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Encounters on the road to heritage and film in the UAE

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CHAPTER TWO: The Tourism Genre

Introduction

In 2009, Dr. Sheena Westwood, one of my colleagues at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, asked me to accompany her on a field trip with her Emirati students to the city of Al Ain. She was a professor of tourism, and her group of 20 female students were each specializing in tourism, a major that was part of the College of Communications, where I taught film production and media history from 2008 to 2018.

In line with the national agenda, tourism was a new major. At the same time, the film and media production major was being asked to revise its curriculum to focus on film and entertainment rather than news, which is why I had been hired. This is also when Abu Dhabi fully launched into the tourism and film industries, bringing considerable capital to these fields across the UAE as the main financial and government center of the country.

Film and tourism are sibling industries. Both are leisure activities and both are prisms for creating collective memory and a national narrative. They both also serve each other's purposes when it comes to national branding, namely through film production and film festivals, which launched as rapidly as tourism during our decade of study. As film scholar Alfio Leotta notes in his research on New Zealand, tourism and film are two fields in which "national identity is inextricably linked by the shared imagining of the land" and "as forms of modern, symbolic production, tourism and films are also responsible for the emergence of new myths and their collective representations." (Leotta, 2011:13). This chapter explores how collective representation developed in UAE tourism films and how that has impacted heritage building in the UAE.

On Tour in the UAE

Dr. Westwood's 2009 class began its journey on a tour bus from our campus in Abu Dhabi to the city of Al Ain. The German tour guide explained to the students that narrating the two-hour journey for a mainly European and North American audience was her primary role as a guide. Al Ain is the UAE's only UNESCO World Heritage Site, a natural oasis inhabited for 4,000 years, engineered with the traditional *falaj* irrigation system. Among other heritage attractions, it includes a museum set in the early home and birthplace of the father of the nation, Sheikh Zayed.

The German tour guide asked the students if one of them would like to try to narrate the bus journey. None of the students had been to any of Al Ain's heritage sites, although many went to the city frequently to visit family members. Only one student, Halima, volunteered. The tour guide encouraged Halima to point out interesting things along the highway. Halima switched between gazing out the window blankly and turning to her classmates for suggestions. But her fellow students just shrugged.

We passed spectacular sand dunes, camels, and ghaf and date trees. "Come on," said the tour guide. "You have to fill up the time. You have to entertain the tourists with stories. You have to help them see this place. Just speak." Halima said, "But there's nothing here." The German tour guide said, "But there has to be." So, Halima looked out the window again and at last, after a while, shouted, "Look, look there— a worker walking on the side of the road." The other students nodded approval. "There are lots of nice cars on the road," she added. This got further approval from her classmates.

When I asked Halima later in a conversation why she hadn't mentioned the sand dunes, date trees and the camels, she said, "Oh, they've always been there. That's not new."

She didn't view these things as new, i.e. interesting, for her classmates or her foreign teachers or the foreign tour guide guiding her classmates through their country's heritage.

New was everything the eye could see in 2009. The UAE rulers had been promoting new as the way forward to its citizens since the union had formed in 1971. Thus, Halima and her classmates, young, eager students, saw all this newness with pride. In Dubai, there was the new Burj Khalifa, the new university campuses, the new malls. Abu Dhabi was talking about the upcoming Louvre and Guggenheim Museums, and the new Etihad Towers. In a landscape of bulldozers and cranes, new was everywhere.

Many of the new hotels were designed in homage to a vague "Arabia," relying on the Mughal and Moorish design, neither of which has any roots in the UAE. Even this "traditional" Orientalist architecture of the new hotels was new more than it was Mughal or Moorish. The newness made it Emirati. When I asked the students on bus if they thought these structures were their heritage, they said, "Yes." Then I asked them where this heritage that was being built into five-star hotels came from—the arches, the lush gardens, the marble fountains—they shrugged with answers like Morocco, Damascus, Mecca. They didn't identify it as Indian (Mughal), although that was present in the hotel designs and, by virtue of geography and trade, they had much more cultural exchange with India in the past than the Arab Levant and North Africa. These students identified their past as part of a general Arab identity, something that would lessen by 2018, with heritage commodification, as we will see in Chapter Four.

But the hyperreal orientalism continues to be built for tourism. When Abu Dhabi's massive Qasr al Watan (Presidential Palace), a mishmash of architecture and mosaic design to rival the palaces of Al Hambra, opened nine years after Halima's bus ride, this

simultaneous absorption of multiple “old” architectures as national heritage architecture continued: Qasr Al Watan’s welcoming brochure and website tells visitors “...uncover centuries of Arabian knowledge...delve into the region’s rich heritage of artistic contributions.” (www.qasralwatan.ae, 2020). Thus, the association with “Arab” still exists when needed to attach itself to a glorious past that it was not in fact a part of, whereas the hyperrealism of the scale of the palace, modern skyline and the extravagant style make it uniquely Emirati. I would call it Modern Emirati, not heritage Emirati, with this modern Emirati actually beginning to be the formation of a national identity, a place of hyperreal, unspecified Arabia, but one that struggles for a heritage narrative.

Meeting the Tourists

Halima and her classmates were on their tour bus ride just at the cusp of change, just a short time after Dubai’s economic crisis of 2008 and just before the Arab Spring. The German tour guide on the bus explained to the students on our way back to Abu Dhabi that the museums in Al Ain were meant to show how people lived when Sheikh Zayed first ruled. This was, for most of the students, their first encounter with their past as a visually-engineered physical entity, aside from photos of the father of the country. The word “heritage” or the phrase “rich cultural heritage” hadn’t become the fashionable buzzwords they are today, words now attached to names of restaurants, beauty products, and festivals. Nor were these students aware of being filmed and photographed by the Western tourists at Al Ain Palace. The tourists couldn’t seem to believe their luck in seeing the natives live in action. (Figure 9)

One could go to Rome and tour the Forum, for example, and have no clue if the others also touring were Italian or not. But in the UAE, the Emiratis are branded by their

clothing: the women's *abaya* (black robe) and *shayla* (headscarf) and the men's *kandoura* (white robe) and *egal/ghutra* (headdress).

Dr. Westwood and I had to discreetly tell the tourists to put away their cameras because we knew the students would become very upset if they realized they were being photographed. In 2009, it was rare for families to allow women to be photographed. It was hard to find even one or two students who would agree to be photographed at a university event. As an exemplar of how serious being photographed was and still is for many Emirati women, that same academic year, one of my most polished, confident students had a near meltdown when she discovered she was missing a flash drive. The issue wasn't her lost homework but that there was a photo on the drive of her 15-year old sister (who would also later become my student) posing for a photo without her *abaya* and *shayla*. The student and her friends turned the classroom and anywhere she had been that day upside down looking for the flash drive, and there were many tears before it was found. No other student questioned the genuine panic. It was familiar.

But these same students didn't notice the tourists photographing them that day as they were having too much fun. They had never been to Al Ain Palace—their heritage as a physical space was new and entertaining, more than it was a heritage lesson. But our students, because of the uniqueness of Emirati dress, were unknowingly functioning as extras in home movies being filmed by the tourists.

They were unaware of what John Urry dubbed “the tourist gaze,” the set of expectations that tourists place on local populations as they try to have an “authentic” experience. (Urry, 2002) Urry developed his theory after the work of film scholars in the 1970s, who had come to refer to the “gaze” when discussing film. In feminist film scholar

Laura Mulvey's seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Film" (1975), she explains that the "gaze" is based on Freud's theory that as humans we like to look, and both tourism and film give us permission to do that. What we think is "authentic" at a tourism site is often something we have seen in a film about a place, and so visitors come hoping to see it live in person, much like we go to see animals in a zoo because we thought they were cute as an idea "constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature, records, and videos" (Urry, 2002:3)

For the UAE, these tourists were likely eager to film the women because of the media fascination with the oppressed Arab woman.⁵¹ But capturing to camera the so-called "authentic" gaze in the UAE is tricky. Unlike other countries, in which the gaze is encouraged at heritage sites in order to generate tourism revenue, even changing actual facts to meet tourist expectations,⁵² the UAE wishes for tourists to visit but does not seek the gaze to fall on its actual citizens in the course of their daily lives. Photographs are only encouraged at heritage villages, where actors and elderly Emirati women are trained in "heritage crafts," like weaving, with the purpose of performing them for tourist photos. The tourism police actually do stop people who are taking pictures of Emiratis without their knowledge.⁵³

Halima was the only one of the students who wore a *niqab* (the full veil cover of the face) but she was not wearing it at that moment because she was only aware of herself and

⁵¹ For more on the gaze on Arab women in Hollywood film, see *Tramps vs. Sweethearts* (Yunis & Duthler, 2010)

⁵² A regional example of altering the story for tourists would be the island of Zanzibar in Tanzania, where several Emirati families have a long history, with some families split between the UAE and Zanzibar. In Stone Town, locals will pose with tourists in the slave dungeons, a heritage site that actually wasn't actually where the slaves were held.

⁵³ For brief overview of the tourism police's responsibilities, see "Abu Dhabi Police Offer Tips to Tourists," *The National*, (12/09/2018) wrote about the Tourism Police's responsibility.

her classmates in this safe space. After all, what space could be safer than the home of Sheikh Zayed, the father of the nation, the man who brought them into modernity and out of poverty, a man revered here in the way that Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela are internationally. In all my 11 years in the UAE, I have never heard an Emirati say one disparaging word about him, and I know of no other person who has ever heard any Emirati speak of him with even a note of criticism or cynicism. As stated in the official discourse of the government:

Understanding the UAE is impossible without understanding the life of Sheikh Zayed and his deep religious faith, vision, determination and hard work; his generosity at home and abroad; and the way in which he devoted his life to the service of his people and the creation of a better world.⁵⁴

Sheikh Zayed alone embodied all the heritage that was needed until the rentier state came under threat in the economic crisis of 2008. But, in post-2008 UAE, citizens want to be seen as a people with heritage. For example, in their research in 2017 on Emirati and tourist perceptions of the UAE, tourism scholars Nataša Slak Valek and Russell B. Williams discovered that while tourists value Abu Dhabi as a sun, sand and sea destination (i.e. fun), Emiratis value the notion of authentic Emirati culture the most:

Looking at the results of graphic images that have been shown to tourists, they would use a sun, sea and sand (3S) ...to describe Abu Dhabi as a tourist destination (40.8%), followed by authentic Emirati culture (22.1%) shopping (19.6%) and the image of sunset in the desert (17.5%). On the other hand, the first choice of Emirati

⁵⁴ Similar statements can be found in all government and most private corporate publications in the UAE. This particular one was taken from the official website of UAE Embassies <https://www.uae-embassy.org/about-uae/history/sheikh-zayeid-bin-sultan-al-nahyan-founder-uae>

respondents was authentic Emirati culture (44.7%), followed by 3S (24.4%), shopping (21.5%) and sunset in the desert (9.4%). (Slak Valek & Williams, 2018:156)

Slak Valek and Williams, both longtime UAE residents, defined for the study “authentic Emirati culture” in a graphic made up the following: a sunset with an Emirati man holding a falcon with a background of camels trekking through sand dunes in the background. These images are the foundation of today’s tourism films. But the landscape did not decide that these camels, sand dunes and falcons were the UAE’s “authentic” heritage.

Commodification of heritage is the work of humans, but it doesn’t take a grassroots consensus to define it for the greater whole, as we will see in the UAE.

Capturing the Natives

Today, unlike Halima’s class, students are well aware of the tourist gaze. The panicked student mentioned earlier, who had lost her flash drive with her sister’s photo, actually went on to work in tourism communications, as did her sister, although their family, a tribe close to the ruling family, still doesn’t allow women in the family to be photographed in public. Women of the ruling families are very rarely photographed, with notable exceptions, like Sheikha Hoor, the daughter of the ruler of Sharjah. She runs the Sharjah Arts Foundation, which hosts tourist-driven events like the Sharjah Biennale. But further away from the more protective ruling families, things have changed in the urban centers. About 70% of the female students, sometimes even more, in my classes would agree to be photographed by 2018. Female entrepreneurs and high-level civil servants such as ministers, rarely reject being photographed today. In fact, the government encourages Emirati women to be photographed at public events as a form of state feminism, supported by the

benevolence of the patriarchal rulers. As a young male Emirati put it to me in a class discussion:

We are always promoting women for the top jobs. Sometimes it feels like reverse discrimination. (Khalifa, 23)⁵⁵

He was only half joking, but “women have been afforded enhanced opportunities in education, so there are more female graduates than male. Women also have higher literacy levels (DWE 2009) and have actively pursued entrepreneurial business start-ups.” (Suliman & Hayat, 2011:117). The UAE has pushed hard in recent years to make its female population educated and visible in the government institutions, making state feminism as an international export. This state feminism ignores any discussion of gendered issues such as sexual abuse, poverty, and divorce, where divorce rates hover at 50%, according to the Abu Dhabi Statistics Center (2018).⁵⁶

An effort to make women visible in UAE tourism is abundantly obvious at nearly all tourism sites. Men have also become more visible, as the nation’s leadership understands the importance of the local people being somewhat available for tourists at heritage sites. As Slak Valek states in subsequent research:

This is especially true in rapidly modernizing countries such as the Emirates where locals should be more attentive to preserving their culture and heritage as they themselves partially represent the country brand itself. Moreover, local people should understand that they are one part of the destination that the tourist comes to see. (Slak Valek, 2017:78)

⁵⁵ Zayed University Media History class, October 2018.

