledge. He doesn't want to get the best poetry, the best singer to sing, to be known as a destination where you have an artist that comes from America, or from Saudi Arabia... no, no, he wanted to build a nation that actually evolves, not in one year, not in two years, maybe in 30 years, an educated nation, they build on their skills. And this is different than trying to host a big event only for the marketing purpose. (...) His Highness is a believer of a long-term strategy. He is not looking for only short-term results, he is looking for nation-building. And now we even noticed that the federal government, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa, he is also developing an evolving people who are proud to be Emirati, who are building our nation by their own hands not by the use of others.

As Mr. Hisham Al Madhloum, Director of the Directorate of Art argues:

His Highness said this is a second support for our people. This is a second school. We have a basic school, and this is a second school. That is why they are opening. This is why they started the museums. And when believed it in Sharjah, when we started... see, why did they start and doing good until today?

The unique priorities of Sharjah's nation-building and nation branding strategies are boldly articulated in the comparative context of the museums of Sharjah and those of the other Emirates. According to most interviewees, while these cultural institutions in Sharjah serve a primary educational function and thus operate as instruments of nation-building, museums are mostly considered as part of the tourism development repertoire elsewhere.

Dr. Zaki Aslan, Founding Director of the Sharjah-ICCROM ATHAR Regional Centre (Archaeological-Architectural Tangible Heritage in the Arab Region) also agrees that museums function as educational instruments in Sharjah.

In Sharjah, in particular, there is a major interest by His Highness, the Ruler of Sharjah, and that is why you can see several and diverse museums here in Sharjah. And also in Abu Dhabi, although it is a different approach, there is this interest to, in my opinion, is more to attract tourism, and to have leverage as a destination as well. That is why they have the Louvre, the Guggenheim (...). However, in Sharjah the approach is quite different. Here these museums were made for the people in Sharjah in the first place, and of course for others as well, but they have great emphasis on education of the people of the Emirates.

Mr. Giuseppe Moscatello, Manager of Maraya Art Centre of the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) directly connects the rationale behind the establishment of museums in Sharjah to policies of

nation-building. He also points to the contrast between these strategies in Sharjah and in Abu Dhabi.

It is a different strategy. That is a different political and also economical... they cannot afford to build a Guggenheim in Sharjah. But also there is no need to have a Guggenheim in Sharjah. (...) There are 19 museums and most of them are quite good museums, but they are not international names like the Guggenheim or the Louvre. They are just Sharjah museums. So there is like more attention to the identity, to shape the identity of the city, or the system in general.

For Ms. Manal Ataya, Director General of the Sharjah Museums Department it is their role in activating community spirit, or serving as a kind of agora at the place that connects museums to the priorities of nation-building.

(...) now museums are getting more involved in terms of community involvement that are not necessarily related to particular objects or they are not as it used to be. So, in that sense we are reviving more of a community spirit, a community involvement and dialogue over different topics and different interests that come through our doors, but also that are usually related to things in society (...). I think it can be a wonderful

reference point and I think that can be that way like an agora for the people. So it is a good thing to have I think.

Furthermore, as she continues, museums can play a major role in saving cultural and communal reference points, and even personal memories at a place that goes through a period of rapid transformation.

For a nation that is young and that is going through a lot of changes in its past (...) because you have to catch up with a lot of other countries, you need to make it sure that you have certain reference points for the people. Otherwise their will feel lost, and they will want to come back to something and remember things that were important to their lives and they won't be here anymore. And it is as simple as that things get demolished and they can be very simple buildings like a cinema where you went when you were a child, or a road that you know, and it is just not there anymore.

The argument about the recognized need for preservation and cultural transmission in times of social change is further strengthened by Ms. Alya Al-Mulla, Assistant Curator of the Sharjah Art Museum. As she argues, these tendencies increasingly characterize the other Emirates, too.

I think because everything is moving so fast and rapidly, I think now they have realized that they need to preserve, to actually have something to like hold on to (...) you have all these new buildings

coming up and everything is happening so fast that you want to hold on and preserve the old. You don't want to just let it go. Yes, it is quite an interesting point. Even in Dubai they have all these small museums (...). And even in Abu Dhabi, apart from the Louvre and Guggenheim, they have the Sheikh Zayed Museum coming up, so that would be one of the most important museums in the country.

Apart from education and the transmission of cultural memories, the perceived threat that increased globalization and the massive influx of immigrants might mean to national and local identities is often portrayed as a primary cause behind tendencies of cultural revival in Sharjah and in the whole Arab Gulf region. According to this argument, the cultural focus of Sharjah's national brand can also be explained in the context of policy measures and strategic instruments that aim to fight or take control of these global flows and thus to preserve local identities. While most of the interviewed experts agree these cultural tendencies should be interpreted in the context to a perceived threat globalization and immigration might cause, there are some who would refuse a direct connection. As Ms. Manal Ataya, Director General of the Sharjah Museums Department puts it:

It [this explanation] probably comes from people from the outside, because I actually would say that (...) it is not the threat of globalization, or other people (...).

As Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager of Destination Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority argues, people of the UAE have historically been exposed to dealing with foreigners.

If you go back in history not so long, even before the country was established... there have been Emiratis, Bedouins, they have been happily trading with all those other countries, so they are actually a country and a nation, tribe, people, that are quite used to dealing with foreigners. And I don't think they have seen them as a threat ever. The Creek in Dubai, it has been highly cosmopolitan melting pot of different cultures, people there are used to dealing with people with other cultural backgrounds and nations, so that is remained. So I don't think that the expatriate community is seen as a threat. Not as long as Emiratis are given jobs, and are provided with secure lifestyle. As long as they are being taken care of by the government, I don't think that they see it as a threat much.

Mr. Peter Jackson, Architect Advisor in The Ruler's Office argues along similar lines to reuse any suggestion about the supposed threats immigration and globalization might mean to national identity in the UAE. For him, the historically multicultural experiences enable locals to successfully cope with these global flows. Compared to anti-immigration tendencies in his native Europe, Mr. Jackson argues, the cultural confidence of locals in Sharjah is strong enough to save local identities even within a highly multicultural environment.

I think that is what the UAE is about. It is a fusing place. I think it is a place that brings together cultures. And I think this is where Europeans get really frightened about, you know, losing their identity, because of the immigrant populations in Birmingham, wherever, in Berlin, in France. I think there is a real self-confidence here. The national, the Emirati population is larger in Sharjah proportionately than, let's say, in Dubai, but still a minority. But they are just such confident, easy and relaxed people. I don't think that they worry about it. They have always been traders. Dubai and Sharjah exist on the ports of the Gulf because they are places where people come together. The Indians have always had a very large part of trade. People in the summer may go to India, may go to Bombay, go up the Gulf, a couple of merchants would go to Paris – it was always a place of meeting. And I think it is a fusion of cultures. So I think it is a place where all the cultures are celebrated.

Being a highly multicultural place is a celebrated characteristic of the UAE and Sharjah, Mr. Hazem Al Sawaf, Marketing Director of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority argues. For him, the international exposure such an environment offers is an important asset of the place.

Let's say, the beauty of being in the UAE in particular, it is that you are living among 195 different nationalities. So, the idea to get

exposed and to have a dialogue with someone who you don't belong to, don't know, don't understand, it is common. And the idea is how can you... Just understand. You will always get something out of it. It doesn't mean that you need to change your lifestyle because of... but understanding those people, trying to adapt, or work with these different backgrounds, it is important for the business and for the lifestyle.

However, Mr. Al Sawaf also allows for an interpretation that explains regional tendencies of cultural revival by a perceived need to save, or redefine local identities within the context of globalization and the influx of global cultural flows.

Well, this [heritage revival in the region] is a trend. It is a new way of self-exploration and self-explanation at some point. Now, everyone is going out and speaking especially in this region with the influx of a lot of expats (...). A lot of local culture has been, not affected but influenced by this new wave of cultures and backgrounds coming into the place. One of the loud but still honest [reactions] is the self-explanation through art, or through music, or through folklore or dancing. These conversations about purity...

Mr. Al Sawaf emphasizes that as opposed to many other places in the region, the UAE prioritizes the conservation of national identity. As he suggests it is in this context that tendencies of cultural revival have to be understood.

Here they see (...) the future by empowering their own country. But by using, or getting exposed to different backgrounds, and by other experiences coming in... But still they conserve their culture, they conserve their way of living. And they still empower it. They talk about it a lot, they talk about their identity a lot, the UAE identity, and they push this forward. Which is quite unique in a sense, most of the cities are not, let's say, nations these days, they went into modernity and the new lifestyle and technology and all of this, and they somehow forget that they used to be this and that. (...) They forgot all of these and they moved into the new. I am not saying that any of them is wrong or right, what I am saying is that there is a way that they want to conserve whatever they had. They don't want to call it 'had'. They want to keep calling it 'I still have it, we still have it, and we still so it'.

Discussions about national identity in the context of immigration tendencies often raises questions about the notion of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in the region. As Mr. Bobby Thomas Koshy, Manager of Overseas Promotions and Acting Manager of Domestic Promotions at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority argues immigrants in Sharjah and in the UAE should be targeted by cultural awareness campaigns to learn about the history and traditions of the place.

Because here you have a majority of Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, South Africans, English, Australian, American, Spanish, Germans, a lot of Egyptians, a lot of Jordanian, a lot of Syrians, Lebanese, all of them have their own history and culture. They are considered residents here, because they are working here and they are part of the society, and we want them to understand what the Emirati is all about. There is no point in them coming to another country and not understanding where they are living.

This aspect becomes especially relevant when it is directly discussed in the context of nation branding. For Mr. Koshy, nation branding by nature has to represent and focus on the national culture of a place instead of highlighting or promoting multicultural, or cosmopolitan elements and identities.

You see, by default, you would just go indigenous, you would not go cosmopolitan, because your mission and statement is to promote what you have within you and what is around you...

Ms. Conny Bottger, Manager of Destination Development at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority refuses the suggestion that nation branding couldn't highlight and feature cosmopolitan or multicultural element. However, as she argues, nation branding in Sharjah and in the UAE functions as a policy measure that aims to empower and strengthen the identity of nationals.

Although this cosmopolitan element is a fact and you cannot deny it, I think a lot of people see it as a threat to their local Emirati identity so that the key drive for anything and everything that people do over here would be to preserve and protect Emirati identity. Now how do you define that? It is written on another sheet. And who are true Emiratis is goes down to probably Bedouins at some point and that the culture that we showcase is that related to Bedouin lifestyle or is it not...? I don't think we disregard this, we just don't really look into offering something for other cultures other than Emirati.

In addition to providing cultural reference points and facilitating the transmission of cultural memories, policies of heritage revival – and nation branding is seen to serve those – are also often interpreted in the context of a need for building national loyalty and solidarity. As Ms. Manal Ataya, Director General of the Sharjah Museums Department argues, in such a young country as the UAE, such loyalties as part of a nation-building strategy have to be necessarily strengthened.

I actually would say that more than anything, it is not the threat of globalization, or other people, I would say it is actually a country's own need to ensure that its own indigenous identity, or whatever, that its nationals, let's say, do have a sense of loyalty and understanding and love for their country. Because, I think in a

normal national narrative, regardless of whether you have an expat community or not, it is something that any country in such an early stage worries about, because you need to ensure that not only the people in your country are happy but that they want to be productive, they want to continue to live here. I mean, many countries have had nationals who leave countries because they have better opportunities in other countries whether it is better jobs, or better lifestyle, so it is not necessarily about that they are overworried that there are other people here who are going to make things confused for us, but rather we want to make it sure that we are offering a really good life for people here, so that they would stay here and that they would want to build this country. Because we need people to build this country for the next hundred, two hundred years. It is so young in that stage, and it is a part of every country that has been at that level or has had something very drastic, let's say, it has been colonized for two hundred years (...) and then once they had left there was exactly what you would find here in terms of a national narrative, it would be similar to theirs which is trying to revive (...) nationalism, understanding and love for their country, the use of (...) vernacular, (...) and also a very visible representation of it, whether it is clothes, or how people celebrate national day, or whatever it might be. So I think it is just part of a normal way in which you express like that type of a pride and loyalty and love for your country, I think every country goes through that particularly it is a normal thing to do when it is very

young and your community is so growing, and so much of your population is very young in term of age, so something that you realize you have to build. (...) you never know what will happen in the future, so you have to think about how and in what ways you want to develop a sense of, you know, regardless of what happens in the future and hopefully it will always be good, even if you have tough times, your people will always stick to it, want to stay here, take through that period and hope for that rather than they would leave they would stay and hope that they would have better opportunity at the end. It might be one of the considerations but I don't think that it is necessarily something related to, I don't think it is too much of a worry of globalization.

There are experts, however, who more directly argue for the perceived threat of immigration as the driving force behind cultural policies in the UAE and in Sharjah. As Ms. Jawahir Saeed Al Jarwan, Head of Brand Development at he Media & Communications Department of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority emphasizes, it is difficult to save local identity in an environment where nationals represents only the minority of the resident population.

When you are mixed with other nationalities, you learn from them, and you might do exactly what they are doing, and as you said we are the... [KF: Minority?] Yes, so, still people they go back to what

they use to do, but we are the... it is difficult to live at a place and you can't get back to your origins.

Adding a comparative perspective to her argument, Ms. Al Jarwan highlights the specific case of the UAE where rapid modernization and social change necessitate the safeguarding of local identities and ways of living more than at other places where the urban transformation and the change of the population structure have not been that radical.

If I am visiting another country and I want to learn about them and their country I would go for museums and these kinds of things. I don't know, maybe it is difficult... Gulf countries, they because more to like modern buildings... so it is difficult to save their cultures, so I think the museums and this kind of things will help people to understand. (...) Like if I go to London, I think everything in London talks about London. Wherever you go, the buildings, the atmosphere, the cars, in everything you feel that you are in London. Whereas if you come here, you can see new buildings, glass, and fancy things, and you will not understand where we came from, like the old houses. Even our clothes they have changed from what we used to wear. (...) We don't want to lose our identity. So to keep it safe I think we should have museums.

As Ms. Al Jarwan continues, she points to the relevance of nation branding in building pride and loyalty to the nation and country in the host community or the local population.

I think it [nation branding] should play a role in giving people a pride of my country and of what we are doing. And hopefully we go and make sure that everybody knows in Sharjah, they know about their culture, and we want even the local people to visit the museums, and to appreciate what they are in today, and what reached in development in Sharjah. So this is our target as well. So not only families, and other countries, or other cities, but even the locals, we want them to experience the past and enjoy what we are having now.

Mr. Bobby Thomas Koshy, Manager of Overseas Promotions and Acting Manager of Domestic Promotions at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority further elaborates on the role of nation branding in building national pride. In his view, it is the responsibility of the nationals that they should work as brand ambassadors of their country when travelling abroad.

I feel that every country should, it is a duty of every citizen not to forget where they come from. At the end of the day every person, every UAE national in this case is an ambassador for us. So every time when a UAE national goes out to the other part of the world, if

he does not know his own culture and history, he has no identity himself. So yes, I feel it should be filtered down where if a UAE national does go, let's say, to Singapore, where he meets a Singaporean his first interest should be to know what a Singaporean is. And if a Singaporean ever enquires about who an Emirati is, he should be able to proudly explain his heritage and culture. And I hope that is what being filtered down with the fact that we are all bringing up heritage and culture and we tend to revive our past and the younger generation to experience it so that when they go out, they can talk about it.

In the context of nation branding's role of building national loyalty and pride, the recent Emiratization campaigns of the UAE government also emerge as one of the major discussion topics in the interviews. As it will be argued, it is in these discussions of Emiratization that the ways in which nation branding becomes part of the ideological projects of negotiating home becomes most apparent. As Ms. Nawar Al Qassimi summarizes the rationale behind campaigns of Emiratization: "The numbers are diminishing. Now there is a conscious effort to change that." As she continues:

I think (...) now people are realizing that we are 20 percent, we need to do something. What happened was that the country in the last ten years opened up really. It was so easy for people to get in, so easy for people to stay here, and this is what has been changed. Because previously, I am talking about 30 or 40 years ago, there

was an expat community here, but it wasn't as huge as now. But over the years, with the country kind of expanding, Dubai booming, it brought in a lot of people, and people just stayed, because its low taxes, you have got everything you want, you know, it is a good life. And more people come, and more people come, and more people come, and then people realized, wait a minute, there is something wrong, then they wanted them to leave, or not to come, but it was kind of too late.

Ms. Al Qassimi agrees that heritage and cultural revival in the Gulf is necessarily related to processes of national identity reassertion.

There is. I do feel it. I think it is related to what is going on. Otherwise they wouldn't feel the need to question what is the Emirati, what is the Emirati identity. It has been a debate recently, after all of these. I think previously, for example my parents or grandparents, I don't think they felt the need to question the identity, because they were all there, they knew what it was. But now, that the Emirati population is getting smaller, now they started to realize that, who are we...

The argument about an ongoing cultural identity reassertion is strengthened by Ms. Manal Ataya of the Museums Department. Asking about the community outreach programs of the museums she recognizes a recently emboldened emphasis on the involvement of the local, Emirati national community.

(...) the mandate and goal for it to be primarily Emirati, it was not previously. And for that reason, and we only know it from our data collection on the program set, there were not enough Emiratis coming into the museums and workshops, so we had to find a way to target them and to do things that would be more relevant. And it is important, the Emiratis is a community, this is their country, we have to make sure that the programs that we have are relevant and useful and attract everyone, and in particular Emiratis, as well because they a key audience for us to whom for some reason we are not getting to.

Beyond thematicization and programming, however, Emiratization has recently become a tendency in the employment statistics, too. As Ms. Ataya continues she highlights that by today the whole Educations Department consist only of UAE nationals.

The whole Education Department now is UAE nationals, we have about 35 women working at our Education and Interpretation.

Ms. Alya Rashid Burhaima, Manager of the Education and Interpretation Department of the Sharjah Museums Department further elaborates on the rationale behind and the effects of the recent Emiratization campaign.

I think my Department is 100% locals, Emirati ladies who are, most of them are fresh graduates, who have graduated and then worked in Museums. All of them are locals. We are trying to focus really on Emiratis. (...) So the government is really focusing on employing Emiratis who are fresh graduates, or graduates who are still looking for jobs, and most of them who would get into the museums already have this background, in a community, working, and I think it is really good, and this is what we are trying to approach.

Ms. Sherifa TJ Madgwick, Manager of Development and Communication at the Sharjah Centre for Cultural Communication provides a background to the campaign.

Going back to the point of what is the Emirati, there was this whole Emiratisation campaign that started a couple of years ago. It was a massive, massive campaign, and basically because people were realizing that we are the Emiratis and we are diminishing basically, so they have decided to do all of these pro-Emirati things. For example in government now there is a certain percentage, 18-20 or 40 that have to be Emirati. And they are trying to up the number of Emirati workforce. So they are also targeting, for example, the airport, or people who stand at the cashier, usually these jobs were like ones that the Emiratis felt we don't want to do this, that is something that the working force would do, the composition of

which would be mostly South-East Asians, and they are the biggest population here. So what they wanted to do was to turn that around, so to try to push for Emiratis to do this kind of things, saying that listen, it is not beneath you, and this is your country, you should be proud of this, and you should be doing this, this was a whole campaign. And then they enforced that certain percentages have to be Emirati at certain institutions. And also what happened was, I don't know how true this was, but basically a lot of people are getting citizenship a lot easier because they want to push the numbers up. And also, previously, if an Emirati women wanted to marry a non-Emirati, they children didn't get the Emirati nationality. They got whatever the father is. Now I think they have changed this, I think the kids can take it after their mother. Now basically they are getting aware of this problem and they are trying to have a solution. (...) when you realize that 'Oh my God, our people are not here anymore', you are desperately trying to bring everybody back. And I think this is what happening. I think if people are opening up the doors of their country and they are bringing everybody in, and they are telling Emiratis that if you are marrying an Emirati you lose your citizenship, you get nothing...

It has to be noted that in the discussions about immigration, global cultural flows, and Emiratisation a strong sense of patriotism, or even nationalism is articulated in the interviews. As Ms. Madgwick argues:

As a British person, I wouldn't say that we in Britain are over-patriotic, patriotism comes out only when we get football matches, or it is the Queen's Jubilee (...) or Princess Diana is dying and you have that gathering that is linking together society from all of its walks, together, but I would say, here, genuinely I feel the patriotism all the time here, very much so. Even in the workplace because Emiratis are very well looked after with their government, with their jobs, with the package their salaries are higher than others.

In her narration in the last few years there has been of strengthening of national pride in the local Emirate population. Ms. Madgwick explains these tendencies by the growing influx of immigrants in the UAE and also by what she calls increased 'Westernization'. As she argues these developments of growing nationalist sentiment should be understood as a reaffirmation process that aims to strengthen the national identity.

I would say it is more to do with pride (...) of their achievement and what they obtained. But within the last few years, I would say, and particularly (...) in around 2006 I really started to feel - with the young generation (...) I could see them being quite pride, this is their Arena: 'I am Emirati', you know, proud to talk about their culture. But I would say in 2006 as the country was exploding with lots of projects coming in, and a lot of people arriving here, it was just vast (...) I think then there was a real stance to say: 'yes, we are

here', and this feeling of holding onto the identity, it has definitely come in the last decade. Because it was getting very Westernized, you know, like you see, because attitudes have changed, it is a lot more open than before. Some families, their daughters didn't work before, now they are working, they are in a work environment, you see a lot more women in the work environment. Before you would see them maybe in the Ministry of Education, you would see them teaching in schools, and you would see them at Immigration, and maybe they were wearing niqab. But now there isn't a government department where you don't go into and you don't see Emiratization, you don't see girls being there as well. So lots of things have all linked in together. I would say that yes, they are very proud. When my daughter went to school, (...) I put her in government grade 1 and 2, they sing the national anthem every morning. (...) they do it every single morning. They reaffirm...

Ms. Madgwick points to the recently popularized – and very much commercialized – tradition of celebrating National Day as an example of the growing nationalist sentiment in the UAE.

I would say that the idea of celebrating National Day is a new concept, actually, it has become more commercial now. Years ago on National Day we used to have on the TV here, when Sheikh Zayed was alive, they used to have a very traditional Majlis and he would be on the TV and he would go down, and they would have

camel racing on the day, and he would toast people, and a commentator would be speaking, because he used to be embraced being with the people. And that was about it. You wouldn't see what you are seeing now with the cars being painted now, and flags, and decorating cars, it is more open, and driving at night, this is really new coming.

Mr. Peter Jackson, Architect Advisor of The Ruler's Office also agrees that there is a growing sense of national pride in the UAE. As he further explains, he points to a difference between the national identity of the UAE and what he sees as Sharjah's cultural identity.

The UAE obviously has a strong national identity. You know its football team is getting into the finals at the Gulf Cup and there is a huge sense of national identity at that level. On National Day there is a huge outpouring of celebration, in a way that cars are decorated, and the flags that go up, it's fantastic, it's like Denmark where you see Danish flags flying all over the place. There is a huge sort of pride in the UAE national identity. I was first here when the UAE was just few weeks old. So there is that national identity. I think what Sharjah celebrates is cultural identity.

It is important to note that the interviewed experts disagree on the reasons and motivations behind the growing sentiment of national pride in Sharjah and in the UAE. For some, it is the 'natural' result of historical development. As Mr.

Osama Samra, Director of the Sharjah Media Centre argues, the people of the UAE are traditionally proud of their nation, culture and history, and the government enjoys a great level of popular legitimacy and acknowledgment.

In his words:

Here in the United Arab Emirates the national identity is something within the nature of the people. (...) The people of the United Arab Emirates, the local people, are very much attached to their country, very much, into details, to their tradition, to their culture. And they are very much around their government, both sides, it is a very high level of understanding and relationship between the government and the people of the United Arab Emirates, and it is very important.

For others, however, the growing nationalist sentiment in the UAE should be explained by those governmental policies that aim to support such discourses and feelings. One of the interviewed experts explains these policies in the context of regional political developments.

I think, ideally, you want to have a national identity, but you certainly can't force it. (...) all these campaigns (...) on what an Emirati is, and for example, the last National Day, or the one before (...) they made it really big. People were doing things for the public, and on the occasion of the National Day you get whatever because you are an Emirati and it is National Day (...).

So they are trying to, they sort of push this Emirati pride but sometimes it is really-really forced and sometimes you feel maybe it is a mechanism of keeping people quiet, keeping people happy so they don't think of other things? Because of what's going on in the region, for example.

As the interviewed expert continues:

I personally feel that when people push this 'one nation', 'we are so happy', 'the government', 'the UAE', too much you say, wait a minute, there is actually something else going on, people are trying to... Because it feels very forced. It feels very-very forced. In previous years, nobody needed messages from the government, or from your phone service operator, to tell you that it is National Day. Nobody needed leaders to... So basically for the last National Day, the Ruler of Dubai sent out through the phone network providers a personalized text message telling the users that he is wishing them a Happy National Day. When you think about this, in previous years you didn't need somebody to do that, you knew it was National Day and you were happy. But now they are forcing things like fireworks, celebrations, music and dancing, and all other stuff, and you really think, what is the real purpose?

For some of the interviewed experts, in relation to these debates on the 'organic' or 'orchestrated' nature of tendencies of growing national sentiment

the notion of the UAE 'nation state' should also be problematized. As Ms. Nawar Al Qassimi argues, national identity in the UAE is further complicated by the federal composition of the Emirates and by the different origin of its ruling families and population groups.

What is happening also when there is this sort of pushed nationalization of identity, is that people from different Emirates are looking at it differently. It is something that came out of Abu Dhabi, someone in Sharjah would say wait a minute, it is not us, that's not how we dress, that's not how we talk, that's not what we do, so you can't really force this. I think it should be something organic, it should be something agreed upon, but you can never force it. Because the UAE is really so different. It is seven emirates but every emirates has its ruler, every emirates has its rules, its traditions, its beliefs.

As she continues, Ms. Al Qassimi points to the variety of traditions that have contributed to the making of the national state of the UAE.

The term Emirati, what does that really mean? The people who are Emirati now, how Emirati are you? Because people come with all these different backgrounds, and are you Arab with Arab roots, are you Arab with Persian roots, are you Arab with Saudi roots, are you fully Arab or are you not? Are you Emirati because you lived

here for 50 years, or are you Emirati because your great-great-great...? So there are all these different debates...

In this context, some of the interviewed experts were asked whether they think that the hegemonic notion of the nation state necessarily fits the historical and cultural setting of the Arabian Gulf. As it was suggested, there is a variety of identities and loyalties in the region, such as tribe, clan, family, and religion that are often seen as contending the hegemony of the nation state. While Ms. Manal Ataya of the Sharjah Museums Department acknowledges that there are other legitimate forms of identification in the region, she argues that the national affiliation or loyalty is certainly a legitimate and dominant form of how people imagine modes of belonging in the UAE.

I think it doesn't necessarily have to be [nation] but it is definitely one aspect of it. It depends on how you identify yourself. So it is definitely not the only way and it is not the way as we promote, but it is a way that we realize a lot of people do, make an affiliation with, I find it very central to who they are, so this is part of what we feel very important of what we do. But of course there are so many ways in which people identify, multitudes of identifications, just the way how you are thinking, the way you have been educated, where you have lived, or religion...

Ms. Manal Ataya finds the national form as a kind of identification that makes it comfortable for many people to imagine belonging.

It is so fascinating when you actually talk to people especially today when people have moved so much and lived at so many places, have married different nationalities, it is quite interesting when you try to talk to people and ask how they feel about certain aspects... And you will be surprised, sometimes the most diverse people, I guess, do want to go back to that one particular thing, maybe it is also because it is a sense of being a bit confused when you had a lot in terms of experience and mixtures, not everybody is comfortable with that I think, and sometimes just signaling out one thing can help people just to feel...

Others point to historical and political reasons of why the legitimacy of the national form is not problematized in the UAE.

Nobody has questioned it, or even thought of it. (...) one explanation for that could be that because of the tribal nature of the place there are a lot of political connotations to it and not necessarily (...) issues that people would want to promote or talk about. So, even within the Al Qawassim tribe or family, there is a lot of issue that (...) we are not even supposed to touch upon... (...) especially from a tourism perspective (...) we usually try to

avoid anything that is only slightly politically or could become political in a way or another so this is kind of not touched.

As Dr. Zaki Aslan, Founding Director of the Sharjah – ICCROM ATHAR Regional Centre (Archaeological-Architectural Tangible Heritage in the Arab Region) explains it:

I think one of the things that are important in this area is the fact that you should really understand what happened in the region in the past century particularly. And then you will be able to understand why it is happening that way. I think, in the twentieth century in particular, after the First World War, the Second World War and after the colonization period and the independence period, the emergence of these nation states, I think it had a major influence on how people perceive their cultural heritage and how they want to have this kind of branding as you said, about their nation as opposed to the region. Because I think this geopolitics is very important in the formation of such new perceptions of how nations want to portray their heritage as nations as opposed to culture. Culture in the sense of, as you called it, Islamic culture, Arab culture, whatever you want to focus on in that sense. Some people are more aware of this, some are not. I think if you look into this history and the evolution of such influences on culture and cultural heritage through these political changes you will be able to understand why it is happening that way. (...) Of course there are

particular localities but, in the same time, there are many commonalities between the various countries in the region.

As Dr. Aslan argues, apart from the nation-state, the political realities of the region do not support any other level or form of identifications acknowledged or promoted at this point of time.

The political situation is in such a situation where whatever you want to do in order to have a more regional... it would be more logical if you start from the sub-regions... for example the Gulf people, you have a sense here that they feel that there are issues in common between them, but you need to push this forward in a way in such types of forums, to bring them together. So in way, you mentioned the pan-Arab... it is a dream in a way but maybe it will happen at some point, I don't know, but logically speaking it won't be easy to do it quickly, it would be a lot of time to achieve.

In his conclusion, Dr. Aslan provides an excellent summary of the variety of reasons and motivations at work behind trends of cultural revival in the region. In the following quotes he reconstructs the wider relationship between the history and nature of the formation and development of national identity, concepts of heritage, and these regional trends. According to Dr. Aslan, the recognition of economic and promotional value is one of the main reasons behind the cultural boosterism of the Gulf region. As he argues, those

organizational changes that partner the governmental administration and management of heritage and cultural institutions with tourism also point to an understanding of heritage and cultural production as mere sources of revenue.

This question of the why, you know, why we do this... and then you answer about identity... Here, I think there are different intentions. And you have different people thinking, or answering the why in different ways. The majority is looking at culture and heritage as, and I will extend it in more details, as an economic source or something by which you can please tourism etc. So there is that tendency and that is very common in the region, by the way, and it is increasing because of globalization, as you said, the economy, so it is one intention. But it is a major one. Here you can see it in the formation of institutions, even like now Abu Dhabi is now merging culture with tourism as an institutional structure. You can see like it is becoming now a trend, if you want, in Saudi Arabia antiquities with tourism, in Jordan antiquities with tourism, in Iraq, antiquities with tourism, people followed a model which is not ideal but sometimes culture and tourism they should work together. Actually they should work together but in reality this partnership is not too easy. Because people from tourism have different agendas than people from culture and heritage so it is not really working in the right direction as it should be. I am not saying that we are against tourism but it is difficult to have it work without

full awareness of the one about the objectives of the others. So there is that first tendency.

In addition to trends of managing heritage and arts as sources of tourism revenue, culture is also seen by many as an educational instrument of nation-building. Long-term cultural policies in Sharjah and recent trends of cultural revival in the region, thus, can also be interpreted as part of the nation-building efforts of these states. Moreover, as Dr. Aslan explains, the bold cultural focus and also the highly top-down nature of Sharjah's cultural policies and nation-building efforts both should be seen connected to the history of the formation of the Emirate.

There is also good intentions here as we mentioned, like education... and here you might consider the top-down in a way, but here still the aim is to try to help, because of the interest of His Highness in Sharjah, but the aim is also to engage the public to education about their cultural heritage so they will understand, so in a way it is a mixture. So education is one of the reasons why they care about culture and heritage in some countries. (...) he is one of those very few people who is cultured, it is the right word, and he in a way thinks that culture should play a major role in identity-making, or image, or brand if you want of the society. Although you might think about it as a top-down approach, but you need that sometimes, in such a region, this is how the states were formed. And we are coming back to understanding all that history,

there is that system in place, the sheikh and the sheikdoms, so there is this other intention.”

In addition to commercial and educational motivations, heritage revival and cultural boosterism in the region can also be interpreted as a trend, Dr. Aslan notes, that originates mainly from the West and is only imitated at certain places in the Gulf.

