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# Dubai, Anyplace: Histories of Architecture in the Contemporary Middle East

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Contemporary architecture cannot be limited by geographic or regional definitions. Nonetheless, issues of nationhood, history, and cultural identity continue to play a role in the types of projects undertaken to represent a country's future. Among these are also the multiple histories of architecture itself, concerning genealogies of the distant past as well as interpretations of a postmodern future. In the early years of the twentieth century, European and American architects were commissioned to experiment in contexts that appeared to them exceptional, and to actualize projects that opened up new horizons in their own practices. For local architects, such as those in the Middle East, modern architecture was equated with Westernization, and historical precedent was often marginalized in order to create what represented the new and progressive. In both cases, the ideals of modernism were understood through a displacement of context and history, as though the present itself provided utopian possibilities through which social, economic, and nationalist agendas could be realized. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, architecture continues to serve as prophetic, especially for nations that view themselves as newcomers to the global political stage.

The case of Dubai provides insights into understanding contemporary architecture in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It is also significant to other countries in the Middle East, such as Qatar and Lebanon, which look to the rapid modernization taking place in the Gulf region as a template for their own development. This emulation takes place on the one hand by simply mimicking a particular brand of corporate architecture that exemplifies the development of Dubai, and

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on the other hand by establishing institutions whose primary goal is commercial, such as luxury malls and hotels. For example, Emaar Properties, a Dubai-based real estate developer, has international joint ventures that implement new projects to give the "Dubai effect." As its web site proclaims,

> Emaar is charting a new course of growth through a two-pronged strategy of geographical expansion and business segmentation. Replicating its successful business model in Dubai, Emaar is extending its expertise in creating master-planned communities to international markets… The company has established operations in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, India, Pakistan, Turkey, China, USA, Canada and United Kingdom.[1]

Whether through direct intervention, such as Emaar's, or through more subtle channels, the Dubai aesthetic is one that has permeated several parts of Asia, from Beirut to Shanghai. The images of prosperity that came to define the development of the Gulf States through oil wealth and real estate speculation were disseminated through sophisticated marketing tactics.[2] Often the commodities brought back by the thousands of migrant workers who helped make the transformation of Dubai possible were evidence enough of the economic opportunities Dubai presents. Dubai, for workers and visitors alike, represented a giant stage of possibilities measured, however, through the lens of money and commodities. The underbelly of this success was, and continues to be, vast discrepancies in wealth and the dissipation of traditional cultural markers (Kanna 2009: 208).

Numerous words have come to define Dubai's official image, including economic liberalism, Islam, Arab, modernization, and globalization. Before the 2008 economic crash, the city's luxury brands and excessive commercialism were flaunted in the popular press and in glossy magazines as examples of super-modernity, and were presented with a tinge of neo-Orientalist voyeurism (David 2007; Jensen 2007). In *al-Manakh*, a publication associated with the research arm of his firm, AMO, Rem Koolhaas valorized the supposed revelation of the Gulf and its rapid development, writing that

> The Gulf is not just reconfiguring itself; it is reconfiguring the world … Perhaps the most compelling reason to take the Gulf seriously is that its emerging model of the city is being multiplied in a vast zone of reduced architectural visibility that ranges from Morocco in the West, then via Turkey and Azerbaijan to China in the East. In each of the countries of this Silk belt, the Gulf's developers operate on a scale that has completely escaped our attention. (Koolhaas 2007: 7)[3]

The reiteration of the Silk Route and the privileging of the Western ("our") gaze are clearly symptomatic of Koolhaas's strain of architectural imperialism; however, in the case of Dubai it is also typical of a mindset in which the region presents a carte blanche for experimentation.[4]

Scholars have criticized the rapid development of the Emirates and the price paid in terms of urbanization and the loss of traditional forms of sociability. The

anthropologist Ahmed Kanna writes of the nostalgia embedded in the identity of modern Emiratis, a longing for a place existing more in fictional tales than in historical facts. Ethnic distinctions – for example, many of the locals are of Iranian extraction – play a major role in creating class difference, even as the tribal past is extolled in political rhetoric (Cooke 2014; Kanna 2011). Nonetheless, Dubai serves as a model for the region, such that "the fusion of neoliberalism with Dubai's unique national character emancipates the city-state from its 'mere' Arabness, creating in the process an emergent Dubai identity both Arab and post-Arab or multinational" (Kanna 2009: 211). Architectural projects commissioned by the Dubai government straddle this multiplicity in the manner in which they evoke native typologies, Islamic precedent, corporate modernity, and the mid-twentieth-century "international style," as ways to represent a country grappling with issues that make the idea of a nation suspect.

## History and Context

Settled since at least 1799, Dubai played a significant role in the trade and pearl industry of the Gulf, as part of the Ottoman Empire. Along with seven other shaykhdoms, it was a protectorate of Britain from the nineteenth century until 1971, when Dubai became part of the federation known as the United Arab Emirates (Davidson 2008). The Emirates are composed of Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Fujairah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, and – the capital of the federation – Abu Dhabi. Each of the Emirates, as the name implies, is a monarchy, in which the leader of Abu Dhabi, currently Shaykh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan, acts as the President of the United Arab Emirates and that of Dubai, currently Shaykh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, is the Prime Minister. The al-Maktoum family has ruled over Dubai since 1833 and is closely associated with and invested in its development. Since the 1970s, oil wealth has defined rapid progress and development in this region of the Gulf. Dubai is among the least endowed of the Emirates; however, until the global economic crisis of 2008, it was second only to Shanghai as the world's largest construction site.