⁵⁶ For more on the relationship between women and the state in the UAE, see *Women in Civil Society* (Krause, 2008)

But it is not so easy for a tourist to meet an Emirati outside of a tourist site, and not only because of their low numbers. Emiratis self-segregate by gender and, more importantly, increasingly in the past two decades by nationality. This tendency for citizens to separate themselves from non-citizens was echoed by many expats I interviewed. For example, Paul Venn, a public relations officer in his mid-40s, told me in an interview:

The UAE people have become more insular as they have become so outnumbered.

When I first came here 20 years ago, the cultures weren't so far apart. They are still hospitable people, but they have walled up now and so fewer Westerners living here even get to know Emiratis. They are more comfortable now keeping to themselves.

My days of joining them at the majlis are over. (Venn, 2014)⁵⁷

A Lebanese woman who came here as a young bride in the 1970s shared with a blush:

When I first came here, the Emirati women would tell me all their secrets, and ask me about what clothes to buy, what I thought about hairstyles, even asked me about sex. Really. But now, I can't imagine one of them asking me for advice. They don't look at us like that anymore. (Interview, 2019)⁵⁸

But without people, the heritage is flat, as I witnessed with the tourists in Al Ain when they had the opportunity to film my students. The tourists were plodding along with their mobile phones and cameras listlessly until they spotted our students. Tourism is only surface deep, which suits the UAE: today, visitors are welcomed at heritage sites by young Emiratis; the same is the case in hotels, although the welcoming coffee server is likely a South Asian

⁵⁷ ⁵⁷ I interviewed Paul Venn for an article I wrote in 2014, "The UAE Goes Into the Film Business," *CineJ* (Vol 3, no. 2). He is also a personal friend, and we have many conversations about film.

⁵⁸ Interviewee requested anonymity.

worker dressed in Emirati clothes. But tourists don't scratch below the surface to see this. This renders the people, in their national dress, as symbols of Emiratiness, along with a handful of other tropes.

Symbols of Heritage and Identity

In 2016, for this research, I started surveying Emiratis and longtime expats (with 10 years or more of residency), asking them one question, "What five images say/mean this is the UAE to you?" The *kandoura*, the male white robe, and *abaya/shayla*, the female black robe and black head cover, are consistently in the top five. Rhetoric scholar Kenneth Burke said:

"Man is a symbol using (symbol making symbol misusing) animal, inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative), separate from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (removed by the sense of order), and rotten with perfection" (Burke, 1965:507)

Burke goes on to say that we create symbols that become things we can identify with and create order with, i.e. perfection. (Yunis, 2014:59) Perfection is very manifest in the sanitization of UAE heritage for tourists. Emirati superior hierarchy and perfection is in the perfectly pressed, never wrinkled *kandouras* and *abayas/shaylas*, the one image that makes you know the person you are looking at it is Emirati. The *abaya* and *kandoura* are understood by Emiratis as their timeless national dress. When I ask both students and adults to explain to the origins, I hear various stories, including the idea perpetuated by Emirati tour operator Ali Al Saloom (aka Ask Ali) as originally mourning clothing put on during the loss of Andalusia to Spain. This is fantastical as this region was not involved in Andalusia, but it still makes a beautiful heritage story. In actuality, the *shayla* likely came to the UAE

via Saudi Arabia from Damascus, where women of upper classes wore a sheer black veil (*mandeel*) to cover their faces during the Ottoman era as a symbol of class, not religion. That veil morphed as Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi conservative government emerged as the power broker in the region. (El Metwelli, 2015)

Women in what is now the UAE prior to Saudi influence wore a *burqa*, a gold-colored face mask—as a sign of beauty, not religious modesty. For example, in a photo taken sometime in the 1960s, Sheikh Zayed's mother sits next to him wearing a burqa and doesn't hide her colorful dress with an *abaya*. (Figure 10) Today, his wife, Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, often called the Mother of the Nation, is never photographed and when she does make a rare public appearance, with only women allowed, she is fully-covered. Thus, the current *abaya* is more a product of political changes in the region, specifically the influence of Saudi Arabia, rather than heritage clothing. But it has also been cultivated to create national identity, along with many other invented traditions, as Emirati scholar Rana Al Mutawa puts it:

To create an image of one, shared history and culture (one that is usually associated with a pure-Arabness), much of the culture promoted within the national narrative is also newly reinvented.... While what people traditionally wore in different parts of the Arab Gulf varied depending on family, ethnic background, occupation and region, the national dress promoted in many of the Gulf states today is standard and uniform, not representing any of the local diversity within these states. (Al Mutawa, 2016:10)

The unwrinkable *kandoura*'s history is even shorter, literally, than that of the *abaya*. The word *kandoura* means “tunic” in Arabic and men of this desert have worn tunics here for

centuries, but they were not the long, white ones of today. Prior to nationhood, they were haphazardly tied at the waist in order to carry knives and other supplies, as we can see in the earlier photos taken of the region by British explorers and residents during the Trucial States period. The *kandouras* were not long or white—otherwise they would have been even dirtier than they were. The *kandouras* only became crisp and perfectly pressed after urbanization in the late 1960s, perhaps, I speculate, influenced into this style by the arrival of European businessmen in starched white shirts. The British also brought the concept of clothing uniformity as they began establishing Arabian-style uniforms (various head scarf themes) for the native population being trained for the newly-formed military and police. But the strong belief in the *abaya* and *kandoura* as long-serving heritage dress speaks to the limited knowledge—and acknowledgement—Emiratis have of the origins of their identity and heritage.

In her two-volume book on Emirati clothing, fashion historian Reem El Metwalli talks about the unlegislated code that has been in schools since 1980s and government institutions since the early 1990s, asking students and employees to wear the *kandoura* and *abaya*, which are both now called national dress. “The black *abaya* became the norm for women as immense wealth led them be more isolated.” (El Metwalli, 2013:59).

This goes back to the *neoglobalism* of the place—foreigners, please come visit but don’t try to mix with us. And yet the heritage the UAE government is protecting—and fostering—today is based on images given to them by foreigners, specifically the British.

The Beginnings of Film and the Tourist Gaze

Earlier I mentioned that I began asking both Emiratis and expats who had lived in the Gulf for at least 10 years a piece of paper to list, without giving it too much thought, five

images that represent the UAE. I would do this at dinners, in shops and offices so that I could get respondents who represented diverse nationalities, age groups and socioeconomic groups.⁵⁹ I thought I would end up breaking people’s answers down by these demographics to understand the results, but I discovered that it didn’t matter what anyone’s background was. The top five answers crossed all demographic lines. In all, I asked this question to 75 people, half of whom were Emirati. Perhaps I would have continued asking people if I were getting more diverse answers. I did not give prompts—just pieces of paper to write down the first five things they could quickly think of. In order of frequency, the most popular images were:

- Date Palms
- Falcons
- Desert
- National Dress⁶⁰
- Burj Khalifa
- Camels
- Mosques⁶¹

Aside from the Burj Khalifa, all the images evoked by residents are related to long standing images, not new ones. No other images had significant registration, including the sea, dhows (ships), and fishing, the backbones of the economy for most of the region’s history. My

⁵⁹ People I questioned include lawyers, business owners, architects, educators, clerical workers, domestic help, laborers, homemakers. The responders included Emiratis, Americans, Europeans, South Africans, North Africans, Levantine Arabs, Filipinos and South Asians.

⁶⁰ Some people answered “national dress,” but amongst Emiratis most females answered “*abaya*” and most males “*kandoura*.”

⁶¹ Some people answered “Islam,” which I have merged with people who answered “mosques.” I did this survey in English with many non-native speakers, so I interpreted “Islam” as “mosque” in terms of visualization.

theory is that the images that the respondents listed were orchestrated for them even before the inception of the UAE: If we look back at the first photos taken of the UAE—in fact, the first tourism films—we will see the same images that were at the top of my survey results. The time of these early films was the era of the British Trucial States, particularly after oil was discovered in nearby Bahrain in 1932.

Even before oil, the British were responsible for developing the first images of what is now the UAE. Many of the first photographers were adventurers. In 1931, Thomas Bertram, a British government advisor to the Sultanate of Oman, was the first European to cross the Rub' al Khali Desert (the Empty Quarter), as the harsh valleys of pristine sand dunes that run through Abu Dhabi, particularly surrounding the oasis of Liwa, are called. Bertram's book, *Arabia Felix*, published in the UK in 1932, featured many photos, although only a handful of the Rub Al-Khali, aside from wide shots of camel caravans in sand dunes. The majority of his photos were snapped in present day Saudi Arabia. Thus, in the UAE, his work would be overshadowed by the late Wilfred Thesiger, whose photos have occupied their own gallery at Al Jahili Fort in Al Ain since 2009. Thesiger also had the advantage of being a friend of Sheikh Zayed and crossing not once, but twice, the half million square mile desert from the Hadhramaut in Yemen to Abu Dhabi between 1945 to 1950, mapping the Liwa Oasis and the quicksand of Umm As-Sammim. He was guided and supported on his journey by two young Bedouin companions, who gave him the nickname Mubarak bin London, and he was treated like a hero by the ruling family.⁶²

Thesiger's black and white photos at the Al Jahili Fort are breathtaking sand dune landscapes and close ups of Thesiger and the two young men who served as his guides. One

⁶² This history is chronicled in Thesiger's memoir of his journey, *Arabian Sands* (1959).

of his most famous photos is of Sheikh Zayed wearing a *kandoura* (although not a yet perfectly pressed one) on a camel with a falcon in the desert. That photo contains four of the six images that made the top five lists in my survey *kandoura*, falcon, camel, desert—all in a photo with the only national hero the country promotes at home and abroad: Sheikh Zayed (Figure 11).

It was the British who made these symbols, through film and photography, and the UAE embraced them as an independent nation. The British didn't capture the sea—probably because they were a seafaring nation and it didn't have the exotic factor that the tourist and film gaze needed to hold attention. The UAE continued this visual narrative as it began to create a national identity. As an example, the falcon is the emblem of the national seal. These early British images are what Leotta describes as somewhere between ethnographic and tourist romance.

The deep interconnection between tourism, cinema and consumer culture could explain the early prominence of travel films that flourished in the period preceding the emergence of classical cinema. (Leotta, 2011:34)

Globally, these ethnographic tourist films go back to the early 1900s. But the earliest filmmakers in the Gulf go back to the 1930s and were primarily women, the traveling spouses of British officers. In fact, it was the wife of political agent Gordon Loch, the officer who feared cinema (as referenced in Chapter One), who pioneered this touristic filmmaking in the Gulf.

Eleanor Isabel Wilkie-Dalyell, Loch's wife, would also be the first to screen films in the region, but not for locals. Following formal receptions, Dalyell would share her actuality

films about local events and public gatherings in Bahrain with invited guests in the so-called cinema parties at the Agency residence. (Fuccaro, 2009; Oruc, forthcoming)

Wilke-Dalyell also met local women in Dubai, Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah at various Sheikha majlis', which she describes in her diary, often in detail. There is no footage of those visits. But there is footage of her husband climbing the mountains in Ras Al Khaimah, most likely taken by her. In the limited existing footage from these filmmaking women, preserved in British libraries, we see mostly shots taken from outside the action, often looking down at the action from the rooftop of their homes. Not concerned with individuals but the general exotic, they do not focus in on any one person, and do not offer a story. And the filmmakers are distant from the action, unlike in Wilke-Dalyell's writings about their encounters with the local populations, in which we read conversations and interpretations of the personalities of the Gulf people they met. (Wilke-Dalyell, 1937)⁶³

This genre of amateur filmmaking is well-described by film historian Patricia Zimmerman:

As a genre, colonial amateur filmmaking was based on four major visual strategies as described in magazines such as the *British Amateur Cine World*: (1) panorama shots to emphasize the gap between the maker and the subject, (2) sneaking shots of natives to produce the effect of neutrality and authenticity, (3) smooth cinematographic organization of landscapes to limit the traces of dislocation and disorientation, and (4) shots that would invoke "exotic" contrasts to life at home. (Zimmerman, 1996: 4)

⁶³ While most of the amateur filmmaking from the Trucial States is housed in British libraries, some of it can be found at: www.colonialfilm.org.uk

This has not changed much in the slick tourism films made today: The Emiratis were rendered “other” in their landscape by these early films and, as we will see shortly, also in most of the current UAE tourism films. This dates back to the elements in Bertram’s and Thesiger’s photographs and most especially in the professional films that were soon to follow after the discovery of oil: the petro documentaries.

The Petro Documentaries

Petro documentaries were the first films made in the Gulf by the European and American oil companies after the discovery of oil in the 1930s. Now in re-circulation via YouTube, they were ethnographic films that played as exotic tourism films with a political agenda: They were produced to attract the British to the Trucial States and to justify the money being spent to explore the Gulf to the people back in the UK. ⁶⁴

In looking at these films, I saw that they defined this new oil space as not only an exotic adventure to be discovered but as a place that without the arrival of Europeans could not have been pulled out of centuries of darkness to enjoy its newfound wealth. With images of European men having a good time playing pool or meeting *kandoura*-garbed sheikhs, these films also served to encourage European men in the oil business and its peripheral industries to come work in this new, still wild destination. The films also have the feel of the US cowboy and Indian films of the same era, with the locals being welcoming Indians, savage still but, unlike the Indians in the US westerns, not reluctant to share their land with the white man.

