

Rescripting Saudi Arabia

The Curation of a National Metaverse

Anna Klingmann

The Rebranding of Nations Through Virtualized Mega-zones

In recent decades, the management and marketing of brands for nations, regions, and cities have garnered much attention from scholars and practitioners alike as tools to create soft power and help attract foreign investment, tourism, and skilled human capital.¹ As Kotler and Gertner argued nearly two decades ago, global competitiveness among countries revolves around attracting investment, business, residents, and visitors, increasing employment opportunities and exports.² Hence, the importance of branding for nations to actively manage their image has been widely acknowledged.³ In a climate of accelerated globalization and digitalization, nation branding has presented countries with an effective

1. Cheng Lu Wang, Dongjin Li, Bradley R. Barnes, and Jongseok Ahn. "Country Image, Product Image and Consumer Purchase Intention: Evidence from an Emerging Economy," *International Business Review* 21 no. 6 (2012): 1041–1051.
2. Philip Kotler and David Gertner, "Country as a Brand, Product and Beyond: A Place Marketing and Brand Management Perspective," *The Journal of Brand Management* 9, no. 4–5 (2002): 249–261. See also Andy W. Hao, Justin Paul, Sangeeta Trott, Chiquan Guo, and Heng-Hui Wu, "Two Decades of Research on Nation Branding: A Review and Future Research Agenda," *International Marketing Review* 38, no. 1, (2021): 46–69, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-01-2019-0028>.
3. Jiaxun He, Cheng Lu Wang, and Yi Wu, "Building the Connection between Nation and Commercial Brand: An Integrative Review and Future Research Directions," *International Marketing Review* 38, no.1, (2021): 19–35, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-11-2019-0268>. See also Keith Dinnie, T.C. Melewar, Kai-Uwe Seidenfuss, and Ghazali Musa, "Nation Branding and Integrated Marketing Communications: An ASEAN Perspective," *International Marketing Review* 27, no. 4 (2010): 388–403.

medium to streamline their image abroad, promote their products and resources, and acquire general notability on the global map.⁴ As Nye and Dinnie point out, nation branding has become an essential tool for developing and sustaining a nation's competitiveness.⁵ In contrast to place branding, which emphasizes the promotion of specific economic interests (export, tourism, or internal investment), nation branding focuses on the overall image of an entire country, encompassing cultural, economic, and political dimensions and how others perceive these.⁶ Consequently, Anholt defines nation branding as a strategic process of aligning a country's behaviors, actions, innovations, investments, and communications to achieve a strengthened competitive identity.⁷ Conversely, Fan observes that a nation's brand exists with or without any conscious efforts in nation branding, as each country exudes a specific image to its international audience, be it strong or weak, carrying both factual and affective information.⁸ Accordingly, Beerli and Martin define a nation's brand image as the sum of people's beliefs and impressions about a country,

4. Cornelia Zeineddine, "Employing Nation Branding in the Middle East: United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar," *Management & Marketing: Challenges for the Knowledge Society* 12, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1515/mmcks-2017-0013>.
5. Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 2, (2004): 255–270; Keith Dinnie, *Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice* (2nd Edition) (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2016).
6. Salah Hassan and Abeer Mahrous, "Nation Branding: The Strategic Imperative for Sustainable Market Competitiveness," *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences* 1, no. 2, (2019): 146–158, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHASS-08-2019-0025>. See also John A. Quelch and Katherine E. Jocz, "Positioning the Nation-State," *Place Branding* 1, no.1, (2004): 74–79.
7. Simon Anholt, *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities, and Regions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
8. Ying Fan, "Branding the Nation: What is Being Branded?," *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 12, no. 1 (2006): 5–14. See also Nicolas Papadopoulos and Louise Heslop, "Country Equity and Country Branding: Problems and Prospects," *Journal of Brand Management* 9 (2002): 294–314, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540079>.

including all stereotypes.⁹ As stated by Anholt and Fetscherin, a nation brand, therefore, comprises the total sum of all perceptions of a nation in stakeholders' minds covering political, economic, social, environmental, historical, and cultural aspects.¹⁰

During the last two decades, the strategic management of nation brands has become a critical tool for countries to confront existing negative stereotypes and to improve their economy by rescripting negative brand images that impair tourism, discourage favorable trade conditions and foreign investment, and engender unwillingness from other countries to cooperate in academic and scientific affairs.¹¹ By engaging in this process, nations seek to identify appropriate measures to bring their countries closer to a positive national image, actively increase their global awareness, and mitigate negative associations.¹² Consequently, nation branding is ultimately a political tool that strives to alter a nation's international perception, allowing it to compete more effectively in global markets.¹³

With the impact of significant environmental pressures and calls for conservation, nations are now increasingly forced to incorporate social responsibility agendas and sustainable development themes as part of their positioning.¹⁴ These paradigms are consistent with the expectations of affluent tourist- and ex-pat segments that demand exclusive desti-

9. Asunción Beerli and Josefa D. Martín, "Factors influencing Destination Image," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31, no. 3 (2004): 657–681.