Central to Dubai's identity is the role of history, as interpreted by the Emirati ruling elite. As in other countries in the region, the government of Dubai aims to move beyond geographic and national boundaries while simultaneously drawing heavily on indigenous traditions. The seeming paradox is also representative of contemporary discourses within the fields of architectural history and practice, which similarly seek to find a balance between local and global trends (Jarzombek and Hwangbo 2011). Indeed architecture provides an important opportunity for the representation of nationalist ideals that mobilize the refashioned past, present, and the future of the country. Thus there are multiple histories at play in representing the modern nation, monumentalized through traditional forms and international institutions.

In creating a historical narrative for the United Arab Emirates, the government has sought to augment certain realities, while suppressing others. Thus, little is said about the status of the region as a province of the Ottoman Empire until the nineteenth century, even as museums extol its ancient history. Archaeological finds from the late antique period are juxtaposed against the seemingly timeless images of dhows and camels, meant to signify the indigenous past. Inventing new traditions (such as camel racing) and juxtaposing them against older cultural practices (such as poetry recitation), the government aims to create a nationalist narrative that is seemingly unique to the United Arab Emirates (Khalaf 2000).

Given the diversity of ethnic and tribal alliances that make up the United Arab Emirates, the idea of a national identity is complicated by the need to conform to collective historical and cultural norms. In this chapter, I discuss five examples of architecture in Dubai that were commissioned to describe particular themes of identity and history; they consist of a mosque, a museum, a national bank, the first freehold construction, and what is currently the world's tallest building. These examples are typical of what may be considered a global imaginary based on corporate architectural culture; in the case of Dubai, this imaginary merges with issues of religion and residency. All the projects make apparent the complex representations undertaken by this Emirate to construct an idealized past while projecting a utopian future. In so doing, what is revealed is not the particularities of architecture in Dubai alone but the contingencies of architectural modernism in the new millennium.

The speed at which the city has developed and the government's response in creating public spaces is remarkable (Elsheshtawy 2010). Nonetheless, anonymity defines Dubai, whether viewed in its emergent skyline of stylish high-rises, or etched on the faces of the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers that build them. Coexisting in this thriving polis are the Emirati elite, their indentured servants, prostitutes, and merchants. The society is extremely compartmentalized and kinship plays a key role in the manners in which Emiratis socialize; people's lives intersect in educational, entertainment, and professional settings. As Ahmed Kanna writes, "Like other Gulf states, Dubai is neither an autocracy nor a democracy, but rather an ethnocracy" (Kanna 2011: 30). The fragmented ties of those outside the framework of Emirati kinship result in tensions within the multiethnic and multinational state and raise difficulties when it comes to creating a national identity. For example, who are the users and audiences for the public buildings? Whose history is being evoked?

The heterogeneity of the population is reflected in the multiplicity of Dubai's architectural imprint: shanties, villas, skyscrapers, malls, wildlife reserves, and expatriate enclaves – familiar components of a large city in any part of the world. The social consequences of these segregated communities are without doubt. It is a striking statistic that only 17 percent of the population in Dubai is Emirati with the largest group of residents being migrant workers from South and Southeast Asia.[5] This remarkable number points to a complex relationship between power and identity, and makes us question the role of the built environment in such

contexts. Urbanists and anthropologists alike have criticized the attention paid by architects and the media to grandiose architectural projects which appear to ignore the social issues of labor and migrancy that are central to Dubai's development (Lacayo 2008; Sorkin 2009). They rightly point to the need for accountability on the part of the patrons and architects for ensuring the rights and well-being of the immigrants living in the United Arab Emirates in squalor and without any legal recourse. Thus when looking at specific nationalist projects, as this chapter will do, it is crucial to be mindful of the ethical repercussions. Yet the goal here is not to dismiss the significance of Dubai's architectural history owing to these issues, but rather it is to situate it within the context of nationalist politics and regional trends.

## Constructing an Imperial Past

Dubai is currently home to the tallest building and the largest enclosed mall in the world, reflecting a record-breaking competitiveness that makes "size matter." Much has been written about the "global" nature of Dubai's development, but less attention has been given to religion, culture, and history in the Emirates. Complementary to the image of commercialism disseminated in foreign media, Emirati society is a deeply traditionalist society, in which faith plays a large role in daily life.[6] The majority of Emiratis are Sunni Muslims and the government of Dubai adheres to the Maliki school of jurisprudence, which was the earliest to emerge and pays close attention to traditions of the Prophet and his companions. Emiratis originally from the coastal areas of southern Iran comprise the 22 percent Shiʿa population, having lived there for several generations. The city is thus dotted with mosques, the urban landscape punctuated with domes and minarets. Each neighborhood of Dubai, for example, has a local mosque, often privately financed with government subsidy. The design and location of the mosques reflect the constituency for whom they were built. For example, the Iranian Hospital and Mosque are located in the al-Bada neighborhood, one of the oldest areas in the city. The two buildings are adjacent to each other, revetted in brick and tile-work. The mosque, even more than the hospital, gives the impression of being directly imported from Iran, with its minarets and dome embellished with intricate mosaics reminiscent of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Safavid architecture (see Babaie and Kafescioğlu, CHAPTER 33). Nearby is the Iranian Consulate, with its majestic gateways meant to evoke the nineteenth-century Qajar architecture of the capital Tehran (see Grigor, CHAPTER 41).