⁶⁴ Most of the prints of these films are part of the British Petroleum archives, for which there is no public access. Others are part of collections at various British universities and some are part of the UAE National Archive, which is also closed to the public.

Even though these films were clearly competently helmed by professionals, the mix of tourist gaze and film gaze they offer follows the same principles of colonial amateur filmmaking described by Zimmerman above, to a point that they do not acknowledge the presence of the many Egyptian, Levant Arabs and South Asians who were already working here as laborers, teachers, translators and clerks in the “sneaking shots” of people.

Even though color film was available, these films are mainly in black and white.

Independent researcher Todd Reisz believes this was a calculated decision:

Black-and-white film also achieved something else: it reduced specificity, especially filth and blemishes. Places and things came across rustic but pleasingly antiseptic. Black and white diminished difference. It had the effect of dissolving the Trucial States’ landscapes into a smooth continuity of insufficiency. The region’s people, already a thriving mix of Arab, South Asian, and African, blurred into a shared, grayed skin color. Black and white united them in a way that simplified, if not fictionalized, the story of “a people.” (Reisz, 2018:304)

These films have no space for anyone but the local people they are trying to give a national identity to and their benefactors. Anyone falling out of the white European model becomes the local other, without nuance. As noted by Lee Grieveson’s multi-year study of colonial filmmaking globally:

The (colonial) film portrays an account of life and work in desert lands which are made arable by man’s ingenuity. With help from the British Government, the Rulers care for their people. (Grieveson, 2011:3)

In the case of UAE, this portrayal works particularly well because it has the added bonus of also playing into the tribal/rentier systems of the caring ruler, already part of the social

structure, who is now getting help from the all-knowing, modernized British. The bravest souls in these films are indeed the white men—doctors, engineers, consultants—who venture to Arabia with a noble cause to help these new millionaires literally tap into the modern world through the oil wells. This is clear even in the title of the 22-minute British Petroleum/Total’s 1963 documentary “A Calculated Risk,” directed by Julian Spiro in Abu Dhabi.⁶⁵ Beginning with and interspersed with underwater footage of European workers at an oil rig, it tells, like all the petro documentaries do, the story of the backward natives—sitting on the floor, flies surrounding them, trekking through the desolate heat—intercut with oil production on Das Island, the original hub of oil production in Abu Dhabi.⁶⁶ The majority of the workers on the oil rigs were in reality Arabs and South Asians, but the close-ups in the film are only for the Western bosses. It also features conversations between an oil executive or British executive with the leader of Abu Dhabi at that time, Sheikh Shakhbout, portrayed as a bumbling yokel in his palace, Qasr Al Hosn. (Figure 12) ⁶⁷

The portrait of Sheikh Shakhbout as such is also calculated: The British were very supportive of Sheikh Zayed’s decision to peacefully replace Sheikh Shakhbout, his older brother, who was not embracing –and spending— the newly found wealth as the British wanted. Shakhbout may have been the first person to have been aware of the loss of heritage with the coming of oil. Shakhbout’s legendary miserliness likely had more than a fear of going back to poverty, as his folklore is generally recounted.

Prophetically perhaps, Shakhbout also feared that any rapid oil-financed

development would have far-reaching socio-cultural consequences for Abu Dhabi,

⁶⁵ To see full film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQw1JczQz8w>

⁶⁶ Worth noting for the current heritage industry, as proof of the abaya not being an ancient tradition. It includes rare footage of women at the souq—not wearing abayas or headscarves, but rather the burqa.

⁶⁷ Qasr Al Hosn reopened in 2018 after a 10-year renovation project.

predicting that the resulting changes would soon erode the traditional way of life.

With this line of thinking he was, however, in the minority. Consequently, the final fifteen years of his reign were dominated by a pitched struggle between his own conservatism, the more adventurous members of his family, and what remained of the sheikhdom's business class. (Davidson, 2009:33)⁶⁸

Shakhbout was of course right about this new wealth eroding the traditional way of life, for better or worse. But we do not know what traditions he would have feared losing the most because the “valuable” traditions were defined not by the local population but by the British.

Indeed, there were a handful of films made for US and European television that further fostered the tropes of a changing Arabia. The most famous and longest of them is *Farewell, Arabia* (National Film Education, 1968), a 55-minute ethnographic film showing Sheikh Zayed modernizing the Bedouins, people who did not yet comprehend nor had ever aimed to join the world beyond their desert landscape. It opens with camels trekking through sand dunes and Sheikh Zayed trekking through similar dunes in his Cadillac, the contrasting sign of modernity and the old. He sings to himself in the car as he arrives to hang out with his loyal followers: roughshod Bedouins who are just mastering the knife and fork. The narrator, David Holden, on several occasions refers to “time” as the only thing the Bedouins had going for themselves—time on their hands as they remained hidden from the world for “a thousand years,” time being the only thing in this “harsh and lonely place” that the “unforgiving sun” and “desert had been rich in” until the discovery of oil. Holden narrates that until then, the people of Abu Dhabi lived “in the same way as the days of Abraham, the

⁶⁸ For a more detailed history of the troubles of Sheikh Shakhbout with his family and the British, see Chapter Two, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond* (Davidson, 2009).

father of all tribes.” As proof of this never changing life, we see the following images in the film:

- Camels marching through the desert
- Flying falcons
- Barren desert
- Date oasis
- Young women doing the swinging hair dance
- Women in their burqas selling fish
- Men dancing around the fireplace
- Men eating with their hands on the floor, tearing at the meat in what to foreigners could only look at as savage.

Aside from the portrayal of the Emiratis as uncivilized in their table manner, these images correspond to the same images people mentioned in my survey, taken 50 years later.

Farewell, Arabia also features a shot of an elderly old man reciting Nabati-style poetry. But in the film, the narrator calls it the “poetry of the 1001 Nights,” a tale these Bedouins would have likely never have heard of. Yet in this film, the Abu Dhabi Bedouins reportedly survived with nothing to sustain them intellectually but the poems of *The Arabian Nights*, setting up the Orientalist fantasy that UAE tourism relies on today at the cost of the loss of the rich history of Nabati poetry to tourists.⁶⁹

Unlike the other films, *Farewell, Arabia* tends more towards narrative and creative documentary with the development of a main character, in this case Sheikh Zayed, the glue

⁶⁹ To read the richness of Nabati poetry, see the translations of Marcel Kurpershoek, most recently *Arabian Satire* (2017). He is currently translating Emirati Nabati poetry.

of the nation and around which most narrative of the country is built, both locally and by the British before their departure, to the near elimination of any prior history. While Sheikh Shakhbout, in this film and others of the era, is always filmed from high angles, highlighting his smallness among the British, Sheikh Zayed is filmed from a low angle, increasing his stature and size when amongst his people, if not when he is with the British. He also has many close-ups in this film that humanize him.

I have spent a fair amount of time describing this film here because the visual images and ideas of timelessness it promotes play into the tourism films the UAE would start producing in the 2000s, once the federal government fully embraced tourism and film—and heritage production. Indeed, these early films would define the heritage (and the absence of it) and identity of this land for foreigners and the local population for decades to come.

Farwell, Arabia also provides the tropes of UAE citizens learning English in school and going to see a doctor for the first time, with the doctors being European. The European savior in the old films has been replaced today in the tourism films not by the desired European tourist, invited, but at a distance, to enjoy the land their grandfathers created an identity for.

Curing Anxiety with Visual Heritage

Farewell, Arabia ends with the narrator saying, over a sweeping desert landscape peppered by a group of Emirati men enjoying some fun sparring with Sheikh Zayed around the campsite, “In the desert alone with each other, they can be sure of themselves again, still have the comradeship the new world takes away.”

This last sentence also speaks to the anxiety that has come with rapid modernization, which today has resulted in the appetite for heritage. *Farewell, Arabia* itself now serves as proof of heritage, with the tropes it offers now considered part of the national identity, from the image of Sheikh Zayed to the desert dunes and falcons. Heritage then becomes an anecdote to the alienation of change.

After the British left in 1971, British Petroleum would continue to make a small number of films, but the UK government's interest in molding the UAE's image diminished as its colonial power diminished, leaving the door open for others to interpret the region, but these still remained primarily British and European filmmakers and TV producers.⁷⁰

A decade after *Farewell, Arabia*, when the process of nationalizing jobs had begun but the British were still the leading Western expats (albeit with diminished public power), celebrated Irish writer Edna O'Brien, then in her 40s, narrated *Arabian Days* (South Bank Show, 1978), an ethnographic film that follows O'Brien's quest to meet the elusive citizens of Abu Dhabi, including Sheikh Zayed and his wife. Like the other films, according to the narrator's implied superior space of the West, she congratulates Abu Dhabi for emerging into the present, escaping a barely civilized heritage.

But in this film, there is no admiration of the people in the present, aside from Sheikh Zayed, whom she cringingly fawns over, even talking about his sexual magnetism, harkening back to the sexual Orientalism in old Hollywood films, such as Rudolph Valentino in *The Sheikh* (1921). O'Brien laments the country's extravagant, shallow embrace of its newfound wealth and the rudeness of the Sheikhas, including Sheikh Zayed's wife, who doesn't show up for their planned meeting. I show this film in class, after

⁷⁰ French and Italian oil companies also made some films, including an Italian series directed by Bernardo Bertolucci. But these were set in other parts of the Gulf. They do not differ in their narrative.

screening *Farewell, Arabia*. The students watch *Farewell, Arabia* spellbound, as films of the UAE before oil are so rare and not yet part of school curricula, particularly one featuring Sheikh Zayed in close ups, with his commanding personality on display. *Arabian Days* (yet another film linking this land to *The Arabian Nights*) with its disdain for the lavish ways of UAE modernity, including the hotel buffets, has proven in every class in which I've shown it to be particularly offensive. When I asked young Emiratis why it is so offensive, they say that O'Brien is "talking nonsense" or showing disrespect for Sheikh Zayed by speaking about him sexually.

It is a defense of the country's hero, Sheikh Zayed, and his family, of course, but I would argue that O'Brien's disdain for Abu Dhabi sparks Emirati anxiety, an inferiority complex that their superior wealth is looked down upon by others as something they do not deserve, that without the interference of foreigners they would still be in the dark ages, even with their wealth. This film and the earlier films imply that some miracle has given the UAE oil and thus unearned wealth, perhaps undeserved wealth. But it also insinuates that without the British and other Europeans, there would be no progress, no way to use the wealth because the citizens were born into this wealth without education or skills to turn it into a business or even understand the value it could bring them. This Western attitude to Emiratis, generically dirtying them in the way the government generically sanitizes them, is epitomized in a more contemporary scathing *Vanity Fair* article, in which the writer, A.A. Gill, also likens the UAE to *The Arabian Nights*, but only negatively, trashing the tourism attractions, saying it "suffers from gigantism—a national inferiority complex that has to make everything bigger and biggest."

Emiratis are born retired. They waft through this city in their white dishdashas and headscarves and their obsessively tapered humorless faces. They're out of place in their own country. They have imported and built a city, a fortress of extravagance, that excludes themselves. (*Vanity Fair*, 2011)

The UAE government's present hyper-reality and general hype have helped foster this negativity. The government promotes "firsts" almost to the point of parody, with constant news about the first Emirati to climb Mount Everest, the first Emirati woman to fly an airplane, the first Emirati to go to space, and so on, replete with photo opportunities with the rulers, who in many cases fund these "firsts." The leader constantly tells the citizens they are special, unique beyond definition through these "firsts," which minimize heritage in favor of futuristic "firsts." Indeed, Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid, the ruler of Dubai and prime minister of the UAE said in 2010, "Our leadership does not import ready-made models that may be valid for other societies but are certainly not suitable for our society." (Reuters, 2010)

But it is films like *Arabian Days* that are partly responsible for turning Emiratis inwards, away from foreign visitors and its long serving expats. This feeling of inferiority, which is counterbalanced by the ego boost of national superiority the government promotes, has also been fostered by Arab expats who arrived in the UAE in the early days of oil, educated Arabic speakers from countries with little economic opportunity. In June 2019, I collected oral histories from a group of Levant/Egyptian expats who had either been born here or lived here more than 30 years. They were all friends and we met at the home of one of them. When I asked them, "What is the UAE's heritage?" they laughed or snickered. "How can you have heritage in a place where there was nothing until 40 years ago—what is

that compared to Damascus?” said a man who has become a multimillionaire in the UAE building apartment blocks and towers since the early 1970s.⁷¹ For this man and his friends, the British heritage tropes are proof of a lack of heritage. I also sensed some resentment that the UAE’s promoted heritage renders invisible their role and/or the role of their fathers and grandfathers who came here as educated labor. They were mostly teachers and engineers, valued for their skills and knowledge of Arabic. However, there is one film which did not leave those early expats out: *These are the Trucial States* (1958).