And then of course there are always many other intentions, it is trendy, it is a trend, something that is a mold of life, and it is kind of like they are doing like this in the West so why don't we do it like this here, but here you risk the non-knowledgeable people being involved in this by portraying the wrong image, i.e. affecting the authenticity of the culture and cultural identity. If you go to certain places, I don't want to mention, you can feel that they are providing fakes, you know, but because cultural heritage is something trendy, so we will do it, we don't have to have real cultural heritage but we can imitate it, so we can just rebuild and reconstruct and we can do something that looks like old but in reality it is new. So there is that other intention. So you have different motivations if you want behind that interest in heritage in the region. And you should be aware of the various intentions because they are not one. They are many and it depends on what you are talking about and where you are.

In his excellent summary of the various reasons and motivations at work behind the heritage and cultural revival in the region, Dr, Aslan points to an important, postcolonial element in the formation and nature of these tendencies. As he explains, the concept of heritage, culture and cultural production in the region is often based on interpretations that are European and colonial in their origin. In his words:

But more than that, there are influences which came with the history and the evolution after colonization etc. which affected the system itself. One system in any of these countries for example is practically based on heritage law. And the heritage laws are put in such a way that were also put by the Others, not by the culture itself. They inherited that from the colonial period. So in fact the law itself affects how people are looking at that heritage, how the heritage has been defined, or how it is in the law and legislation and therefore what are the structures in place to protect [?] that heritage. And if you look at the systems one should really think about how it was done before even the twentieth century and how people naturally looked after their heritage... (...) And why you have such attitudes also nowadays and the different motivation we just mentioned... how would you look at... There was actually, in many of these laws, there was a focus on the monuments. Which is a more Western approach. When we are talking about archeology... I am talking more about the immovable heritage. So this looking at the monuments and the archeology the Western

approach, especially with the archeologists who worked here during the last century, they had this intention [???] to interpretation of the history according to what their studied of the Other. So their approach is more archeological, if you want, their approach is that this is an evidence of history so we should preserve it, this is reflected in the law, so this becomes a monument, so this we cannot touch, this monument is something that is untouchable. Whereas if you talk about historic cities and the living heritage and even sites which have people living that element which is more intangible with the tangible together would be working best with Islamic cities. There were various systems that existed before you would ensure the protection of heritage buildings in particular.

The coloniality of the notions of heritage, culture and art that form the basis of cultural policies, nation-building efforts, and also strategies of nation branding in the region, thus, is a crucial recognition that should be further discussed in order to better understand the nature of these visions.

Arts: It brings Sharjah to a global standard

In addition to the commitment to heritage preservation but within the discourses of the cultural focus of Sharjah's brand identity and image: art, and especially an embracement of contemporary art emerges as a further qualifier of the place. As one of the interviewed experts put it,

I feel Sharjah, by any offences, is very good sort of a platform for the arts... it is something (...) that brings it to an international standard, and also allows for this kind of self-referential aspect for Sharjah.

Once again, an embracement of culture, and in this case, art in particular becomes a brand attribute by which the Emirate positions itself within the UAE and in the region. And once again, a commitment to the nurturing of art is featured in a historical context by which a sense of authenticity is created to the claim. References to Sharjah as a ‘place of learning and art’, and especially the portrayal of its ruling family as that of ‘learned men’ and Maecenas of artists are richly featured in these narratives. On the other hand, in the context of a perceived artistic revival in the Gulf region, Sharjah is usually described as a pioneer and as a player that focuses on ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ artistic values versus what is said to be the ‘popular taste’, pursued by others in the region. In the words of Ms. Ebtisam Abdulaziz, one of Sharjah’s most celebrated artists:

How do I identify the image of Sharjah...? Again, culture, art, serious art, professional art...

It is interesting to note that in these narratives, the embracement of contemporary art becomes a marker of ‘modernness’. More precisely, art, the understanding of art, the cultivation of art, and the embracement of art become references of a process of a ‘modernization’ of mindsets – for Ms. Manal

Ataya, Director General of the Sharjah Museums Department: a 'natural' and advanced phase of national progress and nation-building.

I think it is a natural progression when countries reach a certain maturity level (...). Every country from history goes through different phases, when you first have to (...) accommodate particular needs of a very early nation, and this is a very early one, this is entering a very early maturity type of level. So, previous to that, I think there were other, more pressing concerns, things that would be more important, from developing infrastructure to proper health system, proper education system, general needs like that. And then you reach a point, when you have done really well in that way, economically you are in a good place, so what is sort of the next phase? And you start looking at other areas, so that might be the cultural area, or social fabric building, civic society, so you start looking at ways how you can strengthen that, or develop that further. (...) it is I think part of a natural progression towards getting to a point where you have a very strong nation in ideally all areas, you developed (...) So, I think it is a natural way to go, and I think it reflects where you are at, and I think whenever a country can be at a point when it can afford to, and think about things that are not immediate needs, that is a good reflection of where you are at, and how are you doing.

In these narratives, Sharjah's vibrant art scene and the cultural policies that are seen to embrace this are portrayed as evidences of the Emirate's advanced nation-building processes. In addition to a sense of progressivity that Sharjah's vibrant contemporary art scene is portrayed to embody, it is also articulated as a reference of a kind of 'openness' to the world and to different artistic and cultural traditions. As Mr. Hazem Al Sawaf, Marketing Director of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority puts it on the role of art in shaping Sharjah's identity and image:

(...) exposure, understanding other cultures, understanding other directions. As I said, art is conversation. It is an exploration of self, of ideas, of cultures. Whether it is focused on the Gulf, or focused on the Orient, or focused on the Western, or driven by someone, it is just something to understand, something to look at, read, discuss.

One of my interviewees further elaborates on the role of art in forming Sharjah's image and identity. Talking about the Art Museum she highlights how art can connect the Emirate to international cultural flows and vice versa.

Then, of course, you have the museums, which address all sorts of different aspects, not only specific to Sharjah but also going beyond that, and reaching out to the wider world. In a way you could say that it is like showing Sharjah to the world but also showing the world to Sharjah. So there are local things that are projected to the visiting public but there are also international

things, like in the Art Museum, where people here are exposed to other currents, particularly in the artistic field.

In addition to its international and global flavor, however, art becomes a reference to creativity and an embracement of it is an educational mission of nurturing creative thinking in the population. As Ms. Manal Ataya, Director Generale of the Sharjah Museums Department explains their primary mission: museums and especially art museums aim to nurture an attitude of creativity in the population. In this context, the promotion of local artistic production to visitors and tourism come only as complementary targets besides the goals of nation-building.

That is why we are there for. And for us, it is all we ever strive to do every day, is just to promote learning and encourage creativity in young people. And also as well as in older people who have never had that chance maybe, and this is the way for them to feel that and enjoy that with their children as well, and families maybe, to learn together, have that joy of learning together. And any relationship that comes from external partners, including tourism, it is just something that happens because it makes sense for a particular reason. Or, for example, Sharjah Tourism says that we are a ‘cultural emirate’, we have a lot of cultural emphasis, His Highness has so much on everything that he is doing, including the museums, so we are going to ensure that more people know about

that, and more tourism come for that, so if we have more tourist that is also great, that is not a problem for us.

In Ms. Ataya narration, museums and especially art museums explicitly carry the mission of providing a more creative learning environment. According to this vision, these cultural institutions should function as creative alternatives to schools and traditional classroom learning.

For us number one for we are here, and there is no doubt about it, is education and learning. That is why we are here for. We have never been told any different, we never felt any different in anything what we do, and in a way it really simplified everything what we do, for everything we have to do is to promote and encourage learning of all kinds for all kinds of people. (...) we are really going into areas that we feel are important to us as that kind of body that will engage people in a way that is very different than sometimes a lot of classroom learning which it is still quite book based, and it is still quite heavily based on memorization in a lot of schools. We want to get kids out of that, we want to do it in ways that they start enjoy learning, to look at things, to enjoy to talk about things, being more creative about expressing themselves and their opinions about things, and that learning can be done in many ways.

It is important to note that in these narratives a recurrent notion of an elite responsibility emerges of the need for educating the local population.

This vision is expressed through a series of subthemes, such as a perceived, historical lack of art education in Sharjah and in the UAE, the apparent absence of a museum-going culture, and a general lack of interest in culture within the wider population. These narratives are dominated by the vision of moulding a kind of ‘cultured’ citizen who is both proud of his or her national heritage and also familiar with contemporary art. The responsibility and mission of the elite for nurturing a love of culture in the local population is a notion appears throughout the interviews providing a context in which nation branding should be interpreted. Ms. Bahar Erdogan, the International Media Coordinator of the Sharjah Media Centre gives a historical perspective to this argument.

Before the country came up as the United Arab Emirates, the people were not so educated. But they [UAE] were growing massively. So the people started thinking that the Arabs have the oil, the money, that is why they can afford everything. Now they [the government] are turning away from this, this is why you have the education here in Sharjah. They want to show that we are investing now in people, we develop our people. We are coming from a situation which was Bedouin. We lived in tents in the desert. Why would you need education in the desert? You need to survive, this was the instinct at that time. We are developing massively now to meet the challenge of the global world. To be able to become competitive with other countries and cities. And it is happening. And they are very fast. And people forget that they are doing things

very fast here. And they catch up very fast here. This is something amazing. People always think that it is artificial. People think that they are so uneducated here, they take everybody from outside. But you need to look at why they do that. Because they want to give education to their own people. Their own people they need to learn first, then they can build up.

In these narratives, there is a recurrent subtheme that describes locals as people who lack exposure to, and education in art. As Ms. Shaikha Al Mazrou, an artist and lecturer at the College of Fine Arts & Design of the University of Sharjah puts it:

People here are not much introduced to... they don't know much about what's happening in the arts" "(...) art and culture here are quite young. Like a lot of people would consider art as a hobby. When you say you want to study fine arts, everyone would look at you: what are you going to do next? (...) they would prefer they children to go to a degree that has a career after it. They don't consider art as a career.

Ms. Alya Al-Mulla, Assistant Curator of the Sharjah Art Museum also points to what she perceives as a lack of awareness about art in the region. Compared to international examples, she argues, local preferences do not support the development of a museum-going culture.

The thing is that people here they are not very... there wasn't much of an art awareness before. For example for us, when we travel, we always go to museums and all these places, it is a very regular part of your visit to any country, and when you go there you see a lot of people from that place they are also visiting their own museum. But here you don't see that, you would rarely see a local family coming into a museum just to visit a museum.

However, these narratives also carry an often degrading perception of local artistic approaches and work. As Mr. Giuseppe Moscatello, Manager, of the Maraya Art Centre of Sharjah's Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) recalls the story of the appearance of abstract art in the UAE he also notes that this thread of art is not yet well represented in the region. It is important to highlight, however, that in his thinking contemporary abstract art is characterized by a wider vision and perspective than local, traditional forms of culture.

In the 80s (...) I think contemporary art was different, the perception of contemporary art was completely different. They were painters. They started to paint abstract objects for example. And at time it was a big shock. Now, today I think it is more... there are many emerging artists, very young, and most of them study, for example, here, or they study abroad, so they have a wider vision, perspective of what contemporary art is. I think it still needs

to be developed more. Also because the number of artists is very few. They are not many.

Ms. Shaikha Al Mazrou, a lecturer of the College of Fine Arts & Design at the University of Sharjah and an artist herself further elaborates on what she sees the differences between the focus of Western and Arabic or Islamic cultural tradition. In her view, art has not been traditionally embraced as part of the mainstream cultural production in the region. As she notes, however, this perception is changing as young Emirati artists are increasingly given platform and are being officially promoted, representing a change in cultural policies.

[Arabic culture] has a certain path, like it wasn't very open to kind of contemporary art, it was very traditional, it was calligraphy, it was Islamic architecture, and design, it was mostly... it wasn't as the Western art and culture. We have a very heavy and rich culture and tradition but it wasn't very focused on art. Now they are embracing art as part of the culture and they are trying to promote, if you have noticed it here, they keep on promoting Emirati artists, they are trying to give them a platform where they can be recognized.

Ms. Ebtisam Abdulaziz, artist, writer and curator also believes in the need for changing the traditional concepts of local art in the UAE.

I think it is part of the artist's job to educate people. (...) And we don't want people to still think that art is just painting and very traditional things because it is not that. I think that is why I started to write because I feel like that no one gets what I am trying to say and I don't want that especially the kids to have that experience that I had while I was in the school. There was no curriculum for the art, it was just a hobby class or a fun class, do whatever you want to do. I really don't want the kids to grow up thinking that art is like this.

Ms. Abdulaziz recalls the story of the Flying House, a group of four artists who are credited to 'bring' the concept of 'contemporary' or 'conceptual' art into the UAE. As she argues, these artists brought a new notion of modern art to the region after coming home from the UK.

I think the UAE plays a big role in terms of changing this. I remember when Hassan Sharif [famous UAE artist], the father of contemporary, or conceptual art in the UAE, when he came back from the UK with all of his ideas and his way of thinking... he was kind of weird at that time, different in understanding things, but now I think he did so much things that our lives became much easier, the new generation will have everything ready, the whole image of contemporary art is ready, they don't have to fight for their rights and things, so I think he played a big role in Sharjah and also in the UAE, if you compare it with other Arab countries

we are doing very well in terms of achieving our goals in contemporary and conceptual art.

In the context of the cultural environment described above, an apparent notion of a self-assumed elite responsibility emerges in the interviews, not only for educating people but more particularly for changing their way of thinking, their mentality about art, and of in the most general sense. As Ms. Manal Ataya, Director Generale of the Sharjah Museums Department frames it, in the vision of Sharjah's Ruler the Emirate should be developed into a place of learning and museums should be the tenets of this transformation.

His Highness has always said, what would make him happy is to walk into a museum and see that there are families there with their children learning together, that would make him happy, that there was something there that would make them feel that instead of going to a shopping mall or staying at home they thought it would be a great thing to go to a museum and spend a day learning and having a good time there and to build their own knowledge base, and doing it as a family together. Besides that having them at home reading together probably that is the next stage for him...

Cultivating an interest in art, she continues, requires a change in the 'culture of thinking' of the people. This transformation, Ms. Ataya argues, will take time and it is at the centre point of her organization's mission and also the nation-building efforts of Sharjah.

We are not born with an interest in art or even with a talent in art in many cases. A lot of it is what you cultivate and experience of it. (...) people, like I said, who didn't really have a lot of exposure to art, or when they did it wasn't a very good one maybe, it was the way of how they were taught or not taught or helped correctly, and have just sort of stayed away from it (...) It is probably because of the history of elitism of art and maybe of elitism of museums and institutions years ago. But it is changing now, the more we are accessible to people like other expressions are, the better would be. I hope that we can just change that in people. This is just awareness and it will take time. But we have patience here, we know that these things don't happen easily. And that always to achieve the important things in life, they take time. I always believed that if you want quick wins they are not really wins at the end of the day, they just seem that way, but they are not all. In this organization we don't function that way, we don't think that way. We always say, we are trying to change the taqaafat al-tafkeer, changing the culture of thinking that how you actually think about things. There is even a culture about how you think. And it is trying to change that. Trying to change the mentality of people that is not something you do with just one exhibition or with a branding campaign, we don't do it like that. That takes a lot of hard work and effort over years, with children who become adults, and adults with their children and different groups of people mixing together, and all of that.

Ms. Ebtisam Abdulaziz, one of Sharjah's foremost artists defines this mission as a task of 'developing the mentality' of the population. For her, this vision also carries the potential of changing the outside world's perception about Sharjah.

When I say that it is our job to educate... I think our art is not only for the very well educated people who are really into art. When we are doing something, I think it is for everyone, the uneducated, the very old people, the grandfathers, I think everyone should understand that the Emirates do not only focus on developing the buildings and of how the city looks like, but they are also trying to develop their mentality, how people think, how people react about everything.

Ms. Manal Ataya, Director General of the Sharjah Museums Department elevates this responsibility to the federal level of the UAE.

It is not an easy job of course, changing how people think, and mentalities. It should be a whole national endeavor, not just emirate per emirate, it should be all of us together in this.

In the context of the idea - held by local elites - that contemporary and global art carries the potential and mission of changing or 'modernizing' the people's way of thinking, the debate over the new international museums in

Abu Dhabi also gains a different perspective and relevance. For some of the interviewed experts, these new museums remain only tourist attractions. As one of my interviewees in Sharjah argues, the new museums of Abu Dhabi have been conceptualized to enrich the Emirate's tourism potential.

I think it is a desperate attempt of creating tourist attractions, more than anything else. Again, commercial side coming in. Looking at what do we have as an Emirate if you want to attract tourists or if you want to venture down that tourism development route, what do we have, oh we don't really have much as such which... Whenever people went to Abu Dhabi years ago, and even us as guides, we didn't really know what to show. There was only so much that you could show a Petroleum Exhibition which was so related and great. The Heritage Village and a few other things but that was pretty much it. So I guess that at a higher level people would have thought that if we bring in a couple of fancy, known attractions that might help us to develop our tourism.

Ms. Shaikha Al Mazrou, Lecturer of the College of Fine Arts & Design at the University of Sharjah also believes that these big-name museums have been invited to Abu Dhabi in order to provide it with global exposure, or as she summarizes this argument: to put Abu Dhabi on the map.

I would say it is all about trying to... it is all about putting Abu Dhabi on the map. That is very obvious. Why would you open a

Guggenheim when Guggenheim already exists somewhere else? Why not build a museum that would actually represent Abu Dhabi and call it Abu Dhabi Museum? And it would be good if you wanted to exchange Guggenheim collections, that is still possible, you don't have to bring Guggenheim itself.

As others argue, however, the coming of these globally-renowned institutions will provide exposure to locals to the latest trends in international art. As Ms. Alya Al-Mulla, Assistant Curator at the Sharjah Art Museum believes, building a Guggenheim and a Louvre in Abu Dhabi might create a local museum-going culture that has been missing from the region.

Personally speaking, I think it is a good move because a lot of the people here they are not very familiar with the concept of museums or especially art. OK, maybe in the last few years we have these new students coming up and artists, so there is an awareness and knowledge about these kinds of activities, especially with the art fairs. Suddenly, a lot of the people in this society started visiting these art fairs and now they know these artists' names and arts and all kinds of stuff, so with the Guggenheim and Louvre, even that the buildings are still not ready, but even then people have this knowledge, they know that these museums are opening, so they want to know more about it. (...) Yes, it is positive. People already know about these museums and I am sure once they open they would want to visit, it creates kind of like a museum-going culture.

According to Ms. Nawar Al Qassimi, these museums also take on the responsibility for bringing 'global culture' into the region. In these narratives contemporary global art becomes a reference to progressivity and these museums become the messengers of 'modernity' and 'modernness'.

They are bringing in culture, they are flying it in, or shipping it in. This is how people call it, like parachuting culture in. So the question is, if you build a museum, will people come? I think this is one of the biggest thing that has been discussed all over the news. If there is no audience, where is your audience? For example, if you are looking at somewhere else where the audience has been exposed to that stuff for a long time, it feels natural but when you bring in a museum... but at the same time, there is the other side of the argument which are, I mean, I also see the other side which is about that sometimes this audience sometimes does not have the chance to get on a plane and go to Paris and see a museum there. People will never going to see the Guggenheim. There are some people who don't have the means to fly out and see the Guggenheim, so maybe if they have it here they will go and see it. It is true that they have never been exposed to this kind of art and culture before, but there is always a starting point. You know, if you bring in a museum and you have 50 people who have never seen it before you have done something. (...) I mean, that is the critique that it is a tourist attraction, it is marketing, it is money, it

is fake, that is true, I am not saying that it is not true, that might be the original plan. And yes, of course, people will fly in from Qatar, from Egypt, people from the region will fly in to see it, but I don't think that anybody in New York will get on a plane and fly in to see the Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi. I doubt it. But people in the region will come and people who don't want to go all the way and people who can't go all the way will come and see it. But what I am saying is also people within the country who might have not heard of it, or who might not even have an interest in art will suddenly be exposed to it. And it really depends on the way how they market it, and on the way how they do it, it really depends on that, it is a double-edged sword.

Mr. Giuseppe Moscatello, Manager, of the Maraya Art Centre of Sharjah's Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) is also optimistic about the opening of the Guggenheim and Louvre museums in Abu Dhabi. According to his expectations, these new museums could provide the opportunity for local artists for showcasing their own work. Through locally thematized exhibitions, he argues, the Louvre and the Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi can become venues that could build global recognition for Emirati art, and publicity for the UAE in general. Although Mr. Moscatello notes that currently there is a lack of local artist who would be able to work for such museums, the regional tendencies are promising.

(...) at the beginning you might think that it is difficult, or there is no need, but it is a big step that they are taking in order to improve the future, and to expand the vision of the city and of the country. Because once you bring in the Guggenheim and the Louvre, it is like you are putting yourself on an international map. So it is a smart idea. (...) I think it does not necessarily mean that they have to show the same artworks, the same collections that are shown in New York, or in Bilbao, or in Venice. They can start to show these in order to inspire the new generation. I think this is the plan that they are having, for sure, this is what they are planning to do. Because now, of course, you have this big building but you don't have regional and local artists, or UAE based ones who can create projects for such museums. But the thing can be developed. Until 2007 there was almost nothing. Before, there was the Sharjah Biennial. And in 2007 they established Art Dubai. And in 2009 they started with Art Abu Dhabi. Then the museums started to develop more exhibitions, other art departments, then Maraya Art Centre was established in 2010, so this shows... And of course a lot of commercial galleries opened in Dubai in the recent 4 and 5 years, galleries popping up like mushrooms. So it is a good signal. There is a need and a will to develop.

Ms. Ebtisam Abdulaziz, one of Sharjah's foremost artists brings into discussion the example of Sharjah's March Meetings, an annual gathering of artists, art professionals and institutions concerned with the production and

dissemination of art in the region and internationally. As she believes, these meetings contribute to the reshaping of how people think about art in the region.

(...) the March Meeting, I think it is a very deep thing to bring people from all around the world, who are working on art, museums, or projects, or even managers, and residency things, to the UAE to give us an image of what is going on in the world and to have contact with them, and to learn from them, it is a good thing. Especially for someone like me who doesn't study art. Yes I did my own studies and I teach myself.

While Ms. Nawar Al Qassimi agrees that the March Meetings bring global cultural trends to Sharjah, she also points to the opportunity these events mean for local artists to showcase their own works to international visitors. Ms. Al Qassimi also points to what she sees a difference between a more established Western art audience, and the cultural environment in Sharjah, or the Gulf region, where people are not used to attending exhibitions and visiting museums and where artists struggle for building audiences.

There are so many projects realized out of these March Meetings which is why we have done that every year. It really kind of reshapes the way people in this region think about art or perceive art or approach it. It also gives a perspective to the Western side as well, because you have all these people from these top

organizations who work within their own communities and circles, like people from TATE or MoMA, working with the US or UK arts crowd. When they come to this part of the world and see what people in the Middle East are doing, so it is a completely different...(...) I think maybe their priorities are different, because you have people who are already established. Of course, everybody is always struggling with building audiences, it doesn't matter who you are. For example, there you have people who are really well established and the arts scene is very old and has been going on forever, they have art education in schools, it is the norm that on the weekends if you have a family you take them to the museum, and they come to places like the Middle East where there is no art education and art is seen as something on the side, not everybody had the leisure of going to a museum with their family, it wasn't a priority. Then you have all these small organizations that are struggling to build audiences, to educate, and they are not necessarily following the international model, they might be, but they are not always... and I think there is a lot of really good Arab art over the past 5 years, really big names, and people know them but nobody really knows anything about this guys' country...

Mr. Giuseppe Moscatello, Manager of the Maraya Art Centre also believes that the contemporary art sectors of the UAE and the Gulf region in general are going through a period of rapid growth. Mr. Moscatello explains these tendencies by an increased recognition of the strategic location of the

UAE between the West and the East. Art, he notes, has always been an instrument of creating cultural and economic relationships between different parts of the world.

I think there is a big interest, first of all, for the region. Because contemporary art has always played an important role on the international scene, in general. It is always a tool that can connect, drive the economy, the culture, it can connect and create a bridge between other countries. (...) geographically it is a strategic place (...) in terms of interconnections. If you think about Emirates Airlines, it connects the East and the West with its flights, I think it is a very good example. Until a few years, or decades ago, it was Istanbul. Istanbul was the connection. Until now Istanbul is the real connection between the East and West but now Dubai and the Emirates became one of the biggest connections.

For Mr. Hazem Al Sawaf, Marketing Director of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority, the 'art boom' of the whole region can at least partially be interpreted as a natural consequence of the growing economic fortune and purchasing power of the residents of these countries.

The other way to consider it, of course, is the wealth of the cities. These GCC cities are getting wealthier by the minute. Because of whatever, whether the oil, whether the new businesses coming on board, the whole boom. So one of the aspects associated with the

boom is the arts scene which always goes up when the wealth goes up. These are always interrelated. That is one thing.

As one of my interviewees from the American University of Sharjah notes, these tendencies are also supported by the growing number of young people in the Emirates who, empowered by economic opportunities, increasingly experiment with art-related professions.

First, I think the government supports it, so it helps. But we also have the demographics, the population is young, it is under 40. And it is interesting how the Emiratis decided to go into different professions. Now, in other Arab countries, where the economy plays a more important role, in a sense that people are poorer, if people go to university they all want to be engineers or doctors because this is the way how they can improve their... But here the choices are bigger, so you find the Emiratis in trying out different things. (...) But I think it is also because they are a new nation, they are experimenting, and they are trying to, they are getting into different venues, different professions, so it is... I remember when I first came to the country there were not so many who were well known but now there are quite a few, there are a lot of them now.

Mr. Moscatello highlights the role of international galleries, networks, exhibitions in changing traditional perceptions about Arab, Middle Eastern and Islamic contemporary art and culture which, represented by newly

emerging names from the region are increasingly becoming global in their themes and motives. In these narratives, contemporary art emerges as an embodiment of modernness and an instrument of communicating changing realities in the region.

(...) contemporary art is global. (...) The elements that sometimes get recognized as Arab art or Middle Eastern art is the Arabic calligraphy. (...) whenever there is (...) wave design, so it is Islamic. So it is Islam, it's Arab, so it's Middle East. They think in this way. But slowly-slowly Arab art is becoming more international and there is more awareness around the world of who the artists are, who are the names, instead of just saying where they are from. (...) through networks such as Christie's for example, or private galleries, or museums, or Biennials around the world, they became more popular and the people recognize the artist, instead of recognizing the country they are coming from.

In these narratives, cosmopolitanism, or the denial of national references in art is perceived as a progressive direction and local artists who succumb to its trend are often elevated to the role of being messengers of global modernity. As Ms. Shaikha Al Mazrou, artist and lecturer at the College of Fine Arts & Design of the University of Sharjah emphasizes it: "My work does not speak about either culture, either religion". Talking about the emerging art scene of Sharjah, Mr. Giuseppe Moscatello, Manager of the Maraya Art Centre also highlights the global nature of the works of these

young artists, saying that “geography is not the first element that is considered in order to develop these projects”. Ms. Mandy Merzaban, Collections Manager and Curator of the Barjeel Art Foundation also points to the tendency of refusing national references in the art works of young Sharjah artists.

The categorization of art is not necessarily something that is universally accepted by artists. There is a growing interest in dissolving this link to ethnicity, and having your art being guided by this, this umbrella of ethnicity. Everybody has a different approach of how to create art and it does not link to sociopolitical circumstances, where they live, their heritage is not necessarily and always is shown in their work.

As she continues, Ms. Merzaban highlights what she sees is a difference in how cultural policy makers interpret the role of art in nation-building and how these young artists see their mission and work. In her view, the official classification of art initiatives under the term of heritage is misleading and false.

I don't think that art should be under heritage. Or culture should be under heritage, this is kind of like not a very good umbrella term for these very different things. I mean, everything is connected but everything isn't heritage, I really wouldn't put contemporary art under heritage. That is why I think that there is little bit of a

disconnect in understanding the importance of these art initiatives in Sharjah, and it should be probably better represented.

As Mr. Hisham Al Madhloum, Director of the Directorate of Art at the Department of Culture & Information in Sharjah narrates, however, after Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, the daughter of the Ruler and the President of the Sharjah Art Foundation finished her studies and came back to Sharjah from the UK, the conceptualization of art initiatives took a different direction. These initiatives, he argues, have a much bolder contemporary focus today.

(...) we don't close our house, we are open to other cultures. We established the Biennial in 1993, and that time (...) we tried to push for and focus on the Arab world (...) And we pushed for the Arab world, and we looked for artists from the Arab world, and we honored Arab people who helped art. (...) From 2006, from the coming of Her Highness Shaikha Hoor, her mind is contemporary art. (...) She changed it [the Biennial]. First I was afraid. But when I saw it, I thought she was right and very good to do it. She tried mostly an all-contemporary focusing. Here you can say: 'not your identity'. I tell you, I tell you there is some part of our identity, some people. Because mostly today in the Arab world they are working in contemporary art. And we invite them to this Biennial. (...) Not only classic. We also have something contemporary.

Orientalist representations: From ignorance to reversing conventional wisdom?

On the previous pages I have argued that most interviewed experts perceive contemporary and global art as progressive and as an instrument of ‘modernizing local mindsets and mentalities’. In this chapter I will examine how local elites interpret Orientalist representations of the region. It will be argued in general that local discourses approach Orientalist art and colonial representations of the region with a ‘relaxed’ attitude, emphasizing the artistic value of these artworks.

One of the most often repeated arguments in the interviews explain the local embracement of Orientalist representations by a sentiment of historically prevailing national ‘self-confidence’ in the region. As Mr. Marwan Bin Jasem Al Sarkal, CEO of Shurooq - Sharjah Investment & Development Authority notes, the region experienced the rule and influence of several empires and peoples and it has built a ‘self-confident’ attitude that allows for the acceptance of different narratives about and representations of the region.

Here it [Orientalism] is not an issue because we have a history. And we are more like a melting pot for a lot of nations that came here, whether they are the Arabs, whether they are the Portuguese, whether they are the Ottomans, they all passed through...

The same argument about national ‘self-confidence’ is strengthened by Mr. Peter Jackson, Architect Advisor of The Ruler's Office. He recalls his experiences in post-independence Zimbabwe to compare the angst he

perceived there about colonial representations to the relaxed attitudes of the Gulf about Orientalist art.

I think it goes back to the idea of self-confidence. I lived for 22 years in Zimbabwe. And I moved in at the time of independence from Zambia whereas I worked after in the Gulf. And I had my own architecture practice in Zimbabwe. And that Zimbabwe came about after a very vicious and horrible civil war, and real anti-colonial feelings, very strong anti-colonial feelings. And yet there is a National Archive there where you could see all sorts of equipment of the Orientalists images, the colonial images. (...) But there was a real angst about it. Here, in this part of the world, there is no angst really, as far as I can see. I wouldn't be here if there was an angst about what the British did...

For Ms. Bahar Erdogan, Global Communications Coordinator of the Sharjah Media Centre, it is Sharjah's long history that allows for the embracement of such representations. She also notes that the Gulf region has not been at the focus of these colonialist artworks.

Yes, we have them but it is not really much focused on the United Arab Emirates to be honest. Because the thing is that even that we exist for almost 7000 years in this area, Sharjah is one of the oldest ones...

As others explain, Orientalist representations are interpreted along and appreciated for their artistic and educational value in the region. As Ms. Alya Al-Mulla, Assistant Curator of the Sharjah Art Museum recalls the examples of the recent Orientalist exhibitions at her museum, she notes that it was almost only Western commentators who criticized the projects. As she argues, local visitors enjoyed the exhibitions.

The Lure of the East (...) that was the exhibition, and then when exhibition happened in the UK and in the US, there were some reviews of the exhibition which were quite critical (...) of the things to display and of objectifying the Orient in these paintings. And a lot of them were not actual or real scenes but they were just what the artist would imagine, or portray from the time he lived here, then he would go back and use his imagination to paint things, and some of them were not even true. But for us when the exhibition happened here it was a very-very big success. Very big success really, it was one of our best exhibitions that we had in the Museum.

Ms. Al-Mulla explains the local success of these exhibitions by pointing to the artistic value of these Orientalist paintings and lithographies. As she puts it, local visitors apparently appreciated ‘the art itself’.

I think people here they look at the... more than on the content and the history they focus more on what they see, the visuals, the beauty of it.

(...) I mean if you look at those paintings, I don't think that lot of the people here (...) would go back to the history (...) and to what made the painter do this... The typical Orientalist critics which people perceive as... But here people, most of them, not most, all of them who came in they just appreciated the art itself. Appreciating the art, the exhibition, the way the display was done, the visuals, the colors, the techniques, the skill, that itself was something very significant. So you won't go into finer details of why they did this... (...) like I said, there were some critics abroad when it happened in the UK and US, I even remember meeting a few of them and they were actually skeptical and they were saying how can this exhibition travel to Sharjah with the works it was showing. But once it came to Sharjah we did not face any of these...