The Jumeirah Mosque is the recognizable "Great" mosque of Dubai and is a prominent landmark in the city (Figure 48.1). It was commissioned by the ruler of Dubai at the time, Shaikh Rashid bin Saeed al-Maktoum (d. 1990) and built by an Egyptian construction company, Hegazy Engineering Consultancy in 1979.[7] The mosque is located between the old financial center of the city and the exclusive tourist enclave of Jumeirah Beach, on the busy Jumeirah Road. The building is clad in yellow-pink sandstone, with two tall minarets and a prominent dome that are elaborately

FIGURE 48.1 Jumeirah Mosque, Hegazy Engineering Consultancy, *c.* 1979. Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=Special:Search&search=mesquita+jumeirah&fulltext=1&profile=default&searchToken=227nx2likcjy01emvrz195ghe#/media/File:Mesquita_Jumeirah_(4128588527).jpg (accessed March 31, 2017). Copyright: Copyright info: CC BY 2.0

carved in deep relief. Calligraphic panels are inserted over doorways and windows, whereas the ornamental carving on the minarets and dome is abstracted and geometric. The forms are reminiscent of medieval Cairene Mamluk architecture, with its intricate, patterned stone carvings (Rizvi 2015; see also O'Kane, CHAPTER 23).

The stylistic connection is clear and deliberate, as was the fact that an Egyptian firm was given the commission, typifying the longstanding relationship between the Emirates and Egypt, both of them Arab nations formerly under Ottoman and British authority.[8] The Mamluk dynasty holds great meaning for the new rulers in the Gulf, who associate themselves with these ethnic Turks who as conquerors ruled Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz during the thirteenth through early sixteenth centuries, prior to Ottoman and European rule over the region. Although according to the English version of the Dubai City web site the Jumeirah Mosque is built "in the medieval Fatimid tradition … and … is a tribute to modern Islamic architecture,"[9] the Arabic language site does not mention any stylistic affinities.

According to the engineer in charge of the construction the reason for this omission is that the Fatimid dynasty of medieval Cairo (r. 969–1171) represents an Isma'ili Shi'i dynasty, something that would be problematic in the staunchly Sunni Emirate (see Anderson and Pruitt, CHAPTER 9).[10] That the engineer designing and building the mosque himself conflates two very different Cairene styles and periods (tenth- to twelfth-century Fatimid and thirteenth- to sixteenth-century Mamluk) is surprising, if not unexpected, given the lack of awareness most architects and designers have of Islamic architectural history in many developing countries. Hence the persistence of an eclectic merging of elements from diverse styles in an Orientalist manner reminds us that the long-nineteenth century is not over. The audiences for the Arabic and English commentary are different but difficult to define. The sparse presence of Emiratis in public spaces, such as the Jumeirah Mosque, means that the Arabic commentary is most likely also meant for expatriate Muslim visitors who do, indeed, make up the bulk of the clientele of the mosque during prayer hours.

The epigraphy of the mosque is made of common prayers written in a clear and legible script accessible to anyone able to read Arabic, Persian, or Urdu, namely the numerous Arabs, Iranians, and Pakistanis that also call Dubai their home. There are two primary entrances to the mosque, one facing the busy Jumeirah Road and the other facing a parking lot in a quiet neighborhood. Worshippers enter the mosque through the entrance facing the parking lot, which is also where the epigraphy is most prominent. Above the doorways is a panel with a Qur'anic verse written in bright green paint that encourages believers to care for their spaces of worship, pray regularly, and give alms (Qur'an 9: 18). The interior of the prayer hall is adorned with the Victory verse (Qur'an 48) which begins, "Verily We have granted thee a manifest Victory," and continues to reiterate the power of Allah and of Islam. Historically, this verse is commonly found in contexts where state and theological powers are merged in order to signal the overlay of divine and earthly authority. Its use in the context of a national symbol is, thus, most appropriate.

The function of the mosque as a prayer site is maintained, and yet the Jumeirah Mosque also expands the parameters of Islamic practice. The mosque is home to the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding which organizes tours aimed at "promoting cultural understanding and first-hand experience as an insight to the Islamic religion."[11] Official tours are offered for a fee, and are led by English-speaking guides. At these times, the doors of the Jumeirah Mosque are opened to non-Muslims. The mosque represents what may be the only view of Islam many tourists in Dubai may get, given the segregated social norms. In its willingness to engage – or at least invite – a conversation with people of other faiths, the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding presents a moderate version of Islam; perhaps as a corrective to the more common images of regional violence that have come to dominate the media (Rizvi 2013).

The Jumeirah Mosque monumentalizes history not as a conceptual term alone but also as an aesthetic style that merges belief with identity. The mosque is an ideal type for disseminating cultural and religious values, and for framing them historically through the use of stylistic references. Hegazy Engineering

Consultancy, the designers and builders of the Jumeirah Mosque, were also responsible for another iconic mosque in Dubai, the Bastakiya Mosque in Bur Dubai.[12] It is in the old Bastakiya neighborhood and conforms to a more pared-down silhouette than the Jumeirah Mosque. The building is a simple white structure, with pointed arches announcing the entrance, a single minaret, and a dome, typical features of a mosque. The minaret is a square pillar topped with a covered balcony that looks like a Mughal pavilion, and the dome, in contrast, a flattened hemisphere, again inspired by Indian architecture. Unlike the Jumeirah Mosque, the Bastakiya Mosque is a pastiche of styles and references, in keeping with the heterogeneous, privately funded mosques throughout the Emirates.