10. Simon Anholt, "Anholt Nation Brands Index: How does the World see America," *Journal of Advertising Research* 45, no. 3 (2005): 296–304. See also Marc Fetscherin, "The Determinants and Measurement of a Country Brand: The Country Brand Strength Index," *International Marketing Review* 27, no. 4 (2010): 466–479.

11. Mark Donfried, "How Saudi Arabia is building a New National Brand," *Arab News*, January 13, 2018, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1224971>. See also Robert Govers and Frank Go, *Place Branding: Global, Virtual and Physical Identities, Constructed, Imagined and Experienced* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

12. Simon Anholt "Should Place Brands be Simple?," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 5, no. 2, (2009): 91–96. See also Mihalis Kavaratzis, "Place Branding: A Review of Trends and Conceptual Models," *The Marketing Review* 5, (2005): 329–342; and Mihalis Kavaratzis and Mary Jo Hatch, "The Dynamics of Place Brands: An Identity-Based Approach to Place Branding Theory," *Marketing Theory* 13, no. 1, (2013): 1–18.

13. He, Wang, and Wu, "Building the Connection."

14. Yuan Ren and Per Olof Berg, "Developing and Branding a Polycentric Mega-city: The Case of Shanghai," in *Branding Chinese Mega-Cities: Policies, Practices, and Positioning*, eds. Per Olof Berg and Emma Björner (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014).

nations that exude authenticity on multiple levels, preserve the environment, and “help the planet regenerate.”¹⁵ Repackaging places’ distinctiveness and cities’ historical and cultural authenticity for sophisticated consumers demands a scalar understanding of “branding” that stretches from crafted narratives to “places,” “regions,” and ultimately to “nations.”¹⁶ As Dinnie remarks, territories are produced not only materially and geographically but also in the social imagination through changing ideologies and cultural representation. Far from being politically neutral, nation branding from this perspective reflects a highly complex endeavor that forms the social imagination through the rescripting of memories, stories, and places, embracing both elite and parochial cultural dispositions as well as political narratives and representations of belonging and exclusion.¹⁷ The urban imaginary, in this context, not only serves to produce new fictional spaces but is also strategically deployed to effect change in the public perception of urban reality. In this context, the rewriting of history through crafting enticing narratives, spectacular events, and themed destinations recoding the physical realm all play pivotal roles in manipulating a country’s image and experience. However, as Castell argues, messages and symbols will not survive without their presence in the media. Accordingly, virtual image-creation and social media have become highly influential tools in restructuring geographies and gaining political and economic leverage by prioritizing visual and experiential appeal over substance, the haves over the have-nots, and the virtual over the real.¹⁸ Rather than serving as mere backdrops, urban spaces and places have become virtualized national territories in which the management of brand perception through tailored, placed-based, and monitored experiences has become ever more prevalent. While we might not

15. Hassan and Mahrous, “Nation Branding.”

16. Dinnie, *Nation Branding, Concepts, Issues, Practice*.

17. Ahmad Bonakdar and Ivonne Audirac, “City Branding and the Link to Urban Planning: Theories, Practices, and Challenges,” *Journal of Planning Literature* 35, no. 2 (May 2020): 147–160, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412219878879>.

18. Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

typically think of physical spaces as virtual media, the curation of personalized environments has become a powerful tool of nation branding, encouraging certain behaviors, activities, and economies while excluding others—editing many of the circumstantial frictions of “real” urbanity.

Because of their sheer scale and functional complexity, urban mega-projects in the form of large-scale zones are frequently at the core of countries’ re-imagining and marketing efforts. As spectacular signifiers, these zones serve a critical role as change agents that strategically reshape territory to mirror specific socio-political agendas, perspectives on history, imagined societies, and assumptions of power. Their design and compositions typically involve sophisticated formulas reproduced by multinational firms (e.g., CRTKL, SOM, AECOM, WATG) and marketed as “exclusive” lifestyle products across different cultural contexts. Governmental agencies, together with private developers, marketing consulting firms, independent advisors, destination management organizations, and public relations involved in branding territory, heavily invest in what place branders call “experience masterplanning,”¹⁹ involving a full complement of residential, resort, educational, commercial, and leisure programs that echo the aspirations of a demanding breed of global cosmopolitans. Driven by the goal of creating “never before seen” destinations, these branded territories typically offer “curated lifestyle experiences” that offer “a wide range of luxury accommodations” while “preserving cultural heritage and enhancing the region’s exquisite natural beauty and diverse ecosystem” for the next-generation travelers who prize responsible travel and meaningful connections. Devoid of unwelcomed distractions, these quasi-utopian territories align political, economic, social, environmental, historical, and cultural objectives with new intended behaviors, actions, innovations, investments, and communications. Just like any data-driven virtual environment that is interactive, immersive, and three-dimensional (think *Roblox*), these highly controlled spaces make certain things possible and other things impossible. Consequently, it is not the declared content but rather the content management