These are the Trucial States

Before looking at the UAE’s contemporary tourism films, there is one film worth noting: *These are the Trucial States*.⁷² Made in 1958, just at the cusp of oil drilling in the UAE, the British shelved the film for reasons no one be sure of, but perhaps because it breaks with the exotic desert nomad story. Narrated in Arabic, never translated into English, it shows the progress of the seven Emirates, introducing us to each ruler. The film diverges from the notion of a people that emerge out of the desert with the discovery of oil, noting that that their main economy is fishing, that they once had a vibrant pearl industry. All is not bleak because they are progressing with education, agriculture and trade—and getting proper military training from the British, as well as skilled labor from other Arab countries and South Asia. It also positions Dubai as the commercial hub of the region, the place where things are really happening. At the end of this chapter, we will come back to this film, but at this point, what is worth noting are the visual symbols of emirates that Peter Tripp, the British officer in charge of scripting the film, chose:

⁷¹ Oral histories collected as a group of Levant expats who have been friends for thirty plus years, June 26, 2019.

⁷² While never publicly released, *These are the Trucial States*, is part of the UK’s Imperial War Museum’s online collection. <https://film.iwmcollections.org.uk/record/478>

Ruler

Dr. Majid and patient

Dubai Municipality camera PANS revealing truck going away. New Buildings.

. . . donkey . . .

. . . road repairs

Filling bags with earth

Earth tipped on stones

Men levelling

Mounted Police

Policeman walking through busy market scene

Dubai creek

Boat buildings

Customs wharf

General activity

Men with Crates

Dubai creek

Small boat buildings, camels . . . man and child walk through (Reisz, 2018:306)

Although made before oil production began in the present UAE, this list shows that Tripp visualized the future UAE as a bustling place of commerce, with many of the amenities of modern society, focusing on it as an industrious, hard-working, “clean” place, less on the Orientalism and the idea of being frozen in the past. Thus, this film disturbs the narrative of emerging out of the dark ages into modernity because of oil, the premise of other films. As we will see by the end of this chapter, it would still be a film shelved today as it acts against

the heritage narrative that excludes the early non-Emirati Arabs and South Asians as being vital to nation building. But it is in keeping with how the UAE would initially portray itself as a tourist destination: a heritage-free zone, as we will see next in the tourism films.

Starting Tourism with a Future with No Heritage

Prior to 2008, the UAE's supercharged tourist attractions were more for nation building directed towards business and tourism, rather than constructing heritage for local consumption –and with much success. The 2008 Country Brand Index identified China, UAE and Croatia, respectively, as the top three 'rising stars', predicted to become major tourist destinations (Stephenson, 2014:725).

That would prove to be true: According to UK-based marketing firm Euromonitor, since 2008, Dubai has placed somewhere in the top 10 top city destinations worldwide, sitting at number seven in 2018. This excludes people transiting through its airport, the third busiest airport in the world, receiving 89.1 million passengers, according to Airports Council International (2018 annual report).

While the other six emirates wouldn't plunge into tourism until 2008, Dubai had already been leading the charge, getting international headlines since the mid-2000s, mostly relying on superlatives. Dubai became the rising star in tourism of the hyperreal. The first tourism videos, in 2009, further fostered the myth of a nation burst out of the sand and dark ages, keeping in step with the earlier petro documentaries, but without any depiction of the past—not even as a tourist attraction. The images in these videos attracted so many of Russia's nouveau riche and others looking for the materialistic adventures, such as tax-free shopping, that for a short time, when I used to visit in the early 2000s, Dubai had store signs in Russian, as well as English and Arabic.

Even the country's multiplex cinemas themselves are a sign of hypermodernity the UAE promotes. The show itself is off screen at some cinemas—with the UAE boasting five-star and seven-star movie experiences, including two in which famed British chef, Gary Rhodes, caters a three-course meal.⁷³ Jim Krane wrote while working for the Dubai's ruling Al Maktoum family: “When Dubai launched its initiative into tourism in the mid-1980s, people asked how a city-state with no historical sites could be a tourist mecca. (Krane, 2009:105) But Dubai did succeed in tourism, using hypermodernity and superlatives of biggest and firsts: As tourism researcher Marcus Stephenson notes, it bragged of everything from the tallest building to the largest apple pie, biryani bowl, shawarma, human flag, incense burner, chocolate bar, paper clip, shopping trolley, and chopsticks.

Dubai also boasts of the longest parade of Mercedes-Benz cars, the largest gathering of men named Mohammed, the first cloned camel (named ‘*Injaz*’ – ‘Achievement’), the first ‘cama’ – a cross between an Arabian camel and an Andean llama, and the longest line of sandwiches stretching 2.6 kilometers (estimated to feed 5000 laborers) (Stephenson, 2014:728)

Nations much older than the UAE, but still considered relatively new, like the USA, Canada and Australia, were the pioneers of record breaking feats, also because they did not have much in the way of older buildings as attractions.⁷⁴ But the USA, for example, has world records that are somehow related to its culture and history and often driven from the grassroots, like the “world's largest twine ball,” invented by a Midwestern farmer trying to make use of the abundant leftover twine American farmers had in the 1950s. Dubai's

⁷³ For more information on the UAE's luxury cinemas: <https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/4-options-for-vip-cinema-experiences-in-the-uae-1.30721>

⁷⁴ For more on this, 99% *Invisible* podcast “Goodness Gracious Great Balls of Twine” (2019)

records have been engineered mostly by the state or by real estate businesses that are often partly owned by the government—and the records they achieve are disconnected from the heritage of the population.

Dubai's records are a mix of neoliberal globalization, (re)Orientalism and a media-friendly benevolence. Apple pie, biryani, shawarma and chopsticks were adopted through world records, although Western, Levant, and Asian food icons. The cloned camel speaks to advanced science while meeting the Orientalist expectations of camels in the desert. The sandwich to feed 5,000 laborers speaks to the benevolence of the nation in light of the great deal of global attention to labor infractions at the that time in international media. The food records speak of transient, transnational quality of the city: These records are also not permanent or localized, as anyone else anywhere could attempt to break them, but they represent engaging in internationally recognized competition to be the best, to be the most elite.

Jonathan Friedman refers to a non-Western elite including “emerging nations with a non-Western, transnational elite who can control identity through financial means in a neoliberal globalization.” He dubbed them as “the globalized postcolonial elites, many of whom are part of a globalizing upper class” forming “a new kind of cosmopolitan internationalism very much based on the metaphors of consumption and appropriation, and often combined with a desire for connoisseurship concerning the vast array of world objects that are accessible to them.” (Friedman, 2000:143)

This can be used to describe the UAE. And it's not just about connoisseurship. It's also about the ability to buy and own your connoisseurship and show it off in new tourist attractions. In Abu Dhabi for example, this can most notably be seen in a holy structure: the

82-dome Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, which opened in 2008 as one of the world's largest mosques and the capital's number one tourist attraction, with 5.8 million visitors in 2017. (*The National*, 2018) It is a grand mix of styles by different Islamic civilizations designed by Italian and British architects and featuring the world's largest handed-knotted carpet, a 27-ton Murano glass door leading to worship space for 40,000 people, intricately inlaid marble from Italy, and one of the world's largest chandeliers, made in Germany. These superlatives are shared with tourists hourly during tours of the mosque led by young Emiratis with flawless English, the globalized transnational citizens Friedman described, capable of owning their own Murano glass. Many of these tour guides are products of the same Zayed University tourism major Halima was part of, although more recently graduated. For them, underneath all this crystal and glass, there is heritage, the trope of the mosque, making the hyperreal and collective identity come together.

Challenges to Creating Heritage Tourism

Early hyperreal tourism left the past behind—that poor, semi-colonized heritage the petro documentaries showed—which eliminated any inferiority complex about the leap from the “land time forgot” to the all that is futuristic. This issue of inferiority is perhaps why UAE tourism chose to ignore heritage, compensating for missing heritage sites with hyperactivity into the future. As Stephenson puts it:

One objective of Dubai's obsession in achieving ‘world records’ is its aim to attract international attention through positioning the destination as a city of superlatives, an unrivalled city with the desired intention to make history and move beyond established geographic, socio-cultural and economic boundaries. (Stephenson, 2014:728)

Indeed, Dubai was “making history” by burying its past, disconnecting from its Arab and Muslim identity, aside from using the architecture of the other Islamic/Arab countries to orientalize the environment for tourists. But the inferiority complex of having no past to justify its current abundance actually deletes a relatively rich history and heritage. The idea of a place that came into being out of nothing in a post-oil initiative is not true of Dubai’s history or that of the other emirates. For Dubai, there is proof of civilization dating back 5,000 years and in Abu Dhabi going back 8,000 years.⁷⁵ More recently in 1899, Sheikh Maktoum bin Hasher Al Maktoum, then ruler of Dubai, aggressively laid the groundwork for making Dubai the trade hub of the Trucial States: When traders across the Gulf in present day Iran began escaping the heavy taxes the government had begun levying against them, Sheikh Maktoum convinced them to look to Dubai as their escape rather than Sharjah or Ras Al Khaimah, which had stronger trade infrastructures at the time. In fact, Sharjah was then the major port of the region and Britain’s administrative center for the Trucial States.

Sheikh Maktoum, took the decision to do whatever was necessary to persuade the merchants of Lingah (Persia) to move to Dubai. First of all, he declared Dubai a free trade port and abolished all import and export tariffs. Secondly, in 1901 he and his trusted men made personal contact with the key businessmen in Lingah and offered them free land and other benefits in return for a commitment to set up in Dubai.

Thirdly, he offered the business community guarantees of protection and, fourthly, he demanded that all who resided in Dubai or used it as a trading post were tolerant

⁷⁵ Near what is in now Dubai Internet City, Al Sufouh is the site of a Neolithic stone tomb dating from around 2,500 to 2000BC. <https://www.visitdubai.com/en/pois/jumeirah-archaeological-site>. Near the Saudi border in Abu Dhabi archaeologist Mark Beech and his team in 2019 discovered fish bones and pottery fragments showing a settlement going back to 8,000 years. This information I have through conversations with Beech, who is a friend. It is still not a public site.

of each other, thereby signaling that tribal, ethnic or religious issues would not influence the individual merchants' social standing. (Hvidt, 2007:560)

The Persian businessmen were called Bastaki and their skills would take Dubai from a small trading post to the major port of the region, replacing Sharjah. The Bastaki brought with them the *burjeel*, the wind towers that cooled homes and have become part of the heritage narrative of the UAE as “Arabian,” with the design being recreated in many luxury hotels and everything from restaurants to hospitals being named “Burjeel.”⁷⁶ The Bastaki neighborhood, called Bastakiya, flourished until the 1970s, when the Dubai Creek it overlooked was dredged and much of Bastakiya was bulldozed in the 1980s to expand the Rulers Court.

Bastakiya, pristinely restored in the mid-2000s into an art hub, became Dubai’s first heritage site geared towards tourists, with an Orientalist hyper-reality that ignores its Persian roots—it’s more the visualization of heritage for entertainment than for historical memory. In 2012, Bastakiya was officially rebranded Al Fahidi Historical and Cultural Area for an 18th century fort in the area that was restored. This happened with no media fanfare or announcement, as would usually be the case in Dubai. The likely reason for the quiet change in the name, aside from the fort being even older than Bastakiya, is that as political tensions had risen with Iran in the past decade, the UAE, particularly Dubai, which has the largest Iranian population, has wanted to disconnect its identity from Iran in favor of the monocultural Arab Bedouin identity it has adopted. The government describes Bastakiya as “the traditional style of life that was prevalent in Dubai from the mid 19th century till the

⁷⁶ One of the more upscale hospital franchises in Abu Dhabi is also called Burjeel

1970s.”⁷⁷ It mentions the burjeel wind towers but not the Iranians who originally built them and lived in this neighborhood until the 1980s. Most of the Bastakiya Iranians became Emiratis, and have been generally prosperous. Emiratis of Iranian decent are called Ajami and their origins are spoken of in quiet whispers.⁷⁸ The history and heritage of the UAE is not mono-cultural (the focus of the next chapters), but it has been sanitized as such. Stephenson notes that this has limited heritage building in tourism.

Emphasizing a more culturally focused tourism agenda could help to socially sustain and ground local communities (and identities) threatened by rapid urbanization and Westernization. However, one noted dilemma relates to the complexity of defining and deconstructing indigenous forms of ethnicity and identity (Stephenson, 2014:723).

This is why reverting to the sanitized heritage provided by the early British films has been the safe path in the UAE tourism films—it’s clean and generic. But the road is not smooth. Like Sheikh Maktoum did in taking the Bastaki away from Sharjah, between the Emirates there exists a not-so-quiet rivalry that has played into tourism films and heritage. Each emirate has its own department of tourism, all reverting to the same sanitized heritage set up by the British— but without letting go of superlatives, luxury and fun as part of the identity.

⁷⁷ Dubai Tourism site, accessed July 28, 2019 <https://dubaiculture.gov.ae/en/Live-Our-Heritage/Pages/Al-Fahidi-Historical-Neighbourhood.aspx>

⁷⁸ For more detailed account of the role of Ajami in the development of the Gulf, Nelida Fuccaro’s history of Bahrain transposes to the story of the future UAE: *Mapping the Transnational Community: Persians and the Space of the City in Bahrain, c. 1869-1937* (Cambridge,2009)

Seven States of Tourism

This section analyzes the tourism videos of the different Emirates to look at how the UAE sells its heritage and how that effects the collective memory of the UAE. In doing so, this section also works as an overview to the seven Emirates. The analysis is after the description of each Emirate and their tourism films.