The manner in which the Jumeirah Mosque monumentalizes its historical references through precise quotation points to the patrons' recognition of imitation as a potent resource in creating a national imaginary. In this case, architecture provides an archaeology of forms, in which buildings act as repositories of knowledge that refer to particular historical events as well as geographical locations. The past is defined by a particular understanding of "Arab" identity, with an emphasis on imperial and monarchial authority. In such a conceptualization, the Arabic language connects Fatimid Cairo to the United Arab Emirates, even if anachronistically.[13]

Historical reference is not limited to religious buildings alone but permeates several facets of urban life in Dubai. For example, Nakheel Properties, a development corporation owned by a member of the Maktoum family, has built one of the largest malls in the world with "a uniquely themed environment that is designed to reflect the unique combination of various heritages and cosmopolitan lifestyle that is the very essence of Dubai."[14] The mall is themed on the itinerary of Ibn Battuta (1304–1377), a Moroccan writer who documented his famous travels from North Africa to China. The Ibn Battuta Mall celebrates this *rihla* (travel) by dedicating different geographic themes for each of the six sections of the sprawling building. They are distinguished physically, such that the courts are designed to each represent the architecture of Andalusia, Tunisia, Egypt, Iran, India, and China, much like pavilions in nineteenth-century imperial and international exhibitions. The pavilions appear to simultaneously index the multinational communities in Dubai as well as take pride in medieval Arab cosmopolitanism and trade. Unlike themed parks and hotels in Europe and the United States, which simulate buildings simply through visual quotation, the Ibn Battuta Mall replicates the expensive material and the high quality of their craftsmanship as well.[15]

In the emphasis on materiality and detailing, both the mall and mosque make evident the economic wealth of Dubai, even as the simple recycling of styles speaks to a certain imaginative poverty. Thus, the Jumeirah Mosque may be viewed as another example of postmodern historicism, with its kitsch references that parody the very past that they appear to valorize. Yet that is clearly not the intention of either the builder or the patron. Instead, their goal appears to be to mine the past as a source of inspiration, for the architecture as well as the nation which the rulers of Dubai are trying to construct.

## Heritage Reclaimed and Reimagined

The rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century coincided with the rise in significance of public museums (see Shaw and Vernoit, CHAPTER 44 and CHAPTER 45). In the European context, these were closely associated with colonial forms of rule, set up to display not only national treasures but also the spoils of conquest.[16] In countries such as Turkey, the national museum served as a medium to learn about ancient histories through the archaeological discoveries of the nineteenth century and to preserve the immediate past in the face of rapid modernization (Shaw 2003). Ancient history would provide the architectural iconography of indigenousness that was deployed in architecture and the arts of the early twentieth century (Isenstadt and Rizvi 2008). Traditional arts were similarly employed to further the goals of nationalism, providing a unifying culture for the newly formed citizens and their representative governments. The "invention of tradition," a phrase coined by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983), meant that a new narrative – separate from dynastic or religious histories – was to be created to formalize the rituals and processes associated with nationhood in the twentieth century. The national museum became a prime example of institutional buildings commemorating statehood, a role that it still fulfills throughout the globe.

Institutions such as museums and universities were designed with particular styles and iconography that linked the past with the present. For example, the entrance to the Iran Bastan Archaeological Museum in Tehran, designed by the French scholars André Godard and Maxime Siroux and completed in 1939, was in the form of the Taq-i Kira, the arch of the Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon. The design was a response to the archaeological finds housed within, acknowledging thus also Iran's pre-Islamic past. In a related manner, buildings once belonging to monarchial regimes were renovated to cohere with new republican ideals. Such a functional and ideological transfer is exemplified in the transformation of the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, the residence of the Ottoman sultans from the fifteenth well into the mid-nineteenth century. Following the end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the dynastic palace became a public museum. The United Arab Emirates are latecomers to the league of modern nations, still retaining monarchial and tribal allegiances that are, nonetheless, complemented by bureaucratic governmental institutions. The idea of nationhood is complicated further by the diverse and heterogeneous society that calls Dubai home. Nonetheless, the government of Dubai has seen fit to promote the history of the city-state as one that is necessary for preservation.

The al-Fahidi Fort, which was constructed in 1799 near the Dubai Creek, was designated a historical and national monument in 1971 and transformed into a museum. It had been the residence of the ruling al-Maktoum family when they moved from Abu Dhabi in 1833 (Boussaa 2006: 127; Kay and Zandi 1991: 82). The fort is believed to be the oldest extant building in the city, constructed in defense against neighboring tribes. It is located in the Bastakiya neighborhood in Bur

Dubai, close to a vibrant commercial and residential area. Nearby is Abra Souk, named after the constant water taxi traffic that brings visitors and tourists alike, and connects the area to the rest of the city. The low mud-brick buildings are packed together in narrow streets, their wind towers (*bādgīr*) punctuating the skyline. The architecture is closely related to that of many towns along this area of the Indian Ocean, from Iran to Pakistan, and points to the cosmopolitan trading past of Dubai.

Al-Fahidi Fort was repurposed in 1971, but it was not until 1995 that modern galleries and display areas were built within the museum (Figure 48.2). The original walls of the Dubai Museum (as it is also known as) contain shards of coral and shells mixed in the mud, and their distressed look is preserved in order to evoke a sense of its history. On one side, a massive tower anchors the fort complex and on the other side is a large *dhow* (boat) that serves as an outdoor sculpture as well as signage for the museum. The entrance to the museum is flanked by cannons, reminding the visitor of the defensive purpose of the fortress-museum.