19. Malcolm Allan, “Experience Masterplanning,” *City Nation Place*, February 9, 2017, <https://www.citynationplace.com/experience-masterplanning>.

that dictates the game's rules in the designer milieu of choreographed destinations and branded lifestyle districts. As Easterling contends, "While promoted as relaxed, open and free from inefficient state bureaucracy, the politics written into the zone's spaces and activities often diverges from the declared intent. It is usually an isomorphic exurban enclave that, exempt from the law, can easily banish the circumstances and protections common in richer, more complex forms of urbanity."²⁰ Meta-zones are therefore of particular interest to authoritarian regimes and governmental leaders in emerging economies aiming to align their country's policies to global market demands by creating controlled virtualized worlds, each with its privatized access, membership, monetization rights, and formats of creative expression.²¹

Themed Cities in the GCC

Many Middle Eastern countries, most notably in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), have applied national branding and place marketing strategies to diversify their economies and create positive urban imaginaries.²² No place embodies this phenomenon more than the city-state of Dubai, whose image and identity has undergone a rapid transformation to become the region's leading commercial and financial hub while building a world-class luxury tourism industry from almost nothing, albeit with the high cost of social disintegration.²³ Dubai was also the first nation in the Middle East to employ spectacular mega-destinations, themed environments, and other iconic design forms that combine media, marketing, and architecture into one interlinked entity, where the boundaries between fictional narrative and "real" urban space have effectively merged.

20. Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (New York: Verso, 2014), 16.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Joao R. Freire, "Place Branding in the Middle East," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 8 (2012): 46–47, <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2011.35>.

23. Yasser Elsheshtawy, *Dubai: Behind an Urban Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203869703>.

From the late 1990s onwards, themed destinations have played a key role in repositioning Dubai's image from a backward fishing and trading town to a cosmopolitan, 21st century mass communication, logistics, and tourism hub. In the earlier days of the Dubai boom, malls brazenly seduced visitors with spectacular themes, a strategy initially copied from Las Vegas Casinos but now applied with great success first to lifestyle environments. Gradually the semantic programming of places expanded to encompass an endless collage of resorts, mixed-use destinations, and gated communities, such that its urban fabric has now expanded to an agglomeration of branded "city zones." Through the deployment of narratives, slogans, events, and visual symbols, these zones embrace a variety of themes as festival spaces (Dubai Festival City), leisure spaces (Dubailand), production spaces (Dubai Industrial City, Dubai Textile Village, and Dubai International City), sports activity spaces (Motor World, Dubai Sports City), destinations that evoke cultural and historical aspects (Alserkal Avenue, City of Arabia, Culture Village, Global Village), educational and knowledge spaces (Knowledge Village, Media City, Internet City, Dubai Silicon Oasis), and sustainable communities (Sustainable City). Futuristic designs (Burj al Arab, Museum of the Future) alternate with faux historicity in an uninterrupted flow, visible for example, in the arabesque destinations of Madinat Jumeirah, Wafi City Mall, Ibn Battuta Mall, Wild Wadi Water Park, and later in the reconstruction of Bastakiya, much of which had to be rebuilt from scratch to appease tourists looking for a sense of rootedness and local heritage. In parallel, Dubai has initiated dozens of iconic mega projects that have vied for the status of world-firsts.²⁴ This race to gigantism can be observed in the Palm Islands and "The World," which make up the largest artificial islands in the world, the largest artificial marina (Dubai Marina), and the tallest residential tower (the Princess Tower). Downtown Dubai, a massive mixed-use district, is anchored by Burj Khalifa, the tallest building globally, and Dubai Mall, the world's largest mall, both of which are facing the world's largest choreographed fountains. Packed together into one gigantic destination, "Downtown Dubai" makes an immediate and dramatic impression that

24. Samer Bagaeen, "Brand Dubai: The Instant City; or the Instantly Recognizable City," *International Planning Studies* 12, no. 2 (2007): 173–197.

confronts the visitor with a condensed image of Dubai. At close range, these emblems dissolve into a richly detailed experience-scape, animated by fictional elements and the meticulous recreation of historical and cultural settings, which offer a synergy of atmospheres connected by well-designed pedestrian spaces where people from all backgrounds can meet, socialize, and—despite Islam’s status as an official state religion—also enjoy a glass of wine.²⁵

The other Gulf States soon followed suit in adopting the Dubai model. Abu Dhabi, for example, gained much notoriety by constructing the Saadiyat Cultural District, which, among other cultural facilities, comprises five museums, including the Louvre Abu Dhabi, designed by star architect Jean Nouvel; the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, designed by Frank Gehry; and the Sheikh Zayed National Museum by Norman Foster who also designed Masdar City, a free zone for green energy enterprises. Doha, in contrast, reconstructed its entire center as a polished downtown in a faux historical setting (Souq Waqif) complemented by an array of iconic cultural and leisure destinations, which include the National Museum, designed by Jean Nouvel, an OMA-designed library; the Al Wakrah Stadium, designed by Zaha Hadid; the Pearl, a string of artificial islands; and Qatar Education City.