Ms. Al Mulla also notes that the exhibited artworks belong to the collection of the Ruler of Sharjah who is very much interested in Orientalist art. Being a historian, Ms. Mulla argues, Dr. Sheikh Sultal Al Qassimi, the Ruler of Sharjah strongly believes in the educational value of these works and exhibitions.

All those exhibitions happened here in the Museum. The Levant exhibition happened at the end of last year. Then the Voyage to Persia, that exhibition happened two years ago. All these collections belong to His Highness, the Ruler of Sharjah, he is a very avid, very important collector of Orientalist art. So he has his collection and every now and then... (...) His Highness also has his

other collections and prints, for example the Levant exhibition, the Persia exhibition, they are either stored in the Museum, or there is the Gulf Studies Centre, in different areas, and between now and then we have a request and we coordinate with the Department of Information and Culture, and we exhibit these paintings and collections which belong to His Highness... Even he is very interested, he likes the collections to go on public display so that the people can view them and benefit from it. It is not just for collecting purposes only. I think the whole vision of the Museum comes from his broader vision of how he wants Sharjah to be, and people to be familiar especially with the historical aspects, and the history of the region. A lot of the prints which you see and which were exhibited in the displays had a lot of architectural details and landscapes and things which are very historical for this region, not just paintings and figures. So it is very educational...

Mr. Hisham Al Madhloum, Director of the Directorate of Art at the Department of Culture & Information in Sharjah also emphasizes the historical and educational value of the Ruler's Orientalist collection.

The Orientalist. His Highness, he has this collection, and a different collection of old maps, old photographs, old something. But this collection, His Highness he only collects about the Arab World. From different artists. Because he has already a PhD and a writer, he collects this art. (...) But it is important, two things. Here they

are looking the art but in the same time, the image inside, or the subject inside, it is about the Arab world, the Arab countries. When the Orientalist person is coming in the 18th and 17th century, he want to see through his eyes what he is looking at. That is very important for him because he is a historical man and he is writing. That is why he wants to take care about these pieces, he also tries to collect from the Arab world. There are very important pieces from David Roberts. They already have 350 old prints. But one or two pieces are oil paintings from David Roberts. Also the old print you don't see, more than 500 pieces, all from the Arab world.

As Mr. Al Madhloum concludes, these artworks and representations carry important value for local researchers and historians, including the Ruler himself.

See, this is all prints, but all from the Arab world. This is very important for our people, for our university people, for the whole local research about architecture etc. They have all the prints here. All original. This is his collection. When he collects, he focuses only about this.

However, not all interviewed experts agree with the above explanations. These experts are more critical in their approach and point to what they phrase as different levels of awareness about history in different groups of the local population. As Ms. Sherifa Madgwick, Manager of

Development and Communication at the Sharjah Centre for Cultural Communication argues, the history of European influence in the region carries relevance only for the older generations of the population.

You (...) have to remember that the older generation here, those that do remember when the British were more strongly here (...) Because this is such a young history. (...) So I say, yes (...) the older generation that are around, there is very few of them you could communicate with, to remember that time.

As Dr. Zaki Aslan, Manager of the ATHAR Programme (Conservation of Cultural Heritage in the Arab Region) at ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, Rome), a Honorary Senior Lecturer of the University College London in Qatar, and Adjunct Faculty at the American University of Sharjah emphasizes it, local approaches to colonialism might be different in different groups of the society, some of those characterized by more, while others by less awareness about the history of the region and Sharjah.

I think there is only certain stratum of the society who is aware of this. So it is not really a common knowledge because here, especially if we are talking about the Gulf, it is more of a stable area, people are more relaxed, they don't really have any major problems, in a way citizens are getting their rights, so it is not really something that make people... There is a psychology to this.

(...) I have to tell you something. I teach at the American University, I did a course last semester and I couldn't believe, people know more about Orientalism in the West than here. (...) I was asking a student like "Have you heard of certain people who wrote on Orientalism" and nothing, only a few people answered anything, the majority was unaware of such notions. And we are talking about the American University. So what I was trying to teach during that course... I realized that they really need to be aware of such things so that they could reflect on how cultural heritage can play a major role in this.

Some of the interviewed experts emphasize, however, that the influence of colonialism and the history and nature of the region's relationship with the West should be discussed in the context of the course of development of local identities and mindsets. As Ms. Manal Ataya, Director General of the Sharjah Museums Department argues, discussing these influences might contribute to a better understanding of 'the psyche' of those who built and run the country and also of 'how the nation sees itself'.

When I say how heritage and anchoring is very important when you talk about demographics that is not older than 25 for example, when more than 70 percent of the population is that young, then you are looking at a demographics between 15 to 25, then of course, colonialism is something of a concept that never really had any value to them or interest to their lives. However, for people of

the age of my father who is 72, it is a very-very important topic and probably comes up almost every other day, when he is talking about colonialism, and ‘you know this is why things still are like this today, and this is why this mentality, and why people have complexes about certain things, this is why people are in this way or that’... Not blaming all this on colonialism but explaining how the colonial mind and being under colonial rule (...) what it does to people. (...) And I think for younger generations like myself, it is hard, you can read books but unless you have experienced it, it is really hard to understand it. But I think it is an important part of a nation’s psyche, if it makes sense. So, it might not be important in mine but it might be important to me to understand the psyche of people much older than me, and also of how a nation sees itself. And the people, of course, who run that nation, how they build that kind of identity and nation, what that means... how their experiences made them feel about particular things, or not. So it is an important aspect to understand...

As Ms. Ataya continues she suggests that a proper understanding of the nature of past relationships between the region and the West might be crucial in interpreting, for example, current representations of the region.

I think it will, when those people grow up, for sure, and when they will want to learn about that more and to understand what that means, particularly if they start to see it at their age maybe being

done again, maybe not in the most obvious way as colonial rule, but maybe in the ways how people think about other people, or how media representations of people are, and these all have certain roots in kinds of understandings and misunderstandings of people at a history of time. I think these can be important later on to some people, and we always ensure that that is there, because this is history and it should be there, there is no reason to pretend it didn't happen, or to downplay it. But I think it is more of making it sure that our museums are relevant as much as possible, and it would not happen if we only focused on that aspect there.

One of the interviewees from the American University of Sharjah explains the apparent lack of public discussions about Orientalist or neocolonial representations of the region and its people by the rapid course of development of the country.

It is not an issue because I don't think that it has been thought of properly. (...) I think it will take a bit more maturity for people to realize what is at play here. And this country wasn't... OK, it was ruled by the colonial power but it wasn't colonized like the countries in North Africa or in other parts of the world. Egypt, for that matter, when Edward Said wrote about this and he started asking people to pay attention, probably this particular region wasn't even discussed in his Orientalism, he was talking about other places.

Others point to the role of education in the proper understanding of history. As one of my interviewees argues, the lack of public discussions about the role of colonial, imperialist and Western influences on the formation and course of development of the UAE and Sharjah should be explained by the ways how local history is taught in schools. According to this view, people ‘pretend’ that they are not aware of the role of foreign influences on shaping the course of local history.

I think people don't talk about it. I think people pretend it never happened. I really think it. People believe that there was nobody here before us, we built this Emirate and that is it. But it is not the case. For example in schools, I don't know about public schools, I may be very wrong, but we didn't know anything about colonialism, we didn't know anything about the British invasion, we didn't know anything about all that stuff that changed, or formed the Emirates. What we were taught in school was that there was a country, and there was a leader, and he formed the seven emirates. That is all you learn. And it is very strange. Maybe people want to pretend it never happened, I don't know. But people don't talk about it.

The interviewed expert also notes that certain groups of the population still carry the memories of personal experiences of the time when the country was formed. As she continues, she points to the efforts of Sharjah's Ruler, too, in

educating the nation about the history of those times. Still, she argues, many seem to pretend not being aware of these historical facts.

It is actually not that far. And I think that our generation knows about it because our parents' generation lived through it and we heard the stories. Whereas the future generation I don't think they know it. (...) His Highness, the Ruler he researches and writes, and he recently launched a book that talked about the British occupation with lots of details, also some of his older books showed documents and proves and letters and thinks like that have never been shown before. He made his records public that actually that we were under attack, and the British army was here, and it is actually happened. Whereas some other people say it never happened or they pretend or they would refer to the British troops as the Ally when they actually weren't the Ally. There was a truce afterwards but they weren't actually the ally. So he published all these books because that was a problem that nobody knew it. So he made his research public. That is something that maybe people don't think that is important. I don't know. It is very strange.

As an important angle, some of the interviewed experts point to the marketing potential of self-Orientalizing representations for tourism promotion. As Mr. Bobby Thomas Koshy, Manager of Overseas Promotions and Acting Manager of Domestic Promotions at the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority argues, highlighting those details of a

destination that reinforce the expectations of the imagination of visitors is a necessary and well-established method in place branding.

Well, how do you promote your destination if you don't advertise what you have? Number one. Number two, if you want to advertise what you have, it has to be a showpiece. So, by default, if you don't show what you have out in the open, and you don't make it prominent and big, and you don't make people see it, you can't really show it out to the world. So however small the aspect is, we are trying to make it big, so that people would get to know it. People would be educated about it, people will understand, people would see it, people would remember it, people would experience it... I am not saying that we are trying to over-expose it, so that people will know it, but what I am trying to say is that we are trying to bring it out to the open so that people can see it and experience it. I think this is what we are doing. I wouldn't say that we are trying to over-exoticize it, as the word is, but I think we are trying to make it aware or make it be seen... This is a very difficult question, it is a very how you see it kind of question. People from the outside world might think that we are trying to over-dramatize the whole thing, but I don't think we are, we are just trying to bring out what we have so people can see it.

Others, like Ms. Nawar al-Qassimi, however, emphasize the relevance of changing or turning around conventional Orientalist narratives and images

about the region. Pointing the curatorial vision of the 2013 edition of the Sharjah Biennial, she brings in examples how a reversing of the conventional wisdom about the direction of East and West relations could happen.

The vision for this one [Biennial] is looking at Sharjah on the map historically and seeing it as rather than a place where people walked through and left behind their cultures but actually there is a lot culture and a lot of dialogue that started within this region and it has been carried on. So it is kind of reversing. And she [the curator] is looking at the Travels of Ibn Battuta and going through history and looking at a lot of the architecture, and the influences of architecture in other parts of the world, from the Islamic world, specifically from Sharjah. And she is also using Sharjah as a courtyard, like the metaphor of the courtyard, it is the place of knowledge production and discussion. So it is kind of reversing the idea of the West bringing in its influence to the East but rather what came out of here and were also lost. (...) It is a very new idea. It is nothing that we have been taught about. Because we were just taught to believe that this is the way it happened.

Some are critical of an emphasis on the role of Orientalism in current representations and understandings of the region. For one of my interviewees, it is only the interest of the Western scholar to highlighting these perceived tendencies.

Well, Orientalism you have to look at again... you have to look at this whole manifestation not as a black and white thing, to start with. Second, you have to remember that Orientalism impacted on some countries but did not impact on other countries. So where Orientalism does not have a historic legacy and has not carved itself bitterly into the minds of people, the angst that Western scholars yet again extend to those subjects is just not relevant.

She turns the argumentation around and questions what she sees as the preconceptions of the Western scholar by which a false dynamic is narrated between the region and the West. For her, problematizing local perceptions of and approaches to Orientalist representations of the region can itself be based on stereotypes that reinforce Orientalist interpretations and narratives. As she says,

...this East-West dynamic that people are always very keen to create, because it doesn't actually exist, particularly in our now fundamentally globalized world, cannot explain the currents here in a satisfactory way. It is a very-very complex, fluid, multifaceted state of being that can be found in all other countries as responding to the relevant realities that countries face. So I think you can't really put one point on it, because if you do that, you will falsify it, and you will in many ways reiterate the stereotypical interpretations of this region that prevailed since Orientalist times.

Based on the expert interviews, in this chapter I introduced those perceived characteristics of Sharjah which emerged as the attributes of its national brand. In addition to a reconstruction of Sharjah's perceived image around the themes of culture, authenticity, family, and modernness, based on the collected data this chapter has also attempted to identify and explore those conceptual understandings and motivations that shape the strategies and practices of Sharjah's nation branding efforts. In this framework it has been suggested that nation branding in Sharjah is seen as an integrate part of the state's nation-building efforts based on the perceived elite responsibilities of preserving heritage and tradition, cultivating culture, supporting education, and embracing contemporary art. It has also been argued that nation branding is considered to be a new technique yet to be learned in Sharjah, and an instrument that aims to contribute to the strengthening of national identity, too, beyond the task of constructing the Emirate's place image. The following chapter will turn to the introduction of the expert interviews conducted in Singapore. Following the introduction of the collected data in Sharjah and Singapore, in the discussion chapters I will aim to connect the identified brand attributes and nation branding strategies and practices to those policies and efforts of the particular states that aim to build internal legitimacy through discourses around national identity and nationalism.

The Singapore interviews

As it will be discussed in the following chapter, the interviewed nation branding experts perceive Singapore as a place that has been going through a fundamental change in the recent decade. As they will argue, however, the external image of the city-state did not adequately follow the changing character of the place. The differences between Singapore's reputation as a safe, clean, but boring and controlled place and its changing identity as a vibrant, creative and cosmopolitan country have resulted in a perceived brand-lag situation that Singapore's latest nation branding initiative has been about to change.

As this chapter will demonstrate, the Singapore national brand emerges from the interviews as a construct built on aspirational elements. The brand attributes that are suggested to characterise the place are to a great extent perceived to be parts of an identity in the making. Singapore's national brand, thus, embodies a programmatic project that simultaneously aims to transform identity and image, signalling a strong interplay between nation-building policies and strategies of nation branding.

It will be argued that Singapore's characterization as a multiracial place did not only serve to create a unique destination brand proposition for the city-state but it has also been functioned for long as an ideological tool of the government to manufacture and control ethnic harmony at the place. Similarly, Singapore's recent national brand identity as a vibrant, global city of the arts should be understood in relation to the social engineering efforts of the state to inculcate the values of creativity and entrepreneurship into its citizens along a top-down form of managed or strategic cosmopolitanisms.

In addition to reconstructing Singapore's perceived brand attributes and providing a description of the specific interpretations and motivations at work behind its nation branding efforts, the chapter will also give a detailed account of the methodologies that guide the practice of these efforts in the framework of Singapore's National Marketing Action Committee exercise.

Branding Singapore

The National Marketing Action Committee

As Mr. Koh Buck Song, CEO of Integrative CSR Consulting and the author of 'Brand Singapore: How Nation Branding Built Asia's Leading Global City' (Marshall Cavendish, Singapore, 2011.) argues, Singapore's national brand has been conventionally seen to be formulated by the Singapore Tourism Board. More recently, he suggests, this work has also been influenced by other agencies working in the area of national marketing at the Ministry of Information, Communications, and the Arts, and agencies in policy and implementation from the Prime Minister's Office to the Ministry of Manpower Koh : 36.

Until today, however, the inter-agency body of Singapore's National Marketing Action Committee (NMAC) has been the island state's most comprehensive exercise in nation branding. On the following pages this dissertation will give an account of the conceptualization, strategies and practices of NMAC as those are reconstructed from the documentation of the project, from the products that have been prepared in the course of its activities, and from the in-depth, experts interviews that have been conducted

with most of the branding practitioners who have been involved in the development of the initiative.

According to the ‘Building a Singapore National Brand Platform – Training Presentation’² prepared by FutureBrand Singapore, the brand consultancy that won the government’s National Marketing Action Committee tender in 2006, the NMAC has been commissioned to develop the national brand platform for Singapore. It aimed to “work like a prism to help align marketing efforts of individual components across various sectors of Singapore” while “articulat[ing] Singapore in a consistent way, but with a high degree of flexibility to support, and not override, individual identities”.

Based on the data provided in the training material, the NMAC initiative has been designed to involve the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Manpower, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education the Ministry of National Development, the Ministry of Law, the Ministry of Defense, the (then-) Ministry of Information, Communications, and the Arts, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs , the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, and the Ministry of Social and Family Development.

In this presentation material, the notion of a ‘brand’ is defined as “the collection of associations and perceptions people make with products, companies, people and places”. As it is argued “strong brands are characterised by their focus on delivering a consistent customer experienced accompanied by consistent communications”. In this view, “brands become

² Unless cited otherwise, the quotes of this chapter are excerpts from FutureBrand’s ‘Building a Singapore National Brand Platform – Training Presentation’ document.

strong when they use their brand idea to guide their products, services, people and communications” in a way that “their audience begin to build the association with their brand over time”.

As the presentation material argues, “the same concept of brands can be applied to cities, countries or regions”. “Cities or countries with strong brands”, it continues, “have a consistent set of attributes their stakeholders associate them with”. “The crux is”, the presentation concludes, “to ensure this set of attributes is of value to the country and is what the country wants to be associated with”. “With a stronger country brand”, it suggests, “local businesses, tourism and individuals find it easier to place themselves competitively in the global environment”.

The training material notes that “every country essentially has a brand” which “brand is developed and evolved over the years naturally”. As it continues, however, “while we can let a country’s brand be built over the years, there is also the opportunity to proactively shape perceptions to reflect the changes happening in a country”.

According to the material, “Singapore faces intense global competition with more countries harnessing the power of branding to constantly positioning and repositioning themselves”. “With the increased country branding activities”, the presentation continues, “it will get increasingly harder for us to communicate our proposition if Singapore does not take a proactive approach to branding.” The presentation suggests the developing of a strong country brand that “crystallize[s] our existing and aspired propositions” and that “will help Singapore retain and build its competitiveness”. The challenge, the NMAC material explains, is “to build on our strong existing brand today to

reflect our transformation and aspirations for the future.” For doing so, as it goes, “our goal is not to discard what Singapore is today” but “on the contrary, we need to retain and build on Singapore’s existing strengths as we develop the Singapore brand of tomorrow”.

Brand Singapore, however, has never meant to be “a campaign or a tagline”. As the presentation clarifies, it aimed to become “an idea to inspire and rally stakeholders to explore and drive changes that are shaping Singapore”. Thus, the project didn’t involve the development of a Brand Singapore advertising or promotion campaign. Instead, Brand Singapore was meant “to be infused into all the initiatives and communications of the public sector”.

According to the training material the goals for the brand platform were based on the ideas of articulating the best of Singapore, and Singapore’s aspirations; supporting and aligning marketing efforts of individual public sector agencies; and providing a theme for Singapore’s private sector to leverage internationally.

The actual project started in December 2006 and it was completed in January 2008. It involved the data gathering phase, the developing of a brand messaging guide, and the delivery of a series of workshops at different government agencies.

As of the research methodology of the data gathering phase, input was obtained from interviews with >260 local and international stakeholders and a quantitative study involving 600. Apart from the initial interviews, the initial research phase involved another “two rounds of local and international validations to help home in on the final solution”.

Based on the results of the research phase, several “tools have been developed to deliver and communicate Brand Singapore effectively to the public sector”. In September and October 2007 and in January 2008 around 40 workshops were conducted at the different ministries to “introduce and discuss” the brand idea in specific contexts. Under the title of ‘The Spirit of Singapore’, there has also been a Brand Messaging Guide created that aimed to elaborate on Brand Singapore and to “inspire readers with context for each ministry” and to “provide information on how to communicate the brand”. In addition to several Brand Singapore videos which aimed to communicate the Brand “in an inspirational, engaging & self-explanatory manner via a series of photographic animation clips”, there has also been a series of Brand Heroes videos produced as “short clips (...) to reflect the spirit of Singapore by featuring individuals who live the brand”. Finally, a Brand Council was set up to “manage the brand, broadening ownership across the public sector and facilitating collaboration with the private sector”.

According to the NMAC training material, “a high degree of buy-in was obtained from the public sector’s leaders” and “apart from NMAC, the brand platform for Singapore was signed off by the Committee of Permanent Secretaries (COPS) in September 2007”.

The Spirit of Singapore brand proposition

Based on the suggestions of the Spirit of Singapore Brand Messaging Guide, Singapore should be perceived as a country that is ‘nurturing’,

‘transforming’, actively ‘collaborating’, and known for its ‘daring to dream’ quality. As The Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts explained, the suggested brand attributes “reflect how we as Singaporeans are driven to explore, and how we nurture the spirit that challenges us to stimulate and embrace change; change that opens up bold new arenas for collaboration and transformation, inspiring us to dream and conquer new frontiers.”³

As Ms Carol Tan, then director of MICA’s Resilience and Marketing Division argues, “these attributes will not replace Singapore’s ‘core’ reputation as a safe and efficient country”. As she is quoted to continue, “The core will always be at the heart of what we do. It is not about an old person trying to dress young, but it’s about how you remain relevant in an ever-changing world.”

Most of the commentators and experts argue that Singapore has ‘transformed’ itself over the years and it got into a brand lag situation. In the words, as one of MICA’s materials puts it: ‘The perception of what Singapore has to offer does not match the reality’.

As critics of the new brand concept noted, however, the suggested brand attributes of the Spirit of Singapore brand: ‘nurturing’, ‘transforming’, ‘collaborating’, and ‘daring to dream’ do not bring Singapore’s (envisioned) image closer to its reality. As FutureBrand’s former acting director of strategy Ms. Joanna Stringer notes in an article on NMAC, brand attributes are always a mixture of the credible and the aspirational. For her, what makes the difference is whether a country can eventually deliver on what it promises in its brand. In her opinion, “with a government to be as effective and functional

³ Unless cited otherwise, the following quotes are from Tan Hui Yee’s article ‘Brand New Singapore’. <http://progressgp.wordpress.com/2010/07/11/brand-new-singapore/>

as it is in Singapore, you probably have a degree more confidence, as a brand consultant, getting behind attributes that are slightly more aspirational than if you were in a less organised state.” As she suggests: “Let’s think about how we make these attributes real. We want these words to impact chief executive officers, decision makers and policy makers”. As she concludes in one of these rare media appearances, “We want to have people say, ‘How can we be more transforming? How can we be more nurturing? How can we be more collaborative?’ That’s what we want.”

To communicate in a manner that is aligned with Brand Singapore and to ensure that content and style are reflective of the brand idea, a series of verbal and visual guidelines have been developed. ‘The Spirit of Singapore’ Brand Messaging Guide has been the main product of the NMAC initiative. The book has been created by FutureBrand and it aimed to elaborate on the idea and concept of Brand Singapore and to provide guidelines on how to communicate the brand in both verbal and visual manners. The book is organized along the four main brand attributes of Brand Singapore which has been defined as ‘daring to dream’, ‘nurturing’, ‘transforming’, and ‘collaborating’.

As it is explained, ‘Daring to Dream’ refers to “the liberty and capacity” of Singaporeans “to dream of a bigger, better future”⁴. As the explanation continues: “we are not afraid to pursue these ambitions by embracing change and challenge. Fired by our forefathers’ enterprising spirit, we are determined to persevere and explore every route that will take us to new frontiers”. As of the communication of this attribute of the brand, it is

⁴ Unless cited otherwise, the following quotes are taken from the ‘The Spirit of Singapore’ Brand Messaging Guide

recommended that the verbal elements should “instil a sense of fearlessness and confidence” and “suggest a readiness to explore, experiment and fulfil our aspirations as people”. Images should “show knowledge, inspiration, ideas, thinking, challenge, debate, innovation, perseverance, exploration” and “imply the search for improvement and the spirit of entrepreneurship”.

The brand attribute of ‘nurturing’ is described in the guide in relation to the perception that “with an open culture that welcomes change, Singapore is a country of opportunities for everyone. Our resilience and confident strengths as a progressive nation allow us to support and develop different visions. Here, we create a conducive environment that ultimately acts as a catalyst for success.” When talking of ideas / developments talk of how they have been encouraged and inspired vs. being commanded and directed. Images should “show care, warmth, and openness, and equal opportunity”.

The brand attribute of ‘transforming’ is described in the guide in reference to the perception that Singaporeans “inspired by heritage, and driven by aspirations to continuously build a better future. Our desire for progress is evident in the way we consistently reinvent ourselves, motivating us to boldly embrace change and achieve growth through innovation and constant transformation.” Emphasize wherever applicable, our willingness to stimulate change and embrace challenges for progress. Images should “reflect dynamism, movement, energy, motion, and change” and “show confidence, drive, passion, ambition, motivation and determination”.

Finally, ‘collaborating’ is described in the context of the perception that “Singapore is flourishing with new and creative energies, where diversity is a way of life and ideas are actively encouraged and exchanged. Thriving on

the power of differences, we are collaborating on various platforms across diverse pursuits to build a more vibrant, exciting and invigorating society”. Reinforce our receptiveness of diversity, partnership and exchange for a more vibrant future. Images should “imply collaboration among people, interaction between people and place”.

The Singapore Brand

Based on a series of in-depth interviews, on the following pages I will aim to provide an insider’s point of view of how the experts involved in the conceptualization, strategy-making, and implementation of the project interpret the aims and evaluate the activities of the National Marketing Action Committee. By doing so, I will try to explore and understand the specific understandings, motivations, and visions at work behind the creation and implementation of Singapore’s largest national marketing positioning exercise until today. In the first part of the chapter I aim to reconstruct the perception of Singapore’s image as it emerges from the interviews and also to explore and describe how they the envisioned transformation of the brand is conceptualized by the experts involved in the NMAC exercise. In the second part of the Singapore case study I will aim to give an analytical account of those understandings that shape the practice of nation branding in Singapore.

The shift: From smooth performer to confident explorer

The interviews capture Singapore’s brand image in motion. While most of the interviewed experts agree that the city state’s currently dominant

image still revolves around notions of safety, stability, and reliability, they also argue that there has been a recent shift in perceptions towards an image of a more innovative and creative city.

As Mr. Dominic Mason, the former project lead at FutureBrand's winning National Marketing Action Committee tender recalls, while those who were familiar with Singapore could sense how the city-state had transformed itself in the first years of the new Millennium, the country's external image and reputation were still dominated by outdated stereotypes about a boring place at the time when the idea of NMAC was born.

I think people who were more close to Singapore could sense how Singapore was changing, at that time, how there were a number of examples that pointed to the innovativeness and creativity of Singaporeans. When you took the external people, there wasn't a huge amount of people that felt that Singapore was transforming, they felt Singapore still stereotyped as a very safe and boring place.

As he notes, one of the paradigmatic challenges of the NMAC exercise has been to transform Singapore's external image from one characterized by safety, reliability, and security to a reputation based on innovation, risk-taking, and entrepreneurship.

I think, it is going back seven or eight years now. At that time there was a very stern kind of concern that Singapore was seen as a very safe and reliable but not as a very creative or innovative place. And

you can gather this much from the National Day Rally Speeches delivered by the Prime Minister, and we went back at least, I think, three if not five years and looked at every single National Day Rally speech. And from that we could identify that there was a direction set for Singapore which was to start to become more entrepreneurial, more risk-taking, more creative and more innovative. So if that is the future direction, that is the aspiration, the question is how do you shift people's directions or mindsets who are not based in Singapore i.e.: external audiences. And so the narrative for the brand as a result of our research was set on a trajectory of what is that we got now and how far we need to go to. So from safe, reliable, secure, all these strong left-brain things, how do we start to evolve the reputation to more innovative, risk-taking, entrepreneurial, knowledge-based activities.

Further explaining on the 'mental mind' of the Singapore brand, Mr. Mason adds efficiency and diversity (or connectivity) to safety and reliability as the conventionally-held left-brain characteristics of the image of the place. Towards the other end of the spectrum, Mr. Mason identifies attributes associated with knowledge, service, innovation, and finally, risk-taking and creativity.

If you can image in your head a spectrum of different attributes, or values: on the left side you have safety, reliability, you have your efficiency, your quality, and then as a sort of third pillar you have

connectivity. Connectivity and diversity is a big part of this story, you know the whole East-West narrative, and the diversity of different races here. And then, as you moved further towards the right, it was about building up pillars or attributes around knowledge, around service, and finally around innovation, and then risk taking and creativity.

Between these two ends of the spectrums, Mr. Mason argues, between the notion of the ‘smooth performer’ and the image of the ‘creative pioneer’, the bridging persona of the ‘confident explorer’ emerged as a credible proposition of the new place brand.

These spectrums basically formed, or helped inspire a series of hypotheses. And those hypotheses were what we then brought back to discussion. (...) Do we want Singapore to be a smooth performer vs. a creative pioneer? And that helped facilitate the debate. And then we came up with an archetype which is a very simple personification of what we felt the brand could be. And that was captured in two words, which was: confident explorer. Confident - built on the existing strengths of safety, reliability. Explorer - allowed us to talk about the other end of the spectrum, the transformative end of the spectrum. The idea of ‘confident explorer’ could be a bridging area for the two ends of the spectrum. It was never intended to be a tagline (...) as much as a mental mind of the Singapore brand.

As another interviewed experts recalls, the nation branding project was initiated with the purpose of pushing Singapore's image towards what he calls a more modern, contemporary, entrepreneurial place.

I think what came out from at this first stage was pretty much confirmed that the people's perception in the way they talk about Singapore was around stability, safety, efficiency, kind of discourse. And across government communication, it is also very consistent, so you have this whole government consistency about how Singapore is articulated. And it is also interesting that across businesses, we talked to different businesses, and the public generally, this is also very much aligned. So it is well aligned. (...) I think, after many years of public sector communication, and being able to live up to it, you know, in terms of delivering results, many public sector projects done, whether it is the airport, the port, it is education, it is about pro-business environment, being able to deliver on all these, the perception of Singapore as stable, efficient, so on. And there are the benefits that people can see, they would like that to continue, but there is a challenge because while the value that has been traditionally been there, there is also a need to aspire to something that is a bit more contemporary, a bit more modern, much more today, which is about flexibility, creativity, innovation, and such line.

While the interviewed expert points to the role of governmental policies and communication in shaping and maintaining Singapore's safety-based reputation, he also notes that the recognition of the need for transforming this image into a more global and creative place brand and identity coincided with the aspirations of certain well-travelled parts of the society.

The government as a whole is, of course, aware of how the whole discourse of global city needs to involve creativity, innovation... At that point, I think, there were some awareness of what Richard Florida was talking about, in terms of being a creative hub and a global city and all that. So the question is how do you get to there from here. And then the people, of course, have been exposed to, they are well travelled, they also want to break away from the rigidity of the past, so they want to aspire more creative lifestyles, being more innovative. So that stretch from stability and efficiency to creativity was something that we had to use to kind of pinpoint where Singapore can be on this stretch, on this dimension. So that is essentially what the whole project gravitated towards.

One of the interviewees even suggests these differences between the existing and conventional image and that of the transformational one can also be tracked on the map of Singapore's recent political developments.

The General Election that just passed, the PAP was still talking about, you know, we've done well, we've given you all these things. Which is the existing brand. The clean, efficient thing. But then you got the opposition saying that OK, fine, we got up there, but we need to move on to the next stage. (...) And the next stage is about being more innovative, have more entrepreneurs, why are people just happy to do things well, not do things better or different, or things to sell. So all that is reflecting this.

Most interviewed experts agree that the last decade has brought a shift both in Singapore's cityscape and atmosphere and also in the city-state's reputation. As Mr. Mason argues, the Casinos, the Formula 1, the Esplanade have all contributed to moving people's perceptions away from Singapore being a very controlled place. For him, Singapore is becoming more of a glamour location these days.

It is quite interesting because thinking back seven or eight years ago we didn't have Formula 1, we didn't have the Casinos there, we didn't have the Marina Bay in its, sort of, emerging glory now. Yes, we had the Esplanade but, you know... I think the point is that in the last five years it has caught up, maybe, even overtaken what was then perceived to be a restrictive Singapore. Singapore now is maybe perceived something as a glamour location. It has gone through a property bubble, property here is still expensive, you see a lot more Ferraris, you hear about a lot more Singaporeans being

disappointed or frustrated with expensive foreigners coming in, stories of very-very rich people buying.... And in many ways, those things as the Formula 1, the Casinos have really shifted my view what were perceptions of Singapore being very staid, very boring, and very restricted in a way. You know, they haven't necessarily changed their laws on press freedom here, or the Internal Security Act, or on the death penalty, those haven't shifted fundamentally, but the Formula 1 somehow has moved people's impressions away from Singapore is being a very controlled place. And I see it something like a stroke of genius, if that was pre-meditated on the part of the Singapore authorities... I don't think for one minute that they actually imagined the power of an event like the Formula 1 would have to mitigate perceptions of Singapore being a very locked down, controlled place. Fundamentally, those laws are still in place.