In this essentially ethnographic museum, exhibits displaying weaponry and defensive technology are located in rooms along the periphery of the courtyard, whereas a small, wooden, *barasti* house has been constructed in its center. Inside, mannequins show how villagers traditionally lived before Dubai's modernization. In one corner of the courtyard, a grand stairway leads down to the basement level of the museum where numerous dioramas have been assembled. Visitors are


FIGURE 48.2 Al-Fahidi Fort, renovated *c.* 1995.

guided on a precise route charting the history of Dubai, starting with archaeological discoveries in the region and continuing with "Natural Phenomena." Whole environments are created to simulate the desert at night and an oasis by day, both displaying the natural beauty of the region. The largest section is devoted to an "underwater" exhibit of marine life, which not only shows the flora and fauna of the Persian Gulf but also the pearl fishers that typified the local industry.

Putting the "original" inhabitants of the United Arab Emirates on par with the native animals and vegetation is a trope in many natural history museums. While it speaks of a colonial mindset, it is a practice that has come to define nationalist intentions. This is reflected not only in the Dubai Museum but also in other similar institutions throughout the United Arab Emirates, such as the Archaeology Museum in Sharjah and the Qasr al-Hosn Fort ("the symbolic birthplace of Abu Dhabi"), both of which serve as repositories of the Emirates' deep history. The importance given to native people and to the land upon which they live creates what Benedict Anderson has called "imagined communities" of people united neither by tribes nor by political ideologies but by the very fact of belonging to the native soil (Anderson 1983). This narrative of indigenousness, that is, an identity related to the land, is aimed directly at constructing a nationalist history. However, the history of Dubai is presented as an intangible one, lost to the vagaries of oil wealth and its consequential rapid development.

The Dubai Municipality has tried to preserve the character of the neighborhood of al-Fahidi Fort and Bastakiya with the construction of the Grand Mosque, a large space for the Friday congregational prayers. In addition, commerce in the Old Souk, or marketplace, is carried on in ways that make it an appealing destination for tourists and residents alike. The traditional neighborhood of Bastakiya is now considered a heritage site and several buildings there have been converted into art galleries and restaurants. In utilizing a rather heavy hand in terms of preservation, the government has inadvertently caused the area to lose some of its vibrancy. At the end of the day, the shops and galleries close and Bastakiya becomes an empty shell, devoid of life. Like the National Museum that occupies the old al-Fahidi Fort, Bastakiya has become museumized: a heritage exhibit, frozen in time.[17]

## A Capitalist Modernity

Activating the past through historic reference is an oft-repeated method in the dissemination of nationalist ideology, as demonstrated by the previous examples. The Jumeirah Mosque provides a neo-Mamluk-cum-neo-Fatimid interpretation, whereas the Dubai Museum recreates the city's geography, preserved and exhibited for consumption by natives, expatriates, and tourists alike.[18] Where does the modern history of Dubai belong in such a nation-building agenda? It cannot be reduced, as it sometimes is, to the simple fact of oil discovery and wealth, which

has led to the exuberant – and unsustainable – growth that the entire region has experienced. Nor can it be symbolized in terms of the commercialism of malls and shopping plazas that attract millions of tourists to the city. Dubai is perhaps best known for its high-rise development, which has transformed the main Sheikh Zayed Road from a dusty thoroughfare hurtling toward Abu Dhabi into a concrete and glass canyon, with elegant as well as kitsch examples of contemporary architecture.

Although oil production was still a central form of wealth production, already in 1985 the Jebel Ali Free Zone was established to bring foreign capital and industry to the Emirate (Davidson 2008: 114). In the 1990s the Emirate introduced free trade and a liberal market economy which encouraged investment and development. The commercial zone along the Dubai Creek echoes the historic Spice Souk nearby, where Iranian immigrants own shops in a traditional covered marketplace, selling everything from Chinese exports to spices from all over Asia. At another end of the Creek is the famed Gold Souk, where visitors flock to barter for gold sold by merchants from India to Saudi Arabia. The waterfront bustles with activity, with immigrant workers loading and unloading large boats traveling along the Indian Ocean.[19] Alongside the modest *abra* water taxis, 20-foot yachts idle along the docks, while large, refurbished *dhow*s – the traditional mode of transportation – now take tours up and down the Creek.

Development of the Dubai Creek maintained the historical trading and commercial character of the area, with the construction of the National Bank of Dubai (NBD) in 1979, designed by the British architectural firm John R. Harris and Partners (JRHP).[20] The architect had been invited by Shaikh Rashid bin Saeed al-Maktoum in 1960 to help develop a master plan for Dubai (Reisz 2008: 131). In 1966 oil was discovered, which prompted the ruler to commission JHRP to design the tallest skyscraper in the Arab world at the time, the Dubai World Trade Center (DWTC), which was inaugurated by Queen Elizabeth II in 1979 (Hawley 2007: 18). The monument went into construction just as the World Trade Center Towers were being completed in New York City. The NBD, in contrast to the towering DWTC, is a typical, two-story bank building, with its concrete structure and functional programming. Other national banks were built along the Dubai Creek, such as the corporate head office of the British Bank of the Middle East designed by JRHP and the Bank Melli of Iran, the national bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Dubai was established as a banking center whose presence on the world stage was realized and then monumentalized. The Dubai Creek, like the Sheikh Zayed Road thoroughfare that runs through the heart of the city and on which the DWTC was built, symbolizes the trading history of this Gulf state and its commercial aspirations.