Dubai

With 3.32 million people, Dubai is the most populous Emirate. It has been ruled by the Al Maktoum family since its founding in 1833 by 800 tribal members along the Dubai Creek. It was a quiet fishing and pearling port until the 1930s when it began developing into the major trading port of the region. Despite the efforts of portraying it as monoculture, according to the Dubai government's own estimates, the population of Dubai in 1933 was 20,000 people, a quarter of whom were expats, indicating its long time as a multinational society. (www.dubai.ae)

After 2008's near financial collapse, Dubai's Department of Tourism and Culture (DTC) didn't limit hyper-reality when it released its first online tourism video with both an 11-minute and a 4.5 -minute version. But it did give its first ode to an existence of heritage in the opening of the video. Called "Vibrant Dubai," both the long and short versions open with a thumping manufactured classical music that repeats throughout. We open with a shot of the sky and clouds and the words, as text, "The alchemy of the sea and desert begins here." Thus, it connects the heritage to the sea, not just the Orientalist desert, for the first time. In the four-minute video, after a shot of the city from the sky, we get 10 seconds for heritage in four shots: A close up of a horse, a horse running through the desert, a close up of men doing the *ayala* (cane dance) and a shot of preteen girls in traditional dresses doing

the hair dance, all images found in the orientalist black and white films of the petro dollars era. Then the video reverts to expected Dubai luxury— including in the first minute, four shots of Emiratis taking part in the luxury, along with attractive, white Europeans/North Americans, who continue basking in Dubai’s fun and luxury through to the end of the video. The Emirati shots, in soft focus, include a couple eating together at a restaurant, a child running in slowed down motion into the open arms of her mother, a family of four walking through the airport, and a close up of a woman smelling perfume.

There are no non-European tourists, no expats, no mosques in the video.⁷⁹ The 11-minute video differs only in that it adds more Europeans having fun at the luxury attractions and a medium shot of two Emirati women having coffee together.

The above-mentioned video was launched in 2010, hinting at a local population in the midst of all the hyperrealism. And as the financial crisis remained on everyone’s mind and the Arab Spring started, Dubai began in October 2010 to work on a much publicized new “Definitely Dubai” campaign. *Campaign Magazine*, a trade magazine dedicated to advertising in the UAE, described the campaign as “The brand identity, created in-house, aims to show Dubai's culture alongside the country as a cosmopolitan holiday destination.” (Campaign, 2010). The video for the campaign, made in partnership with European-run, Dubai-based Eclipse Media, a production house, was released in 2011. In 2013, it was named Best Film in the World by the International Committee of Tourism Film Festivals at the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber in Vienna, outperforming more than 1,400 other tourism films. (*Gulf News*, 2013)

⁷⁹ DTCM Vibrant Dubai 2010 video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYJ0TU_4qD0

Dubai's heritage gets one minute and 37 seconds at the beginning of Definitely Dubai's 8 min 45 second video, cramming almost all the heritage symbols that were defined for the UAE in the early petro documentaries plus highlighting the defunct pearl industry and the connection to the sea that had been missing in the petro documentaries.⁸⁰ The video starts with a sand dune, followed by a young Emirati man camping in the desert, Oryx running wild, a fisherman contemplating the sea, an Emirati boy playing with a miniature dhow in the sea, a real dhow in the water, a pearl in an oyster shell. Then we see many Emiratis enjoying the life in the old traditional neighborhoods—or at least the illusion of neighborhoods, but in reality, it is all filmed in Bastakiya, which seems to be the beginning and end of all heritage sets in Dubai. We see an Emirati man taking photos of Bastikiya, as if gazing at his own heritage, like a tourist, Arab boys running through the alleys laughing, a young Emirati woman painting in Bastikiya (the area is promoted as a gathering spot for international artists by Dubai Tourism), girls running through the alleys tossing rose petals, men doing the cane dance and the young girls doing the hair dance. Local heritage and identity are then forgotten for the rest of the video, reverting to another montage of the hypermodernity and luxury, including one more shot of Emiratis, two women and two men, walking around the lobby of a modern business center, and cane and hair dancers greeting a cruise ship. The video was broken into smaller versions by themes, and “heritage” is one of the themed videos, resulting in a 32-second video mostly of the Bastikiya shots.⁸¹ Heritage and hyper-modernism live separately in these videos, not overlapping, although Bastikiya might be considered hyper-reality heritage.

⁸⁰ To see full Definitely Dubai 2012 video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRQVmn9yBbk&t=35s>

⁸¹ To see Definitely Dubai 2012 heritage video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_BqjElXqUAg

Summary of Heritage Visuals in Tourism Videos: Sand dunes, desert landscape, Oryx, horse, fisherman, dhows, pearls, spacious desert, old neighborhood, cane dance, hair dance, kandoura and abaya

Sharjah

Sharjah is the third largest Emirate, with a population of 1.17 million living in 2,590 square kilometers (UAE government). Dubai flows into Sharjah via a notorious traffic jam that has become part of Sharjah's identity since the 1980s. While stuck in the traffic jam, fewer of the cars one will observe are the luxury models found in Dubai and Abu Dhabi and the buildings on both sides will need repair, at least on the outside. Built in the 1970s to 1990s, these three-to four-story buildings include street level small shops with neon signs selling housewares, groceries and clothing. While this is not recognized as living heritage, in reality this is what all the city centers of the UAE looked like before they were replaced with sleeker towers in the late 1990s. It is similar to Dubai neighborhoods like Satwa, now inhabited by predominately middle class and lower income South Asian communities—unseen by tourists, as it doesn't fit into the sanitized UAE heritage and identity.

This living heritage pales in comparison to the heritage Sharjah has created. Once one leaves behind the traffic jam, he/she will come across one of the most elaborate heritage re-creations in the UAE. According to the Shurooq (Sharjah Investment and Development Authority), the governmental organization in charge of the project:

“Heart of Sharjah is the largest historical preservation and restoration project in the region. Planned over a 15-year period, to be completed by 2025, it seeks to revitalize the heritage district as a vibrant cultural destination by unraveling a glorious past - restoring historical buildings, constructing new structures following traditional

Sharjah architecture and transforming them into hotels, restaurants, cafes, art galleries and markets, where the current generations and the future generations can experience Sharjah's cultural and social fabric” (Heart of Sharjah, 2020)

Much heritage has already been reconstructed in the area hosting the Sharjah Cultural Foundation. This is where you’ll find the most artistic initiatives in the country, including the Sharjah Biennale, which promotes Arab artists.

Until the arrival of the Bastikiya tradesmen to Dubai, Sharjah was the most advanced of the Emirates during the time of the Trucial States: It was Britain’s administrative headquarters and home of the region’s first airport. Sharjah has been ruled by the Al Qassimi family since the early 1700s. Since 2009, the ruler, Sheikh Sultan bin Mohamed Al Qassimi, his daughter, Sheikha Hoor, and his wife, Sheikha Juwaher have invested in museum and heritage creation and promoted Arab contemporary art.⁸² Almost incongruously, Sharjah is the only emirate that does not allow drinking, even in hotels. Internationally, ruling family member Sultan Al Qassimi is particularly known for being an avid art collector, and art has become Sharjah’s moniker. The Sharjah Art and Heritage District includes a heritage museum, several art museums, restored courtyard houses, coral stone enclosures and recreated “old” Souq Saqr (Falcon Souq). The Sharjah Art Foundation, founded by Sheikha Hoor Al Qassimi in 2009, is the anchor, running across three new public squares: Al Mureijah Square, Calligraphy Square and Arts Square. It hosts numerous events, most notably the Sharjah Biennale. Sharjah’s work in the arts has been remarkable, but how much the heritage recreations speak of any actual heritage remains unclear. For

⁸² Much has been written about the family’s commitment to art. Here is an example from Art News: <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/sheikha-hoor-al-qasimi-shaping-art-2020s-1202675910/>

now, it is essentially Sharjah's version of Bastikiya, which is not surprising as that is where the Bastaki first landed.

As of this writing, Sharjah's most recent tourism video was made in 2015.⁸³ Despite Sharjah's commitment to heritage, heritage and culture don't dominate the video, although identity is there through more images of Emiratis than you see in the Dubai videos, and the videos place local heritage ahead and separate from luxury. While Sharjah does not position itself as a luxury brand destination, the six-minute video, edited to generic music, follows, like Dubai, a montage of images of fun: dune bashing, desert camping, Ferris wheel rides, kayaking, romantic walks. It also includes six shots of the Sharjah Mosque, although this seems more to highlight lavish architecture rather than culture and religion, as we don't see people coming in or out of the mosques or have any images of prayers. The video also gives a lot of time to the staid Sharjah Heritage Museum, with its Arabian tropes, and we see Europeans and Emiratis enjoying it in several shots. This video even includes a young East Asian couple that we see more than once. In fact, it has an element of narrative film structure, missing in the mentioned Dubai videos, in that it builds up around a series of characters, intercut throughout the video –the Asian couple, a perfect white Western family, a group of young, outdoorsy Western men and a sweet, elderly Emirati man. Unlike the Dubai videos, the foreigners interact with Emiratis—an Emirati man greets the Asian couple near a garden, a young Emirati man waves at a young tourist boy on an imitation dhow ride, a family arriving at their camping spot is greeted by a friendly older Emirati who pours them some tea, an Emirati family enjoys the Ferris wheel and the museum along with the tourists, an older Emirati chats with the Asian couple, smiles at the woman as she decides what to

⁸³ To see Sharjah Tourism video 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efkf81LZfjY>

buy in the souq, an Emirati man helps a little Western boy surf a dune, back in the tent the cheery, older Emirati and a younger Emirati man show Western kids how to hold falcons. Emiratis in this video are welcoming visitors, something we do not see in Dubai, adding in the heritage trope of Arab hospitality that we will discuss shortly.

We do not see Emiratis with camels—but there is a shot of camels on the road by themselves and a little scene of the young Western men trying to get the camels to obey them. Towards the end of the video, we see a close up of a young Emirati man that zooms out to show him go to his young son as other Emirati men and women stroll along the corniche (seaside) at night, proof of who populates this landscape, although that is negated by several closing shots of foreigners enjoying the Corniche at night. The Emiratis and the tourists are enjoying the same landscape, just separately. The rare interactions are when an Emirati needs to show a tourist a heritage trope, but for the most part, the tourists find the tropes on their own. (Figure 15)

Summary of Heritage Visuals in Tourism Video: mosques, sand dunes, souq, old neighborhood, tent, falcon, camels, *kandoura* and *abaya*

Ras Al Khaimah

Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah are both ruled by branches of the Al Qassimi family, but they split into two in 1910, after decades of interfamily fighting for control. Ras Al Khaimah, which means “Head of the Tent” in Arabic because of its pointed shape, is known locally as RAK. It is the largest of what are called the Northern Emirates, the emirates in the north defined geographically but also known collectively as having less prosperous economic circumstances than Dubai and Abu Dhabi and to a lesser degree, Sharjah. RAK has an estimated population of 300,000 in a space of 1,684 square kilometers. It has no oil

or gas revenue, and like many of the smaller Emirates derives considerable income from 8,600 free zone licenses. (UAE government, 2019). Surrounded by mountains, it is also the most fertile region of the UAE, with men selling vegetables from the side of the road being a unique site for this primarily desert country. It is also home of the country's three largest cement factories and Julphar, the MENA region's largest pharmaceutical manufacturer. Julphar is an ancient former port city adjacent to present day RAK. Indeed, RAK's bucolic feel belies a prosperous past. For more than 1,000 years, Julphar was one of the largest cities on the southern Gulf and an important part of the glory days of Gulf seafaring and trade routes during the Abbasid period from the 10th to the 15th century, including being the home for some time of one of the great Arab navigators and writers, Ahmed ibn Majid, born in 1432. But the glory began to fade in 1498, when Portugal's Vasco da Gama arrived in the Gulf and captured Julphar. The Portuguese held onto Julphar for the next 100 years, followed by the Persians for another 100 years. But in 1750, the tribe from Sharjah expelled the Persians and have been the rulers ever since, including during the 150 years of British dominated administration. (Di Cardi, 2016)⁸⁴

The extra time spent in discussing RAK's history is relevant to heritage making today. RAK would wait two months before joining the other six emirates who formed the Union in 1971. As stated earlier, the most iconic image of the Union was made in 1971, the raising of the national flag by rulers of the seven Emirates. But the ruler of RAK had to be placed in the image later, as he was not there.⁸⁵ It is also the area in which the most political conflict has been manifested locally and within the federal system, particularly after 2010,

⁸⁴ For more detailed information about Julphar, please see De Cardi, B. (1976). Ras al Khaimah: Further archaeological discoveries. *Antiquity*, 50(199-200), 216-222.

⁸⁵ For more on RAK's late entry into the UAE, please see "RAK Ruler Recalls the Day the Emirates Became Severn," *The National*, February 25, 2012.

when, as mentioned earlier, there was an attempted coup within the ruling family that led to the federal government focusing more finances on the Northern Emirates.

RAK is also the home of *Jazereet al Hamra* (the Red Island), a town abandoned in the 1960s by the Al Zaabi tribe and believed by most Emiratis to be haunted by the *djinn* (evil spirits),⁸⁶ who would not like to be disturbed. As my students have stressed over the years, many Emiratis will not enter *Jazareet al Hamra* for this reason, although it is a major source of storytelling about the past. Thus, it is also perhaps the most “authentic” heritage site in the country, in that its coral homes lay in undisturbed ruins with no filter for the heritage story by the government for visitors willing to roam among them.