As one of my interviewees at Contact Singapore adds, vibrancy, dynamism, fun, and the quality of being a liveable city to the image she believes Singapore has recently been developing into.

I was going to say 'fun' but maybe it is the wrong word. I think it is more 'fun', more 'vibrant'. I don't want to use the word 'livable' but it is the word everybody uses, it is a more liveable, more vibrant city. It is not just a small little island with buildings, there are more things to do in this little city state. (...) I think people

aspire to have a balance, you want to have jobs and you need to have a balance that suits a lifestyle and there are other options available for you. And I think in a way we reached there, we are more open as a country, so it is more vibrant, maybe there is a better word, a vibrant and a dynamic city.

This notion of Singapore as a 'liveable' city complements the country's proposition of being a place with good career opportunities. As another interviewed expert at Contact Singapore notes, with its new iconic buildings and international events the city's perception has definitely shifted away from the "chewing gum image".

What is Singapore's value proposition? (...) it is good jobs, it is really the first thing we want to say, you want to come here because there are job opportunities, you see career growth, you see that you can really grow professionally. And of course on top of that I think Singapore has really grown a lot, F1 race, what do you have, all the Casinos, it is not that much about the Casinos but the whole building is like an iconic building. And there is so much to offer, now the museums are going through a revamp, so many things are exciting, it is not the still chewing gum image, so I think we have in many ways evolved. And that is important and it also can be seen on all the international rankings which we do take seriously. How are we ranked compared to Hong Kong, how are we ranked

compared to Japan, not just in terms of work-wise, but it is a livable city.

For Mr. Rofizano Zaino, the Design Director of FutureBrand Singapore at the time when the brand consultancy delivered the Brand Messaging Guide for the National Marketing Action Committee, blending the traditional and the modern is one of the most important characteristics of Singapore's place brand.

(...) so what do you want to express? We had one way it is an engineer. If Singapore is an engineer. So everything is white, white jackets, and everything checked, checked, checked. So Singapore is like this. Or, Singapore is a bridge. So the bridge means it is a link to the rest of Asia. Or is Singapore a guide? If you want to know anything about Asia, come to us. Which is a way better than the bridge. The bridge is... you set up your HQ here and then you get the money out. Do whatever you want, I don't care. But the guide is different. The guide is 'let me tell you about Malaysia, let me tell you about Thailand'. Or does Singapore want... we had different things. (...) Singapore has shophouses but we have skyscrapers.

The notion of blending, especially in the context of the diverse experiences Singapore offers as a destination appears throughout the interviews. For Mr. Dominic Mason, diversity is the core message of the latest YourSingapore tourism tagline, too.

(...) the 'Your Singapore' proposition isn't just selling that 'it is for you'. If you look at the layer beneath that, it has got... every insecution [?] has diversity to it. So the way how that brand is communicated is basically a frame, or a lens through which you look beyond it and that does not mean just telling you about diversity, what it is saying is that Singapore is yours because you are able to do more diverse things here than you can anywhere else. So actually the brand on a tourism level is about blending. It is about blending these things together. And that comes from Singapore's density and its diversity. So you can have breakfast in the Zoo, you can have lunch on top of the Marina Bay Sands, and then you can have dinner in Little India. All those are very-very diverse experiences. And you can do them within 20 minutes from each other. So the destination campaign where the tagline has evolved from Uniquely Singapore to Your Singapore, the overriding benefit is one of blending different experiences, I think it is important.

Cosmopolitan from day one

The most important context in which the notion of Singapore's diversity reappears is the city-state's multiracial and multiethnic composition. More specifically, almost all interviewed experts mention that cosmopolitanism is one of the most important attributes of Singapore's brand

image and identity. As Mr. Koh Buck Song, the CEO of Integrative CSR Consulting, and the author of 'Brand Singapore: How Nation Branding Built Asia's Leading Global City' (Marshall Cavendish, Singapore, 2011) puts it:

I think cosmopolitan is certainly right up there. The others would come later but I think it would need some processing.

Another interviewed expert at the Resilience and Marketing Division of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts extends Singapore's cosmopolitan proposition by suggesting that diversity and peaceful co-existence should be boldly recognized as core assets of the Singapore brand. For Mr. Rofizano Zaino, Design Director of FutureBrand Singapore in 2007 – 2011, notions of diversity, cosmopolitanism, mutiracionalism, openness and tolerance all fit the collaboration attribute of the Singapore brand.

We are just open to, we are just used to different cultures... And maybe that fits into the collaboration thing, maybe. Because we are like this, we are open to interacting with people and learning.

One of my interviewed experts from Contact Singapore explains the significance of the brand attribute of cosmopolitanism for providing a balanced proposition for both Asian and Western markets.

We would use the word that you used: cosmopolitan (...) and whether we are talking to Asians, or whether we are talking to the

Western folks, it is the same proposition. The fact that we are cosmopolitan, it may appeal to you as Westerners, so we give you a softer landing when you come into Asia for the first time. For Asians, we are still very near to home, we are like seven hours flight maximum, to any part of Asia. But yet we give you the same, a soft landing into where international organizations, or international MNCs function and work. (...) I think it is still very balanced. I think Singapore is a very small country from the beginning we need to reach out to both the Eastern and Western market.

Others, however, point to how a history of immigration in Singapore is intertwined with what they see is favouritism and elitism, especially in the contexts of different approaches to colonial history. In this context, cosmopolitanism is a concept perceived differently. As one of my interviewees from the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore summarizes this particular sentiment: while cosmopolitan subjects are promoted in government discourses, for many Singaporeans these narratives picture their country as a playground for immigrants and foreign talent.

Mr. Dominic Mason calls for a qualifying of the concept of cosmopolitanism in the Singapore context. As he argues, cosmopolitanism gains a particular socio-political, or ideological load when discussed in relation to Singapore's multicultural and multiracial reality. In his view, while cosmopolitanism in the West means a mutual celebration of different

identities, in Singapore it often functions as a symbolic that keeps different backgrounds together.

(...) cosmopolitanism (...) is a word that came up quite a lot. And we had a lot of debates on that word, because what it means in Europe is very different from what it means here. So when in New York people talk about it being a very cosmopolitan place, people are mutually celebrating their own identities. 'I am an Italian'. 'I am an Italian New Yorker'. 'I am promoting my identity from Italy'. And that is fine because of this whole melting pot (...). I think the cosmopolitan in the context of Singapore is more sort of containing the different spices we have on a table. There are four spices, and maybe a little bit more. That is a more measured view of cosmopolitanism. It is not allowing everyone to champion their own backgrounds as much. It is making sure that everyone is sort of kept together by this symbolic.

Thus, while Singapore is perceived as a cosmopolitan place, the notion of cosmopolitanism is debated by the interviewed experts. As some of them argue, cosmopolitanism in Singapore functions as an ideological intervention that promotes government policies of immigration and a politics of multiracialism.

Can-do-spirit: Led by aspiration

Similarly to Sharjah's brand proposition, nation branding experts in Singapore argue that successful and sustainable nation brands should be built on a consensus about the existing qualities of a place. As most of the interviewed experts agree, the problem of credibility has to be addressed in relation to Singapore's new brand proposition as a creative and vibrant place.

For Mr. Dominic Mason, the idea of the confident explorer is a proposition that finds its origins in Singapore's social history. As he argues, the city-state was founded by immigrants and it has been inviting new residents ever since – a reality of the place that justifies the idea of the confident explorer archetype.

If you think of the people who have made up Singapore for decades, if not a century, these are people who have been immigrants. Immigrants leave their homeland to explore a better life. And to do that you need to be fairly confident. So we felt that that archetype also fitted in certainly within the initial founding fathers of Singapore. The challenge was whether or not it could fit well on the shoulders of the average man on the street, the taxi drivers, or even the young who in some ways have been quite overprotected. (...) We didn't think that there was a huge amount of stretch between the idea of confident explorer and a very diverse place, where immigrants had founded this place, where new residents, or new citizens were encouraged to come in, so it felt credible.

As he further explains, the notion of the confident explorer also fits a kind of mentality that many of the interviewees believe characterizes the attitudes and thinking of the public sector in Singapore. According to these narratives, the dominant scientific mindset that is considered to be characterizing public sector thinking in Singapore also supports the proposition of the confident explorer.

There is an established sense of managing risk, in the idea of a confident explorer. So, you make some decisions based on the foundation of knowledge, fact, and some of those decisions might be slightly risky... but we were not saying that Singapore is a creative gambler, or anything like that, it was grounded in that 'engineering' mindset, or scientific, or mathematic kind of base. It didn't really stretch so far from the Richard Branson kind of archetype, or that kind of thing.

As most interviewed experts agree, however, the challenge that the Spirit of Singapore has to face lies in the Heartlands. In the context of the self-image and aspirations of the average Singaporeans, many interviewed experts argue, the suggested brand attributes of creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation might embody a kind of elite sentiment and imagination which are not necessarily aligned with local perceptions. According to Mr. Dominic Mason, the iconic new buildings, the international events, and the globally renowned entertainment venues of Singapore have not been appropriated by

large parts of the local population and thus they did not change their perception of the city and state.

No, they are not. I think they are more to attract the inbound visitor, worker, investor... The conversation on Formula 1 every year is that it is for the rich people, it is not for me, I live in HDB, and then this talk about how do you bring Formula 1 into the Heartlands? You know, the Esplanade is not for the average Singaporean, it is for people who have achieved things, who have travelled overseas, who like that kind of arts but it's... I think they have done a good job here in making the museums accessible to the average Singaporean. That is quite interesting. But they can be accused of dumbing down that kind of culture. Other examples are in London, where they make it accessible but it is not dumbed down as much. The whole idea of retail and F&B inside museums... it is what museums are supposed to be? I don't know. So those things that are sort of coloring people's perception about Singapore. There is some benefit for the local population but there is also some feeling of resentment. It is very expensive for me going to the Esplanade, Formula 1 is very expensive so what's in it for the average Singaporean?

As he further explains, Mr. Mason locates many of the prove points and examples of the aspired qualities only on the governmental and elite levels. In his view, while the often quoted samples of innovativeness certainly exist in

the practice of the government, these were not there at the “cultural level amongst the people”, they were not “part of the national psyche” and “the man-on-the-street kind of outlook”.

There was also a realization that those examples of creativity and innovation were not on a cultural level amongst the people. They were on a macro-government level. For example, things like the petro-chemical installation in Jurong where they carved out a huge facility, and examples like the Formula 1 which at that time was being talked about, all these examples that were given to us as samples of innovativeness, were very much about government, civil service, they weren't part of the national psyche, the man-on-the-street kind of outlook. And that tells something, that tells you that this country has been top-down for decades. And the challenge now is to inculcate a spirit of, perhaps risk taking, or entrepreneurship amongst the people, amongst parts of the people.

Similarly, Mr. Koh Buck Song notes, the creation of an environment conducive of creativity might certainly be an important priority of government discourse and policy, it is not necessarily a value that is being lived on the individual level.

There are attributes that the government wants to convey, but that is true in an aspirational sense and in a broad sense. But when you apply it down to the individual on the ground, invariable there is

some gap which has not been resolved. For instance, if you take creativity. In an aspirational sense, yes, a lot has been done to create the environment for it, that is true, more than in other places, the amount of resources and government work and everything else, in a broad sense yes, but when you take it down to the individual level on the ground, people might raise an eyebrow, to the extent that is being lived, that the brand value is being lived.

One of my other sources also points to it that these challenges of credibility have been appeared early in the project. As he argues, it has been the transplantation of the notion of creativity with the story of innovation that allowed the brand concept to leverage on the prove points which existed in the fields of science and technology.

I think it came up very clearly in the end that if we say we are creative, then there will be a very few who will buy into that. If we say that we are stability, efficiency, basically an excellent performer, services and so on, then everybody kind of agree. But that is not aspirational. So where would be the zone where it is believable and aspirational as well? So it can't be creativity but it has to be more than just stability and efficiency. And that middle part is innovation. And there is a lot of prove point around that in terms of science and technology, and projects like Fusionopolis, Biopolis, (...) A*Star, and the attraction of talent... The scientific talent, they were all beginning to come here. So there were

excellent prove points which allow us to leverage on the innovation story.

As many of the interviewed experts argue, however, nation brands can express aspirational qualities. In the words of an interviewed expert at Contact Singapore, branding principles have to work at an aspirational level to become “inspiring enough to bring everybody on board”.

I think as a country we are led by aspiration to a very large extent. From way back before, when we were a colony Singapore was driven by progress. And the progress is aspirational to a very large extent. And through all this years, I think, even when we were an independent country from '65, we haven't failed to deliver the aspiration whether it is to the people and the country, or to our investors who come in. So we have a very good track record, to an extent. And I think in most branding principles the level that everyone pursued for (?), is always at the aspirational level. So that it is inspiring enough to bring everybody on board with you. Whether it is your own country folks, your locals, whether it is people who have an interest in you, or the people who never heard of you.

In this context, Mr. Rofizano Zaino explains, especially in a country that has been going through a rapid course of development for decades, national brands might embody visions rather than current identities of nation and place.

Similarly, at places which are in a constant phase of development, Mr. Zaino argues, traditional attributes are often called into question in quest of new, aspired attributes.

A brand has to be aspirational. It can't be just reflective of what it is now. Especially in developing markets like Singapore or Dubai where they want to project a new image. If you have got an old image, if you are one of the European countries, that brand is already established. So the thing that Singapore got is efficiency. Clean living, safe... So those are kind of the underlying things. That is the base of the brand. What we are now looking for is the unique selling point. We are not saying that we have this thing and then we forget about this. We are just saying that we will push for this but it is supported by the things that we already have: good public transport, clean... You know whether you are coming here to work, or build your HQ, or you are coming here to travel, or you come here to shopping, all of them will say Singapore is clean, everything is efficient.

It is in the context of aspirations that Mr. Rofizano Zaino reinterprets the main attributes of the Spirit of Singapore brand proposition, putting an emphasis on what he calls the 'can-do-spirit' of Singapore, an attitude of optimism, exploration and learning.

There were a few things but the final thing that was chosen was something bit more creative, the spirit of exploration, kind of discover. So this is the brand. Can-do spirit, Singapore, everybody, whether it is the man in the coffeeshop, or the ministers, this can-do spirit always exists. Never mind if you don't know, it sounds you need to do this. OK, you can do it. The ministers always like to say, more can be done, more can be done. You know if by 4 o'clock we can't do it, we go and get someone who can do it. The MRT problem, we don't know how to solve it, we get someone in. But whatever it is, either beg, borrow or steal. But most of the time we just buy. Can-do spirit. Very optimistic. Nurturing the spirit of optimism within each of us. In Singapore we are easily influenced, I think, because we like to travel, so we travel, and we go to London, and we come back and we must do things like in London. We have lots of America on TV. So we talk like Americans.(...) We get influenced very easily. You can see the negative of that, the negative of that is that you are easily influenced by others. But then you have to remember that Singapore is a very young nation. It is not like Europe. If let's say one day the French suddenly say that they want to be like the Italians. I would never happen, right? But in Singapore because we are only just discovering that we live beyond this island, and maybe this is because of globalization, whatever, so we learn about things. So that nurturing the spirit of exploration is a bit like that. We go and discover. Our country is small. We will never get improving a lot just by staying here. So

we need to go out and learn. We need to go to America, we need to go to China, and when we learn things we come back here and maybe do something new.

This can-do-spirit is connected to another aspirational attribute of the brand, a quality that the National Marketing Action Committee's Brand Messaging Guide calls: daring to dream. In the words of an interviewed expert at the Resilience and Marketing Division of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, as the examples of Singapore Airlines, or Singapore Port Authorities show, Singapore has the capability to achieve its goals, even when it targets the realm of world leader qualities.

From a 'hybrid of East & West' to more 'Asian'?

Singapore's complex cultural identity is thoroughly discussed in the interviews. As most of the experts agree, positioning Singapore as a hybrid of East and West, as a nation that embodies the best qualities of both what they call the Asian, and the Euro-American worlds, is in the core of the Singapore brand identity and proposition. As an interviewed expert at Contact Singapore points it out:

I think it is still very balanced. I think Singapore is a very small country from the beginning we needed to reach out to both the Eastern and Western market.

It is important to note, however, that a subtheme of this line of narratives distances Singapore from its region. As one of the interviewed experts from Contact Singapore argues, highlighting Singapore's unique proposition necessarily emboldens those characteristics of the place that differentiates it from its neighbours.

If you talk about nation branding, maybe in a way all these contribute to the bigger picture, how different Singapore is in Asia, how we have I think quite successfully positioned, if you want to be in Asia, why not Singapore, and build Singapore as your base to do your business from Singapore and cover Asia from here. So in a way I think we have done quite well.

Asked about Malaysia's destination branding slogan: "Malaysia, Truly Asia", for example, most interviewees argued against such a proposition ever to be used in Singapore, and started to elaborate on how different Singapore is in the region. As Mr. Koh Buck Song, author of 'Brand Singapore: How Nation Branding Built Asia's Leading Global City' (Marshall Cavendish, Singapore, 2011) suggests:

Singapore is not Asian in quite a few ways. It is quite international in many ways, it is even Western in other ways, if you were to use that slogan, you would need to qualify it in some way.

As another interviewed expert argues, such a brand positioning should be refused by Singapore. As he explains, Singapore has always projected an identity that has been ‘a hybrid of’ and a ‘port of call’ for East and West. Highlighting only its Asian attributes, he notes, is obviously a “representation of Asia to the Western eyes”.

We have always been a hybrid of East and West. Our proposition is not about completely Asian, or completely Western. That is what we have been right from the beginning because of our history as a port of call for the East and the West. So that has always been our DNA. (...) I think that would not be the Singapore brand [Truly Asia]. I think to present Asia in that form, obviously it is a representation of Asia to the Western eyes. (...) What is an Asian? If you are in Asia you can tell. If you need to go and turn up the volume and go out there and shout ‘Truly Asia’, then I think you can look at your audience as the Westerners. (...) and it is not new. Hong Kong has tried that. You know the Chinese jar and all that. So that is representing Asia to a Western audience. So what do you present to the Asian audience? So the proposition has to be something about getting some of the better qualities of the West here in Singapore. And to the Westerners, getting the best quality of Asia in Singapore. (...) if you are in Asia and you cannot take the raw Asianness of other parts of South-East Asia then maybe this is your launch pad, so to speak. A place where you become a

bit more acculturated to what is Asia. A self-introduction to Asia, if you will.

Mr. Rofizano Zaino, FutureBrand's Design Director at the time of the National Marketing Action Committee tender further elaborates on this thread of narratives by pointing to Singapore's historically sensitive position in its region.

We had to be careful, because you know our neighbors are not necessarily happy with us. It is not like we are representing South-East Asia. We don't. We say that we are a launch pad to South-East Asia, in tourism, you come to Changi Airport and then you take a short flight to somewhere. But as an ideology, you know... I mean, we are one of the richest nations and we have a lot of influence within ASEAN but it doesn't mean that... we don't try to sell our success as Asian success. (...) That is why Truly Asia for Malaysia is a good campaign. (...) Because they can say that we are truly Asia, you got it in Singapore? No. You go to Orchard Road, you know, it is different. So we can't say that we are a gateway to Asia. We can't really say that. We are nothing compared to Malaysia. We are not like Thailand.

While most of the interviewed experts agree that Singapore has historically been positioned and perceived as a 'hybrid of East and West', some note that it will not necessarily remain so. A connected subtheme in the

interviews explores whether changing geopolitical realities could bring more Asian-focused references into Singapore's brand proposition and strategies in the future. As Mr. Dominic Mason argues the growing Western interest in Asia might lead to investors, businessmen, or students 'overstep' Singapore as the 'traditional gateway' to Asia and directly approach the region. In order to avoid it, Mr. Mason suggests, Singapore might strengthen its 'Asian message'.

I think you will see more of that. I think you will see more of it, but not Chinese as much as Asian. I think it is now the right time to Singapore to be backgrounding that Western message and foregrounding the Asian message. In a very pragmatic way of viewing things, it is the new world order, isn't it? But at the same time I think also other Asian countries are seeing Singapore as a stepping stone to the West. If you were an Asian parent, and you can't afford to send your son or daughter to the UK or to the US, or he or she has never left Indonesia before, you will probably consider Singapore as a stepping stone: safe, reliable, Western, before you let them go to the West. Now, I am not sure that it is going to continue because more and more interest is on Asia, Asia gets more confident, more Westerners are coming out into the region, do you need a stepping stone to go there? I don't know, maybe, not sure.

Mr. Koh Buch Song also expects an ‘Asian-shift’ in Singapore’s future brand positioning, although he does not see the exact contours of the new identity, yet.

Oh yes, certainly. That will be quite an important consideration and it will change the way the brand is presented in the future. I am sure you will be able to see that change but it is not obvious yet, I think. The current two models, the national marketing one and the tourism model which I believe both are being worked on, when we see the new form, we will be able to see. It is not obvious yet.

However, as most of the interviewed experts agree, for Singapore to credibly reposition itself, it would need to find and specify a unique niche on the Asian brand landscape, especially in terms of its proposed cultural content and identity. As Mr. Dominic Mason argues, while the Asian values campaigns in the 1990s did not have an effect on Singapore’s brand proposition of that time, a renewed interest in Singapore’s cultural history might result in the identification and featuring of new cultural traits in the brand image and identity in the future.

I don’t think people were really clear about what was being said around [on Asian values], and there was a confusion, is it Asian, you know, what exactly are we saying here. It didn’t feature significantly in our work, neither the Asian values, nor that time the individual cultural aspects of Singapore’s races. Maybe because we

already had a lot of other stuff to be chasing after, you know, in terms of different perceptions in different countries. Will it change as we move forward? Yeah, maybe I think you would expect to see here an emphasis on Singapore's role in Asia, what it means for Singaporeans, and how they then project that outwards. Let's face this, if you wanted to learn Chinese culture, you wouldn't come to Singapore. You go straight to China. And that is happening more now than it was 10 or 15 years ago. There is a lot of Westerners who are going straight there, businessmen who are getting on planes and going straight there, So I think what is interesting is that Singapore needs to find that part of Chinese culture which is unique to Singapore. And that might be manifested in, I think was it the Lee Foundation, or somebody investing in the Asian Civilizations Museum... someone put up 5 million or how many millions to extend the Asian Civilizations Museum which is having a special wing on Chinese immigrants. Now, Chinese immigrants don't exist in China, because they were coming out of that as their choice. So you know it is about that, and the Peranakans, which perhaps we will see more of.

Some of the interviewed experts, however, are more skeptical about the need for a stronger 'Asian thematization' of the Singapore brand proposition. As they argue, a more powerful cultural message within Singapore's nation brand might go against the discourse of openness which has traditionally been at the core of its identity.

Singapore has always pictured itself of being a cosmopolitan city. And that is all part of that openness discourse. So do we want to be just highly targeted in a way that it is completely and only relevant to a particular market like China or India? I think that is not part of the openness proposition. But can there be a number of different strategies hitting at these different markets but from common base in terms of brand proposition and positioning and so on. I think yes, the talk maybe is like this, that you have to contextualize the single proposition in different ways in order to get to represent this in a relevant way to different markets. So, you might, in terms of execution, run different campaigns, communication campaigns in these different countries, but it is still the same core proposition. (...) OK, let's say, to the super-rich of the world, whether it is China, India, or elsewhere, the fact that this country is safe and reliable, and a strong adoption of the rule of law, what is in a sense predictable, it is what they appreciate. So it is the same thing whether you talk to... in its basic form it is the same proposition, whether you talk to the Chinese, or the rich Indian.

A lack of cultural content?

A major thread of narratives in the interviews explores further the issue of cultural content in Singapore's brand image and identity. Singapore's brand proposition as a cosmopolitan, 'hybrid' city of East and West, its historical

distancing itself from the region, and the suggestions of a future shift towards a culturally more Asian-focused message all call for a the problematization of its nation branding model in relation to the cultural content it features.

As Mr. Dominic Mason, the former strategy lead of FutureBrand's winning National Marketing Action Committee tender strengthens the argument, Singapore's success in branding can in many ways be explained by its distancing itself from the rest of the region. For doing so, he explains, Singapore has backgrounded the projection of a strong cultural identity and changed it to a larger narrative about stability and economic success. The lack of bold cultural content in the brand proposition, thus, might be seen as a result of this 'trade-off'.

Malaysia is actually positioning against Singapore. It is basically saying that that place down there is not really Asia. Come up here and experience what real Asia is. And I think it tells you something about Singapore's positioning. It is trying to distance itself, to some degree, from the rest of the neighborhood. If you step outside of here, is it safe? Is it reliable? Is it clean? Do you have any guarantee that you as an investor, or as a visitor will be safe? And all those things in some way underpin Singapore's success in the last 50 years. The fact that it has got the basics right when everything around it has had got a lot of... whether it is natural disasters or economic disasters or political challenges. I don't think Singapore makes any apology for that. I think it is intentionally saying, you know, we are not like the rest of the region. That said,

doing so, where does it leave you in the cultural space? You perhaps can't turn up the volume on that that much if you are saying fundamentally we are not like Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, we are more Western, more sanitized, more sophisticated, more clever. Singapore would never use these words but that is the underlying narrative. (...) that made Singapore successful. And it is not the values or the cultural things... So yes, there is a bit of a tradeoff here, I think, what is happening when you see culture in its richest sense being downsized, or backgrounded for a bigger narrative which is about success, money, security, confidence, all those things...

Mr. Koh Buck Song further elaborates on this argument by criticizing the current tourism brand concept of Singapore which he believes is too abstract and disconnected from the everyday reality of the city-state. For him, it is empty of cultural content.

The current tourism branding, 'Your Singapore', I have criticized that but the civil service, what I hear, they don't like to hear the criticism. To me it is quite empty of cultural content, it is almost like a portal [?] that with direct you to what you like to do but there is very little content that is engaged [?] and presented to promote a certain idea or feeling. That is certainly an area that can be improved. We can do better than that. (...) It is not very well communicated in the tourism space, and even if it were, it is

communicated as an abstract idea, there is not enough of the common man to be allowed to communicate the brand. It is a very high-level, abstract idea usually, rather than something on the ground. (...) And I don't see any clear signs of it change. Like the 'Spirit of Singapore', the 'Your Singapore' is still current until further notice. There is a new Chief Executive of the Tourism Agency, he might be working on something new but until we see the results of that this is what we have for now. Which is, to my mind, worse than what we had before in terms of cultural content. It is even more lacking in cultural content.

One of the interviewed experts points to the problem of 'Asian', or 'Singaporean design' in order to demonstrate the difficulty of identifying Singapore's distinctive proposition in the cultural and aesthetics spheres.

There are many discussions about what is Asian design. And then invariably the discussion will go towards what is Asianness, what is Asia? And you will find that it is difficult to talk about that Asian topic without going to specific examples coming from Japan, Korea, and talking about what makes Korean design Korean, Japanese design Japanese. So then it comes back to Singapore, what is Singapore design when you have always been influenced by global trends, global thoughts? So what is Singapore design in furniture produced in Singapore? What is Singapore design in the context of publications coming out from Singapore? I don't think

we see any of those yet but I am not sure if we... I am not sure what the equivalent is when it comes to Singapore because Singapore is so open. If you look at some of the Singapore's travel promotion and some of the ways how the Tourism Promotion Board is articulating about Singapore, I think there is some sense that what you see in terms of architecture of the group of people called the Peranakan is uniquely Singapore. But that is not entirely true. Because you see the same in Penang or Malacca. So you have that kind of issue in architecture. When it comes to food, what is truly Singaporean food, there are many dishes that when somebody in Singapore say that it is truly Singaporean somebody else across the Causeway in Malaysia will challenge that. And of course what is synonymous with Singapore is the chilly crab but... So what is Singapore's distinctive, aesthetic design 'proposition'...? And I am not sure if we have one in the end because it is hard to pin it down.

Mr. Dominic Mason explains the lack of direct cultural content in the Singapore national brand by the economic irrelevance of such a message.

I wonder if it was because the tourism people had already banged that and sold that so much, that it was done before, or it perhaps didn't have enough relevance to economic audiences. So let's say you decide to invest a factory in Asia, we've got nice Indian food here, we've got fine Malay clothes, that sort of stuff doesn't make any difference. But if you talked about the diversity of the

workforce, that would resonate with you more. So that you would be able to employ managers who would be able to manage diverse cultures. But in terms of museums and that sort of art and culture I don't think that was a big part of what we were doing.

However, as Mr. Mason further elaborates on the theme he suggests to open up the conventional interpretive framework of the discussion on cultural content in order to identify qualities that would provide the Singapore brand with the required distinctiveness while remaining relevant in the particular social and political context. For him, Singapore's relatively young history as a nation-state, and its strongly top-down directed and public sector led cultural policies might be some of the reasons behind the lack, or the weakness of an apparent and 'inherent' sense of cultural identity.

What is culture in a place that is only a few decades old, you know, as against the countries that you and I might be more familiar with? (...) Yeah, there is perhaps more that has been written about it, there have been more debates about it [...] and it is sort of settled around something. You know, Singapore has the culture that has been forced or driven by political masters, or is it something that is inherent to immigrants from diverse places? But, you know, it isn't been something that has been widely debated in Singapore. You find those books in that bookshop across there, focused on this, but that is only a few individuals who have debated it, like Chua Beng Huat... So I think in this context it is perhaps harder to really pin

on it whereas if you thought about Britain or America, you probably get those four or five words coined, quickly, and you wouldn't have that much debated about it. (...) I don't think we intentionally put culture in front of the NMAC and said we need to establish what it is, because we would still be working on it now. But maybe some of the processes and mechanisms and platforms were designed to identify those perhaps more shared meanings or beliefs, but not in an explicit way.

As Mr. Mason continues, however, he differentiates between cultural content in an ethnic sense and that as a shared set of beliefs and values beyond ethnic identities. For him, pragmatism and a will for constant improvement and betterment feature as such characteristics of Singapore and the Singaporeans.

You have got a sidestep here, that ethnic lens. And you have to look at a level of higher, for something that is more deep [...]. So what is a more shared set of cultural beliefs or values beyond ethnicity? And you could get to pragmatism, although that is not a very sexy kind of... And what else you would find if you are looking across the three [races]... a will for constant improvement, although that is not a snappy one word, but, you know, the idea that this is a place that is constantly striving for being better and better, and regardless of your race you can always find that ideal [...] to some degree or less (...).

Looking for the shared values and beliefs that characterize Singaporeans beyond the categories of ethnicity and race, Mr. Mason adds a ‘sense of independence’ and specific kind of ‘survival mindset’ to the list of ideas that could be featured as the cultural traits of the place and its people.

What else you are looking for? Maybe a sense of independence, you know, this is a very consistent narrative that we have heard for 50 years that, you know, that we are alone, no one is going to look out for Singapore, we are small, we are threatened, therefore it is about a ‘survival mindset’, and that is very strongly inculcated into what people believe in here. If there is any hint of racial tension, it just instantly gets identified, put out, because of these narratives. But maybe it is more of tolerance here that you wouldn’t find at other...

As Mr. Dominic Mason concludes, however, he does not expect a bolder cultural content to emerge in the Singapore brand proposition. In his view, being a young nation, Singapore needs a strong governmental involvement in formulating the cultural messaging of its brand, especially on a field where success is measured by economic effectiveness. This proposition, he suggests, will necessarily remain short of a more ‘organic’ sense of cultural identity that could make such content more apparent and powerful.

I think Singapore’s exercise was trying to be cultural but, I think, at the end of the day it is going to be measured by economic

indicators like level of investment, level of visitor arrivals, level of people working at... all these metrics. But it wanted to be seen to be inclusive in the way that it embraced every stakeholder. But it is a function of time and money. If you are a country, can you really wait for decades for the world to understand you properly? Can you really let that culture kind of bubble up over fifty years? You know, Singapore is a young nation, she has got to learn it her style [?] by, as you say, a top-down, direct approach. And I don't think that it is likely to change.

On the previous pages I have reviewed how those experts who are involved in nation branding see the Singapore brand. Based on the attributes identified by them, I aimed to reconstruct an insider's view or perception of the image and identity of the nation and place. According to these results Singapore is perceived as a place that is going through a shift from being a brand of safety and reliability to becoming that of a vibrant, global city of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. It has also been argued that while many of these new attributes reside only at macro-levels and cannot be located at the cultural level of everyday people, being aspirational is an inherent trait of the Singapore brand itself. As some of the interviewed experts expect, reacting on shifting geopolitical realities, the Singapore brand will feature more of its Asian elements in the future. Others argue, however, that such a change would go against the city-state's proposition of openness and cosmopolitanism. In this context, the notion of cosmopolitanism has been discussed and identified as a form of a governmental, ideological intervention

that functions as a specific symbolic that aims to define and contain differences at a multicultural place. Finally, this managerial, top-down approach to cultural policies has been identified in relation to the perceived lack of cultural content in the Singapore brand. As it was argued, Singapore's cultural proposition should be interpreted in economic terms and looked at in the register of shared values and beliefs beyond ethnicity.