Perhaps one of the most important symbols of Dubai's mercantile pedigree is Emirates NBD, designed by the Uruguayan architect Carlos Ott in consultation with the multinational NORR group in 1997 (Figure 48.3).[21] On one side of this tall multistory building, located directly on the Dubai Creek, is the Dubai

FIGURE 48.3 Emirates NBD, Carlos Ott in consultation with NORR, 1997.

Chamber of Commerce and Industry and on the other side, the Sheraton Dubai Creek Hotel and Tower. Emirates NBD prides itself as employing "more than 8,000 employees from over 50 nationalities" and serving as "an ambassador of economic and social progress."[22] The bank thus embraces the cosmopolitan and commerce-driven zeitgeist of the city. Similarly cosmopolitan is Carlos Ott, who was trained at the University of Hawaii, with offices at the time in Quebec, Toronto, Shanghai, Dubai, and Montevideo.[23]

According to Ott's web site,

> The headquarters of the National Bank of Dubai is an imagery (sic.) of the dhow, a regional boat centuries old used in the Indian Ocean, and the establishment of Dubai as a market place. Its curved curtain wall represents the billowing sail, supported by two granite columns. The base of the building, the banking hall, is clad in green glass representing the water and its roof of aluminum, the hull of the boat.[24]

The design is thus meant, according to the architect, to signal a local reality by abstracting the forms of the "centuries-old" dhow, and creating analogies with the sails, the water, and so on. Such ahistorical references have often been utilized by foreign architects building in the Middle East, in particular the Gulf. Two examples from Saudi Arabia are useful to consider. First there is Frei Otto's Intercontinental Hotel and Conference Centre in Mecca, built in 1974 in the form of a large tent canopy. It is a tensile structure that is meant to be "a synthesis of advanced

structural techniques and revived local artistic traditions that had become almost extinct."[25] Similarly, the Hajj Terminal built in Jeddah by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) in 1982 has a roof structure in the form of multiple tents, their white canvas pulled taut, as though against desert winds. Literal abstraction is not unique to the Middle East, given such famed examples as the Sydney Opera House in Australia, designed by Jørn Utzon in 1957 and completed in 1973. The opera house is located on Sydney harbor, and its roof is formed as a series of overlapping shells, evoking the white, billowing sails of a boat. In all these examples, primordial forms are meant to evoke a sense of timelessness, choosing simple allusions over complex stylistic or historical references.[26] Both Saudi Arabia and Australia were on the margins of great empires, with important cities that thrived on commerce and trade for their existence. In the eyes of the architects, imported to help build national institutions in the twentieth century (like banks, opera houses, and airports), these countries lacked monumental architecture. Thus, there was a need to go beyond history for inspiration, to timeless naturalist tropes of waves and sails. Yet, in actuality, these abstract forms could be deployed in any location, from Miami to Muscat.

The form of the Emirates DNB evokes something more than the sails and hull of the dhow or the colors of the sea. The forms and material are abstracted to the degree that one might not recognize the references, especially if removed from its maritime context. Indeed, the inspiration for the Emirates DNB may be found in the pages of books on modern architecture, especially of the so-called international style that was popular in the United States and Europe in the middle of the twentieth century (Hitchcock and Johnson 1932). The style, valorized by the likes of Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson in the early twentieth century, came to exemplify modern architecture, with its clean lines and lack of referential ornamentation. It also represented, by mid-century, American corporate culture, through the commission of such iconic buildings as the Seagram Building (1958) in New York City, home of American capitalist culture at its peak.

The glass curtain wall of the Emirates DNB clearly reflects the international style and can be formally related to the earliest skyscrapers ever built. A direct reference is made to the Lever House in New York, designed by Gordon Bunshaft for SOM in 1952, with its tower and slab typology.[27] In the year of its construction, the British architect Fello Atkinson wrote,

> These buildings do for modern commercialism what the medieval churches did for liturgy or the Baroque palace for monarchy. That is, they do not merely answer [to] specific functions which are implicit in all good building. They answer a deeper social need. By their beauty they give both pleasure and dignity to those whose life is spent in them. (Atkinson 1952)

For Atkinson, as for builders and patrons around the globe, American corporate architecture provided a new vision of postwar success and prosperity.[28] A closer parallel may be drawn to the Boston Federal Reserve Bank built by Hugh

Stubbins in 1977, which was also a state institution along the lines of the Emirates DNB's original designation, the Dubai National Bank. The tall glass tower is offset in both banks with the horizontal slab, although the articulation is ultimately quite different. American bank buildings were deeply embedded in capitalist culture, an association easily appropriated by the newly wealthy Gulf monarchies, such as those of the Emirates. The Emirates DNB is thus evocative of, in a very fundamental way, the history of modern architecture itself.