Rebranding Saudi Arabia

Due to its sheer size (2.15 million km² versus Dubai at 35 km² and Qatar at 11,571 km²) and politically conservative and, until recently, highly restricted social environment, Saudi Arabia has been slow to develop into a significant global player. While other states in the gulf positioned themselves as diversified global business hubs open to tourism and a mix of cultures, Saudi Arabia had remained a closed society, which first and foremost emphasized the preservation of Islamic traditions. While importing many Western brands and products, the Kingdom did not permit leisure tourism for a very long time. Because of severe religious

25. Anna Klingmann, “The Rise of Shopping Malls within the Framework of Gulf Capitalism,” in *World of Malls: Architectures of Consumption*, eds. Andres Lepik and Vera Simone Bader (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2016), 175–183.

restrictions, Saudi culture still lacks any diversity of religious expression, buildings, annual festivals, and public events. Until recently, cinema was banned, and single people were kept strictly segregated, while bars, music venues, theaters, and nightclubs did not exist. Hence, the nation's image—revered in many countries with a majority Muslim population as the birthplace of Islam—is to this day still tainted by a series of perceived negative stereotypes in the West, summarized by a trilogy of excessive wealth, abuse of women, and political and religious extremism. Further complicating the situation are the country's problems, such as freedom of the press, the war in Yemen, and human rights in general, which adversely affect the country's reputation in Western countries.

In the last five years, however, a young population of well-educated, technology-savvy Saudis has forced the government to re-evaluate its policies and make serious efforts to diversify its economy while loosening existing socio-cultural and religious restrictions.²⁶ To this effect, Saudi Arabia announced an economic blueprint titled "Saudi Vision 2030" in 2016, outlining how the country envisions transforming itself as a more open, tolerant, and progressive nation. Designed with the management consulting firms McKinsey and Boston Consulting Group, Vision 2030 is a developmental program that aims to clear the country of negative perceptions and reposition it as an economically, culturally, and socially reformist nation within the global community. Vision 2030's socio-economic reform program prominently affiliates with King Salman's son Mohammed bin Salman (or MBS), promoted to crown prince in 2017, and has branded him as a powerful forward-thinking ruler in Saudi Arabia and internationally. The plan essentially revolves around three core elements: developing a diversified and sustainable economy that moves away from dependency on the energy sector; shifting economic growth and prosperity from the public to the private sector; and creating the jobs needed for Saudi Arabia's booming population, where nearly 45 percent is under the age of twenty-five with nearly one-third without employ-

26. Turki Shoaib, "Place Branding in a Globalizing Middle East: New Cities in Saudi Arabia," (PhD. diss, Oxford Brookes University, 2017), https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/file/88098f91-21f6-46a7-9b7a-a271a34f8cd5/1/TurkiShoaib_PhD_Thesis_2017_RADAR.pdf.

ment.²⁷ Targeting a predominantly young population, the strategy, aside from economic objectives, also implies a degree of social liberalization with its embedded “Quality of Life Program.” The envisioned improvements include the enhancement of urban lifestyles and livability, most notably by creating an “ecosystem, which enables citizens’ active participation in cultural, leisure, and sports activities,” which had been conspicuously absent in the public realm.²⁸

Within this framework, themed meta-projects represent crucial change agents to attract a national and international tourist industry, domestic and international investment, and keep more of the money spent on entertainment within the country’s borders. From a nation branding perspective, the creation of spectacular destinations becomes a critical milestone in furthering Saudi Arabia’s international status and influence, promoting the country economically, culturally, and politically: economically by diversifying and extending its influence; culturally by transforming the nation from being a remote player of world culture into a creator of symbols of global consumer culture; and politically by helping the country to move from the world’s periphery to the world’s core. As part of the country’s rebranding process, the government’s socio-economic reforms strategically interlace with the construction of at least fifteen meta-zones which span the global themes of leisure, sustainability, technology, entertainment, culture, heritage, health, and wellbeing. Spread throughout the country’s different regions at strategic locations, these include themed, high-end resort areas, economic-free zones, environmental parks, heritage destinations, and technology-driven megacities. Like other significant initiatives of Vision 2030, all destinations are funded by the Public Investment Fund, which is among the most significant sovereign wealth funds globally founded to invest funds on behalf of the Government of Saudi Arabia.

27. Varun Godinho, “Two-thirds of Saudi Arabia’s Population is under the Age of 35,” *Gulf Business*, August 10, 2020, <https://gulfbusiness.com/two-thirds-of-saudi-arabias-population-is-under-the-age-of-35/>.

28. Jane Kinninmont, “Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia’s Social Contract: Austerity and Transformation,” *Chatham House: The Royal Institute of International Affairs* (July 2017): 1–44, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-07-20-vision-2030-saudi-kinninmont.pdf>.