With a rapidly growing number of beach resort hotels (eight as of 2020) and the opening in 2018 of the world’s largest zipline, tourism has become increasingly important to RAK’s economy. In 2016, the Ras al Khaimah Tourism Authority introduced their first online video, a 30-second spot featuring aerial shots of the sea and landscape, a little European girl laughing in a pool, a blond woman hiking up the mountains, two little European girls going down a waterslide and a young Emirati woman looking off in the distance.⁸⁷ In 2018, a more sophisticated one-minute video was released with the hashtag #iFoundRak. Using a narrator, it tells the story of one Western backpacker, a 30-something white male, taking photos with his SLR camera, as he visits mountain sites, the souq, shares a cup of coffee with an Emirati, and we assume from his POV, sees young, good looking Westerners enjoying four-wheel driving, jumping on sand dunes, dancing on a modern road devoid of anything but camels, taking on the zipline, while Western children enjoy the

⁸⁶ The belief in djinn is very strong in the UAE, and exorcism are often used to get rid of what in Western medicine would be diagnosed as mental illnesses. For more, see Weber, Alan (2012)

⁸⁷ RAK Tourism Authority Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnMDnSJUVwM>

beach and sea creatures. There is one shot of a Western boy taking a bow and arrow class, joined by a young Emirati woman. The narrator says, “I was seeking adventure beyond the limits of my imagination...I found it, all of it, in Ras Al Khaimah.”⁸⁸ (Figure 16)

Summary of Heritage Visuals in Tourism Videos: souq, coffee, sand dunes, camels,

kandoura and *abaya*

Um Al Quwain

Um al Quwain, the least populated of the emirates, has just under 50,000 people in 720 square kilometers (UAE government, 2019). It is also the most sparsely built up, with huge swathes of pristine beaches that attract expat surfers from the other Emirates, as well as Russian tourists enjoying the relatively cheaper 3-star beach hotels and Dreamland Aqua Park, which boasts it is the country’s largest waterpark (Dreamland website, 2020). Um Al Quwain has no oil, gas or other natural resources, but in Arabic the name Um Al Quwain means “the mother of two powers,” with speculation that it has to do with the shape of the land or its once fertile date farms and sea power—and a more glorious past. It sits next to the former city of Ed-Dur. Greek descriptions written in 60-75 AD list exports from Ed-Dur as pearls, indigo, clothing, wine, gold and slaves, and Roman pottery remains found there today indicate it was a major trade point connecting the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean traders (Rutten, 2007). Almost forgotten in UAE media today, Um al Quwain received a bit of international attention in 2012, when French archeologists discovered the world’s oldest natural pearl at what is believed to have been a burial site, but this news was dwarfed in 2019 by the discovery of the world’s largest natural pearl in Abu Dhabi. Perhaps playing on

⁸⁸ I Found RAK Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WGDMxvuWp4>

that brief pearl claim, in 2017, Um Al Quwain Tourism Department created its first online video with slogan, “The UAE’s Hidden Gem.”⁸⁹ The four-minute video mostly features European/white expats enjoy the beach and water sports, including the UAE’s largest waterpark. For five seconds, there are images of older Emirati weavers, based at the Um Al Quwain Museum, with a close up of a UAE flag being woven on a Sadu loom (Bedouin weaving pattern) and for two seconds, there is a shot of four young Emirati men sitting cross-legged in the desert with no context. The only other humans in these films are Indian chefs and Filipino servers, hinting at an expat community more than any other Emirate’s video does. Shots from the museum of ancient pottery do nothing to ground us in place, nor do the shots of generic sandwiches and French fries and concluding shots of Westerners enjoying a cheesy Karaoke night that feels stuck in a 1990s-time warp. While Um Al Quwain is also selling luxury, it is in reality the only Emirate without a five-star hotel, giving the video that feeling of being in the UAE in the early 1990s or before.

Summary of Heritage Visuals in Tourism Video: Sadu weaving, desert

Ajman

Ajman, the smallest emirate (pop 373,000 in 260 square kilometers), is known to expats for its inexpensive liquor warehouse. Fishing has always been its primary source of income, with 250 licensed fishermen operating their boats from its harbor. (UAE government, 2019). In 2012, the Ajman ruler, Sheikh Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi, decreed the opening of the Ajman Tourism Development Department. Since then, it has become the home of four 5-star luxury beach hotels. While it has not built heritage

⁸⁹ Um Al Quwain Tourism Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2hZmGkzoQs>

attractions, the former home of the ruler, an 18th century fort, has been restored as the Ajman Museum in the town center, with a renovated outdoor souq catered to tourists. In 2016, Ajman released its first online tourism video.⁹⁰ It's six minutes long, a montage with canned Arabia music. It starts out with aerial shots of the small city, focusing on the hospitality of the Ajman people helping out a white European family: the man has a great business meeting with an Emirati man, the wife has an animated conversation with an Emirati woman in shop in the souq, the family enjoys golf and the luxury hotel and a ride from friendly Emirati men. Three minutes into the video, we see birds over the water and Oryx galloping in a compound, the only nod to a UAE trope. Then it reverts back to the European family enjoying the luxury hotel and the beach and mountains. It ends with the slogan "Sincerely Emirati." The one-minute version of the video starts with a sunrise over sand dunes, the Ajman Museum and a mosque and then shows the young Western brother and sister running on the beach with an Emirati boy, laughing, an older Emirati man opening the museum doors for unseen visitors, showing the European boy around (after the Emirati boy taught him how to do the traditional cane dance.) Then suddenly the European father is looking up at the free trade zone building, doing business with an Emirati, playing golf and then ending the day having an Emirati man serve his family coffee in a tent, another Emirati lead a camel the family is riding, and having a romantic dinner with his wife. As the sun sets, the European family runs along the beach carefree and happy as we dissolve to an aerial shot of the city over the slogan "Sincerely Emirati."⁹¹ (Figure 17)

⁹⁰ Ajman Tourism Video (six minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQ1aq1LOLsw>

⁹¹ Ajman tourist video (one minute) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7QK4_S0GpU

Summary of Heritage Visuals in Tourism Videos: Sand dune, souq, Oryx, cane dance, coffee, tent, camel, mosque

Fujairah

Surrounded by sea and mountains and the only Emirate on the east coast along the Gulf of Oman, Fujairah is approximately 1,456 square kilometers and has a population of 202,607 people, 64,000 of whom are Emirati, over 25%, a very large percentage for the UAE. A major crossing point for oil tankers, it is the UAE's only direct access to the Indian Ocean and the UAE government states that "it operates a multipurpose port that offers access to major shipping routes of the world making it home to the world's largest livestock shipping companies." (UAE government, 2019)

In 1952, Britain signed an agreement with Fujairah, as the UK needed concessions to explore for oil making it the last emirate to join the Trucial States. Minimal oil has been found, and the emirate, which still has active waterfalls, relies primarily on fishing, agriculture and being a port city for oil tankers. It also boasts several luxury resorts and easy access to Oman. It is also the site of Al Bidyah Mosque, the oldest still-operating mosque in the country, built in 1446 with mud and bricks, as well the excavation site of Al Bidyah Fort, which dates back to somewhere between 1450 to 1650, when the Portuguese were here. Fujairah is the only place in the UAE where you will find a rather unexpected sport—bullfighting, and that is also shown in the video.²²The Fujairah Museum and restored Fujairah Fort, built in 1670, are part of Fujairah Heritage Village, which includes reconstructed houses meant to depict how Emiratis used to live.

²² While some believe the bullfighting is a legacy of the Portuguese, others say that it existed in the region prior to the Portuguese. But within the UAE, it is only practiced in Fujairah area. For more detail on this, see De Man A. (2018) *Portuguese Heritage in the UAE: Authenticity in Archaeology and Tourism*.

Fujairah Tourism and Antiquities Authority's only tourism video to date was made in 2015. The video was shot mainly in the Fujairah Heritage Village, a manufactured set of some undefinable time period. Thus, the video relies on many of the UAE tropes of heritage easily available in the heritage village – an Emirati man camping in the desert, a close-up of a falcon, women doing Sadu weaving and frying *legmat* (a beloved donut ball dunked in date syrup that appears at most special occasions), the cane dance. It also gives a great deal of time to its rather mundane heritage museum and images of the Bidyah Mosque. But it includes two things that make its heritage distinguishable from the other videos: waterfalls, bullfighting, female drummers, and the male sword dance. While less slick and with lower production value than the other countries videos, it offers some connection to the past, including Portuguese heritage, being the only emirate with a physical building from that time. Yet it still manages to give half its 5 minutes and 13 seconds to show many happy Europeans enjoying the beach and resorts and mountain views.⁹³

Summary of Heritage Visuals in Tourism Video: Desert, camping/tent, weaving, falcon, *legmat* (food), cane dance, mosque, bullfighting, male sword dance, mosque, *kandoura* and *abaya*

Analysis of the Tourism Films

The predominant images in these films are of sun and sand and luxury, with hyper-reality being the most dominant form of UAE identity on display. But heritage is increasingly counterbalancing the hyper-reality if we see how the tourism films have developed over the decade from 2008 to 2018. Heritage and Emirati identity still play a relatively minor role, but heritage has worked its way into all the videos since Dubai's first

⁹³ Fujairah Tourism Video 2015: <http://www.fujairahtourism.ae/>

heritage-free videos in 2008. However, it is a vague, sanitized heritage in which little has been created beyond that provided by BP and other British entities. If we look at the heritage tropes in these tourism films, they rely on what was given to the Trucial States by the petro and other British documentaries: falcons, camels, sand dunes, clothing, mosques, hair dance, cane dance. A limited number of new elements have been added since the British petro films, most notably the sea heritage in Dubai's videos, which the British showed no interest in promoting, even though access to safe seas was the initial motivation for Britain forming the Trucial States but not valuable for selling them as an exotic Arabia when the oil was discovered. The Sadu weaving also wasn't shown in the petro documentaries but appears in several of these videos. Sadu weaving, a ubiquitous heritage festival undertaking, is made to look "authentic" in the tourism videos, hiding the assembly line of the women dressed up in burqas weaving for tourists at the various heritage festivals/villages. It also hides a narrative in which much of this type of work would have actually been done by slaves or servants, a history that is not part of the tourism heritage package. Additionally, the weaving likely wasn't shown in the petro documentaries as slavery would have given a negative side to the romantic, untamed desert. Sadu weaving was also a very domestic, not nomadic, activity and didn't fit the British narrative of the rootless Bedouin.⁹⁴

The heritage tropes on display in these videos exist in a vague, undefined era called "Emirati heritage," in which there is little time or space for individuality of each Emirate. Even though each emirate is funding its own campaign, each Emirate is trying to be the

⁹⁴ In discussing the taboo subject of slavery, Islam Hassan argues that to acknowledge the missing of blood with slaves would dilute the notion of tribal Arab purity and freed slaves don't challenge the national heritage narrative in order to not damage their place in society. (Hassan, Sites of Pluralism, 2019: 75).

most “Emirati” by embracing as many of these tropes as possible. But these are tropes without heritage stories, without conflict that makes a story interesting, without grounding aside from having originated from some lost Arabian sands of time before oil.

Additionally, the multi-layered heritage of this land is quite limited in these films, much like the petro documentaries. Um Al Quwain, whose biggest claim to fame is a pearl, doesn’t use the sea as a heritage source in its video. Ajman’s fishing remains its most important industry, and yet we don’t see the fishermen in the video. Meanwhile, what distinguishes RAK from Dubai, for example, is that it has mountains, which really defined the heritage of the people here—these mountains gave water, caves for raising bees, and places to graze livestock, and plant food.²⁵ Yet mountains barely make an appearance in the video. Fujairah does add in the bullfighting, giving it a unique spin, but like RAK, its Portuguese heritage remains unspoken, although shown, as well as its Persian links. Being Emirati in these tourism videos means no individuality nor layers of heritage within each emirate.