## Skyscraper Dreams

References to twentieth-century American corporate architecture, in particular the skyscraper, are the norm in contemporary Dubai as elsewhere in Asia.[29] A literal example may be found in the form of the al-Kazim Towers, situated on Sheikh Zayed Road (Figure 48.4). The towers were designed by the architectural and engineering firm, National Engineering Bureau (NEB) and completed in 2008 at a cost of AED 630 million. Each tower comprises 53 floors of mixed residential and commercial space, and has been designed in imitation of the Chrysler Building in New York City, with its roof comprising cascading sunburst patterns. In 2002, Dubai became the first of the Emirates to offer freehold property to foreign-born residents. Until that time, all land ownership was in the hands of the Gulf Coast countries and UAE nationals, but with the burgeoning tourist economy of Dubai, the change to freehold was seen as an economically and socially viable move.

The Chrysler Building has inspired many reinterpretations of its iconic form, such as Liberty Place in Philadelphia (1985–1990) and Argentina Square in Tehran.[30] It was designed by William van Alen and completed in 1930, at the height of the Great Depression in the United States. Thereafter, it has come to symbolize not only one of the most wealthy and cosmopolitan cities in the world but also the industrial and capitalist culture that is signified in its very name. In Dubai, unsurprisingly, it is not only replicated but also multiplied, as not one but two identical towers. However, here the roof structure is reduced to a space frame, outlining the design of the ornamental crown though not its intricate details. Located on the busy thoroughfare, the al-Kazim Towers perform as architectural signage, visible from the Dubai Marina to the Dubai World Trade Center. They quote the New York landmark, while becoming landmarks in their own right, in terms of design as well as political significance.

The skyscraper harks back to the early years of the twentieth century, with architectural practice embracing modernity and its own autonomy. Artists and architects at that time rendered the skyscraper within the context of a heroic, if sometimes apocalyptic, urban environment, where technological advances gave rise to the impossible scaling of heights.[31] The al-Kazim Towers thus simultaneously call to mind the optimism of early twentieth-century American industry and the utopian imaginings of modern architecture.

FIGURE 48.4 Al-Kazim Towers, National Engineering Bureau (NEB), 2008.

If one is to take seriously the contention that the rulers of Dubai dreamed of making the city the financial capital of the world one day, it is no surprise that its urban iconography utilizes the vertical ambitions embodied in the skyscraper. The Burj Khalifa, formerly the Burj Dubai, actualized their ambitions while also paying homage to the history of the skyscraper itself (Figure 48.5). The building is named in honor of Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan, the President of the United Arab Emirates, and is owned by Emaar Properties. Adrian Smith, at the time a principal at SOM in Chicago, designed the skyscraper, which was inaugurated in 2010. At 828 m (approximately 2717 feet), the building is currently the tallest in the world and comprises hotel and residential suites, corporate offices, and observation decks with expansive views of the Gulf and the Arabian Desert. The tri-lobed foundation base was inspired by the Hymenocallis, a flowering

FIGURE 48.5 Burj Khalifa, Adrian Smith with Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill, 2010. Source: Photo courtesy of SOM, Nick Merrick/Hedrick Blessing. Reproduced with permission.

desert plant, a reference once again tying the indigenous with the international. The Y-shaped floor plans give maximum wall space to the interiors, and provide the setbacks necessary for the tower to extend skyward. The curtain wall is achieved through the use of aluminum-framed hand-cut glass panels on a steel structural armature.[32]

The concept of the building is stated on its web site:

> More than just the world's tallest building, Burj Khalifa is an unprecedented example of international cooperation, symbolic beacon of progress, and an emblem of the new, dynamic and prosperous Middle East. It is also tangible proof of Dubai's growing role in a changing world. In fewer than 30 years, this city has transformed itself from a regional centre to a global one. This success was not based on oil reserves, but on reserves of human talent, ingenuity and initiative. Burj Khalifa embodies that vision.[33]

The building thus symbolizes Dubai's ambitions to be a global city and a technocratic and progressive society.

SOM's design for Burj Khalifa is reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's 1956 Mile High Tower, a project never built but often reproduced. Like the Burj Khalifa, the foundations of the Mile High Tower are splayed out to maximize its stability, and the floors are set back as the tower ascends such that it culminates in a fine needle on top. Wright was famously antagonistic to urban living, building most of his iconic buildings in natural landscapes. As one author wrote, "Wright despised the commercial world and its representation in the skyscraper city. The city of towers was not, to Wright, a tenable answer to centralization" (Mostoller 1985: 17). Viewing Burj Khalifa through such a critique calls into question the exuberant positivism expressed by its builders, even as it points to the visionary and utopian dreams of modern architects over the past 100 years.

Dubai's architecture intersects with history in important and complex ways, from constructing an idealized Islamic past, or displaying an indigenous ethnology, to building a prophetic modernist future. Examples such as those considered here highlight the transregional and transhistorical trends that define architecture, religion, and statehood not only in this emirate in particular but in the contemporary Middle East in general. What is at stake in all cases is the issue of history, whether in terms of global corporate design or the local heritage industry as conceived through nationalist projects. Such an intellection provides important insights into the regenerative nature of contemporary architectural practice, which views modernism as a work in progress that picks up references and reuses them in creative ways. It is a modernism that celebrates the historical significance of its own making. If we expand that notion, we could say that Dubai's primary engagement is with modernity in a manner that is clearly not limited by geographic or national boundaries. Rather, this version of modernity is and continues to be a shared prospect, with its anxieties as well as its possibilities.