Through their sheer scale, complex infrastructure, and sophisticated technology, these projects usher in a new era of territorial branding where customized lifestyle universes present immersive, three-dimensional, high-tech utopias within groomed ecological settings. In this respect, Saudi Arabia's metaverses portray the next iteration of "politically correct" subjective worlds and acknowledge that we are entering into a more substantive, virtualized geography than ever before, rendering Dubai a hedonic playground. The design of immersive worlds—guided by the notion that spaces and their multiple architectural, material, performative, and virtual agencies effectively condition "guests" and their behavior—has, of course, become a well-established practice.²⁹ Editing any form of freedom, unpredictability, and "real world" messiness in the name of our personal safety, theming, in this matter, has long transcended the notion of escapism, embracing globally engrained sententious ideologies that conjure notions of wellbeing and health, the greater good, and optimization of self, all under the umbrella of a perversely contorted commoditized version of sustainability.

Exclusive Ecological Enclaves

Aside from seeking to reform the lifestyle of its citizens to comply with neoliberalist values, Saudi Arabia is also fervently working on multiple top-down tourism strategies aspiring to turn the country into the next global destination. While Saudi Arabia has been a host for religious tourism for centuries in the form of pilgrimages to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, it has recently opened the country for leisure and cultural tourism through the construction of large-scale, enclavic resort-zones, each with its own airport, infrastructure, and exclusive access. As part of this mission, the crown prince declared vast territories, including coastlines, entire islands, and other attractive sites, as Special Economic Zones (SEZ), seeking to leverage the country's natural assets for high-end

29. See also Scott Lukas, "The Meanings of Themed and Immersive Spaces," in *A Reader in Themed and Immersive Spaces*, ed. Scott A. Lukas (Pittsburg: Carnegie Mellon Press, 2016), 3.

tourism while consolidating his power over large tracts of land. Created to attract affluent (primarily non-Muslim) tourists from the GCC, Europe, North America, China, Japan, and Russia, these territories will be regulated by an independent set of laws “in line with international standards.”

According to Healy and Jamal, enclave tourism refers to a type of tourism development that comprises concentrated geographic areas of tourist-oriented facilities and attractions removed from the surrounding environment by spatially or psychologically created boundaries.³⁰ From a geopolitical perspective, separating enclaves from their surrounding socio-cultural environments and regional economies can be understood as a form of human territoriality. While tourism portrays itself as a peaceful and benevolent sector “that brings people from different cultural backgrounds together and contributes to employment, poverty alleviation, and global sustainable development,”³¹ it also involves practices of dispossession and erasure, along with an incessant manipulation of territory. Established modification practices include eviction (removing communities and individuals from territories that they have previously occupied), enclosure (dispossessing people from access to material means of subsistence and resources), extraction (exploiting the natural environment by extracting resources), and erasure (rewriting pre-existing definitions of place, livelihood, identity, and history).³² By employing one or more of these practices, tourism enclaves become potent tools of border-making between “us and them,” affecting exclusive spaces and spaces of exclusion at the same time. As elaborated by Edensor, these “purified” spaces are carefully scripted, themed, and managed, ensuring that tourists enact prescribed protocols as “actors” in a scripted setting.³³ In the case of Saudi Arabia, a variety of scripting methods include the era-

30. Noel Healy and Tazim Jamal, “Enclave Tourism,” in *The Sage International Encyclopedia of Travel and Tourism*, ed. Linda L. Lowry (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2017), 418–419, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483368924.n160>.
31. Jarkko Saarinen and Sandra Wall-Reinius, “Enclaves in Tourism: Producing and Governing Exclusive Spaces for Tourism,” *Tourism Geographies* 21, no. 5 (2019): 739–748, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2019.1668051>.
32. Andreas Neef, “Tourism, Land Grabs and Displacement: A Study with Particular Focus on the Global South,” *Tourism Watch* (February 2019), https://www.tourismwatch.de/system/files/document/Neef_Tourism_Land_Grab_Study.pdf.
33. Tim Edensor, “Staging Tourism,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, no. 2 (2000), 322–344.

sure of cultural heritage in the form of “purged” futuristic settings (Mecca and Medina), themed recreations of cultural heritage as historicist destinations (Diriyah Gate and Al Ula), enclosed cognitive utopias (Neom and Qiddiya), and scenographic worlds of ecology (Amaala and the Red Sea Resort), created through the appropriation and enclosure of virgin land.

Luxury Islam: The Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina



Image 8.1. View of the Makkah Clock Royal Tower (A Fairmont Hotel), the Great Mosque, and the Kaaba. Photo: Faredah Al-Murahhem.