Welcoming Clothing

The most consistent thread that runs through all these videos is the local clothing. It is as if dressing people up as Emirati is enough to create a collective identity for the UAE, even though it is likely that many of the Emiratis in these videos are non-Emirati actors, as these types of jobs are not at all in keeping with the salaries, status and working conditions of the rentier system. In the case of women, there is also the added complication of public photography, which is still an uncomfortable situation for many Emiratis. Yet the clothing has become the most necessary part of the heritage and identity mise-en-scene. The

²⁵ The mountains also isolated the mountain people and they had their own language called Shehi. The Al Shehi family still preserves the language, but only minimally and there is no government support to keep it.

kandoura and *abaya* serve as tourist attractions that visitors can secretly capture on their mobile phones, adding a mystique to the tourist gaze. Only the Um Al Quwain video doesn't offer any token Emiratis in national dress. But in keeping with *neoglobalism*, the videos separate Emiratis from others, including the missing non-white expat population in all these videos. These videos create a pure, sanitized world, unsullied by multiculturalism, even among tourists, who are strikingly white and attractive. Only in the Sharjah video do we see an East Asian couple amongst the white tourists. Surely this is out of respect to the increasing number of Chinese tourists that come to the country, now numbered at one million people a year (Gulf News, 2018). But the Chinese would be able to identify with the seemingly wealthy white people in the other videos without being included themselves, as whiteness is also a preferred quality in Chinese society, in which "a white complex was highly valued, as Chinese poetry has shown many times." (Dikotter, 1992:8)

A few Emiratis are also sprinkled in the Emirati tourist videos, but rarely interacting with them. And when they do, it is to be hospitable. This is the trope of Arabian hospitality, also part of many of the British documentaries and an Orientalist cliché. In the Sharjah video and Ajman video, we see Emiratis welcoming people. Potential tourists wouldn't know that these would not be real encounters with Emiratis. Such servile mixing barely exists, as we will explore further in Chapter Four. But Slak Valek and Williams discovered that Emirati citizens want to be known more for their culture and heritage and consider a key part of their cultural heritage to be "hospitality." Emiratis in the study perceived that their highest attribute is "friendly people" This shows that Emiratis highly rate their heritage of hospitality. (Slak Valek & Russell, 2018:156)

What is Emirati then becomes the clothing people are wearing and a perception of hospitality. In actuality, when one arrives at recreated heritage sites in the UAE today, he/she is greeted by Emiratis at the ticket counters who are trained to be warm and friendly, but that doesn't mean mixing—nor doing menial tasks like opening doors and serving coffee, as shown in the videos. After 10 years of observing public interactions between Emiratis and tourists, I believe a more realistic depiction of life in the UAE is at the end of the Sharjah video, where the expats enjoy the corniche one evening, then disappear and are replaced by Emiratis enjoying the corniche. Same space, different population. The space is shared with tourists but separately at different times, continuing in the monolithic, sanitized heritage.

The Guides

Having a main character to guide you through the landscape adds a story element to a tourism video, and you see the beginnings of that in the RAK video. If we look at the RAK video, we are seeing the country not through the POV of a native but through that of another tourist, a good-looking blond tourist, and his gaze is not on any Emiratis, except one brief shot of an Emirati woman. But the handsome European character taking us through RAK is just discovering it himself, as #ifoundRAK implies. The video in fact follows a colonial path—the “discovery” of a place is made by the white man. It is as if the tourist gaze is telling us what RAK is, with a mediating tourist figure telling us what is worth seeing, which does not include much heritage beyond the tropes of the first guides, the early British filmmakers, now being revealed to us decades later, also like a new discovery. It is essentially a modern version of the amateur colonial filmmaking Zimmerman describes, including the sneaking shots of natives, shots that “evoke exotic contrasts to home” and

“panoramas that evoke the gap between the maker and subject.” It’s not the hospitality-loving Emiratis asking you to see their country. It’s a foreigner, specifically one not so different than the early colonial filmmakers. We are led through the landscape by others, it is being enjoyed by others, and it features no Emiratis, hospitable or otherwise.

In contrast, we can compare this campaign to popular campaigns in Europe in which a character welcomes and guides tourists through his/her country, breaking stereotypes and tropes, rather than encouraging them. For example, the Netherlands had the “Original Cool” campaign in 2013, a series of tourism videos in which an actor welcomes people to the Netherlands by actually taking the country’s heritage tropes of wooden shoes, windmills and cheese and telling us that these are just surface elements, and we need to see how the citizens really look at these heritage souvenirs.⁹⁶ In another notable campaign, “The Great Escape” from Visit Norway, a young New Zealand couple is lured from crowded Paris to welcoming Norway, where a local couple takes them through Oslo, highlighting its multiculturalism because of its recent immigration boom.⁹⁷ The Oslo video uses multiculturalism as a draw to the city, as opposed to the UAE, whose multicultural heritage is buried in its videos.

The UAE’s tourism videos assume that tourists come to destinations to see themselves, not the UAE population in all its diversity, certainly not its 85% non-nationals, many of whom have been part of the fabric of the country for generations.

The Indian Guide

The tourism videos discussed so far have rather minimal narratives, but there is a guide that would change that trajectory. The UAE’s approach to identity in the tourism

⁹⁶ Holland.com’s Original Cool video online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqEh0iFWlgs>

⁹⁷ Visit Norway “Great Escape” video online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reaB-rstpv>

videos we have looked at so far has promoted Emiratis as mono-cultural, as token tourist attractions. But even amongst tourists, the tourism videos promote each nationality (or race) to itself, as if other nationalities or ethnicities exist as sprinkles, as if tourists, like much of the expat population, will not have to worry about sharing their time and space in the UAE with other nationalities and races.

While not having an official colonial past, the UAE does cater to such a past in featuring primarily white (very white) people in its tourism videos, as if all that exists in the world are attractive white people and occasional welcoming Emiratis. But the UAE's largest number of tourists don't come from Great Britain but rather from a country with which it has an even longer history, particularly with trade: India. Although the two countries have different heritages, the UAE and India share intangible heritage such as religion, food and marriage practices.⁹⁸ In 2018, more than two million Indians visited the UAE, not to mention that Indians account for the largest expat group in the country, making up 27% of UAE population (United Nations, 2019). Bollywood has also filmed in the UAE, and as further proof of the connection, the UAE is home to the world's first Bollywood Theme Park, which opened in 2016.

While Western media focus has been on South Asian laborers in the UAE and whether they are being treated humanely or not, the country has a large middle-class Indian population and is the second home of many wealthy Indians, including A-list Bollywood stars like Anil Kapoor, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Abhishek Bachchan and Shilpa Shetty.

⁹⁸ India is the world's second largest national Muslim population, Indians were the main trading partners/merchants during the pearling era and the connection along trade routes has been so strong that Emiratis consider biryani to be a local dish.

It is also the favorite city of arguably the most famous movie star in the world, Shah Rukh Khan, who made *Happy New Year* (2014) in Dubai, a Bollywood buddy film that featured the biggest stars of India trying to win a contest at the Palm Atlantis Dubai, competing against many other nations. Artistically, it is a nearly unwatchable film, but it is a rare film that does feature Dubai as a multinational playground. This cannot be said about Khan's tourism videos for Dubai, #BeMyGuest, which have been wildly successful on social media—but primarily feature Indians, keeping with the theme of all groups to themselves.

In December 2016, Dubai Tourism unveiled #BeMyGuest, with Khan as the brand ambassador, and the videos have been Dubai's most successful tourism films to date. The first video had 12.4 million views on YouTube as of September 13, 2019. It was also the winner in the Tourism Destination category at the 2017 International Tourism Film Festival held in Riga, Latvia. There have been two other #BeMyGuest campaigns since then. The first #BeMyGuest begins with a hooded Khan walking through the Souq Jumeirah, a tourist souq, telling us “This is my Dubai.”

Capitalizing on his fame and catering to wealthy Indians, the video features Khan surprising Indians enjoying the good life —parachuting, jogging at the seaside, playing volleyball, shopping, and dining out. In the background, we can glimpse a couple of white Westerners who seem to have accidentally fallen into frame. The video only has one shot of Emiratis, two young women smiling with amusement as Khan surprises two Indian women in the midst of shoe shopping at an upscale store. This shot is almost gratuitous, as if to say, “Look, the Emiratis enjoy watching us have fun here” —and somewhat ironic, as it's as if the tourist gaze is that of the Emiratis in their own country. It actually plays into the Emirati fears of being overtaken by foreigners, as discussed earlier, as they do seem in this shot as

the outsiders peeking in on the Indians at home in the mall. It also plays into keeping Emiratis separate. Khan is a megastar to Emiratis, as well as the entire Gulf, and yet we never see him surprise any Emiratis, as if Indians are the only relevant people on the landscape, much like the white Europeans (and anyone who can identify with them) are in the other tourism videos.⁹⁹ (Figure 18)

In fact, the videos give ownership of the city to a foreigner. As Khan wanders through Dubai he starts out by telling us, “I know these colors. I know this energy, this spirit, this vibe. I know these people. This is my Dubai. Come, follow me. Be my guest.” The 2017 and 2018 versions of the series also start out with him saying the same thing, but they are built around different narratives. These are the first tourism films that develop a narrative, albeit around tourists, not Emiratis: The 2017 version plays into the UAE’s airports now being the major hub for travel from India to Europe and the US. It includes Indians arriving in Dubai for marriage proposals, anniversary celebrations and a chance to compete in football. For a young Indian boy at a football match, Khan surprises him on the field and says, “Come, let me make you feel at home,” as if he is a native son. It is all modern and sleek, with no heritage markers. It’s as if Dubai is a new playground for wealthy Indians, rather than a place with a long connection to India, place to which much of its history and heritage is linked.¹⁰⁰

The 2018 video had over 18.5 million views seven months after its release online in January, 2019.¹⁰¹ Unlike the others, it offers some attempt at giving Dubai a past and a

⁹⁹ #BeMyGuest 2016 film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bqW7AAnuRg&t=54s>

¹⁰⁰ #BeMyGuest film 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vg8bc6jGINo>

¹⁰¹ To see full “Be My Guest” film 2019: <https://www.visitdubai.com/en/discover/shah-rukh-khan-in-dubai>

sense of a diverse local population. Told in six approximately 1.5-minute episodes, it is an Orientalist tale, in which a beautiful woman of undefined nationality gives Khan a box, telling him to find the three missing coins from the clues he is given, and he will discover his “gift from Dubai.” His encounters include meeting an Emirati woman (well, a woman with an Indian accent wearing an *abaya*), a French woman, and a Levant male. It is also the first tourism video that features an expat who is very much a part of the heritage of the modern UAE: The South Asian taxi driver. Today, this does feel like a piece of fading heritage, as so many of the South Asian taxi drivers have been replaced with less costly drivers from Africa, a situation that is not only about money, as we will discuss in Chapter Three. In this series, Dubai also contains Emiratis –two as clue givers and another three women scattered among several females that mob him with their mobile phones to take his photo. This happens at Souq Jumeirah, an Orientalist tourist hub in which seeing an Emirati shopping is actually very rare, but this can be forgiven just for showing Emiratis engaged with the rest of the population. The video ends with a middle-aged Emirati man (or an actor playing an Emirati) who reveals to Khan the “gift from Dubai”: that he is invited to be a guest. Thus, ownership of the city reverts to an Emirati man, who can offer the gift of hospitality. This shows an evolution in Dubai over the decade of 2008 to 2018. The early films had no Emiratis, no heritage tropes, not even the hospitality trope Emiratis pride themselves on. But in the post financial crisis world, the videos began to include the sanitized heritage of the petro documentaries and then with the latest Khan video, an inclusion of Emiratis without camels and falcons by their side. The video says Emiratis exist, this is their land, and many can share it with them, just separately. Khan tells the Emirati character who reveals to him the last secret in his treasure hunt that he “saw Dubai

like I've never seen it before, like I belong." The Emirati replies, "and you do." As do the mostly South Asian people who appear in the video. This is the hospitality trope, and one that in an Orientalist tale, hides the life of many South Asians who do live in UAE, work here and are always reminded that when their visa finishes, they are no longer welcome—unless they come with money or Shah Rukh Khan.¹⁰² But is the beginning of creating a heritage that is more multilayered, if still sanitized and still relying on Orientalism. It is also the beginning of trying to create a narrative around heritage. This has not been easy for the UAE, without a narrative of struggle for freedom or of great battles. That doesn't mean it hasn't had battles—there has been plenty of recorded tribal fighting and rebellion even within the ruling families and whispered stories of such up until today—but those are stories that upset the notion of a monocultural, eternally peaceful society. But story can come from finding a natural enemy, which Abu Dhabi did.¹⁰³

What to Do with No Battles: The Abu Dhabi Solution

For Abu Dhabi, the pressure of heritage creation is the most urgent among the emirates because of its economic role and role as the federal capital. Across the UAE, old forts have been rebuilt as national heritage landmarks and tourist attractions for consumption by visitors and citizens, most notably Qasr Al Hosn in Abu Dhabi, which reopened to public as a museum after 10 years of reconstruction in 2017.

Qasr al Hosn is a first sign of creating a documented heritage narrative that predates oil and even pearls, one that doesn't rely on Sheikh Zayed as the only significant historical

¹⁰² While you won't find them in the luxury malls, unless they are cleaning them, all the South Asian workers and shopkeepers I did oral histories with in 2018/19 said they are happy here—because they make good money and they like the law and order. They were smart enough to know they should never say anything negative, but they also were sincere about being glad for living in the UAE.

¹⁰³ Davidson and Heard-Bey, mentioned earlier, both write extensively on historical tribal fights, which often continued to be violent into nationhood.

figure. As an example, one of the earliest images of Abu Dhabi was taken at Qasr Al Hosn in 1904 by German explorer Hermann Burchardt and it is on display there now. The photo includes Sheikh Zayed the First, who ruled Abu Dhabi from 1855 until his death in 1909, sitting outside with visitors. We are told in text about his greatness but with no specifics and with a poem written from that time by Ali bin Saeed Al Ba'dhabe about his general greatness. Sheikh Shakhbout, the ruler during the discovery of oil, who was much ridiculed at the time by outsiders for his miserliness, as mentioned earlier, is now portrayed as a wise leader throughout the fort. But there is no discussion of the conflict that surrounded him.

Many countries' heritage sites/tourist attractions are the result of the conflict the country has endured. For example, the Gettysburg battle field in the US, the view from the Acropolis in Greece, or the slave castles in Ghana. Abu Dhabi has also found a source of culturally safe conflict around which to build the heritage narrative of a people who have struggled to get where they are. Qasr Al Hosn has been the site of a fort since the 1700s, but none of the original exists—not because of wars, but because of the harshness of the climate. It is the very reason Qasr Al Hosn has had to be redone and rebuilt so many times: the environment.