## Notes

1 http://www.emaar.com/index.aspx?page=about, (accessed 3 February 2017).
2 The Gulf Cooperation Council is a confederation of states, comprising the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait. The Council was founded in 1981 with a goal of increasing economic and political interaction between these Arab countries.
3 He revised his position in "Dubai: From Judgment to Analysis," at the Sharjah Biennial in March, 2011; http://oma.eu/lectures/dubai-from-judgment-to-analysis (accessed 3 February 2017). In appearing to address the criticism poured on architects such as himself in the wake of the 2008 economic crash, Koolhaas puts the burden on "analysis" and "scientific" solutions, and other neo-colonialist rhetoric.
4 For a critique of Koolhaas see Lacayo 2008: 56.
5 A 2011 survey by the Dubai Statistics Center showed that in urban areas Emiratis make up 3.6 percent of the population, with 87 percent Asians, 6 percent other Arabs, and 2 percent Europeans; https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ae.html (accessed 3 February 2017). A 1982 survey gives overall demographics in which Emiratis constitute 19 percent of the population, other Arab and Iranian 23 percent, South Asian 50 percent, other expatriates (includes Westerners and East Asians) 8 percent; https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ae.html (accessed 3 February 3, 2017).
6 Each of the Emirates has different social norms and restrictions; for example, whereas Dubai has relatively loose alcohol consumption laws, Abu Dhabi prohibits alcohol entirely.
7 A brief overview of Shaykh Rashid's patronage is given in Kay 1999.
8 Egyptian politics have played an important part in the Emirates since at least the 1950s, when supporters of Gemal Abdul Nasser asserted Arab nationalism and socialism as foundations for change in the Gulf. Indeed throughout the twentieth century, Egyptian teachers, doctors, and engineers helped build the infrastructure in the United Arab Emirates.
9 http://www.dubaicity.com/What_to_see_in_dubai/Jumeirah-Mosque.htm (accessed 3 February 2017). This is the official city guide, promoted by the Government of Dubai Department of Tourism & Commerce Marketing.
10 Interview with the General Manager, Mr. Samir al-Shabani, in December 2008.
11 http://www.dubaicity.com/What_to_see_in_dubai/Jumeirah-Mosque.htm (accessed 3 February 2017).
12 A foundation panel at the entrance attributes the construction to the engineers Abd al-Moiz Husayn and Muhammad al-Mahdi Hijazi, Cairo – Dubai – Abu Dhabi, dated 1413/1996.
13 Identity is far from static, but it is mutable. Thus if in the 1970s the United Arab Emirates sought to assert "Arab" imperial authority, it may be argued that by the 2000s this identity gave way to a more neo-capitalist stance.
14 http://www.dubaicity.com/dubai-ibn-battuta-mall-dubai/(accessed 3 February 2017).
15 For a sociological comparison of Las Vegas and Dubai, see Schmid 2006.

16 The literature on the rise of museums is too extensive to itemize here, but among the earliest studies were by anthropologists such as James Clifford (1988) and Annie E. Coombes (1988).
17 In a recent book, Yasser Elsheshtawy focuses on the forgotten neighborhoods and by extension, the expatriate residents of Dubai. In areas such as Satwa, migrant workers lived within what the author has termed an "urban kaleidoscope." Such sites are now undergoing gentrification and the original blue-collar population is replaced by young residents longing for a semblance of authenticity in an otherwise seemingly banal city (Elsheshtawy 2010).
18 For a regional comparison, see Exell and Rico 2013.
19 This part of eastern Dubai is also known as Deira, and was the old downtown of the city.
20 The first bank to be set up in Dubai was the Imperial Bank of Iran, in 1948. Its name soon changed to the British Bank of Iran then the British Bank of the Middle East. The first National Bank of Dubai was established in the 1960s (Davidson 2008: 97–98).
21 The original home for this building was the Dubai National Bank. Since its merger with Emirates Bank in 2007, the Emirates DNB is the largest banking group in the Middle East. The current chairman is Shaykh Ahmed Bin Saeed Al Maktoum. http://www.emiratesnbd.com/en/aboutEmiratesNBD (accessed 3 February 2017).
22 http://www.emiratesnbd.com/en/aboutEmiratesNBD/index.cfm (accessed 3 February 2017).
23 Before being commissioned to build in the United Arab Emirates, he designed the Opéra Bastille in Paris in 1987 (Biasini 1991). See also the architect's interview with Emma Sanguinetti (2008).
24 http://200.124.202.19/ott/ott.html (accessed 12 October 2008; no longer accessible).
25 http://archnet.org/library/sites/one-site.jsp?site_id=108 (accessed 3 February 2017).
26 Similarly, the Dubai Creek Golf and Yacht Club is a freestanding structure designed by Brian Johnson and built in 1993 to look like the sails of a dhow.
27 This comparison has been noted by Simon Glynn, http://www.galinsky.com/buildings/nbd/index.htm (accessed 3 February 2017). For a recent discussion of Lever House and the Seagram Building, see Scott 2011.
28 This was also the period of the Hilton hotels, which were seen as proselytizing American political and cultural values, see Wharton 2001.
29 For example, the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur (1998), Shanghai World Financial Center (2008), and Taipei 101 (2004).
30 Such imitation is also witnessed in the design of the National Bank of Abu Dhabi, which references the Citicorp building in New York City, also designed by Hugh Stubbins.
31 The drawings of Hugh Ferris (d. 1962) were particularly inspirational. See, for example, Ferriss 1929.
32 Extensive design and construction details are provided on the web site of the building: http://www.burjkhalifa.ae/en/the-tower/structures.aspx (accessed 3 February 2017).
33 http://www.burjkhalifa.ae/en/the-tower/vision.aspx (accessed 3 February 2017).

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