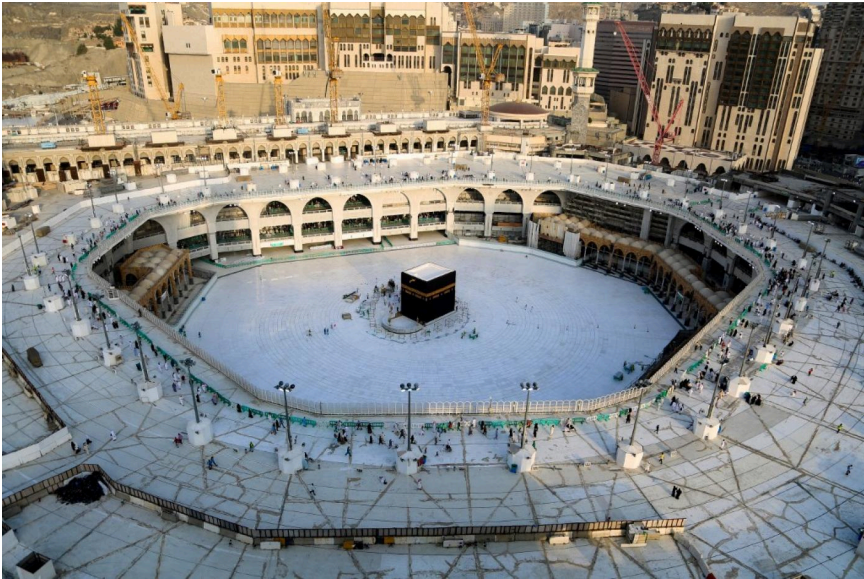


Image 8.2. Three-level pedestrian infrastructure encircling the Kaaba. Photo: Faredah Al-Murahhem.

Due to the centrality of Mecca and Medina in the Muslim world and the millions of pilgrims they attract, the two holy cities form a significant component of Saudi Arabia's national identity and tourism industry. Following the notion that these kinds of tourism spaces are separated from their surrounding environment by well-defined perimeters that isolate the enclave space from the surrounding socio-spatial environment,³⁴ both Mecca and Medina constitute large-scale territorial enclaves that are exclusively accessible to Muslim pilgrims. The control of these territories happens far beyond the city's actual territory via a series of patrolled checkpoints that prevent non-Muslims from entering Mecca. In addition, large-scale road signs on a highway to Mecca, for example, emphasize that one direction is for "Muslims only" while another is "obligatory for non-Muslims."

34. Jarkko Saarinen, "Enclavic Tourism Spaces: Territorialization and Bordering in Tourism Destination Development and Planning," *Tourism Planning and Development* 19, no. 3 (2017): 425–437.

In order to accommodate the growing number of people making the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina that is required at least once of all Muslims who can afford it, Saudi Arabia is in the midst of enormous expansion projects in the holy cities. Over the past two decades, as the number of pilgrims traveling to Mecca and Medina for the annual hajj ballooned from 1.2 million in 1997 to 2.9 million in 2018, the Saudi government launched a multibillion-dollar expansion and destruction project in both cities.³⁵ While Saudi officials argue that the expansions are necessary measures to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims, activists argue that the government's relentless demolitions are part of a campaign to purposely erase historical and religious sites in keeping with the Wahhabi doctrine. Wahhabism, the ultra-conservative branch of Islam that emerged in Saudi Arabia 250 years ago, has long regarded the veneration of historical monuments, especially those predating the Prophet Muhammad's life in the seventh century, as tantamount to idolatry advocating their neglect or outright destruction.³⁶ In the wake of this massive demolition drive, 98% of the old quarters of the holy cities, including historical mosques, tombs, mausoleums, monuments, and houses, have been bulldozed³⁷ to make way for a monolithic landscape of large-scale infrastructures, luxury hotels, shopping malls, and apartment blocks (see image 8.1). Demolition involves the ongoing expansion of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, whose successive expansion has taken over entire city areas with a capacity for 1.6 million people. Meanwhile, at Mecca's Al-Haram Mosque, where pilgrims gather to pray around the Kaaba, entire porticos that encircled the sacred cube of the Kaaba have been torn down for being in the path of construction. The Ajyad Fortress, a sprawling castle built by the Ottomans that once overlooked the Grand Mosque

35. Carla Power, "Saudi Arabia Bulldozes Over Its Heritage," *Time*, November 14, 2014, <https://time.com/3584585/saudi-arabia-bulldozes-over-its-heritage/>.

36. Edek Osser, "Why is Saudi Arabia Destroying the Cultural Heritage of Mecca and Medina?," *The Art Newspaper*, November 19, 2015, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2015/11/19/why-is-saudi-arabia-destroying-the-cultural-heritage-of-mecca-and-medina>. See also Mohammed Khaku, "Never-ending Destruction of Historical Sites in Mecca and Medina, Cradle of Islam," *Arab American News*, May 15, 2021, <https://www.arabamericannews.com/2021/05/15/never-ending-destruction-of-historical-sites-in-mecca-and-medina-cradle-of-islam/>.