The practice of nation branding in Singapore: A matter of survival

Engineering the brand

It is this top-down approach that connects the discussion on the perceived brand attributes of Singapore to the investigation of the nature of its nation branding exercise. The following chapters will explore those conceptual assumptions and research methodologies that characterize the practice of the National Marketing Action Committee's branding exercise.

As a major theme throughout the interviews experts call into question Singapore's paradigmatically public-sector driven approach to nation branding. According to the account of the professionals who were involved in the research and preparatory phases of Singapore's National Marketing Action Committee project and the publication of the Spirit of Singapore Brand Messaging Guide, the initiative began with a wide-scale survey that measured people's perception about the existing image and reputation of Singapore. As Mr. Dominic Mason, the former strategy lead of FutureBrand's winning National Marketing Action Committee tender recalls that phase, the interviews

included both Singaporeans, expatriates living or working in Singapore, and also representatives of the foreign media.

We did spend a huge amount of time speaking to many-many different groups within Singapore, so even the Singaporeans themselves, different age groups, different interest groups, different generations, the P65 generation, the P80 generation... And the mechanisms we used were predominantly focused discussion groups, similar to what is currently playing out now with the Singapore Conversation, where they are engaging different stakeholders through discussions. We used that technique quite a lot. We also cross-referenced it with a quantitative survey that had been done by another agency within our group, which was about, I think, values and beliefs in Singapore, so we were able to link our findings or our thinking to a quantitative sample of about 600 Singaporeans, and then a qualitative sample that would have reached about probably a 150 or 200. And that was just Singaporeans. We also talked to other people with a stake in Singapore. For example, foreign business associations based here, even a couple of groups of expatriate wives. Because these people were seemed to be influencers, or decision makers on issues like investing, or relocating, or working in Singapore.

One of the interviewed experts further explains on the research methods they used for reconstructing existing perceptions about Singapore. As he recalls,

the complex methodology involved qualitative, interpretive methods, it was based on a grounded theory approach combined with narrative analysis, semiotic analysis, and visual analysis. The main goals of this research phase were to identify patterns in the gathered data on people's perceptions of Singapore's current image and also to measure the credibility of suggested aspirational elements of the brand idea.

I think the public tender requirement states the project specs very clearly. And it seems like that we are going to be talking to a lot of people, some directly, and some indirectly. What I mean by indirectly is that we are not personally able to speak with this people, but we go through a number of intermediaries. For example, FutureBrand might activate its overseas offices or its sister companies, PR agencies that were part of the group, to conduct interviews and some of the sources would include secondary information. So for instance, there was a company, I can't remember the name, that we went to, who had database of different responses that was already with them, from previous studies. These are kind of syndicated studies I suppose. So we are talking to those because they are relevant in terms of some kind of triangulation what we were getting from the direct sources. So the database was containing the responses from Singaporeans to explain their attitudes to various topics, and were looking at that database to triangulate what we had gotten in from the direct sources. That was a big piece, I think it took something like three

or four months, the whole discovery phase. We used a very qualitative, interpretive method, along the lines of grounded theory approach, combined with some narrative analysis, semiotic analysis, visual analysis as well, in the case of looking at how much alignment, for example, [existed] across government agencies by looking at the kind of communication that was coming out from the different entities' websites. So apart from direct sources, we looked at secondary information like websites, published material, speeches of the Prime Minister at National Day Rallies. I can't remember how many years we went back, 7-8 years? So we have all this mass of data that we need to find some patterns to it, pattern around what are some of the discourses that have been used to talk about Singapore. (...) By government, by international media, by the different people we talked to directly. And we talked to people from industry associations, creative community, students, and even expats who were based here, as well as with their wives. So for instance, an example of that is that we talked to a bunch of ladies at the American Club, so we tried to understand their perspective of Singapore, how they talk about Singapore. And the idea here is to bring it all together to look at where are we now currently; and how believable if we stretch from the current Singapore in the mind of these people, to a more inspiring and aspirational Singapore? And in that context, to what extent, if we stretch beyond the immediate achievable positioning for Singapore, to what extent is it

believable, credible? So that was probably what we were trying to do.

Mr. Mason explains the apparently great volume of data gathered and the complexity of approaches applied in the research by the specific character of Singapore's nation branding exercise and by the public sector led nature of the initiative.

I think it is not unique to consultancies. At that time this company I worked for was positioning as a strategic consultancy, and when we were doing normal projects for other commercial customers, depending on their budget we were trying to gather as many insights as it was possible. And that meant talking to different groups of people. So if you are doing it for a company, you talk to employers, you talk to customers, you even talk to people who have left the company, who rejected the proposition, so you can start to triangulate different views. It is just that in this particular case the numbers involved were significant. (...) Our client was, obviously, in this particular case, a high level government secretariat, so they are public service, answering to tax payers, and need to be able to turn around and justify what they have done or what they have decided to do has been in consultation with, or has been validated by the people who are essentially paying for their wages.

As he continues, this phase of the research was characterized by a requirement of wide scale stakeholder involvement which signaled an approach unique to the nation branding exercise of Singapore.

I think the extent of stakeholder engagement was perhaps something that the Singaporean civil servant expected. I am not sure if they would have expected that much in other markets, or other countries, that are maybe a bit more empowered, I should say, able to push through an initiative like this, like in the UK what Tony Blair was doing, I am not sure to what extent they had to consult the people in the UK on it, or whether it was more of a think tank approach in the UK.

Mr. Mason also points to an initial skepticism and reluctance of public sector officials about the applicability of branding terminology in their work. As Mr. Mason continues, the embracement of the term 'strategic marketing' in relation to Singapore's nation branding exercise should be in great extent explained by this public sector attitude.

The word 'branding' in Singapore, at least in the public sector, has got connotations of 'hype', 'window-dressing', potentially 'misuse of taxpayers' money, so it was intentionally referred to as strategic marketing because those two have more gravitas and less prone to misinterpretation, than branding is. Because branding is applied to baked bean cans, and beer and alcohol, and anything. Whereas, I

think, on a country level..., but it the same thing with political parties or politicians. If you put the word branding next to a politician it can be instantly knocked down as just hype and lacking in substance. So there are some things which the word branding can't sit next to, and I would imagine religion, also, one of those. But when you talk about it a bit more pseudo way, using terms like strategic marketing it somehow becomes a little bit more palatable, and less superficial or cosmetic.

As another expert further elaborates on the skeptical public sector sentiment about the applicability of branding in their work, he quotes the term 'Singapore umbrella positioning' as a reference to an approach that emphasizes policy actions before marketing communication. According to this view, reputation and image follow the actual performance of a country and its main actors.

I think there are many leaders in the public sector who believe that if you, Singapore decides to pursue a particular vision and given enough tenacity, resources, in other words we are prepared to invest in a particular direction, we will achieve it. So you might say that this is one of those kind of thinking where somebody says, if you build that they will come, right? So against that kind of thinking is from the paradigm of branding, it has to be more than that, it is not just, the internal view is that we create a site to make that objective put our resources and time and efforts against that,

we will get there. And the branding model, it is also, how believable is that? So that is the external view. So if you take the view that the internal stakeholders, political leaders and so on, and you say well, why do you need to turn this into a branding exercise, just do it and make it happen. (...) The brand will take care of itself. (...) Well the fact that the challenge has come under the branding discourse... so the tender, it is not exactly called branding, I think the reference was NMAC, National Marketing Action Committee project. And the project title, if I can remember was 'Singapore umbrella positioning'. So the word 'brand' is not there. It was 'umbrella positioning exercise'. So you can take the point of view that well doesn't matter, the positioning exercise will follow what the country was actually be doing, so then all you have to do is to go out there and ask the different public and private sector what they are going to be doing in the next few years. (...) And then articulate and express that. And the brand will take care of itself.

Some of the experts involved in this initial phase of the project also recall the inherent contradictions of interest between many of the government agencies involved in the initiative. As they suggest, the different ministries did not always accept the premises of the suggested brand identity and these differences often endangered the creation of brand coherence and implementation. For example, as one of the interviewed expert notes, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs "did not want to brand at all", it preferred "to keep

its room for manoeuvring instead”. Similarly, as he continues, the Tourism Board has been “a stout critic of the national branding exercise”, since this agency had already have formulated its own destination marketing messaging and imagery.

Most of the interviewed experts agree that the most unique characteristic of Singapore’s nation branding exercise has been its rigorously data-based, or scientific approach to the initiative and its methods and practices. Across all of the involved agencies, they argue, the project has been dominated by what they call, the ‘engineering mindset’ of Singapore’s public sector thinking. As Mr. Dominic Mason argues, many of Singapore’s ‘traditional’ brand attributes, too, can be explained by this mindset that is dominated by procedures and standards and that does not allow for mistakes or support risk-taking. Another interviewed expert further explains on this public sector approach by Singapore’s post-independence emphasis on science and technology. As he continues, this mindset is inculcated into students at a very early age through the focus of public education and it gets transferred both to the public and private sectors by the ‘brightest students’ taking offices there.

Historically, we put a premium on science and technology and engineering because these things are tangible. In terms of education we tend to filter out the brightest students, the brighter kids, at a very early age of life, and we tend to put them through a science-based, mathematics-based kind of education. So these bright kids are there, and at a later part in their life they get into government scholarships and so on, and various types of scholarships, which

will take them into different public sector space. So they go into the Army, to go into Economic Development Board, and different places. So these people in the public sector then become the next public sector leaders.

As one of the interviewed experts further explains, this ‘bias’ towards a fact-based, ‘positivist’ kind of thinking permeates both governmental policy making and managerial styles in business. Positivism and pragmatism, he argues, is “part of the same lexical chain”.

So given that background or so, there is a tendency or bias towards science and technology, and a positivist type of thinking. So for example, if you have to look at information to make decisions, then you tend to look at information that are more number based. So a lot of research to inform public sector decision making tend to be quantitative, rather than qualitative. And also the country is very much pro-business and business is also about ROI, affordability, turnover, it is very numbers driven as well. So it kind of [???] very nicely in a pro-business public sector management style, and style of governance. (...) they are part of the same lexical chain. You know, positivism, quantitative, pragmatism, it is all the same side of the discourse. It is a very hard sell to put in front public sector leaders, a set of research findings that is just qualitative. There is a great need to present information that is representative, validated in a quantitative way, and of course, deemed to be highly reliable. It is

hard to put qualitative information and then make an argument on that because the question invariably will be: how many people feel this way or see this? Is that representative?

Mr. Rofizano Zaino further strengthens the argument about the suggested dominance of an 'engineering mindset' in Singapore's public sector. As he argues, it is only in recent years that a shift can be detected, at least in rhetoric, towards more creative ways of critical thinking.

The Ministry of Education in the past few years would start saying things, or you would start hearing things like critical thinking, or design thinking. All this have just started to come up. Whereas before it was all about maths and science.

Most of the interviewed experts are critical about the perceived consequences of what they see as a lack of a variety of backgrounds and perspectives in public sector thinking.

It is particularly true of the country like Singapore for two main reasons I can immediately think of. One is the way the economy has always been anchored on and around manufacturing and manufacturing-related services. So the people who are key players in this space are tend to be engineers or they are trained in engineering. So they have that mindset. And the people in government also tend to come from such backgrounds. Either

engineering, or econometrics, or econometrics-related disciplines. The Prime Minister is a mathematician. So certainly it is true that, in the past at least, there hasn't been enough of the perspectives that derive from humanities, and a humanities-schooled view of the world. And in something like branding you certainly would benefit from those perspectives. You cannot just engineer branding.

As Mr. Koh Buch Song elaborates on the consequences of such a mindset on national branding. For him, Singapore is defined by economic terms.

I think that has been a feature of Singapore's branding - using the term consciously, branding as the things that the government has consciously done -, that it has been conceived of and implemented in quite strictly economic terms. And even the country is expressed in economic vocabulary, or context, in terms of reference.

As one of the interviewed experts summarizes it, public sector thinking on nation branding in Singapore often remains skeptical about the efficiency of the practice. In many ways, he argues, their skepticism is supported by questions practicing nation branding professional raise about the applicability of the marketing techniques of business in the public sector where the implementation of such strategies would require unilateral control beyond the available instruments of the government. According to these critical experts, a national brand message to work effectively would need to be based on the consensus of, and cohesively communicated by and delivered on by multiple

and various stakeholders of a society, including the private and people sectors, and also the media. Securing such a consensus and orchestration, critics argue, is beyond the control of the government entrusted with implementing a nation branding campaign. In their view, finding the right balance of top-down and bottom-up approaches in the formulation and implementation of nation branding is a difficult condition to be met.

It is not easy to explain how branding works, or the need to put a lot of money into an exercise like this, mainly because the public sector always measures itself by achievement, getting the real things done, getting the tangible things done, and then the recognition will follow. So there is no need for branding in a way that a commercial business would talk about branding. But this is not just the view that existed that time, but it is also a view that even some brand consultants believe about the nature of country and the nature of nation: Can you really brand a country? Can you really brand a nation? Because unlike a commercial business where you have greater control over communication, production, distribution; you have no unilateral control over similar factors when it comes to a country or a nation. So, to what extent, for example, can a process be bottom-up, to what extent can it be top-down? Supposing you tell the private sector, or to an agency in the private sector that as a brand Singapore needs to be communicated and delivered in a certain way. Now, how many of the players in the public and private sector will follow that, if you take a top-

down perspective? (...) I think even the nature of the challenge where you wonder to what extent you need to be bottom-up, and to what extent you need to be top-down... So, if you take a moderate path, it is a bit of both, then really, the branding of a country needs to be built on a consensus. (...) companies have to deliver on it, public sector got to deliver on it, and people got to deliver on it. And very important is that for people, they got to believe that this is them. That is why we need to talk to a lot of people, to a lot of companies. But then there is a whole big media environment as well which plays a very important part. Supposing Singapore internal media, The Straits Times, the Business Times speak about Singapore in a certain way, but the Wall Street Journal and so on disagree, and your people have access to publications, there is going to be a whole lot of chaos up there. So basically, if you use a visual analogy, you have the space which should then need to kind of draw the lines of constrain, to identify where a common space is going to where kind of everybody have some kind of consensus around it.

For Mr. Koh Buck Song, however, nation branding should be differentiated from a much broader concept of national brand-building. As he explains, while the Singaporean government has long been focusing on branding as a narrowly-defined, deliberate strategy, it didn't pay enough attention to influencing perceptions about the country in much broader terms.

But all this while that is brand-building that is going on which happens without the government doing anything, or being able to do anything about it, like for instance, incidents that make international news about Singapore. It could be something like even the lifting of a ban on a magazine. Well, in that case there is of course policy involved but it nothing that a government consciously did, but it has an impact because it makes news headlines, people hear about it. That is at a very broad level. But at a personal level visitors who come here from overseas, whether tourists, or to study, or to live and work, they take away questions which they then spread by word of mouth. And at that level there is also a brand-building which the government has no direct hand in. And to me the gap between Singapore's brand-building is that there is not enough has been done to try to influence these other ways of brand-building. The government is very focused on branding as a conscious and deliberate effort, but they don't pay enough attention to what could be done to influence brand-building in its broader terms.

Most interviewed experts conclude that Singapore's nation branding exercise remains paradigmatically public sector driven. While some of them critically note that excluding the private sector, for example, prevents the initiative to live up to its full potential, others argue differently. Given the general dominance of public sector leadership in Singapore, these experts refuse suggestions about the necessity of involving actors outside of the public

sector in nation branding in Singapore. As one of the interviewed experts argue:

I think the people sector, as opposed to the public sector, the people sector, the voice of the people sector in the context of branding is not significant. (...) A lot of nation branding effort is done through the public sector. So I think your question is not directly relevant here to the Singapore context where you are asking about how do the people feel about having to wave the flag and to communicate the right version of the Singapore brand. I think that is not quite the context here. (...) Because a lot of these initiatives, branding initiatives are through or by the public sector. Which is the government.

According to these experts, in the context of Singapore's public sector dominated model, branding also needs to be 'top-down' that will 'filter down' to other sectors and to the population from the government. These experts also believe that Singaporeans currently lack both the interest and also the capability for participating in the national branding exercise. As one of the interviewed experts at the Resilience and Marketing Division of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts puts it, 'people are not ready yet' for representing the national brand. As the interviewed expert explains, while many of the core attributes of the brand are already around with the aspirational elements and the connected policies already identified, people just don't see those achievements yet. In his view, 'people don't feel that we are

there'. As the interviewee concludes, the product is not ready yet and that is why hierarchies and prioritization are so crucial from the part of those who are responsible for these policies.

The majority of the interviewed experts, however, don't explain the exclusively governmental nature of Singapore's national branding initiative as a necessity. As they critically argue, while it is in accordance with the general directions of Singapore's social and political particularities, the model could be more efficiently implemented through a wider involvement of various actors from different sectors and groups of the society.

What didn't happen in Singapore was setting up a mechanism or platform which could embrace the private sector. (...) we could find examples of national branding initiatives like in India, for example, where there was more of a mutual platform for Indian business people, Indian companies to get involved and to get part of that. Now, we did talk to a selection of Singapore companies but it was only to be able to say that we have done that. And I didn't get the feeling that it was going to be an initiative where the government would open it up to the private sector to implement it. So in that sense, I think, the Singapore initiative perhaps missed a track but you could still say that that is because of the way how Singapore is. The government does...

Mr. Dominic Mason puts the almost exclusive role of public sector in Singapore's nation branding into a sociopolitical perspective. As he argues,

Singapore's development model, its economic and nation-building policies, the goals the country have been pursuing in the last few decades are dominated by government discourses. One of the possible consequences of such a model is, he explains, that average Singaporeans might not feel a great degree of personal ownership over shaping this success. In this 'economic miracle context', Mr. Mason argues, average Singaporeans might not feel as being the 'drivers' of these achievements and thus might not be confident about those in a personal point of view. In this context, 'living the brand' would require 'living the success' first.

It is this whole debate about what goals is this country chasing. Is it purely economic...? And we are seeing that debate shifting certainly since the last election last year, so there has been a questioning around those goals. I think Singaporeans have got a very complex relationship with their government here in many ways. Because, basically, it was said that the last 50 years of success has been based on predominantly policies, government initiatives, less so the private sector, there are no real IBM, Lucent (...). So, if you are looking that kind of economic miracle context, than I am not sure how much you can feel that you were a driver of that from a personal point of view. I am wondering if a lot of Singaporeans naturally feel that they have sacrificed rather than directly contributed to the growth year by year. Therefore, as a result of that they don't feel as, as you said, confident of what they have achieved. It has been like giving something up for the country

to achieve this. So therefore they don't feel as good about it as if 'it was my idea', and 'I drove this'. It might be a different conversation if you talked to people 30 years ago, people who were perhaps more the gun holder of the country's development and whose agenda was purely economic, to get a better a car, I want to build this nation, maybe it has shifted in the last 20 years or so.

Mr. Mason also notes that the dominating role that has been attributed to the government in public thinking and sentiment in all walks of life in Singapore, it also shapes the ways how people conceive branding. As he argues, the results of the NMAC research phase have shown that the whole idea and meaning of the brand was very closely linked to the government in public thinking.

I remember I had a conversation with one of the leading cultural, social, political researchers, or personalities in Singapore, his name is Chua Beng Huat... (...) He is quite opinionated of what he says about Chua Beng Huat was invited to one of the discussion sessions that was held in MICA as part of the national branding programs. We engaged a group of local artists, commentators, whatever you want to call them, and I remember him saying very clearly in that meeting that 'you can't talk about Singapore for more than 15 minutes before the word government comes up'. And that was quite insightful because I am not sure if you would say the same thing about America, or Britain, or whatever. Whether it is 15

minutes or 15 seconds, his point was that sooner or later you are going to start talking about Singapore in the context of the government. And that is a thing what we found in our whole research that the whole meaning of the brand was very closely linked to the government.

From such a position, Mr. Mason concludes, creating a sustainable brand that portrays an entrepreneurial and risk-taking persona, it would need the government to 'take a step back' and the private and people sectors to 'come to the fore' both in wider societal terms, and also in the branding process.

And from that reputation a brand to evolve to what we were saying a more confident, risk taking persona, the government had to take a back seat, and the private sector, and how we called it: the people sector had to grow. (...) And then we said if people wanted to evolve from safe and reliable over to the side to entrepreneurial and risk-taking, then it might be that the government had to take a step back and both the private sector and the people sector needed to come to the fore over the long term. And here were probably talking about decades, if not a century. That is what you need for this brand to become real and sustainable.

Mr. Rofizano Zaino argues along the same critical lines. As he explains, Singapore's country branding exercise follows the same paradigm about the dominant role of the government in society that has been a characteristic of

policies in Singapore since independence. In his view, this approach is being challenged by younger generations within the society in whom a 'spirit of exploration' is stronger. Reflecting on such tendencies, he concludes, the private and people sectors should take more responsibility in shaping development in the direction of more innovation.

For a country brand to really work it needs to start from the people up. (...) But because Singapore since 1965 has always been about... (...) Malaysia had just left us, we were just an orphan, we needed to survive. So the government was there to give us public housing, give us this, give us that, education, hospitals, so, we have always been used to that. So even when it comes to country branding it seems that you tell us what to do then we do it. But the younger generations, now you are going to see, the younger generations are saying maybe it is not enough. We want more. Because the spirit of exploration in them is stronger. But the older generation is saying, of you don't know what we went through, we went through the war, we went through difficult times, we split from Malaysia. But Singapore has moved on from that. We don't want to stay down here, you want to go up now. Therefore there to go up you need the private sector, you need the people sector. The public sector has to back up. Don't keep do manufacturing, do engineering, do innovation.

Experts critical of the exclusively government-led nation-branding strategies of Singapore often point to a perceived ‘culture of control and censorship’ that they see hinder the success of these initiatives. As Mr. Koh Buck Song points to it, a social atmosphere that discourages or limits experimentation with new ideas prevents the national brand to develop ‘organically’, based on ‘authentic’ examples that are ‘naturally’ taken up by the people in society.

If it is something that happens naturally, or organically, then the people will try to do branding and then borrow those examples to help them communicate their message. That is probably the best process, if you like, if you look for something that is authentic, natural and organic, and then you borrow it to help you communicate. It cannot be done in an artificial way when we try to create something that would fit your message. It just doesn’t work that way. (...) but if you have a culture in which there are limits on the ability of such examples to emerge naturally, then you would have less to work with. (...) Singapore is a bit like that. Again censorship comes into the picture, maybe. There are so many things you cannot do. There is this national policy to discourage the use of Chinese dialects. To that, that doesn’t help. Because even when you have a good example people are reluctant to use it as an example because then it contradicts with the other policy of discouraging of dialects.

As Mr. Rofizaino concludes: “You cannot order people to be like this. It has to start from them”. Mr. Koh Buch Song further elaborates on the sociopolitical environment in Singapore that he suggests is not conducive of strengthening people’s commitment to or participation in national branding. As he explains, there are cultural differences between nations in what ways and how intensely they project their nationality. Singaporeans, he argues, are very modest in that which attitude has also been strengthened by a social and political environment in which discourses on the nation have been dominated by the government and expressions of national sentiment is restricted and controlled.

Especially Americans, they are ever ready to project their nationality. Their wears, the colors of the flag, whether it is a pin, or a t-shirt, they are always projecting their nationality, but Singaporeans do that much less, obviously. Some would even prefer that people don’t even know what their nationality is. (...) And probably also another feature is the way that the government has had dominated the discourse, it hasn’t allowed for expression. Something, for example, that is controlled, is the restrictions on the representations of the national flag. It is actually illegal to represent, to use the flag on anything that is for commercial purpose. The original cover design for my book ‘Brand Singapore’ featured the flag but it had to be pointed out to the designer that in order for that to be used he needed to get the permission of a Cabinet Minister. It is a law. So it had to be changed. So there are actually laws that inhibit people from, you are not allowed to fly

the national flag other than for a month period around National Day. The rest of the time if you fly it, it is actually illegal.

In sum, experts critical of Singapore's top-down approach to nation branding point to what they see as a lost opportunity for involving multiple and diverse agents in the national marketing endeavor and thus giving a wider sense of ownership over the brand in local society. As they argue, without people recognizing their identity in the brand image, they will not become brand ambassadors. As Mr. Dominic Mason suggests, while it is impossible to 'convert' the whole population, specific segments of the society can be targeted by messages which help them identify with the brand. Infusing messages into the school curriculum that are consistent with the brand idea might facilitate the 'moulding' of younger parts of the population in ways, he argues, that could make them appear as 'champions' in the wider society. In many ways, examples of these 'confident explorers' are already there in the creative sectors and in sporting, for example.

In theory it is a very important idea to consider because you don't want to start projecting an idea of a country when it is completely out of step with the people, their values, and their culture. You will never convert everybody, you will never convert every taxi driver, every person, it is just impossible, and the same is probably true to companies. You should try and focus on specific segments of the population that you think can live the brand. Probably you want to start with the younger, rather than the older. And so you start infuse

it into maybe different curriculums, the idea of what Singapore is about. And Singapore has been doing this for years. If you look at this on a primary school level, in terms of the national identity and ideologies around, talking to friends there is not a large gap or large leap for putting some of that confident explorer or whatever it might be to that level of education. And maybe moulding that part of the population that could be seen as champions. People in research, people in the creative services sector, people in the sporting, that is a big thing that is played out here.

It is the lack of wider involvement of multiple stakeholders of the society that makes most interviewed experts question the success of the implementation of Singapore's national marketing exercise. As Mr. Koh Buck Song summarizes these arguments, the narrowly public sector based approach might have wasted an opportunity for engaging many more brand ambassadors who could have helped the government realizing its branding strategy.

That model I think that was developed by a brand consultancy. (...) But if you study the extent to which it has been implemented you will notice the gap. It is a model developed by a consultant and, I think, the key break from the past was to bring it down from institutional to individual level, which is the correct direction to take, but if you look at the execution, the implementation, and the follow up, I don't see it being realized. I think the 'Spirit of Singapore', at least from within Singapore, you can't see very

much of the effective execution of that brand strategy. Or maybe it is being expressed in direct brand communication outside Singapore which we don't see. (...) If that is true, then it means that the Singapore public is not being involved, you are wasting the opportunity to engage many more brand ambassadors to help you to realize your branding strategy.

Experts critical of Singapore's solely public sector-led nation branding model also question the credibility, and thus the efficiency of such an approach. As they argue, a long history of government-issued social communication campaigns in Singapore can discredit a national branding exercise.

You know, the thing about country branding, that is the thing that in the 1960s and 70s there was a lot of campaigns, courtesy campaigns, it just had two campaigns, if this sounds like another campaign, that is it, they are not going to take it. If it sounds like it comes from the government, ironically it is set up by the government, but if there is a sniff of that is being from the government... no. (...) No. Ironically, it has to be, it has to appear like it is organic. So all the government can do is to have this event and has that event, hopefully people will get it, so the kids or whatever will just build up the Spirit of Singapore...

Others, however, refuse the suggestion about the existence of campaign fatigue in Singapore and point to the social relevance of such forms of communication.

At a personal level I don't feel that there is any campaign fatigue. (...) when you think campaign I think, in my personal opinion, I think the very fact that how campaigns are carried out have changed with the Internet and everything, before the fatigue has even settled they are glittering (?) something new, done in a different way. So I don't think there is actually a chance for fatigue. They even change the messaging. They are using the word gracious, it use to be the word courtesy. (...)It has to be changed. So to begin with campaign mechanisms have changed, and even campaign messaging has changed to go with the times. So there is really no chance for fatigue.

As one of the interviewed experts at Contact Singapore concludes:

[Campaigns are] actually important to remind people of the values that they should show, remember, that they should hold.

Branded from inception: It is a good nation branding case study

However critical the interviewed experts might sound about Singapore's exclusively government-led national marketing initiative, they all

agree that Singapore has been historically successful in orchestrating national image making. As Mr. Dominic Mason acknowledges it:

The Singapore story is very unique in a sense that, for example, where do you have a government in place for that long?

Mr. Koh Buck Song also argues that Singapore is a good case of nation branding for a number of reasons. In his view, one of the most important implications of the bold influence of the public sector over Singapore's general development was the possibility this model has created for disserted action for a sustained period of time. This model, he argues, has supported the consistency of the formulation and implementation of the country's image making efforts, too.

I think it is a good case study for a few reasons. One is the way that it has been done in such a concerted way over so many years. In many other countries it has been not as coordinated, and not as sustained for various reasons, maybe, some in some other countries the government is not so centralized, so it is not so possible to that, if they change their government they take it into a different direction. Singapore, because of its history, it has been able to do it in a concerted way. That is the main reason. (...) another aspect is also the way that the government had been able to dominate the discourse on this, such as it has been able to dominate the discourse in society generally, and in many spheres of society. So it is

another inflection of that that adds to the way that it has been able to conduct country branding in such a disserted way for such a sustained period of time.

Mr. Koh Buch Song also notes that the Singaporean leadership has paid a historically special significance point to nurturing the country's national image and reputation. According to him, it should be explained in line with the direction of Singapore's post-independence economic model that gave almost absolute priority for policies that attracted foreign investment into the young country and that promised the sustained and continued existence of pro-business political and social priorities.

It is consistent with the way that the country, or at least the leadership of the country has conceived the nation on its earliest beginnings. Because of the way how we had independence trust on us. Very few people at that time thought that Singapore would prosper, and it would take a long time for it to become successful as a nation. So there has always been this sense that we are on our own, no one owes you a living, that we have to really invest a lot of effort to succeed as a people and as a country. So that is also reflected in the..., it even gets translated into the effort that was invested in country branding because that is one path to, first of all, survival, then later to success. And it is also connected with the economic strategies of the country in its earliest years, the idea that Singapore is so small, there is no domestic market, that you can

speaking of, that you can compare with larger countries. So the economic strategy was to attract foreign investment and as much as possible and that is continued to be the focus of the economic strategy right up to today. And when you have that sort of strategy, you have to first of all make yourself known, and then hopefully becoming famous for certain attributes, so that the investment would come in, and also, where we invest depends on first of all awareness, and secondly a trust that these attributes will continue to be there, and that you can rely on the place being a certain way and having certain attributes.

The attention that has been paid for the careful cultivation of the country's image and reputation, thus, remained a continued characteristic throughout Singapore's post-independence history. The importance of national reputation and a focus on policies and strategies that helped the safeguarding and growth of this asset remained to be at the core of the general approach and orientation of the Singaporean public sector, Mr. Koh argues, even if it was not called nation branding from the beginning.

The sort of brand-building or branding that is focused on drawing foreign investments has been an area of priority for Singapore from day one quite up until today. The tourism-specific branding was less important in the earlier years because tourism was seen as not as a significant contributor to the economy as it is today. Today it is more important than it was in the past. So that type of branding has

become more important but it also adds up to a whole. That is not to say that all the pieces are completely coordinated like that, there is some disjunction, there is some lack of coordination, there is of course different agencies working in their specific areas without enough coordination or consideration for other agencies, that happens as well. But the degree of coordination in Singapore is probably higher than in many other countries. (...) it is not necessarily more holistic but it is more deliberate. That is the key difference. I think there were things that were done in the early years of Singapore's history which the people who were doing it didn't even think of it as branding, that word was not in their vocabulary. Maybe they saw it as advertising, or marketing, or something else. They didn't think of the country as a brand. They thought they were like salesmen for the country. They didn't look at it the way that we do now, as a subject of branding. Today it is much more conscious and much more deliberate. And there are countries like Britain or Australia who do it in a very-very conscious and deliberate way. They are very careful about the specific words that they use, the specific ideas that are used to communicate the way they want people to perceive the country.

In addition to the country's post-independence economic model and priorities, Mr. Dominic Mason suggests, nation branding in Singapore should also be seen as a continuation of both the island state's tourism promotion

strategies, and also as a result of certain personal interests and preferences within the leadership.