Heritage building has developed in Abu Dhabi's videos not as a tale of man against human enemies, as is the traditional post-colonial narrative, but man's victory over his brutal landscape. Tourism films produced by the Abu Dhabi government's Department of Culture and Tourism (DCT) have kept up with the speed of UAE heritage industry developments, today showing Emiratis as victors over their landscape, in a place that is not only new. It's a narrative that also keeps the Arab Bedouin myth alive.

“The story is centuries deep and endless like the desert...” we are told by the American narrator in DCT’s 2016 video. The video features images of male and female Emiratis loving life in the desert and on the seas that they have mastered. These are young, hip Emiratis, part of the modern skyline, comfortable with the modern but their unique “Emiratiness” is indicated by their *abayas* and *kandouras* and their ability to turn the pristine but harsh landscape into a play land for dune buggies and jet skis to be used by others.¹⁰⁴

Abu Dhabi’s tourism videos have carried this theme of man over nature since their genesis in earnest in 2010, at the time of Halima’s bus tour. These videos are still largely produced by international ad agencies with offices in the UAE, including one from the ad agency TBWA, which won the Cannes Lions Award in 2010. In this video, the British narrator tells us over a visual of an Emirati man collecting dates, another man watering his date tree amidst a vast desert landscape, “Nature rewards the inquisitive mind in a land where the impossible is defined. And ignored.” That is when the spectacular Sheikh Zayed Mosque, the country’s largest mosque, is revealed, daunting to look at from the point of view of the young Western boy looking up at it. It is the rare occasion of a white person looking up to, in awe of, something made by humans in the UAE.¹⁰⁵

In 2014, the slogan was “Revive the Past. Envision the Future. And Find Yourself Somewhere In Between.” The video promotes heritage courtesy of the British colonial tropes —falcons, horses, the male cane dance, camel trekking and weaving featuring Emiratis in soft, romantic lighting. Then there are images of malls, Ferrari World, fine dining, romantic beach strolling and the kayaking of Western people, with a less diffused

¹⁰⁴ Visit Abu Dhabi Video, Your Extraordinary Story <https://vimeo.com/274671929>

¹⁰⁵ TBWA Abu Dhabi Tourism Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NixfwhpDJUU>

lighting.¹⁰⁶ It is as if the gentle and beautiful past belongs only to people dressed a certain way, and the fun belongs to Westerners, together on the same land but separate, as seen in the videos from the other emirates.

But unlike the other videos, Abu Dhabi is a place with a heritage of hard work in this series. It breaks with the *laissez-faire* rentier system stereotype lampooned in *Arabian Days* or the carefree Bedouin of *Farewell, Arabia*. For example, the government-run Visit Abu Dhabi (www.visitabudhabi.ae) runs a series about citizens called “Your Extraordinary Story,” and the first story launched features Fatima al Hameli, the country’s first female camel auctioneer, who proudly tells us that her nickname is “Ambassador of Tradition.” The video (two-minute and four-minute versions) is online but also could be seen on most Etihad flights in late 2018. The video shows Fatima, in her *burqa* and *abaya*, filming the modern skyline with her mobile phone, nostalgically recalling a past when they were all Bedouin, she herself an appreciative tourist of the nation’s modernity. She talks about everyone being Bedouins before, how hard people had to work in the past, how people might not know that—and she quotes Sheikh Zayed’s ubiquitous, “He who does not know his past cannot make the best of his present and future, for it is from the past that we learn,” while trekking through majestic sand dunes, walking a camel on the beach, feeding sheep and talking about being the first female to auction camels.¹⁰⁷(Figure 19)

Yet this video also feeds into Western assumption of the region, as depicted in Hollywood films discussed earlier: the repressed Arab woman, but one who is saved from that, as if repression can be solved through “firsts.” It also sells short the heritage of women in this region, women who conquered the landscape, who were often hunters, the ones who

¹⁰⁶ 2014 Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17tVhX0AdAg>

¹⁰⁷ Fatima Al Hameli Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D74nS6UBD7E>

took products to market and the sole caretakers when men were out to sea for fishing and pearling. These are untapped heritage stories that were actually written down by the British, but those stories don't fit into the Western narrative, and consequently not with the UAE narrative. For example, one of the first amateur filmmakers mentioned earlier, Eleanor Isabel Wilkie-Dalyell, who wrote in her guide to etiquette in 1937 about visiting the female majlis of the ruling family of Dubai:

...the daughter (Sheikha Mosa) was a great camel rider and had beaten her uncle a few days before in a race. His rather acid comment had been 'She goes too fast.'

(p.27)¹⁰⁸

Imagine the richness of that story as a film, rather than Al Hameli's story, in which she thanks the ruling patriarchy for her freedom to pursue her dreams. But state feminism aside, the Abu Dhabi tourism films show that there is no threat of calling a city like Abu Dhabi a place stuck in the dark ages, the land time forgot, a land playing catch-up with the wealth embedded in its landscape, a place with no heritage. The Abu Dhabi tourism films speak of a shining collective memory grounded in conquering the land and implies that was done by desert Bedouins, to the erasure of other identities, including that of the other Emirates.

Conclusion: Where Did the United in The United Arab Emirates Go?

Tourism films from 2008 to 2018 have evolved from montages of hyper-reality to more sophisticated stories that artfully sanitize the heritage of the UAE, giving it a vague Arabesque identity with a certain set of tropes to counterbalance the hyper-reality. But even the story of Emiratis conquering a forgotten time and space is a borrowed story, given to the UAE by the British and still fostered by the UAE government as national identity and

¹⁰⁸ 27/21 Etiquette (1937) is housed at the Qatar Digital Archives

heritage, as it maintains the Bedouin myth, the pure Arab blood line of the ruling families as being the source of authority.

However, while each Emirate makes its own videos, taking ownership of the tropes offered by the colonial British and the modern luxury and fantasy play land, the videos do not acknowledge being part of a bigger place. Dubai's slogan is even, "Definitely Dubai," implying that what we are seeing can be found nowhere else, is unique to it. Only one of the poorer Emirates, Ajman, does make itself part of a bigger whole. But its slogan, "Sincerely Emirati," seems to imply that the others are not as Emirati. It also does so without letting us know what is actually sincerely Emirati about the fancy hotels and desert and *kandoura* and *abaya*, as all the videos offer the heritage of seemingly defining "Emirati" by the old British tropes applicable to all the Gulf states.

The UAE is geographically small, measuring 82,800 square kilometers. It is about twice the size of the Netherlands, but is mostly uninhabited: It includes 6,000 square kilometers of outlying islands and huge swaths of the Rub al Khali Desert, known as the Empty Quarter, because its inhospitable climate causes it to be very sparsely populated. Despite the relative smallness of the nation, it does not have a unified tourism project, with each emirate promoting similar tropes as the other emirates without referencing each other. These films provide relatively the same images of heritage and identity and modernity for each emirate. If each emirate did not put its name on videos, one would probably have a hard time telling which one is which, aside from the very iconic modern buildings of Dubai and Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Abu Dhabi. In a country so actively engaged in nation building and heritage building, on the surface and from a business perspective, a tourism film that includes all the emirates seems like a missed opportunity.

Even the USA, a much vaster country in size and population and with a far more fragmented physical and cultural landscape, has a unified tourism campaign with general videos that capture the USA as a whole with themes like friendliness and hospitality being used against the vast landscape. Within it, each state has unique videos, targeted to different audiences. Called “United Stories,”¹⁰⁹ the videos highlight the multi-cultural aspect of the USA, with its diverse citizens welcoming viewers. We also see heritage sites, like the Statue of Liberty and Mount Rushmore, making appearances. But the heritage of the land seems to be the diversity of the people. Even the US’s dark history, the story of the Native Americans, is told as a positive film about Native Americans preserving their heritage through art and music. The film includes non-Native Americans supporting them through joining in the creation of the art and music, and we the viewer are invited to these Native American locations to see their heritage for ourselves.

Additionally, the UAE videos don’t say anything that the other Gulf countries cannot say. For example, all the heritage tropes found in the UAE videos are also used in tourism videos for Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and especially Qatar, which has also tapped into the luxury tourism market. After all, they were all under the same British thumb.

But perhaps a unified tourism campaign isn’t a missed opportunity so much as an avoided opportunity. What is missing from the tourism narrative in these videos is substance, i.e. memory, and memory is local, not something that can be identified by national borders, especially borders only put up in 1971. Fatema Al Hameli, the camel auctioneer, shared her memories in the tourism video featuring her, but her memories fit

¹⁰⁹ Visit the USA films: <https://www.visittheusa.com/>
or <https://www.youtube.com/user/YourDiscoverAmerica/videos>

conveniently into the tropes of UAE narrative begun under the Trucial States. The majority of other citizens stories would not so easily fall into them, let alone the stories of long-standing residents. These videos lack a historical context, an engaging heritage narrative, because while there is abundant heritage here, like there is everywhere, the country is burying heritage in exchange for the heritage façade being portrayed in these videos, as they are in the videos of the other Gulf countries.

Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi, however, as individual nations do have one message, one identity in their tourism videos, perhaps because they are not a federation with beneath the surface rivalries. They also have tribal, ethnic and religious divides within, but not doubled through a federal system that has clear lines of governmental division.

None of the other six emirates could survive without the benevolence of Abu Dhabi and its vast wealth, which provides for the rentier economy across the UAE. Abu Dhabi is also the emirate that was the first and is the strongest in promoting heritage, and it is the seat of the federal government. Thus, the onus is on Abu Dhabi to create this united tourism campaign. But I would argue Abu Dhabi has not gone with a united tourism campaign as it would diminish the sanitized heritage it needs –and one in which it can remain in control, one as perfect as a pressed *kandoura*.

In reality, to look back at the history and heritage of the UAE, Abu Dhabi has had the quieter, perhaps one could say less rich past—its battles have been largely internal among tribes. It really only became engaged with the outside world with pearling. The other emirates, however, have stories about their once vibrant ports, mountainous landscapes, ghost stories and robust cultural influences. This would upset the political balance of the country, the one that gives Abu Dhabi primary control, perceived not only because it is the

source of most of the wealth and seat of the federal government but because it is also the home of Sheikh Zayed.

Earlier I concluded the survey of the early British government films with *These are the Trucial States*. That film, unlike the other films, included a narrative of “united,” even though the seven emirates were still the Trucial States with no public plans for unification. Todd Reisz offers a useful analysis of the script by Peter Tripp, asserting it “reveals a splicing together of scenes from various places along the coast to create a shared and continuous landscape.” It is as if Tripp was already imagining a future nation.

Through the merging of distant places and activities, Tripp’s script rendered an idealized version of the spatial reality, reducing the distances between and differences among the various sheikhdoms to a compact and simple place: namely, a single port city, Dubai, surrounded and supported by hinterlands. (Reisz, 2017:306)

Although Tripp saw the other emirates diminished in importance by Dubai, his film did give each emirate a unique identity, like Sharjah as the regional capital for the British government, RAK as an agricultural hub. In 1958, Tripp saw the center as Dubai, and probably, one can speculate, given Dubai’s business and trade endeavors since, if it had not been for oil, that would have come to be. But today that role belongs to Abu Dhabi, which is perhaps not willing to take the risk of promoting the other emirates. Perhaps that is why it is also convenient that the UAE does not have enough skilled labor in marketing and video production to be creating these films—they are being made by outside companies, American and European, hired by the government tourism agencies. The outside companies don’t have exposure to more than the existing heritage tropes and so they perpetuate them.

It is also worth noting that the UAE wants to welcome back the British they once wanted to see leave, who still live here as expats but under the thumb of Emiratis now, not the other way around. They want them and the rest of the world to come back as tourists, spend money and leave without disturbing the perceived traditional Emirati identity and heritage, which the British ironically themselves helped create. Now new generations of Britons and other Westerners visit with a tourist gaze that their grandparents helped create in their early tourism films, and which Hollywood has expanded upon since. Meanwhile, Indian tourists, who were important to the sea, pearl and trade heritage of the region are attracted with videos that do not show any connection to their own heritage, much as it was unacknowledged in the British films.

If one does come looking for authenticity among the hyperreal, then they will find it mostly in their spotting of Emiratis in national dress. But those very Emiratis are not only tourist attractions, they also are tourists in their own country, watching others in these tourism videos having fun, but perhaps more importantly being tourists to their own heritage, learning what it is supposed to be through the commodification of heritage tropes in these films. It is a heritage without the memories of their own grandmothers or anyone else. But alternative heritage explorations cause friction in the ruling bargain. Local memory and national memory are not the same. With all the hyperreal, there is enough to distract tourists from asking for more for now, at least the tourists who come to see the tallest building in the world and the longest zipline.

Of more concern are the nationals being asked to continue perpetuating this sanitized heritage to the deletion of their own community's heritage. This is most relevant for the younger generations, as they are the ones who are facing the consequences of a threatened

rentier system and political and human rights issues sweeping the Muslim and Arab worlds. They are also the ones coming across these tourism videos online, watching in a *post cinema* world how others are being invited to see them. This asks the old heritage question, “What time is this place?” (Lynch, 1972) and “Whose space is this?” In the next chapter, I explore those questions through the UAE’s oldest visual media production, television, alongside its newest, social media.