37. Lorena Muñoz-Alonso, "Saudi Arabia Destroyed 98 Percent of Its Cultural Heritage," *ArtNet*, November 19, 2014, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/saudi-arabia-destroyed-98-percent-of-its-cultural-heritage-174029>.

from the crags of Mt. Bulbul south of the shrine, was demolished in its entirety to clear the area for the 15 billion-dollar construction project of the Makkah Clock Royal Tower, a postmodern mega-version of Big Ben, now the third-tallest building in the world.³⁸ Simultaneously, numerous historical sites affiliated with the life of Prophet Muhammad have been taken down and built over by mundane structures which include parking lots, a Hilton Hotel, and a Burger King. The house of the Prophet's wife, Khadija, is now the site of public lavatories, while a large McDonald's greets pilgrims just outside the gates of the Grand Mosque.³⁹ In their effort to create a streamlined infrastructure, planners have also leveled the city's varied topography that once was dotted with the homes of the Prophet Muhammad's acquaintances and friends. Hovering over one of Mecca's hills—once sprinkled with modest houses—thirty-nine towers of hotels and apartments are now reaching for the sky as part of the Jabal Omar megaproject.⁴⁰ As the skyscrapers perched above generic malls cast their eerie shadow over a city that once was, all that remains is the Kaaba, encircled by a multi-level steel structure for perambulating pilgrims, dwarfed by monolithic commercial complexes (see image 8.2). As Sami Angawi, a Saudi Arabian architect and social activist, commented a decade ago, "They are turning the holy sanctuary into a machine, a city with no identity, no heritage, no culture, and no natural environment."⁴¹ By relentlessly reshaping urban spaces according to Wahhabi doctrine and restricting regional specificities by erasing heterodox places of worship, the Saudi rulers demonstrate their exclusive control over these religious territories, turning Mecca and Medina into purged enclaves of a Saudi-Wahhabi luxury Islam.⁴² As the cultural critic Ziauddin Sadar comments: "The spiritual heart of Islam has become an ultramodern, mono-

38. AbdulRahman Al-Mana, "The Destruction of Mecca & Medina's Historic Landscapes," *Cities from Salt* (blog), October 3, 2019, <https://www.citiesfromsalt.com/blog/the-destruction-of-mecca-and-medinas-historic-landscapes>.

39. Mustafa Hameed, "The Destruction of Mecca: How Saudi Arabia's Construction Rampage is Threatening Islam's Holiest City," *Foreign Policy*, September 22, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/22/the-destruction-of-mecca-saudi-arabia-construction/>.

40. Jabal Omar, <https://jabalomar.com.sa/>.

41. Raya Jalabi, "After the Hajj: Mecca Residents Grow Hostile to Changes in the Holy City," *The Guardian*, September 14, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/sep/14/mecca-hajj-pilgrims-tourism>.

42. Stefan Maneval, "Mass Accommodation for the 'Guests of God': Changing Experiences of Hajj-Pilgrims in Jeddah," *Arab Urbanism*, www.araburbanism.com/magazine/hajj-pilgrims-jeddah.

lithic enclave, where difference is not tolerated, history has no meaning, and consumerism is paramount.”⁴³ The erasure of Meccan history has also had a tremendous impact on the experience of the pilgrimage (hajj) itself. The word “hajj” means effort, which implies traveling to Mecca often under challenging conditions, walking from one ritual site to another in strenuous weather conditions, and meeting people from different cultures and sects, soaking in the diverse history of Islam. Today, the hajj presents a highly monitored end-to-end experience where pilgrims follow a highly prescriptive trajectory, rarely encountering people of different cultures and ethnicities on their journey. Disciplined collective performances follow a rigid script around which rituals are organized, allowing little room for reflexivity or improvisation. Monitored through surveillance technology, participants generally remain typecast, occupying specified roles in a self-contained environment. While the hajj still allows millions of Muslims every year to experience the notion of equality before God, Sadar argues that the pilgrimage, drained of history and religious and cultural plurality, has been reduced to a mundane exercise in rituals and shopping, where pilgrims are encouraged to spend as much money as possible.⁴⁴ In the meantime, the architecture constructed to accommodate “God’s guests” in Mecca suggests that, on earth, inequality persists—and those in power, who own and lodge in five-star hotels, have no desire to change the status quo.

43. Ziauddin Sardar, “The Destruction of Mecca,” *New York Times*, September 30, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/01/opinion/the-destruction-of-mecca.html>

44. *Ibid.*

Diriyah Gate: History Rescripted



Image 8.3. Rendering showing the extent of the Diriyah Gate masterplan. Courtesy of DGDA (Diriyah Gate Development Authority).



Image 8.4. Impression of Najdi-style architecture at Diriyah Gate. Courtesy of DGDA (Diriyah Gate Development Authority).