I think Singapore had had some success with its destination marketing programs under the Singapore Tourism Board that become aware of the power of having this kind of single minded idea to project Singapore as a tourist destination. And it wasn't a huge leap for them to see how that might work on a country level, or on a national branding level. I think Singapore has invested significantly in destination marketing up until that point, and maybe they saw national branding as a way of leveraging that reputation but on a country level. So, they had obviously Singapore Tourism Board doing its own thing, EDB doing its own thing, different ministries and agencies doing their own things. So it was perhaps a way of consolidating those efforts into a more coherent action. Seven or eight years ago there was also perhaps a need to redress some clichés and stereotypes, you know, you had the caning incident, you had the chewing gum incident, people in general were perhaps not clear about Singapore's role in the world. So, they looked at it in a way, perhaps, covering that lag or gap that you refer to. And then I think on a personal level, the then Permanent Secretary of MICA who was Tan Chin Nam, he had always been interested in this area, I think he had been an advocate of city marketing and of projecting Singapore, and he commissioned a project , I think in his last year, or two years as

Permanent Secretary. So it is a combination of perhaps business issues, the need to avoid any duplication or wastage at different agencies and ministries, the need to redress perceptions, and also I think the personal interest of someone, you know, at the very top.

However, some of the experts who have formerly been involved in shaping Singapore's national marketing initiatives now question the continued relevance of such approaches and strategies. As one of my interviewees argues, Singapore's reputation has evolved in such ways and in such an extent in the recent years that communication campaigns have become unnecessary today.

I don't have a strong point of view about nation branding or country branding. It just seems very old fashioned. (...) I think that a lot of what the country is, in the context of social media, is co-constructed by multiple sides. So who is in control of this thing called nation branding? It is difficult to say. Who is building the brand, it is difficult to say. I mean the sense of one single party like somebody is controlling the brand agenda... so I am not sure, I am curious about where your PhD will take you (...). (...) Also, maybe because the country is fortunate to be at a point, considering all this economic and financial crisis the world is in, to be able to be more visible. Because others are not. So that also serves our intention to have a branding initiative in the first place, in a sense that, because others are not doing as well [?]. Let's say, in the context of talent,

we get to attract more talent here, other countries are not doing as well, they come here for jobs. Businesses are looking for a stable environment which we still have. And also, basically, we could also be more visible in the sea of travel, we provide a point of view at the international arena, even within our region. So Singapore basically is a respected voice, especially in today's condition. So there are many countries who would like to follow and learn from Singapore. So these things are already coming our way. Why do we need to have an artificial branding initiative? (...) In other words, the brand in an abstract sense, Singapore's brand, it is being built in its own way as we speak. So, why do we need to pour additional money into a communication campaign? Because the newspapers are also talking more about Singapore now, you read more about Singapore in the American press than you would have years ago. (...) Years ago it would have been about anti-chewing-gum and Michael Fay, but now is well, Singapore may have something there, you know, something to learn from this small country, so the tone of the way that Singapore is talked about the degree it is talked about is also now more positive. (...) The reputation of the country has gone up and we have a lot of equity in there. If we continue to do well that equity will be even greater, going forward. So what will a brand initiative do to add on to this? We are going back to the basics, we are building the country's reputation through tangible work, not just by communication. And should there be sometime in the future when we need to draw down on this equity,

something goes wrong (...) we will be able to draw from this reputation. So what was the value of a brand campaign? I am not sure.

Mr. Dominic Mason also believes that nation branding would give way to a kind of innovation-focused design thinking in shaping Singapore's image and reputation. As he suggests, the government now aims to "do the next Google or Apple here", instead of investing in new national marketing campaigns. Others, however, like one of my interviewed experts from the Resilience and Marketing Division at the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, disagree with the arguments about the discontinued relevance of nation branding in Singapore. "Why do we need branding?" – he asks. "Because we need friends. We don't have resources, all we have is friends" he suggests. As he concludes, it isn't enough only to have good policies. In his view, "it is like when you have a perfect product but you don't want to advertise and sell it". For Mr. Rofizano Zaino, former Design Director of FutureBrand during the time of its National Marketing Action Committee project, Singapore's historical affair with nation branding has more to do with cultural preferences rather than any other strategies and models. As he suggests:

It is part of an Asian thing, also. If you have heard of the saying 'Save face'? So it is about a bit this 'save face'. (...) the image is important. I think it is the same for every country in South-East Asia except that this is in different ways.

Gaining buy in or crafting national identity?

Assessing the major themes that emerged in the interviews about Singapore's boldly aspirational and government-led approaches to nation branding, I asked the interviewees about a potential internally directed motivation behind Singapore's national marketing initiatives. More precisely, I suggested that an internal gaze of nation branding in Singapore could be identified that purposefully targets domestic audiences in order to reconstruct identities.

When directly faced with such a question, most of the interviewed experts refuse this hypothesis. As Mr. Dominic Mason argues:

If you are trying to make a link to national identity and the building of the Singapore psyche, that idea was brought up very early on in the process but it was basically put in a box because the people who were doing that, or have been doing that for the last 40 or so years since Singapore's independence, they wouldn't call themselves as branders, or marketers. This is a much more deep challenge of building a national sense of identity, and the two were sort of conscious of each other but not linked directly in person. Who was responsible for messaging Singapore's values internally wasn't part of this program, it was very much an external problem...

Others also refuse a direct link between nation branding and internal identity building. As one of the interviewed experts argues:

I think the way you use branding is a bit risky here. (...) Because in the Singapore context brand building effort is very often, by the public sector, I would say, and outward facing which means to the world at large. Why? To attract businesses to come here, to attract talent to come here (...) to support Singapore's diplomacy efforts. So how much of that is directed inwards, where it is to help the people to feel good about themselves, or to rally the people behind the Singapore brand? Not that those efforts are non-existent but it is not crafted in the language of brand. So if there is any messaging sent directed at the internal audience, it is about national solidarity, social cohesion, basically, building up the national resilience of the people. Is that branding? It is not really. (...) But is it similar to the effort of branding? If you are going to do an internal branding like you would in a company, your internal branding effort would be directed towards your employees, and you make your employees feel good about affiliations at the company and so on, so it might come across as the actions seem similar but the discourse of branding is not used in an internal context. (...) I think the language of brand and branding is relevant when you are talking about how do we communicate and deliver on Singapore to an external audience outside Singapore.

Similarly, Mr. Koh Buck Song suggests a differentiation between nation branding and national identity building strategies.

My impression is that most of the effort that has been invested in internal brand building has actually been done for social and political reasons and most of the time in the past the government authorities that have been active in this space do not realize that it has a direct impact on the international brand. Because foreigners' perceptions of Singaporeans as a people are an important part of the international brand but the government hasn't made that link. What they have done is for political or social reasons to foster social cohesion or to sometimes advance even a political ideology but they don't realize that there is a connection to country brand-building. So some of the things that have been done have added positively to brand-building, sometimes it had a negative impact on the country brand and sometimes the authorities have not been aware of that. If they see it happening they tend to ignore it or they remain in a state of denial. (...) From my experience it is usually seen as a totally separate activity, and a totally separate group of people working on the two. There is no element of realization of the connection between the two.

As he concludes:

One is political and the other is economic. It is totally different group of people working on each and they don't talk to each other that much.

However, when their approaches discussed in details, the interviewed experts admit a special attention paid for the buy-in from internal audiences. As Mr. Rofizano Zaino points to the complexity of target audiences in branding:

Usually, when people talk about country branding, people mistake it for tourism branding. Which is very different actually from nation branding. Because nation branding is not just tourism, it is also about portraying Singapore in a way that people want to do business with Singapore. So there is the national side, the economic side, and getting people to come here, getting people to work here, getting companies to be their HQ here. (...) And of course after that the secondary audience is also the locals. But the locals are not just the audience, they are also the players.

As Mr. Koh Buck Song continues this line of arguments, nation branding to be successful in shaping national identities, it should make itself relevant for the average Singaporean, who by recognizing himself / herself in the image would go on and represent the brand.

I think in the earlier years the conscious branding did not even go down to that level. What was being communicated were very broad attributes of Singapore which were not expressed in individual terms. Most of the economic messages about things like how efficient the system thinks generally, how good the infrastructure is, how business-friendly the government is, these are very-very broad, almost institutional attributes, not individual attributes. And because most of the communication is very targeted, it is speaking to chairmen and CEOs of global MNCs, or financial institutions, they are talking to organizations rather than individuals. In more recent years the communication has been more individual-centered rather than institutional-centered. There is an initiative to attract talented individuals and they are spoken to on a one-to-one basis. There the main way of communicating is to use role models, or brand ambassadors and that is more individual. But even there the cut off [?] if you like is usually the people being represented are successful businessmen, or even celebrities almost, not ordinary people. So it doesn't usually percolate down to the man in the street. The man in the street is hardly ever featured in the way Singapore has done its conscious branding. If you compare that with the way as Australia does it, usually you see that the man in the street is used, the common person is used, the ordinary person is used to convey the brand values, not institutions and abstract entities. So there is a contrast here.

Mr. Dominic Mason also points to the significance of creating a by-in to the brand from local audiences.

I think the reason because we were successfully winning that tender was because we didn't come at it purely from the point of view of advertising and aesthetics and visuals. We were conscious that there needed to be a significant (...) buy in from different agencies. However, I think it is a different thing from connecting the people responsible for forging national identity to the project. I think they realized that these were two different... You know, the guys, who have been doing the national identity, they have been doing so for decades, and these are perhaps politicians on the highest level. So, there wasn't an expectation on our part to re-craft national identity (...) that was something that 'we have been doing very well for 50 years, thank you very much, we don't need your help on it. What we need you help on is crafting a strategic messaging framework which can be implemented across multiple agencies and multiple stakeholders.

While Mr. Dominic Mason does not accept a direct link to be made between the different fields of image and identity building, he acknowledges that nation branding applies strategies capable of influencing attitudes and identities on a national level, too.

I think if you leave that idea behind about cosmetic, superficial communicator semiotics and you start to get into the psyche and the national identity, and the deliverables isn't logos but it is a more structured communication content that links back to capabilities, then I think it is more possible, whether or not it is called branding, I don't know.

In terms of its outcomes, however, nation branding could affect national sentiments and pride, Mr. Mason admits.

Maybe this initiative in itself wasn't linked to that outcome but one would imagine things like the Singapore's Sports Hub where you are seeing 7 billion dollars' worth of investment go into that, one would imagine that that has got to give Singaporeans a sense of pride in their nation, in being able to witness world class sporting events and perhaps see their own country participating those kind of events. So, I am just struggling to think of a consulting-driven approach which was the NMAC project being directly linked to people's sense of national pride. It is perhaps more in these downstream implementation initiatives where, you know, let's go with the idea of Singapore is about 'confident explorer', you know, getting Singaporeans up on the global fashion stage, or getting Singapore products acknowledged as best in class in the world. That is the implications of the consulting project, it will be those initiatives downstream that would be linking it to a sense of

nationalism or to a nations' pride. (...) You wouldn't be thinking of branding at that time. You would be thinking of something else, celebrating culture probably. If it is linked back to the same broad direction which is that we want to award creativity, entrepreneurship, all those things, rather than playing it safe and being conservative, then yes, you could make a case that national branding, or an implication of it, could be a source of national pride.

Recalling the results of the research phase of the national marketing Action Committee project, Mr. Mason also points to interesting correlations between internal perceptions of national image, identity, and solidarity within the population.

When we did the research one of the things we were picking up on, it was 7 or 8 years ago, was a strong sense of 'us and them' (...). And at that time we were quite surprised and we flagged it up but didn't really get much attention. But now it is interesting to see how it started to play out in the last election and also almost weekly online and in the media. So what is happening is a result of that? It has more to do with the General Elections, it has not much to do with the national marketing, I think. I think it can do. If you go to someone who really crafted that national psyche but at the same time it is not too difficult to identify what is the opposite and therefore you want to try to communicate stories around that. Is

that solidarity? I don't know. I think what solidarity means to me at a time of conflict or tension that is when that comes to the fore. So, would you necessarily want to do that as part of a national branding initiative? It almost feels like you prepare to go to war or something. That is a way beyond the meaning of a branding consultancy. (...) Well, the National Service is often put forward as a bonding experience for Singapore males. So, if that's true, then would you as the owner of the Singapore brand want to craft that experience so that it was more aligned with that character?

As Mr. Mason concludes, while in Singapore's model of nation branding it might be relevant to note a strong emphasis on the perceptions of internal or domestic audiences, the limitations of any deliberate strategy on shaping national identities through national branding should be obvious.

It is how we approached this challenge. You can find a number of examples where the approach was different, there wasn't this level of internal gazing, or internal engagement. Did they do this for Spain? I don't think so. Taiwan, or Hong Kong, did they do this? Maybe. Maybe they didn't need to do it in those countries because they had a really clear idea of what the culture was, what they wanted to push out there. Maybe it is only the case of Singapore where it is still formative, it is still a bunch of people whose job is to craft this, and they got a separate kpi, and there is still this love-hate government relationship where the process handled as such

[?]. If I have done that differently, I think we would still have had to engage as many people. We could have never done it just a logo job on this thing. It was always going to be highly participative. I think the mechanisms and platforms with the private sector should have been pushed a little bit harder, explored a bit further. And I think it would have been nice to see the thinking that go into, not just the messaging guide, but other parts of the Singapore internalization. When people become citizens, what is what you tell? When people go through NS, what do you tell them? What do you give to the proud parents of the Singapore baby? What is the stuff that is going into the schools? But let's be honest here, I am a brand consultant. What you are talking about there is a much bigger role. That is the role what we get when we do this for a lot of organization, we interface with the HR departments, they should be recruiting, letting into the company. We should be telling what kind of people they don't want in the company. That is fine, because it is in the commercial sector. But in a country's case, it comes back to the idea of this brand and country... And I think that is very the limitations are around it.

After the presentation of the interviews conducted in Sharjah and in Singapore, this dissertation now will turn to the discussion of these results.

Discussion

Sharjah – Exploring identity through history

The interviewed experts described Sharjah's national brand construct along the notions of 'culture', 'family', 'authenticity' and 'modernness'. As it emerged from the interviews, they see nation branding as a practice that is in line with the overall nation-building vision of the Emirate based on the preservation of heritage, a focus on education, and an embracement and support of contemporary art.

On the following pages I will connect these brand attributes and the related practices of nation branding to ongoing social and political processes in the Emirate. More precisely, the cultural and educational focus of the brand will be discussed in the context of how heritage conservation, cultural revival, cultural boosterism, the national identity building efforts of the state, and the recent Emiratization campaign relate to the ideological project of maintaining the cultural components of the ruling bargain between the government and the population.

It will also be suggested that Sharjah's brand proposition as a family destination can be explained along those ideological discourses on the hegemonic ideal of the family as patriarchal and hierarchical that are used both in support of the political demobilization efforts of the state and also in its 'ethnocratic' projects.

In addition to the above governmental efforts that aim to strengthen the image of the state as a patron and guardian of tradition, culture, and the interest of the national, Emirati minority segment of the population in face of

the challenges of rapid economic and social development and the growing tendencies of immigration, the modern, or 'worldling' elements of the Sharjah brand will be explained in the context of how the nation-state tries to negotiate global cultural flows by portraying itself as modernizer.

Circumventing the 'sheikh's dilemma' by a ruling bargain

Discussions about the development and transformation of national identity (*haweeya al-watani*) have been at the focus of public debates in most Gulf Arab countries in the recent decade. This problematic has also been among the most widely researched topics of social scientific literature on the Arabian Gulf. In most cases, the transformation of national identity has been analysed in the context of global cultural flows and immigration. Some researchers also studied the nation-building policies of the Gulf monarchies with a specific focus on the state legitimizing efforts of the respective ruling families. While a major thread of studies discussed the transformation of national identity in relation to the challenges global migratory flows and growing ethnic imbalances mean to national communities who represent the minority parts of these multicultural populations, others problematized the issue of national identity in the context of the intense state interest in heritage revival and cultural boosterism in the region.

There is an apparent lack of studies, however, that would explain the emerging phenomenon of nation branding in relation to these tendencies. Nation branding has not been so far sufficiently discussed in the context of those state policies that aim to facilitate the development of national cultural

industries, heritage conservation, art and cultural boosterism, with a focus on the ruling regimes' internal legitimization efforts in these states. On the following pages I will try to provide an overview of current debates on the transformation of national identity in the Gulf, and also to interpret and discuss the results of the interviews of this research in the context of this literature. Based on this analysis I will argue that nation branding in these monarchies in general, and in the Emirate of Sharjah in particular, becomes an instrument of the maintenance of the state's legitimacy formula, or its ruling bargain with the national part of the population.

As most early modernization theorists (Deutsch, 1953; Lerner, 1958) argued, in order to successfully cope with modernizing forces traditional rulers would inevitably face the 'king's dilemma'. According to these scholars, economic and social transformation in modernizing societies necessarily creates new groups that traditional polity cannot sufficiently assimilate alongside its traditional groups (Davidson, 2005, p. 66). As Christopher M. Davidson (2005) summarizes these arguments: the "traditional monarch would either have to resist modernization in some way or instead have to accommodate the new groups, a route that would invariably lead to ceding of former powers" (p. 66).

However, Michael Hudson (1979) argues, in some cases a traditional polity can achieve long-term legitimacy and stability by strategically using certain traditional sources of legitimacy as part of its comprehensive survival strategy (as cited in Davidson, 2005, p. 66). Writing on the particular Middle Eastern context, Hudson suggests that most ruling families in the Arabian Gulf have managed to maintain power and popular support by drawing in a range of

legitimacy resources by which they have established and maintain their particular versions of an ‘unwritten bargain’ with their citizenry.

About the particular case of the United Arab Emirates, Suleyman Khalaf (2008) explains that the country’s very survival has been rested upon an “extremely delicate balance of legitimacy resources” containing both cultural and religious elements, in addition to rentier benefits distributed to the citizens (p. 150).

The personal resources of the legitimacy formula

Davidson (2005) provides a detailed analysis of the process of how the UAE’s traditional monarchies and their elites have managed “to circumvent the sheikh’s dilemma” by developing a ruling bargain based on a careful combination of traditional and material resources of legitimacy (p. 103.). According to him, ‘personal resources’ function as the primary components of the legitimating apparatus of the traditional polity. As he explains, at a region of the world where political loyalties and structures have been depended on personal authority for centuries, ‘personal resources’ necessarily provide a crucial asset of the ruling bargain between contemporary ruling families and their populations (p. 66). In addition to ‘personal resources’, he continues, “extensive intermediary networks” based on “long-standing traditional loyalties and kinship groups” provide further support to the state’s legitimizing efforts (p. 71).

As the data gathered for this research show, nation branding in Sharjah is perceived to be connected to the state and its ruler in multiple ways. The

interviews unveiled an organizational nexus in which the major governmental and semi-governmental institutions formally, or at least through personal connections are under the direct oversight of the ruler and his family. In addition to a matrix of organizational and personal connections, the ruler's vision of the social and cultural development of the Emirate is also considered to be the absolute point of reference for all activities that are mandated to shape Sharjah's image and reputation within the UAE and in the world. The long-term focus on culture and education in the Emirate, the conservation of the traditional urban landscape, the development of museums, heritage institutions and events, the embracement of contemporary art are all explained as directly related to the ruler's personality, preferences and priorities. For some of the interviewed experts, the Emirate's reputation is based on the image of the ruler to such an extent that he himself is perceived as an attribute of the brand.

Developing the cultural resources of the legitimacy formula

One of the most important elements of the traditional polity's legitimacy formula, however, is the maintenance and invention of certain 'cultural resources' which underpin these ruling bargains (Davidson, 2005, p. 77). It is in this context, this dissertation argues, that the all-encompassing notion of culture as the main attribute of both Sharjah brand image and identity should be interpreted as it emerges throughout the interviews. Being rich in cultural traditions and objects and having a proven, long-term cultural focus in its nation-building efforts and development strategies, its cultural

reputation is perceived to be Sharjah's greatest asset and the core of its brand proposition. This dynamic and condensed cultural focus is also perceived to set the direction of Sharjah's brand positioning against the neighboring emirates, the region, and the world. It is also emphasized by the interviewed experts that Sharjah's cultural focus is not a result of any strategic marketing thematization but it is 'naturally' based on its identity. As some of these experts put it, it is Sharjah's cultural focus in which the Emirate's reputation and identity come convert. Culture, thus, functions as an organizing idea along which all other attributes are interpreted, and as this study suggests, can be controlled.

As Sulayman Khalaf (2008) argues, the Gulf's 'imagined national communities' rest on certain cultural and heritage-related foundations which are being produced and reproduced, for example, in forms of heritage institutions and cultural festivals. These institutions and events provide these political communities with "a constructed theatre", upon which such "invented cultural themes" are continuously promoted, reconstructed, and authorized as national political culture (p. 41). According to a number of studies mainly from the fields of anthropology and ethnography, "the production and celebration of popular heritage culture with particular poetic discourses and strategic essentialism" primarily function to safeguard national cultures, and in turn, national political identities in these traditional monarchies (p. 41). Writing on the invented museum culture of the UAE, for example, Khalaf (2008) notes that as a cultural project, the establishment of these institutions serves the "production of historic memories and nostalgia" which are transformed into "discourses of national politico-cultural representation"

through a state-controlled media machinery (p. 42). In a similar manner, Davidson (2005) continues, the recently institutionalized (or, in cases invented) traditions of camel racing, pearling, or the building and rebuilding of forts and towers all should be added to the list of practices, monuments and objects which construct a “legitimizing bridge” between the traditional, governing elite and the contemporary Emirati society (p. 78).

Scholars argue that in most developing states, national museums do not only function as repositories for historical objects and memories but also as instruments by which new national identities are built (Durrans, 1988, p. 152 as cited in Picton, 2010). Writing specifically about Sharjah, Picton (2010) suggests that museums and heritage sites in the ‘Cultural Emirate’ operate to establish and maintain a sense of nationhood and nationalism in the young state. These sites, he argues, have become places “where nationals can practice imagining the nation and manage their local and global identity” (p. 80). These institutions and events provide the means for the state by which it can produce and appropriate historical and heritage knowledge, and also control the dissemination of it to the public (p. 80). As such, Picton concludes, these examples should be interpreted as ‘exercises of statecraft’ that use tradition and heritage in state formation and nation-building (p. 80).

Extending these arguments about to the relationships between policies of heritage conservation, the nationalization of tradition, and the ideological formation of the ruling elite, Davidson (2005) suggests that the development of the Emirati identity itself should be seen as part of the state efforts that aim to maintain the UAE’s legitimacy formula and its ruling bargain. Developing an ‘Emirati’ identity, he explains, has long been seen by the rulers of the UAE

as a “stronger platform upon which to build future legitimacy without necessarily weakening other personal, cultural, and religious legitimacy resources” (p. 82.). In this context, this dissertation argues, nation branding should be interpreted as an instrument that, by celebrating national cultural heritage and arts, and reaffirming the national identity becomes a crucial part of the state’s internal legitimizing apparatus.

Globalization, heritage revival, and the strengthening of the ruling bargain

The construction of past heritage as national cultural industry

When cultural cultivation operates through state-controlled institutions in a top-down manner, global cultural forces necessarily get into interplay with state policies. As many argue, globalization and modernity in the UAE are perceived to threaten what most nationals imagine to be ‘authentic’ Emirati culture and heritage to an extent that this sentiment becomes one of the major reasons behind the state-led heritage revival tendencies (Picton, 2010, p. 69). For Picton (2010), these fears of the national population have been translated into a “politicized government policy of heritage revival” which centers around the establishment of museums, heritage areas, the invention of cultural traditions, and generous state support for education and the arts (pp. 69-70).

Hobsbawm’s (1983) term of the ‘invention of tradition’ refers to those practices of this sort, ritual or symbolic in nature, that aim to create the necessary links and continuity between the reality of the imagined community and its suitably imagined past. Despite their “culturally inauthentic” nature,

invented cultural traditions are powerful in inculcating certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition (Picton, 2010, pp. 76-77). Hobsbawm also notes that the invention of traditions is expected to occur more frequently when societies go through rapid societal transformations that threaten to destroy the patterns which former traditions were designed for (Picton, 2010, p. 76). As Picton (2010) and Khalaf (2008) argue, the Arab Gulf states and the UAE in particular are excellent examples of places where the construction of past heritage, often in forms of invented traditions has reached the levels of national cultural industries. According to the results of this dissertation, nation branding is interpreted by the interviewed experts not only as a primary platform for celebrating cultural heritage but also an instrument through which the inculcation and strengthening of heritage-related knowledge can happen. Through its market-based and popular activations, nation branding embraces the often recently invented elements of cultural tradition and contributes to their ‘naturalization’.

‘Imperialist nostalgia’ and heritage revival

Adding a different perspective to discussions about globalization as a perceived threat to national cultures, Picton (2010) brings the notion of ‘imperialist nostalgia’, that is a feeling of guilt or regret about the “destruction wrought by colonization, and on nature by industry” (p. 79), into the context of tendencies of heritage revival in the Arabian Gulf. For him, this term can also be applied to the case of the UAE where the distant memories of hardship, conflict and famine of pre-oil Arabia make Emiratis feel guilt and regret “for

the luxuries and lifestyle changes” they have experienced in the last decades. As he argues, while these representations of heritage and culture are highly romanticized and remain short of invoking the “the harsh realities of life before oil wealth”, heritage sites in Sharjah can be interpreted as appealing to a sense of ‘imperialist nostalgia’. Moreover, he explains, this quest for an authentic past has also elevated the non-urban and non-service sectors to the level of authenticity by those alienated urban dwellers fantasising about a ‘simpler life’. For Picton, this sense of nostalgia is a major driving force behind cultural policies in Sharjah and it is more strongly connected to the rapidity of the socio-technical changes of the recent decades than to a need to ‘understand’ Emirati past, tradition and heritage (p. 79).

In this context it can be argued that Sharjah’s brand proposition of authenticity in general, and its attribute of offering a touch and feel of the traditional within a modern framework can all be understood as ways of negotiating the experiences of rapid modernization, accompanied by a sense of imperialist nostalgia.

Both ‘patrons-cum-guardians of national heritage’ as well as state modernizers

Khalaf (2008) argues that one of the most important consequences of these state-led heritage revival exercises in the Gulf is that these policies and initiatives enhance the image of the leaders of these states “as both patrons-cum-guardians of national heritage as well as state modernizers” (p. 41). As he explains, while the state emerges as “a supervisor who orchestrates the

production/invention of heritage culture” (p. 45), it does not only generate the symbolic meaning and ideological capital which support the making of its ideological identity, but it also builds an image of itself as a champion of modernization in the course of its successful negotiation of global cultural forces.

Urry (1990) writes that the ways in which societies remember their past demonstrate the extent to which memory and heritage are hegemonic or contested at a particular place. In the UAE, Picton (2010) argues, memory and nostalgia are largely hegemonic and the collective consciousness of national citizens is very strong (p. 78). Discourses about heritage, tradition and the national past are all highly politicized with the primary aim of educating the nationals about the traditional ways of life of their ancestors in recent history and thus to instil in them a sense of national pride (p. 80).

In the UAE, it can be concluded, while global changes have “upset” the cultural, religious and national identity resources of the ruling bargain between the state and its national population (Davidson, 2008, p. 151), globalization has not weakened the nation-state but has “enhanced the hegemony of the ruling Sheikhs” (Picton, 2010, p. 70). In this context, this dissertation argues, nation branding has been recognized as a major instrument that the state can utilize to communicate national identity in forms and manners which fit the language and suit the logic of globalization.

Taming modernity

Marwan M. Kraidy (2010) writes that what it means to 'be modern' in the Arab world has been vigorously contested since the 1850s. As he explains, "debates over the meaning of modernity are heated in the non-West because 'modernity' conjures up social progress, economic growth, individual emancipation, or cultural modernism, or, alternatively, cultural decline, loss of authenticity, and economic dependency", complicating these discussions with the "widespread belief that modernity is incapable of shedding its Western ethos" (p. 8). For Kanna (2011), the recent history of the Emirates has to be interpreted in continuity with this project of the state that has been "shaped by the local struggle over ideals of modernity and independence" (Kanna, 2011, p. 9). As this dissertation argues, many of the debates around nationalism, national identity, and nation branding in the Arabian Gulf can be explained in the context of the dynamics, using Kraidy's (2010) term, through which "the taming of modernity" occurs (p. 21). As he argues, since the experience of modernity in all of its economic, political, and cultural aspects and consequences is "unavoidable", this "contention in public life" revolves around and focuses on "defining and managing modernity" (p. 203).

Abdul Khaleq Abdulla (1984) explains that "ever since the British recruited them to be imperial protégés" Emirati royals and leaders have strived to "monopolize definitions of modernity and sovereignty" from the nineteenth century (see in Kanna, 2011, p. 9). Drawing on what Kanna (2011) writes about Western 'starchitects', this dissertation suggests that by "foisting a very Westernized, neoliberal notion of modernity onto local society" perhaps unwittingly, nation branding experts, locals, expatriates, or foreigners

contribute to the legitimization of “royal ideologies and claims to local historical memory” (p. 9).

The coloniality of the ‘ruling bargain’ and ethno-national modes of national imagining

There are many entry points for postcolonial criticism to discuss the above accounts of national identity formation in the Arabian Gulf. Trends of heritage revival based on a museums culture, first of all, can be criticized for the institution’s Western ontology. Picton (2010) emphasizes that while these institutions may attempt to negate the perceived threat of globalization, cultural imperialism and homogenization, the concept of museum itself originates in the Western philosophical tradition and is not rooted in Arab culture as a form of representation. Similarly, when these institutions present themselves as repositories and guardians of Emirati heritage, it is inevitable to ask who those experts are and where they come from who identify and select local heritage and culture. Since a large number of the experts employed in these fields are non-Emiratis, there is a ‘complex geometry of power’ in decision-making that also needs to be discussed in the context of postcolonial approaches (p. 76).

Most importantly, however, Ahmed Kanna (2011) writes about how the Arab Gulf is one of those rare cases of a postcolony where representations of the region, its countries and peoples can still take “ahistorical” and “apolitical” forms, as they were “exempt from the structural constraints of empire and capital” (p. 1). These narratives, he suggests, embody a specific

form of “Orientalism in reverse” according to which it “still seems natural and obvious” to write about the region as a traditional, unique part of the Middle East which is governed by popular dynasties whose legitimacy rests on pillars of cultural authenticity and “a sophisticated if intuitive grasp” of globalization and market capitalism (p. 1). In these stories, he continues, these “visionary, modernizing, and moderate rulers, with the help of well-meaning Westerners” have championed impressive development and modernization projects and gave the “gift of progress” to their “tribal, primitive, and irrational populations” (p. 3).

These accounts completely ignore the nature of state formation in the region that has been shaped by Britain’s imperial interest and that to a great extent explains the current characteristics of these societies. It should be recalled that after defeating the Qasimi state in the early nineteenth century Britain has fragmented the so-called Trucial Coast to defend and conserve the imperial order of trade routes under its domination. In order to ‘pacify’ these ‘unruly’ territories and to ensure “a continuous supply of reliable proxies”, Kanna argues, the British “enlisted the collaboration of prominent tribal chiefs in the Gulf emirates and reinvented them as unitary, hereditary, and absolutist sovereigns” (pp. 23-24). Such course of conception, Kanna concludes, has enclosed these rulers “in the trappings of tradition and legitimacy” for a long time to come (pp. 116-117).

The coloniality of the mode of national imagination in the Gulf

To understand the significance of colonial legacy in the region, it has to be emphasized that the idea and logic of “unitary, indivisible governance” was a major break from the prevailing models of legitimacy in the Gulf. In contrast to the models that developed in the precolonial Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires where a “galactic” type of sovereignty prevailed, containing “an umbrella of imperial centralization overlapping multiple, legitimate, regionalized and localized claims to territory”; the colonial modes of imagining “entailed a spatialization of the state as governing an indivisible territory and a homogeneous citizenry”. This transformation of the mode of national imagination in the Gulf, thus, signalled a radical shift from “anational”, “culturally pluralistic forms of imagining” with a “hybrid”, pan-Indian Ocean cultural type of identity (Onley 2005) to a mode of identity formation that resembles European ethno-nationalism (see in Kanna, 2011, pp. 116 – 117).

The idea of the “spatialization of national culture” has also been reaffirmed by state practices and ideologies which formed a crucial part of the ruling bargain. This course of state formation and the connected ideological conception of the system of unitary, centralized sovereignty in the region have “permanently thwarted the possibility of Arabs, Persians and South Asians fashioning an alternative modernity in which the claims of all three communities on the Emirati society and polity would receive equal legitimacy and respect” (p. 120).

Nation branding as a discourse and practice that reaffirms the national mode of imagining of collective identity and forms of community in the Gulf

region, thus, is a measure of those ideological tools by which the ruling bargain between monarchs and their populations is strengthened. This ruling bargain, however, is not much of a bargain but rather a political project of state building which to a great extent has also consolidated an ethno-national, or even “ethnically purist sense of citizenship and claim to national territory” in the Gulf (Kanna, 2011, p. 26). As Kanna (2011) explains, in order to strengthen its legitimacy by representing itself “as the guardian of these ethno-nationally inflected values” the traditional polity taps on and manipulates the language and imagery of this ethno-nationalism (pp. 26-27). Kanna points to it, however, that as “the polity is imagined as ethno-linguistically pure, patriarchal, and autochthonous (...), discourses of authentic national identity and related practices (...) are part of a larger family-state-centered hegemonic project to marginalize reformist tendencies and to replace them with the politics of paternalism, dependency, and popular deactivation” (p. 110). In this context, this dissertation argues, nation branding becomes a tool that contributes to what Ahmed Kanna calls the naturalizing of the “ethnocratic spatialization of inside and outside, local and foreign” (p. 111).

Before further explaining on the role of nation branding in strengthening the ruling bargain, it also needs to be noted that this function of its practice also highlights the nature of the phenomenon of nation branding as an “episodic utterance” of national identity constantly in the making, or a form of ‘constitutive rhetoric’ of which Marwan M. Kraidy (2010) writes in the completely different context of Arab reality shows on TV. Nation branding can also be interpreted as a discourse and practice that works on “strengthening national personhood” by reminding citizens that they belong to

particular nation-states and as such, it underscores “the contingent and arbitrary character” of Arab nation-states which needs national sentiment and loyalty continuously rekindled and reaffirmed by national leaders (p. 18).

The nation as family-affair

We have seen that in order to establish its legitimacy and ideological hegemony, the family-state in the Gulf needs to monopolize the discourse of identity and readapt it in ways that it contributes to the overarching purpose of depolitization of the population. As Kanna (2011) explains, this project has largely been accomplished through an ideologized appropriation by the state of the idealized representations of village, family, and ‘Beduin’ identity (p. 31).

In the context of a discussion of Sharjah’s brand attribute as a family destination it is important to note that since the 1990s, a particular, “patriarchal and hierarchical construction of family” emerged to hegemony in public discourses and national representations that has not only played a role in locating family over the notion of tribe, for example, but also in representing the ideological construct of family as a tool of preserving “what many Emiratis consider authentic national culture” (p. 110). As Kanna explains, the naturalization of the notion of the patriarchal family and the connecting of it to the responsibility of preserving national cultural identity lead to a “spatialization of inside and outside”, or to a definition of what belongs to “us” and what does not through the analogy of a family affair (p. 110). As Kanna concludes, “the integrity of the family house stands in for

politics” (p. 110). The family, ideologically defined as “hierarchical and gender-segregated, came to fill in for the political.” (p. 31).

Situating the nation branding discourses of Sharjah as a family destination in the context of the ideological reconstruction of the notion of family as a site of preserving national authenticity and of reaffirming the social order in which the citizens primarily relate to the state through their loyalty to the family, rather than to such competing unit of sodality as the tribe, for example, demonstrate how nation branding is utilized by the state as a measure of its nation-building efforts and political program.

Globalization, ethnocracy and Arabized neoliberalism

Finally, this dissertation suggests that discourses and practices of nation branding in Sharjah also connect to the emergence of those forms of political-legal structures that Anh Nga Longva (2005) identifies as ‘ethnocratic’. In our attempt to recall the legacies of British imperialism on processes of state formation in the Gulf, we have already discussed the emergence of a discursive field of national identity dominated by the elements of ethno-nationalism. We have also reviewed the manipulation of the symbolic elements of nationalism has also been serving as an important resource of both the personal and cultural legitimacy resources of the ruling bargains of traditional polity with the national population.

In addition to these processes, this dissertation suggests, it should also be emphasized that the emergence of a specific type of ‘Arabized neoliberalism’ (Kanna, 2011) in the globalizing Gulf and the related

ethnocratic tendencies are also connected to the maintenance of the resources of the bargain, and nation branding is an important discursive intervention that is capable of reaffirm both purposes.

As Kanna (2011) puts it into context, the demographic tendencies of the Gulf cannot be explained without an understanding of the neocolonial relationship by which the region connects to the global economic order. In his words, “this conjuncture of global forces with family-state agenda favoured the emergence of a discursive field in which a certain kind of ethno-nationalism” or ethnocracy “and an Arabized neoliberalism were flip sides of the same coin” (p. 31).

Anh Nga Longva (2005) notes that the radical demographic imbalance between citizens and foreigners that characterize most Gulf societies unavoidably leads citizens worry about their cultural integrity which necessarily affects state policies and the nature of government. Longva describes ethnocratic systems as politico-legal structures in which elites posit “their own physical characteristics and cultural norms as the essence of the nation over which they rule, thus narrowing its definition and excluding all those within the polity who do not exhibit the same characteristics or embrace the same norms” (p.119). Ethnocratic regimes are characterized by “a vivid awareness of being under threat” that is combined with “an equally vivid experience of empowerment derived from control over subordinate groups”, Longva explains (p. 126).

But how does an elite minority hold on to its privileged status? In civic ethnocracies, such as most of the Gulf states, this exclusion is practised on the basis of citizenship and nationality. As one of the most crucial steps, Miriam

Cooke (2014) explains, is “asserting a unique right to citizenship and exclusive entitlement to national wealth” (p. 12). As she puts it: nation building on these not so long tribal territories “has turned into race into nation” which necessitates the fabricating of immediately recognizable identities to differentiate nationals from the immigrant part of the same polity (p. 12.). Nation branding, this dissertation argues, is an example par excellence of such ideological measures that contributes to these nation building efforts of the states in Sharjah within the conditions of globalization and neoliberalism.

In the following chapter, however, this dissertation will demonstrate that nation branding as a flexible discourse of neoliberalism can feature themes of completely opposite nature in order to support the internal legitimacy building efforts of a ruling elite. From the Arabized neoliberalism of Sharjah, now we turn to discuss the strategic cosmopolitanism of Singapore.

Singapore – Aspiration as identity

On the following pages I will discuss how the interviewed experts see Singapore's national brand and its nation branding efforts by contextualizing the introduced results of the interviews in an overview of Singapore's previous tourism promotion campaigns, and by pointing to the overlaps of these initiatives with the government's major nation-building policy visions of the last couple of decades. Given the amount of scholarly literature on the development of national identity in Singapore and on processes of ideological formation and hegemony in relation to its ruling party and elite, this chapter will provide a rather detailed presentation of the context in which, it suggests, practices of nation branding in Singapore should be understood. The chapter will begin with an introduction of a notion of multiracialism that, many scholars believe, has been the major ideological construct of Singapore's national identity formation for decades. Then, connected to the discourses of diversity and collaboration, the results of the interviews will be discussed in the context of a Singapore's 'strategic cosmopolitanism', in order to point to the ways how these narratives support the government's political demobilization and state-legitimizing efforts.

The ideologies of survival and pragmatism

According to the interviewed experts, Singapore represents a highly successful case of nation branding. As most of them argued, Singapore is a good example of national marketing for such initiatives have been strategically conducted in the city-state since its independence in 1965. Moreover, given

the country's political history in which a single party has managed to dominate the discourse on national identity and has set the goals and priorities of the country for decades, nation branding has been conducted in a uniquely concerted, coherent and consistent manner in Singapore.

These results confirm the argument pursued by many scholars that in the field of nation branding Singapore provides “a fascinating case study” (Koh, 2011, p. 1). As Koh Buck Song (2011) writes in his book ‘Brand Singapore: How Nation Branding Built Asia's Leading Global City’, Singapore has done much better than many other countries in terms of its conscious and concerted branding efforts ever since its independence (p. 12). For Koh, it was by creating and nurturing a country brand that Singapore has “pulled itself up from next to nothing to become Asia’s forerunner in the league of leading nations” (p. 1). As he argues, Singapore’s nation branding strategies might actually be “the most important secrets” of the city-state’s progress, development and economic success (p. 3).

In possession of a state but without a nation

When interpreted in a historical context, Singapore’s performance in the field of nation branding is often explained in relation to the particular nature of its national identity building processes which go back to its very formation as an independent country. Historians argue that as a country with a long colonial past, the imperatives of nation-building have always been compelling in Singapore. In addition to its postcolonial history, the multiracial and multicultural composition of Singapore’s population has further necessitated a continuous and extensive exercise of nation-building. As Yeoh

and Kong (2003) suggest, with a population of largely immigrant stock, at least in the first decades there has been more divergence than shared experience among Singaporeans to draw on for an exercise of building a nation and a common identity on. Such a conception, they argue, makes Singapore a rich example for studying how nation and identity are constructed through processes of industrialization, with a key role of the state in creating the consciousness and sentiment of nationality. For Chua Beng-Huat (1995), the terms Singapore and Singaporean don't refer to "the ontological geographical feature of the island nor to the biological being-as-such" but are the temporal and ever changing products of discursive practices that aim to achieve specific social, cultural and political effects through the "discursive formation of the new nation and its people" (pp. 102-103).

Scholars, such as (Hill and Fee, 1995) argue that such a course of national identity formation is the result of the historical situation in which Singapore's leaders found themselves when inheriting a state without a nation at the time of independence. Similar to other "Westernized political elites" in the newly independent postcolonial countries, the leaders of Singapore had to abandon their colonial identities and try to replace those with alternatives. In most cases of the postcolonial world the potential routes of transformation presented either a returning to a golden past, or a building of a kind of progressive, usually socialist identity – none of these offering a viable model for nation-building in postcolonial Singapore (p. 19), without a historical consciousness in its population and strong Communist sentiment among the members of the political opposition.

The only reality of economic development

The model Singapore's political elite chose, however, has proven to be enduringly popular in political terms. In his review of Singapore's post-independence political history, Chua Beng-Huat (1995) explains the ruling elite's long-term popularity by its success in establishing ideological hegemony through processes of ideological formation in the development of the new social order (pp. 1-10). As he argues, the popularity of Singapore's ruling party has significantly been based on its ability to develop an ideological system that was able to adequately reflect and conceptually translate the "underdeveloped material condition" of the population at the time of independence. The vision that the government articulated for Singapore, Chua explains, has successfully thematised these historical conditions into an 'ideology of survival' that emphasized economic development as "the only rational choice" for the relatively impoverished and uneducated population and around which all policy orientations and measures were consistently rationalized. It was the term of 'pragmatism' has become the all-encompassing notion to ideologically elevated "the necessity of economic growth" and the connected "economic instrumental rationality" to the level of "only reality" in Singapore (p. 19).

It is important to note, Chua continues, that the independent state has also been an interventionist one that systematically reduced the relationship between the government and the population to "a bargain" according to which legitimacy formula the political rights and freedoms of the citizens have been exchanged for economic prosperity and social progress (pp. 19-20). Added to a "deep skepticism" of the ruling elite towards "common peoples' ability to

make rational choices” (p. 22), Chua argues that “the hegemony of economics became total over all other spheres of life” (p. 20) which resulted in “the cultural and material transformation of Singapore’s population into a disciplined labor force whose everyday life is subjected to the logic of industrial economy” while “all other means and markers of social organization” have been “politically reduced to structural inefficacy” (pp. 19-20).

The idea and preferences of what later became nation branding, the interviewed experts of this research argue, have been in perfect line with the economic and developmental policies of Singapore since its very independence. The crucial relevance that nation branding attains to cultivating a business-friendly image for a country as a primary tool of attracting investment and the necessary labor force resonated well in the ideological frameworks of pragmatism, economic rationality, and a need for survival – the paradigmatic notions which became to be constituting the founding myths of Singapore. The idea that without resources and a hinterland Singapore can only build on its image and reputation as a business-friendly place where the government is also able to guarantee the continued presence of these attributes, were built into the very core of Singapore’s strategic commitment to national image management, even that it hasn’t been called ‘nation branding’ in the first decades. Moreover, many of the interviewed experts argue, the economic priorities and logic of governance that nation branding proposes has always been easily embraced by the Singaporean civil servant trained in a country that itself is expressed through an economic vocabulary in most governmental discourses.

Still, as the interviewed experts note, the terminology of nation branding is often refused in government communication and by civil servants. This public sector attitude is explained by what most of the experts termed the dominant ‘engineering mindset’ of public sector thinking in Singapore. As they suggest, governmental approaches and discourses in Singapore are conventionally characterized by a positivist mindset that is based on standards and procedures, and that can only interpret and measure success in tangible terms and achievements. Some of the most critical experts has even come to a questioning of whether Singapore would need a marketing exercise for communicating its successes at all, since its successful policies, rankings and records are increasingly recognized by the global media in the recent decade.

Marketing as a resource for shaping society

In addition to the ideologies of survival and pragmatism, the state of Singapore has emphasized various ideological positions for its legitimization as the building of a national identity became a crucial and complex governmental project after independence (Yeoh and Kong, 2002, p. 4). With a focus on their interplay with nation branding, on the following pages I will continue with an overview of how the ideologies of multiracialism and multiculturalism; ‘Asian’ communitarianism; and most recently a specific notion of cosmopolitanism followed suit in the state’s exercise of constructing a nation, achieving ideological hegemony and maintaining political legitimacy.

Many argue that the imperative of nation branding has been part of Singapore's economic strategies since independence. As Koh Buck Song (2011) argues, right from the beginning, with the establishment of the Economic Development Board (EDB) in 1961, investment promotion has been at the focus of EDB's day-to-day work (p. 27). Since the country "had practically nothing else to go on", Singapore's primary aim was to attract foreign investment thus making "it all hinged on nation branding" (p. 27). In his words, "at the heart of every EDB officer's work has always been nation branding, pure and simple", a spirit that has been then gradually transferred to an approaches that dominates the whole public sector (p. 29).

In addition to investment promotion, tourism has been identified as another strategic field for Singapore's international image making and reputation management efforts from the earliest days of the independent country. Scholars argue, however, that in addition to the mandate of positioning Singapore as a destination, tourism and tourism promotion have also played a crucial role in the constructing of Singapore's national identity (Wee, 2012, p. 5). While John Urry (1995) demonstrates that the images constructed for tourism consumption are in most countries used for the production of national identity, too, in the case of Singapore, Wee (2012) suggests, tourism and nation-building are intertwined to the extent that "it is no longer possible to separate the branding of image and the construction of identity, as they are fused in ways that reinforce each other" (p. 14). Thus, as Singapore's tourism industry has conventionally provided resources to the government's local social engineering policies, it has been strategically functioned not only as a source of economic revenue but also as resource and

platform for the imagining and shaping of society (Ooi, 2001, p. 632). As Chang (1997) explains on the processes of interplay between tourism and nation-building, “when successfully portrayed as a selling point to visitors and a cause celebre” for the country’s tourism industry, “the image gains legitimacy in the eyes of both tourists and residents” (p. 550). In this way, Hall continues, tourism “colours” the societal belief system “by socializing certain values in individuals and reinforcing dominant ideologies” (Hall, 1995, pp. 188 and 176 as cited in Chang, 1997, p. 550), thus inculcating the state’s vision of a particular version of social and political reality into its population, without politics emerging in the focus of attention (Chang, 1997, p. 549).

The ideology of multiracialism

Translating this link between tourism promotion and the ideological processes of nation-building into concrete examples, on the following pages I will provide a brief outline of the development of Singapore’s destination brand propositions in the context of the city state’s political and social history. In the field of tourism brand positioning, Singapore’s destination proposition has been reconceptualised at least five major times within four decades. As Can-Seng Ooi (2001) narrates:

In the 1960s and 1970s, Singapore was ‘Instant Asia’, where one could find an array of Asian cultures, peoples, festivals, and cuisine conveniently exhibited in a single destination. In the 1980s, ‘Surprising Singapore’ positioned Singapore by placing contrasting

images of modernity and Asian exoticism together. The co-existence of East and West, old and new were already highlighted then. In the 1990s, Singapore continued to promote itself as a 'multi-faceted jewel' and also emphasized its desire to be the regional hub for travellers. 'New Asia – Singapore' is the eventual destination identity. There is a subtle shift in focus between 'Surprising Singapore' and 'New Asia – Singapore'. 'Surprising Singapore' promised pockets of unexpected diverse and distinct ethnic cultures in a modern city, 'New Asia – Singapore' offers ethnic cultures fused into modern development, Metaphorically, 'Surprising Singapore' describes a 'salad mix' of various ethnic cultures in a modern environment, 'New Asia – Singapore' presents Singapore as a 'melting pot' of eastern and western cultures. (p. 625)

As we have already discussed, the all-embracing notion of 'pragmatism' has served as one of the earliest and most important ideological constructs of Singapore's history of nation- building. Almost simultaneously, however, reflecting the situation of newly independent Singapore with a heterogeneous population that lacked any shared history or common experience, the idea of 'multiracialism' had also been elevated to ideological prominence (see e.g. Benjamin, 1976; Yeoh and Kong, 2002; Wee, 2012). Right after independence, it had immediately become obvious for Singapore's ruling elite that the nascent sense of national identity in the city-state needed intensive nurturing, and the bonds between members of the community and

those between people and place had to be strengthened (Yeoh and Kong, 2002, p. 8). As then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew put it: “There are books to teach you how to build a house, how to repair engines, how to write a book. But I have not seen a book on how to build a nation out of a disparate collection of immigrants from China, British India and the Dutch East Indies” (Lee Kuan Yew, 2000, as cited in Wee, 2012, p. 3).

Singapore’s ruling party has replied to this situation with the establishment of the paradigmatic CMIO racial quadrotomy, referring to Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others (Siddique, 1990, p. 36). This classification of the four ‘races’ has functioned as a crucial means for maintaining racial harmony since its very conception and tourism, Wee (2012) argues, through the promotion of marketing images that advanced the ‘CMIO-ideology’ has contributed greatly to multiracialism (p. 3).

As Ooi (2001) promptly explains, “re-presenting” cultures through tourism does not only inform tourists but it also transforms “the very society tourists want to gaze up” (p. 633). Thus, portraying Singapore as a multiracial society did not only serve the purpose of tourism promotion but it also conveyed an image of ethnic harmony for the Singaporean population itself (Teo and Chang, 2000, p. 125, as cited in Wee, 2012, p. 3). The CMIO classification has both provided “a harmonizing yet exotic image for tourism” and also served the nation-building imperative of uniting the society that consisted of many different ethnicities (Wee, 2012, p. 5). In other words, the CMIO model became to function as a formula of disciplining Singapore’s disparate ethnic communities into a state-conceived classification that provided valuable resources for tourism promotion, too. (Leong, 1997, p. 93).

This formula has also contributed to an increased commodification of ethnicity in Singapore. Producing cultural capital for tourist consumption in such ways, once again, is not unique to Singapore. However, some scholars argue, the model of reconstructing ethnicity for tourism has influenced the development of self-identity and ethnic relationships in Singapore to such an extent that it became constitutive of “what it means to be Singaporean” (Wee, 2012, p. 3). As such, however, this simplified tourism marketing model has ‘camouflaged’ the complexity of Singapore’s diverse ethnic composition, that is in reality was characterized by very different dialects and religions, and it transformed local cultures according to the ever-changing needs of tourism (Teo and Chang, 2000, p. 125).

Instant Asia

Building on this multicultural identity, Singapore featured itself as ‘Instant Asia’ in its tourism promotion campaigns throughout the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. The key idea and tagline of ‘Instant Asia’ played on the notion of Singapore as an ideal gateway to the major cultures, foods and festivals of Asia - all in one place. As Koh Buck Song (2011) narrates, this apparent ‘self-Orientalisation’ and eagerness to appeal to the Western stereotypes about ‘the exotic East’ signalled “a time of a lower level of national identity and self-confidence” (p. 37). In the words of P.L. Lam (1969), the first director of the Singapore Tourism Promotion Board: “The cultural traditions and customs are definitely new to the tourists from Western

countries and I believe this is a rich ‘oilfield’ which we can tap” (as cited in Chang, 1997, p. 552).

As Chang (1997) argues, however, it was not only the pragmatic considerations of tourism revenue but once again, socio-political objectives of nation-building also played a crucial role in featuring a theme of Asian multiculturalism as the main proposition of the Singapore brand construct of the time (p. 548). As Singapore needed to forge a national identity and a sense of belonging among its multiracial residents, in accordance with the governmental discourses of multiracialism produced for domestic consumption, the ‘Instant Asia’ tourism image functioned as an important ideological tool that has been employed for the purpose of nation-building, too (p. 548). Since this image served as an invaluable opportunity for advancing the CMIO ideology, the ‘Instant Asia’ brand construct itself contributed significantly to multiculturalism (p. 549) and in many way, it gave meaning to ‘Singaporeanness’ (p. 548). More precisely, Chang points it out, this construct has helped to keep a balance among Singapore’s various ethnic communities by de-emphasizing the majority Chinese character of the country (p. 549). The point in this case is, he notes, that while “Singapore is visibly a Chinese city” it has “successfully donned the multicultural garb as nation-building tool and a strategy of tourism promotion” (p. 551). As an ideological tool, thus, the ‘Instant Asia’ theme provided an “image, model or self-image” of how the society should be and this theme still serves as an “essential component of the foundation myth of a nation-state” (p. 551).

The ideology of New Asia

Decoding the 'Asian soul' behind the modern facade

While in the 1980s, the focus of Singapore's tourism promotion, or nation branding efforts turned to the 'Surprising Singapore' theme emphasizing a fusion of "modernity and Asian exoticism", in the 1990s multiculturalism began to give way to a new concept with a new focus on the Asian tourism market (Koh, 2011, p. 38). This change in focus and tone, however, coincided with a significant shift in Singapore's political orientation – an interesting parallel yet to be discussed in the scholarly literature on Singapore's history of tourism promotion, place branding, and nation-building.

The new destination identity was launched in January 1996, with the Singapore Tourism Promotion Board proclaiming the former 11 year-old 'Surprising Singapore' positioning being no longer adequate in communicating "the breadth of the mature Singapore tourism product" (Ooi 623-24.) As Koh (2011) recalls it, the 'New Asia – Singapore' brand concept aimed to refer to Singapore as a nation with "its soul in the past, but its head in the future" (p. 39). It meant to articulate Singapore as a melting pot of traditional ethnic cultures and modern development, and a place where "reinvention and modernization" go on hand in hand, all the time (pp. 38-39). As one of the briefs of the STPB's Destination Marketing Division put it at that time: "New Asia – Singapore expresses the essence of today's Singapore: a vibrant, multi-cultural, sophisticated city-state where tradition and modernity, East and West meet in harmony; a place where one can see and feel the energy that makes New Asia – Singapore the exemplar of the

dynamism of the South-East Asia region” (STPB Destination Marketing Division brief, 1997, as cited in Ooi, 2001, p. 629). For Tan Chin Nam, STPB’s then chief executive the progressivity, sophistication, and the unique multicultural Asian character of Singapore all represent modern Asian dynamism (Chang, 1997, p. 556).

Beyond a portrayal of Singapore as a place that blends the exotic and traditional with the new, however, the brand concept has also been built on the argument that many of the Asian aspects of Singapore’s urban landscape and society were increasingly difficult to be experienced by tourists. The ‘New Asia – Singapore’ concept also meant to “accentuate” the “oriental aspects of the city” and to “decode” the “Asian soul” behind the modern facade (Ooi, 2001, p. 627). As one of the officers of the STPB put it, while Singaporeans “don’t seem to be very Asian”, the global image of ‘New Asia – Singapore’ emphasizes that the city-state “could never be where it is without the Asian soul in it” (as cited in Ooi, 2001, p. 626).

Ooi (2001) argues that the ‘New Asia – Singapore’ brand concept, once again, offered a vision to the changing local society, too, as it selectively accentuated aspects of local cultures for tourist consumption, thus being in the same time both “descriptive of the society, as well as visionary” (p. 630). Through ‘New Asia – Singapore’, he argues, the “STB has modified, enhanced and even created cultures to realize the identity” (p. 630), thus not just decoding but also “creating reality” (p. 620).

The coming of the 'Asian values'

Interestingly, the emergence of Singapore's new, 'Asian' destination brand proposition has coincided with the coming into age of the Asian values discourse of the PAP. Quite precisely, the Asian values discourse originated from some neo-conservative American intellectuals who "discovered" Confucianism as the essential cultural underpinning that supposedly explained East Asian capitalist successes, akin to the supposed role of the Protestant ethic in the rise of capitalism in the West" (Chua, 1995, p. 29). These ideas, Chua Beng Huat (1995) argues, rapidly gained currency within the circles of some neo-Marxists, too, as both groups of intellectuals saw "unchecked individualism" defined against a communitarian approach to responsibility the main reason behind the "perceived malaise" of the West in the 1970s (p. 118). As Chua elaborates on the Singapore part of the story, in the first two decades after the county's independence the values of individualism and consumerism have been placed at the core of the cultural transformation Singapore needed for capitalist growth. However, as rapid capitalist development began to effect the social stability built on concepts of 'survival' and 'pragmatism', the value of individualism had to be reframed as "detrimental to the social order (p. 6). In this ideological battle, Chua writes, the Confucian and 'collectivist' tradition of East Asia has been identified as the major force behind the rapid growth of the region, overcoming the individualistic tendencies of the West (p. 6). In these discourses 'Westernization' became the holder of all the ills of capitalist development in Singapore, against which, in Chua's words, "a very loose formulation of 'Asian values' (...) was elevated supposedly to arrests the rot that threatened" (p. 118).

Scholars describe how these ‘culturalist’ arguments have been used by the government of Singapore to shore up its existing political hegemony, industrial production and economic growth (Chua, 1995, p. 29). More precisely, Chan (1976) explains that the “elitist-statist and paternalistic-authoritarian Confucian conception of hierarchical social order in which the ‘benevolence’ of the sovereign in promoting the general social welfare is exchanged for compliance and obedience of the governed” has used to produce additional popular support for the government (Chan, 1976, pp. 230-233 s cited in Chua, 1995, p. 28). It would need a thorough scholarly analysis to prove any direct relationship between the rise of the Asian values rhetoric in politics and public discourse, and the emergence of the New Asia – Singapore brand tag in tourism promotion. Still, given the suggested paradigmatic interplay between the development of nation–building and nation branding efforts in Singapore, this timely coincidence of the two trends should be noted here.

Finally, moving into the 21st century, the tourism brand positioning for Singapore has shifted again. First, in 2005, the ‘Uniquely Singapore’ branding was unveiled, just to give way for the YourSingapore tagline in 2010. As Koh (2011) explains, representing “a kind of post-modern, ‘deconstructionist’ way of nation branding” the new tourism tagline invites travellers to find their own sense of the place by planning personal itineraries to discover Singapore (pp. 40-41).

In this context, it is interesting to note that the interviewed experts did not agree on whether the current geopolitical shift towards a more powerful Asian role in the global economy and in world affairs would strengthen the

Asian message in the Singapore brand construct. Some argued that as Singapore has always been a ‘hybrid of the East and the West’, such a shift would go against the very idea of the place. Moreover, they continue, such a change of tone would also contradict Singapore’s paradigmatic openness proposition. For others, however, as the Singapore brand proposition has always been a prompt reflection on the economic needs and interests of the country, the geopolitical changes might require the city-state to background its Western message and move towards a more Asian positioning.

Nationalizing cosmopolitanism

I argued throughout the previous pages that Singapore’s nation-building, tourism promotion and nation branding efforts demonstrate apparent examples of interconnectedness ever since the country’s independence. In order to give a more elaborate account of the context, the following pages will provide a brief overview of Singapore’s three main national strategy papers of the last four decades, before turning to a discussion of a suggested ideological connection between the city-state’s latest nation brand proposition, the ‘Spirit of Singapore’ exercise, and the recently featured ideological construct of ‘cosmopolitanism’.

As Derrick Ho (2012) recalls in his article ‘A primer on national conversations’, when in his 2012 National Day Message Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced the establishment of a new committee “to review Singapore’s policies and national philosophies” that will guide the country for “continued success”, it has been the fourth time that the government has

sought to take such a large scale review⁵. Framed as ‘National Conversations’, the initiative aims to engage Singaporeans in a broader conversation about themselves and to explore the question of where and what Singapore wants to be in twenty years time. Although they were thematized differently, the previous exercises of ‘The Next Lap’ in 1991, the ‘Singapore 21’ in 1999, and the ‘Remaking Singapore’ project in 2002 were similar to this latest initiative in terms of their objectives and scale.

Headed by then-Acting Minister for Information and the Arts George Yeo, The Next Lap review was launched as a 160-page book in February 1991. While it aimed to map out a broad plan for the country over the next 20 to 30 years, its proposals were thematized around the challenge of how to make Singapore a nation of distinction. Representing the collective efforts of more than a thousand people both from the government and private sector groups, one of the main outcomes of the review has been the establishment of the Singapore International Foundation that carried the missions to urge Singaporeans “to think globally and become better members of the international community, project the nation's image abroad, develop a network of friends of Singapore and encourage the world's talented to visit, study and work here” (Ho, 2012).

In 1999, the government published the second major review under the title of ‘Singapore 21’. Launched in 1997 by then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Ton, the initiative established a committee tasked by the ‘strengthening’ of the “heartware of Singapore”. In the related government and public discourses, the term related to such intangible elements of the society as “social cohesion,

⁵The presentation of these initiatives is based on the cited source and the quotes are not separately referenced. <http://www.singapolitics.sg/fast-facts/primer-national-conversations>

political stability and the collective will, values and attitudes of Singaporeans” (Ho, 2012). The subsequent report that assessed the results of about 6,000 discussions with Singaporeans from all walks of life became a vision and a road map to guide Singapore into the next century (Ho, 2012).

Published in 2002, the ‘Remaking Singapore’ report signalled Singapore’s nation-building strategies entering the new Millennium. Chaired by then Minister of State (and National Development) Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, the committee “sought to pry Singaporeans away from material pursuits and probed political, social as well as cultural norms to help prepare the nation for the future” (Ho, 2012).

While each report pursued it from different angles, what all strategies and visions had in common, however, was the recognition that Singapore’s global success largely depends on its nation-building strategies. As it was argued, the Singapore of the 21st century would need to be built on and built by Singaporeans who are confident in their identity and thus able to successfully compete within the reality of globalization. This objective has been translated by the government into a task of building a global city with cosmopolitan citizens who feel at home in Singapore. The following pages will take a closer look at the nature and development of this imperative as the major context for the analysis of Singapore’s recent nation building efforts and the results of this research.

The world-embracing city

Although scholars, such as Janet Abu Lughod (1999) would contend that colonial Singapore as a port city at the crossroads of international trade has historically existed as a global city, Selvaraj Velayutham (2007) argues that the concept of the 'global city' proper in official rhetoric and policy terms has only been adopted in 1991 (p. 86). Although Rajaratnam has, for example, applied the term of 'Ecumenopolis' or the 'the world embracing city' much earlier than the 1990s, his understandings referred only to the economic aspects of Singapore's status as a global city and did not point to the socio-cultural implications of its global transformation (Velayutham, 2007, p. 84).

It was in the The 'Next Lap', Velayutham (2007) argues, that the government took the issue of Singapore's social transformation in the era of globalization seriously and decided to "make Singapore not only a world city but also a genuine 'home' for its people" (p. 92). By the time of 'Singapore 21', Velayutham explains, the government has realized that "Singaporeans were lacking in emotional and affective commitment to the Singapore nation-state" and there has been an "emerging anxiety about the kinds of citizens Singapore has produced" (p. 95). It became aware that the growing standard of living on its own has not been able to create affective attachments and sentiment towards the idea of the nation in the wider population. In this sense, Velayutham explains, the 'Singapore 21' report envisioned a citizenry "with both emotional and economic stakes in Singapore" (p. 97). In the words of then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (1997), what Singapore needed was to go "beyond economic and material needs, and reorient society to meet the

intellectual, emotional, spiritual, cultural and social needs” of its people (as cited in Velayutham, 2007, p. 97).

It has soon been realized, however, that the envisioned project of cultivating and moulding the national consciousness, commitment and sentiment in Singaporeans would need to be achieved without hindering the country’s proposition of being a global city. As this dissertation argues, the nation branding campaigns of the new century became the integrate part of this project.

Manufacturing the affective building blocks of home in a global city

As the results of the expert interviews conducted in the course of research show, the notion of cosmopolitanism emerges as the main attribute of the ‘Spirit of Singapore’ brand proposition of the National Marketing Action Committee. It is important to note, however, that this term covers a variety of meanings and understandings. Cosmopolitanism is used in these narratives as the equivalent of a ‘multiracial’ place, but it also refers to the perceived characteristics of Singapore as an ‘open’ and ‘tolerant’ city. Some of the experts also point to what they see as a difference between the conventional understandings of the term in Western discourses, and the way how it has been appropriated by the political discourses of the Singaporean government. According to these views, while at most other places, especially in Europe and in the USA cosmopolitanism refers to a mutual celebration of different identities, in Singapore this notion functions as a controlling symbolic that aims to hold different backgrounds together. For these experts, the idea of

cosmopolitanism in Singapore is an ideological intervention that ultimately promotes the government policies of immigration and its politics of multiracialism. As one of my interviewees explains, the history of immigration in Singapore is so much intertwined with favoritism and elitism that government discourses on cosmopolitanism appear to many as an example of those ideological tools that aim to facilitate the transforming of the country into a 'playground' of immigrants and foreign talent.

To better understand these arguments and in order to be able to locate the role of nation branding in relation to the suggested government discourses and policies, we need to take a closer look at the major cultural policy initiatives of the Singaporean government in the 1990s and 2000s. Velayutham (2007) argues that in the early 1990s, the Singaporean government has pursued cultural development with two key goals in mind (p. 120). While it wanted to promote Singapore as a 'Global City for the Arts and Culture', it also aimed to enhance the quality of life of Singaporeans by building a culturally vibrant, cosmopolitan environment (p. 120). It is in this context that in the late 1990s, the government has begun to employ the term 'cosmopolitan Singapore' both in the branding campaigns of the city-state and also in its domestic, nationalistic discourses.

This idea of a 'cosmopolitan Singapore', Velayutham (2007) explains, has become linked to three major objectives in particular. It sought to construct a Singapore brand proposition that would attract global capital and a cosmopolitan capitalist elite; and in addition to these 'conventional' branding principles, such a discourse was also meant to encourage the globally mobile

and flexible, creative groups of Singaporeans to stay and work at home in Singapore (p. 120).

The results of this dissertation support the existing literature on the specific nature of Singapore's 'strategic cosmopolitanism', or 'cosmopolitanism from above' (Velayutham, 2007, p. 143). As the concept of cosmopolitanism in Singapore has been politically appropriated in order to reinvent the city-state, it became to represent on the one hand, a romanticized image of multiculturalism and tolerance, and on the other, a variety of identities and backgrounds that has to be managed (p. 137). In this sense, cosmopolitanism became a discourse in government policy, "measured by a dot-point checklist of characteristics which the state has determined will be most useful for nation-building" and that can be "harnessed" in its "pursuit of economic success and hegemony" (p. 120; 140). Thus, this notion of cosmopolitanism has become to function as "a tool to contain globalization, to manage it, rather than a description of some natural outcome of it" (p. 120).

This dissertation terms this appropriation of the notion the 'nationalization of cosmopolitanism' which, in this sense becomes a primary discursive strategy of the Singaporean state in dealing with the challenges of creating a national home in a global city.

This interpretation and use of cosmopolitanism, Velayutham (2007) notes, point to a fundamental contradiction in the state's nation branding efforts and in nation-building policies. While Singapore is promoted as a 'global city', in the same time it is also reaffirmed as a 'home' in government discourses (p. 120). This dissertation argues, however, that nation branding as an implicit cultural policy measure and as a channel through which the

nationalization of cosmopolitanism happen, is capable of communicating both image and identity in Singapore.

It is in this context that this dissertation proposes to interpret those narratives of its expert interviews that suggest a lack of cultural content in the current Singaporean national brand proposition. As most of the interviewed experts argue, although Singapore has been traditionally communicated as multiracial place, the cultural diversity of the brand has never been emphasised in an ethnic sense. Moreover, as one of the interviewed experts argues, the latest brand proposition of the country is empty of any cultural references at all. For some, it is the suggested economic irrelevance of the communication of a strong cultural identity that explains this perceived characteristic of the Singapore brand. Others point to the difficulty of identifying a distinct cultural identity at a place that has always been influenced by global trends and movements of ideas, people and commodities. Moreover, as one of the interviewed experts provocatively asks, what is culture at a place that is only a few decades old?

Explaining on this characteristic of the Singapore brand some of the interviewed experts suggest that one of Singapore's main proposition has been its uniqueness in the region. Such distancing itself from the neighbouring countries, they argue, necessarily required a backgrounding of the projection of cultural identities. This trade-off has resulted in the change of a distinct cultural message to the larger narratives of political stability and economic success, for example. Thus, it is by looking beyond the ethnic lenses, as one of the interviewed experts suggest, that one can identify those set of cultural beliefs and values that are distinctly characteristic of the Singapore national

brand. In addition to pragmatism, he suggests, tolerance, openness, a will for constant improvement, a sense of independence, and a survival mindset all emerge as such qualities and attributes of the place. As this dissertation argues, Singapore's current, cosmopolitan brand proposition fits the requirements of such a narrative par excellence.

Culturally primed for success in a new global economy

Creative thinkers and entrepreneurial spirits in 'Renaissance City'

Beyond the discussion of Singapore's nation branding practices in the context of the city-state's 'going global and staying local' paradigm, its latest brand proposition also has to be analysed in relation to a governmental approach that considers culture as a field to be controlled, managed, and harnessed to the benefit of the economy. More precisely, as Velayutham (2007) argues, culture and the arts are seen in these governmental discourses in Singapore as instruments and platforms through which certain social traits, such as spontaneity and creativity, can be mobilized or manufactured in the population in order to produce the characters global market capitalism requires (p. 140).

Around the beginning of the new millennium, the Singapore government has envisioned a new role for the city-state. Based on the policy documents of 'Singapore - Global City for the Arts' (1995), and 'The Renaissance City Report' (2000), the government has proposed to re-imagine Singapore as "an investment base for leading arts, cultural and entertainment enterprises in the region, the theatre hub of Southeast Asia, and an

entertainment destination for tourists”.⁶ These documents were premised on a twofold vision. First, they aimed to establish Singapore as a global cultural centre “to live, work and play in, where there is an environment conducive to creative and knowledge-based industries and talent” (The Renaissance City Report, 2000, p. 1 as cited in Velayutham, 2007, p. 130). As their second promise, however, these papers envisioned a place where locals can “develop as creative and well-rounded individuals”. As The Renaissance City Report puts it, these strategies also aimed to “provide cultural ballast towards the nation-building efforts and strengthen Singaporeans’ sense of national identity and belonging, and inculcate appreciation for artistic and cultural heritage of Singapore” (The Renaissance City Report, 2000, p. 1, as cited in Velayutham, 2007, p. 130). Velayutham (2007) argues that these cultural policies clearly pointed beyond developing the arts and culture and also aimed at creating “a certain kind of Singaporean citizen” who is “culturally primed for success in the new global economy” (p. 139). Such citizens were envisioned as creative thinkers and entrepreneurial spirits who will be “cultured’ enough to impress the most cosmopolitan of the world’s elite business professionals” (pp. 139-140).

As this dissertation argues, the cultural qualities envisioned by the ‘Spirit of Singapore’ national brand proposition are the exact continuation of such approaches to culture. The archetype of the ‘confident explorer’ who is the embodiment of the enterprising spirit always ready to embrace challenge and change, is a perfect example of a citizen who is carefully ‘designed’, or ‘cultured’ for success in the context of global neoliberalism. In addition to

⁶ <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2427.00280/abstract>

their capacity of ‘daring to dream’, the Singaporeans of this brand vision create a culturally conducive, or ‘nurturing’ environment that acts as a catalyst for success. The brand attribute of ‘transforming’ is a reference to an ideal type of Singaporeans who are socialized to always be driven by aspirations of continuously reinventing themselves in order to build a better future and achieve growth. Finally, the Spirit of Singapore brand vision puts ‘collaborating’ into the middle of those attributes that describe a culture that embodies diversity as a way of life at a place that flourishes with new and creative energies.

It is in this context that Singapore’s internal branding efforts are proposed to be discussed. Some of the interviewed experts argued that Singapore has been an excellent case of successful internal branding efforts, too. While nation branding is generally understood to be about a country’s external image and reputation, there is also an important domestic dimension of the practice. Internal branding, as Koh Buch Song (2011) defines it is “the way the country brand is communicated to and shaped in the minds of the citizens of that country” (p. 23). As he argues, “the degree of sophistication” of Singapore’s internal branding efforts is “unparalleled” (p. 2). In its case, he concludes, “internal nation branding has been extraordinarily successful in cultivating cohesiveness and conformity” (p. 24).

Others argue, however, that nation branding should be differentiated from those efforts of the state by which it aims to engineer social cohesion, solidarity, or a national identity. When directly asked about the relationship between strategies of nation branding and policies of nation-building in Singapore, most of the interviewed experts refused the suggested overlap

between these fields of activities. As they emphasized, those who are working on fostering a sense of national identity in Singapore is a separate group of experts from those who are responsible for forming the nations marketing strategies. As they argue, although the two groups of people are conscious of the work and mandate of each other, they are not linked together neither in person, nor through their activities.

However, by demonstrating a synthesizing reading of the development of Singapore's destination / national brand propositions and the city-state's major ideological revamps in terms of the hegemonic governmental discourses over national visions and cultural policies, this dissertation aimed to identify and point to the discursive overlaps between strategies of nation branding and policies of nation-building in Singapore. Moreover, based on its expert interviews this dissertation also proposes that in the recent years, nation branding has increasingly become a primary internal cultural policy measure of the neoliberal state of Singapore.

The dynamics of cultural difference

One of the major common themes that emerge in both sets of the interviews is the paradigmatic assumption about the unavailability and necessity of nation branding. The interviewed experts accept nation branding's own 'ontological axiom' about the 'reality of globalization' in the context of which nations, especially small and developing ones, are required to rearticulate their identities as unique selling propositions in order to avoid or fight global political, economic, and cultural invisibility and marginality. More

specifically, nation branding is interpreted as an instrument by which Sharjah and Singapore, perceived as ‘blind spots that one knows’, could finally put themselves on the global map, recognized for their successes.

Another widely accepted assumption that underlies practices of nation branding at both places is that greater global visibility could only be achieved by a differentiation of these places, first of all, from their neighbors. ‘Creative differentiation’ is not only seen as a strategy for targeting the homogenization of the global market by building unique identities vis-à-vis the rest of the world, but also as a way of dismantling those negative regional branding effects that these experts believe are influencing the image of their countries. In these narratives, the unique, culturally-focused identity of Sharjah is put into stark contrast with the ‘glamour-driven’ strategies of its neighboring emirates. Similarly, as many of the interviewed experts argue, Singapore’s major proposition to the world has been its regional uniqueness and difference since its very independence.

In addition to creating greater visibility and targeting regional stereotypes, ‘creative differentiation’ is also seen as a way of addressing the perceived brand lag situation that, these experts believe, exists in their countries. Sharjah’s national brand construct, for example, does not only seem to articulate a recognizable and unique identity in the region, but it also aims to target and overwrite the existing ‘conservative’ image of the place. Similarly, the spirit of 21st century Singapore does not only invoke aspirations that aim to project the city-state as a strong global contender and an acknowledged brand name of success, but it also provides an image that disassembles old perceptions based on Singapore’s past and that are still seen to

dominate its present reputation. In this case, 'differentiation' is a strategy that works within the brand by updating it to its latest version.

The interviews have also confirmed the nature of nation branding as an agent of neoliberalism. Nation branding emerged from these conversations as a practice that prioritizes and propagates a reductionist and essentializing reading of collective identity that is based solely on the marketable aspects of culture, tradition and history. By doing so, nation branding naturalizes market fundamentalism in all spheres of society. Moreover, as a neoliberal technology of government par excellence, it does so by presenting itself as a non-ideological and technical solution.

Nation branding is defined in these interviews as a practice that rather than inventing those, only accentuates existing characteristics of a place. The interviewed experts refuse to admit that creating marketable characteristics of a country would be part of nation branding's repertoire of practices, and such marketing strategies are labelled as 'artificial', 'unsustainable', 'cynical', 'calculative', and 'cold'. Even in the case of Singapore's apparently visionary brand proposition, the aspirational attributes of the projected image are presented as qualities 'linked to' historically existing attitudes, experiences and capabilities of the city-state and its people. In these narratives, the marketed brand attributes of Sharjah and Singapore are seen to originate in and to be built on such 'inborn' qualities of these places that are 'already there' and that 'can be felt'. As such, nation branding in these narratives presents itself as 'true' to the existing 'culture' of the place and perceived as 'organic' and 'natural'.

The notion of ‘culture’, and especially ‘cultural difference’, thus, plays a paradigmatic role in naturalizing neoliberal rationales and logics. But what does ‘culture’ and ‘cultural difference’ mean in these practices and discourses?

Culture is most often referred to in these narratives as a realm of artistic production. More precisely, while in its authentic and traditional forms it becomes a reference to heritage and tradition, in its contemporary manifestations culture is presented as a site of ‘modernness’ where progressivity is articulated. In Sharjah, it is mainly contemporary art that becomes a realm where modernity is performed. In Singapore, the notions of creativity and innovation emerge as the main venues of progressivity in the realm of cultural production.

Beyond its meanings as heritage and art, the notion of culture also appears in these interviews as a reference to specific ways of thinking particular to a certain place. While in Sharjah it is mostly conceptualized as a ‘traditional’, or ‘authentic’ local mindset, in Singapore it is interpreted as a reference to certain overarching mental models or set of attitudes that are described by the notions of ‘economic rationality’ and ‘pragmatism’.

Both as a platform of preserving communal memory or enacting belonging, however, culture in these narratives appears as a site where exclusive identities are produced and performed. In Sharjah, as the innermost realm of the indigenous or host community, culture as heritage is understood as place to be defined and safeguarded against otherness and alterity that appear in forms of different cultural backgrounds or global flows and influences. Similarly, culture as the set of essential truths about Singaporeans

is seen as a place where the meaning of belonging is defined along a sense of exclusively shared interpretations of experiences.

Also, throughout these narratives of nation branding, culture is measured against an imagined hierarchy of the state of other cultures. While heritage defines the essence of Sharjah's identity, it is also a quality to be conserved, rebuilt, discovered, known, and learned to be appreciated again. In the context of nation branding, culture as heritage is a place that needs to get appropriated by the present and the models that are there to be followed are those of the older, more established nations and countries. Similarly, culture as a way of thinking in Singapore is a site of learning, something that Singaporeans need to discover and articulate about themselves as they measure it against the changing world.

Similarly, in these narratives of nation branding culture as the site of the modern in the forms of contemporary art or innovative urban landscape is measured on an imagined scale of globality and worldliness. Along this perceived hierarchy modernness is always a quality that differentiates Sharjah and Singapore from their regional Others who are outperformed in this scale. In the same time, modernness always remains in these narratives an unfinished project, a distance and future place once, or finally to be reached, and that is mostly expressed through the examples of established, industrial, developed countries, or successful brands that are 'already there'.

Finally, when culture is articulated as a way of thinking, or a set of shared mental schemes, it is always a quality that needs to be cultivated, corrected, and moulded, a site of intervention that calls for identity politics. Be it the inculcation of an appreciation of heritage and tradition, or that of an

understanding of contemporary art, or skills of creativity and risk-taking that are required for culturally-primed citizens to compete successfully – culture, in this sense, is seen as a platform through which certain social traits can be mobilized or manufactured.

Critical scholars conceptualize these processes by the notion of ‘governmentality’, both in its post- and neocolonial forms. As this dissertation argues, however, it is identifying the processes of ‘mimicry’ and ‘hybridization’ as the modus operandi of governmentality that enables criticism to connect the practices and discourses of nation branding to the objectives of the state to maintain hegemony and internal domination in the postcolonial context.

As culture, in its various understandings and manifestations, becomes a discursive site that reaffirms difference towards others; it simultaneously functions as an aspirational quality that justifies elite intervention along strategies of creating citizens culturally-primed for success. However, as in the course of articulating difference against near-, and similarities with distant Others nation branding emerges as a site of learning about the nation, its nature is unmasked as a process of Laconian ‘misrecognition’ and as a process that is built on Bhabha’s notion of ‘colonial difference’.

While nation branding in the postcolony recreates the examples of the hegemonic brands that are ‘already there’ – hence the pride it provides on the successful completion of invented national histories, hypermodern urban skylines and cosmopolitan citizens –, in the course of this it also invents (misrecognize) itself from the perfect imago it creates in the mirror of a world of modern, competitive, nation-ness.

In this context, the ‘cultural difference’ at work also unveils itself as part of an apparatus of power (Bhabha, 1994, p. 100). The ‘cultural difference’ of this sort is the product of the ‘colonial-modern’ and not that of ‘cultural diversity’ defined along the recognition of multiple languages and articulations of self and local. As Bhabha (1994) explains, this ‘cultural difference’ of the colonial-modern is an “enunciative category” that is “opposed to relativistic notions of cultural diversity, or the exoticism of the diversity of cultures” (p. 85). In his words:

“Cultural diversity is an epistemological object – culture as an object of empirical knowledge – whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as ‘knowledgeable’, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics, or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate, and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity. Cultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural ‘contents’ and customs, held in a time frame of relativism; it gives rise to anodyne liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange, or the culture of humanity. Cultural diversity is also the representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity” (pp. 49-50).

As this dissertation argues, the ‘cultural difference’ that nation branding creates in the investigated practices of the postcolony remains a category with a claim to power. In this context, the subjectivities that emerge from its practice embody a kind of authenticity and localness that is, as Miriam Cooke (2014) notes, “not available for all”. It is in this way that nation branding creates its privileged national citizens.

Conclusions

This research aimed to explore the strategic, internal dimension of nation branding in order to describe the ways in which it may function to reinforce elite dominion over political, economic and cultural spaces. It studied the particular conditions within, and the ways in which nation branding can become an instrument in the production and reproduction of the internal legitimacy of the nation-state. More particularly, it aimed to explain how discourses and practices of nation branding invent and reinforce notions of cultural similarity and difference in the social imaginary, with the ultimate purpose of producing and reproducing discourses over belonging. Situating its empirical enquiries in the Emirate of Sharjah and Singapore, it explored the various ways in which neoliberal ideals of belonging are created through discourses of nation branding in two different regions of the Global South.

In developing its arguments, this dissertation has drawn on David Harvey's (2007) writings about how, as a result of neoliberal reforms in the last decades, states have begun to act as competitive entities in the world market, thus increasingly facing the problem of securing citizen loyalty and attachment. It argued along Arjun Appadurai (1996) that neoliberal states increasingly address this challenge by creating various kinds of difference over which to exercise taxonomic control, while 'seducing' their populations with "the fantasy of self-display" on a global public stage (p. 39). In this context, this study has argued that nation branding is not only a sort of cosmopolitan form of national-cultural commodification within conditions of globalization, but it also functions as an internal cultural policy, or an altered

form of nationalism that does not hinder the logic of market capitalism and neoliberalism.

As one of its primary objectives, this research has provided an empirical account of how marketing and nation branding experts, policy makers, academics and other members of the local intelligentsia perceive Sharjah's national brand and its practices of nation branding. Out of these interviews Sharjah's brand construct emerged as a proposition that is based on the notions of an intense cultural focus, a commitment to the preservation of tradition and heritage, a support of education and an embracement of contemporary art, and as a family destination. These attributes were perceived as 'organically' connected to the identity of the place and its people and as 'authentic' representations of the 'essence' of the Emirate.

In order to explore the initial hypotheses of this research, that nation branding practices in Sharjah are linked to the legitimization efforts of the state through their embracement of the government's nation-building discourses and efforts, the collected data have been explained in the context of ongoing public debates on the perceived threats of globalization and immigration to the preservation of national identities in the Gulf region. As it was argued, based on the social scientific literature on the region, the challenges of global cultural flows have affected the legitimacy formula of the ruling traditional polities in the region in different ways.

First, this dissertation argued, the increased exposure of the region's national populations to different cultural regimes and to people of various backgrounds due to the rapid technological changes and the radical influx of immigrants into these societies, reaffirmed the ruling monarchies in their

attempts to project themselves as ‘guardians’ of local culture. As the results of this research suggested, nation branding in the ‘Cultural Emirate’ has become an important measure of the ideological apparatus of the state that aims to create a notion of cultural authenticity in ways that it supports its political agenda. In this context, nation branding is interpreted not only as a primary platform for celebrating cultural heritage but also as an instrument through which the inculcation and strengthening of heritage-related knowledge can happen. It was argued, that through its market-based and popular activations, nation branding embraces the often recently invented elements of cultural tradition and contributes to their ‘naturalization’. More particularly, however, by highlighting and constantly reinventing Emirati heritage and tradition as the authentic cultural representation of the population, nation branding contributes tremendously to a form of identity politics that creates and reaffirms an ethno-nationalist conception of community in the context of a social and political reality that is characterised by a multicultural population, and that is primarily based on the establishment of cultural institutions and events, in addition to a governmental Emiratization campaign. The construction of culture as an all-embracing attribute of place image and identity thus, this dissertation argued, is a discursive instrument of control par excellence that limits and guides the dominant and legitimate ways of imagining and expressing the place.

Second, the emerging brand attribute of Sharjah as a pioneer of modernization and development in a traditional and underdeveloped region has been explained in the context of how the state negotiates the challenges of globalization within the framework of its ruling bargain with the population. More precisely, Sharjah’s image as a supporter of education and contemporary

art were suggested to be understood as brand attributes that reaffirm the self-portrayal of the monarchy as a successful, confident competitor on a global stage, and as a visionary leader with a global outlook.

It has also been argued, that the debates about nationalism, national identity, and nation branding in the context of the challenges of globalization in the Arabian Gulf should always be explained in relation to what Marwan M. Kraidy (2010) termed as the ‘dynamics of the taming of modernity’ (p. 21). As he argues, since the experience of modernity in all of its economic, political, and cultural aspects and consequences appears unavoidable, the public contention over its themes revolves around the defining and managing of modernity. This dissertation suggested that by inculcating a very Westernized, neoliberal notion of modernity onto local society, perhaps unwittingly, nation branding experts, locals or expatriates, contribute to the legitimization of royal ideologies and claims over development and progress.

In this context, it has been concluded that while global changes have upset the cultural, religious and national identity resources of the ruling bargain between the state and its national population, globalization has not weakened the nation-state but has enhanced the hegemony of the ruling sheikhs, and nation branding has become a major instrument that the state utilizes to communicate national identity in forms and manners which fit the language and suit the logic of globalization.

As its third major proposition based on the Sharjah interviews, this dissertation has situated the nation branding discourses of Sharjah as a family destination in the context of those ideological efforts of the traditional polity by which it aims to reconstruct a hegemonic, hierarchical and patriarchal

notion of family both as a site of preserving national authenticity, and also as of a tool of reaffirming the social order in which the citizens primarily relate to the state through their loyalty to the family, rather than to other competing units of solidarity such as the tribe. In addition to this, however, the naturalization of the notion of the patriarchal family and the connecting of it to the responsibility of preserving national cultural identity were also suggested to be seen as related to what Ahmed Kanna (2010) calls the naturalizing of the “ethnocratic spatialization of inside and outside, local and foreign” (p. 111). The nation branding proposition of Sharjah as a family destination, thus, was suggested to discursively embrace the ethno-nationalist political agenda of the state.

In sum, by an exploration of nation branding discourses and practices in Sharjah the results of this research have supported the argument of existing literature on the character of neoliberalism in the region. As these studies argue, in the affluent Arabian Gulf, where citizens represent only a minority part of the particular resident populations, it is not economic value but themes of cultural authenticity and forms of virtuous citizenship, aligned with the a notion of a national struggle for modernity that serve as the main theme of the advancement of neoliberalism. This dissertation, however, have further explored the ways in which the neoliberal discourses of nation branding connect to ethnocratic tendencies in the Emirate. It is through its twofold nature as a neoliberal and ethnocratic discourse that nation branding becomes an ‘exercises of statecraft’ and connects to the internal legitimization efforts of the traditional polity.

As one of its major contribution to a study of nation branding practices in Singapore, this dissertation has provided a synthesizing reading of the development of Singapore's destination / nation branding proposition in the context of the major ideological and cultural policy topos of the government in the last decades. It was been argued that the imperative of nation branding has been an integrate part of Singapore's economic strategies since independence. In addition to investment promotion, tourism has been identified as the major strategic fields for cultivating and managing a competitive international image for Singapore. It has also been suggested, that in addition to its the mandate to position Singapore as a destination that attracts tourist, tourism promotion played a strategic role in constructing Singaporean national identity as it provided resources to the government's local social engineering policies.

In order to demonstrate the link between tourism promotion and the ideological processes of nation-building, this study has provided an overview of how the ideologies of pragmatism, multiracialism, Asian values, and a specific notion of a managed form of cosmopolitanism resonated with the development of the country's national brand propositions of Instant Asia, New Asia, and the Spirit of Singapore, in ways that it reaffirmed the attempts of the state to achieve ideological hegemony and maintain political legitimacy.

As it has been discussed, the all-embracing notion of 'pragmatism' has served as one of the earliest and most important ideological constructs of Singapore's history of nation- building. Almost simultaneously, however, reflecting on the heterogeneous population of the newly independent country the idea of 'multiracialism' was elevated to ideological prominence. As paradigmatic CMIO-model of racial classification has been established,

however, it has also started to function as a crucial means for maintaining ethnic harmony in the multiracial society. Reflecting on this ideological construct, the destination brand concept of ‘Instant Asia’ has been formed that as an invaluable opportunity for advancing the CMIO ideology functioned as an important ideological tool of nation-building, too.

In the mid-1990s, with a strengthened focus on the Asian tourism market Singapore has launched the ‘New Asia – Singapore’ destination proposition. As this dissertation has emphasized, this change of focus and tone of the tourism brand has coincided with a significant shift in Singapore’s political orientation, too. The new brand concept that aimed to accentuate the “oriental aspects” of Singapore and “decode the ‘Asian soul behind the modern facade” (Ooi, 2001, p. 627), once again, resonated with the coming of age of the Asian values discourse of the PAP, an ideological rhetoric that put Confucian and perceived ‘collectivist’ traditions of East Asia into the middle of the Singaporean national psyche and the vision of continued economic growth.

In this context it has also been presented that the interviewed experts did not agree on whether the current geopolitical shift towards a more powerful Asian role in the global economy would facilitate a strengthening of the ‘Asian message’ in the Singapore brand construct. Some argued that as Singapore has always been a ‘hybrid of the East and the West’, such a shift would go against the very idea of the place. For others, however, as the Singapore brand proposition has always been a prompt reflection on the economic needs and interests of the country, the geopolitical changes might

require the city-state to background its Western message and move towards a more Asian positioning.

In order to further elaborate on the argument on the nature of nation branding practices in Singapore as implicit cultural policy measures, the dissertation has also drawn a link between such discourses and the government four major national strategy initiatives from the last decades. As it has been demonstrated, the 'Next Lap' (1991), the 'Singapore 21' (1999), the 'Remaking Singapore' (2002), and the National Conversation (2012) strategies all had a recognition in common that proposed Singapore's continued global success to be largely dependent on the nation-building imperative of transforming or creating Singaporeans who are confident in their identity and thus able to compete within the reality of globalization. As this objective was translated by the government into a task of building a global city with cosmopolitan citizens who feel at home in Singapore, this dissertation argued, nation branding was identified as an integrate part of this project. The 'Spirit of Singapore' brand proposition, this study has demonstrated, contributed greatly to reaffirm the ideological construct of 'cosmopolitanism' as a national essence of contemporary Singapore and Singaporeans.

As the results of the expert interviews showed, however, the notion of cosmopolitanism emerged as covering a variety of meanings and understandings in these narratives. Cosmopolitanism was simultaneously used as the equivalent of a 'multiracial' place, but it also referred to Singapore as a 'tolerant' city. Some of the experts also pointed to what they saw as a difference between the conventional understandings of the term in Western discourses, and the way how it has been appropriated by the political

discourses of the Singaporean government. According them, while at many other places cosmopolitanism refers to a mutual celebration of different identities, in Singapore this notion functions as a controlling symbolic that aims to hold people from different backgrounds together. Moreover, as these experts suggested, the idea of cosmopolitanism in Singapore is an ideological intervention that, building on a history of favoritism and elitism intertwined with that of immigration, ultimately promotes particular policies of immigration and a politics of multiracialism.

The results of the interviews have confirmed existing literature on the perceived nature of Singapore's 'strategic cosmopolitanism', or 'cosmopolitanism from above' (Velayutham, 2007, p. 143) as a discursive tool in government policy that aims to manage globalization and that can be harnessed in pursuit of economic hegemony. This dissertation has termed the political appropriation of the notion as the 'nationalization of cosmopolitanism' which, it suggested, became a primary discursive strategy of the Singaporean state in dealing with the challenges of creating a national home in a global city. While some scholars suggested that this interpretation and use of cosmopolitanism point to a fundamental contradiction in the state's nation branding efforts and its nation-building policies, this study argued that nation branding as an implicit cultural policy measure and as a channel through which the 'nationalization of cosmopolitanism' happen, is capable of communicating both image and identity in Singapore.

These arguments have also been drawn as context to interpret another major theme of the interviews that suggested a lack of cultural content in the current Singaporean national brand proposition. As some of the interviewed

experts argued, it is the suggested economic irrelevance of the communication of a strong cultural identity that would explain this perceived characteristic of the Singapore brand. Others pointed to the difficulty of identifying a distinct cultural identity at a place that has always been influenced by global trends. Some of the experts suggested that Singapore's main brand proposition has long been its uniqueness in the region which necessarily backgrounded the projection of a strong cultural identity and changed it to larger narratives of political stability and economic success. As this dissertation proposed, Singapore's current, cosmopolitan brand proposition fits the requirements of such a narrative par excellence.

Finally, the cultural qualities envisioned by the 'Spirit of Singapore' national brand proposition have been discussed in this study in relation to a neoliberal governmental approach that considers culture as a field to be controlled, managed, and harnessed to the benefit of the economy. As this dissertation argued, the archetype of the 'confident explorer', characterized by the brand attributes of 'daring to dream', 'nurturing', 'transforming', and 'collaborating' are the paradigmatic embodiments of neoliberal social transformational strategies that further point to the nature of nation branding in Singapore as a strategic, domestic intervention from the part of the government that function as an implicit cultural policy.

Based on the empirical case studies in Sharjah and Singapore, this dissertation has identified and described two distinct methodologies of nation branding through which, by functioning as an implicit cultural policy that targets the domestic population of a country, it contributes to the reconstruction of the internal legitimacy of political elites, and the

reaffirmation of existing domestic structures of domination. In Sharjah, nation branding has been explored as an essentially culturalist practice that supports the expansion of etno-nationalist, or ethnocratic discursive structures of the state and the ruling elite through discourses of cultural authenticity. In Singapore, nation branding has been described as a practice that aims to reconstruct the community around the neoliberal values of individual creativity and entrepreneurship, with a specific notion of cosmopolitanism in the core of this image. By nationalizing cosmopolitanism, nation branding in Singapore functions as a culturalist discourse that aims to shore up the existing hegemony of the state.

As its theoretical contribution to critical research on the field, based on the results of its two empirical studies in Singapore and Sharjah this dissertation has argued that nation branding is not only an ideological measure that reasserts a global neocolonial hierarchy of nations within conditions of neoliberalism; but it is also a means by which postcolonial internal relations of domination are reaffirmed within the particular states. As such, this dissertation argues, the branded postcolonial nation remains the product of the provincial imagination of an imperial cartography.

Directions for further research

Although this dissertation has attempted to provide a detailed account of nation branding practices in Singapore and Sharjah, it admits its limitations in terms of the possible diversity of angles and approaches one can meaningfully pursue while still preserving the theoretical and methodological integrity of such a research. At the end of this research, then, at least a few

potential directions of further academic exploration should be identified and suggested in the context of the ‘internal gaze’ of nation branding, and in the intersections of nation branding and nation-building.

Since nation branding has been discussed here as a phenomenon that, at least partially, emerges as a result of the transformation of national imagination in an era of global flows, cultural encounters and technological change, the idea of the popular co-construction of national image and identity presents itself as a crucial topic to be further explored and described. More particularly, the impacts of new media, especially social media on the co-construction of national image and identity should be empirically researched and academically discussed with a potential special focus on its relationship and interplay with the development and implementation of nation branding strategies.

Connected to this research angle, the impact of new media should also be discussed from the perspective of how the popular appropriation and the contestation of national brands happen today. This is to say, the currently dominant research direction of nation branding that explains the phenomenon from the sender’s side should be reversed, and the popular negotiation of the meaning of national brands should be problematized.

Students of constructivist international relations should further investigate the changing dynamics of a world order in which states increasingly appear, form and communicate their identities and interests, and interact with each other as brands.

Finally, as the idea of cosmopolitanism emerges as a crucial topic of nation branding, researchers who investigate the practice and discourses of

nation branding in the context of nation-building policies should problematize the politics of cosmopolitanism in the context of discussions on neoliberalism and biopolitics.

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