In the meantime, Diriyah—Saudi Arabia’s ancient capital which comprises the landmark districts of Al Bujairi and At-Turaif, both significant landmarks of the first Saudi state—is aggressively expanding into a seven square kilometers “Cultural and Lifestyle Tourism Destination” that seeks to leverage the historical site’s national and international relevance (see image 8.3). At-Turaif was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2010 and is recognized as one of the world’s largest mud-brick cities, bearing witness to the Najdi architectural style, specific to the center of the Arabian Peninsula. For many decades this historical city was sealed off to the general public and lay in ruins, until 2010 when the government decided to renovate the area and preserve it according to UNESCO standards. Spearheaded by Jerry Inzerillo, a seasoned veteran in hospitality and tourism, the Diriyah Gate Authority (DGA) has since been escalating the historic site into a scripted historicist model city that seeks to amplify the site’s national and international relevance (see image 8.4).⁴⁵ As an exclusive destination, the project involves a predictable mix of luxury residences, lifestyle retail, and entertainment in a curated setting “that abides by the latest international and local sustainable standards, designed for 21st-century living,” targeting a cash-rich cosmopolitan clientele.

Launched by the crown prince four years ago “as the jewel of the Kingdom,” the project has gone from “mega” to “giga” both in budget and project area and will have the capacity to host seven million tourists upon the arrival of its completion.⁴⁶ Modeled on New Urbanist principles and historical architecture,⁴⁷ the project’s masterplan encapsulates a contemporized mega-medina, which references the high-density, low-rise medina quarters of older Arab cities, albeit without the buzzing, tight-knit, messy layering of religious and secular histories. At once nostalgic and futuristic, this vision positions the kingdom “at the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds, while also offering world-class entertainment

45. “Diriyah Gate Development Authority Starts Work on a Major Heritage Project,” *Arab News*, July 1, 2020, <https://arab.news/8g8e7>.

46. Frank Kane, “Frankly Speaking: Saudi Arabia Doubling Down on Diriyah Gate Project, says DGDA CEO,” *Arab News*, June 13, 2021, <https://arab.news/46naz>.

47. SNC LAVALIN, “Transforming Cultural Destinations in Saudi Arabia,” *SNC-Lavalin*, 2020, <https://www.snclavalin.com/en/projects/diriyah-transforming-cultural-destinations-in-saudi-arabia>.

options, sustainable living, at the cutting edge of a global, urbanized future.”⁴⁸ Recalling faux historicist environments such as Souq Waqif in Qatar or Celebration in the US, along with much larger iterations in China such as “Orange County,” “Vancouver Forest,” “Thames Town,” and “Venice Aquatic City,” many of Diriyah Gate’s buildings are predictively conceived as built metaphors. However, contrary to the above examples which rely on the copy-paste of postmodern pastiche guided by cultural displacement, a regionalist twist guides this project in which indigenous craft, labor, and materials seamlessly blend with imported western technology. Concepts like “authenticity” and “heritage” are emulated unselfconsciously as architects ponder the expression of regionally specific designs and ecological paradigms, imbuing the project with a holistic approach that emulates the human scale of the traditional city in the form of connected pedestrian-oriented architectural designs that are responsive to the local climate. For the myriad global practices commissioned to design and craft the symbols of this new destination, these various narratives are potent—indeed more inspiring than the everyday realities of the crumbling old towns, the banal malls, and the impoverished housing in the neighborhoods surrounding it.⁴⁹ Numerous international consultants work together to develop this mega-medina, weaving together contemporary abstraction with the region’s vernacular settlement patterns. Guided by a contemporary interpretation of regionalist urban principles, an array of public services—which include a curated mix of cultural institutions, entertainment venues, shops, sports facilities, and gardens—seamlessly connect to courtyards and arcades, creating an integrated walkable community in what tourists perceive as a harsh climate. Enlisting cultural heritage while envisioning a hypermodern infrastructure have proven effective tools for Saudi Arabia’s national rebranding. Together, these strategies have created an entirely new context in Diriyah in which an imaginary golden age of Arabia fuses with the promise of a technologically advanced ecological utopia. All infrastructures, including three kilometers of tunnels for roads and parking spaces,

48. Diriyah Gate Development Authority, “Development Overview,” 2021, <https://www.dgda.gov.sa/our-destinations/diriyah.aspx>.

49. See also Amale Andraos, “The Arab City,” *Places Journal* (May 2016), <https://doi.org/10.22269/160531>.

are constructed fifteen meters below ground to facilitate a picture-perfect staging.⁵⁰ Above ground, bike tracks, horse bridle paths, and pedestrian walkways will lead visitors from the medina, along “traditional” date farms, to the vast canyon-like Wadi Hanifa valley, which will be preserved as a large-scale ecological park.⁵¹ With its emphasis on regionalist architecture coupled with an ecological approach to landscaping, Diriyah Gate continues the legacy of urban signature projects in Riyadh, including the Diplomatic Quarter, Qasr Al Murabba, and Qasr Al Hukm, which have all successfully blended the historical with the contemporary. The conjoining of tradition and modernity demonstrates the government’s keen commitment to reconciling ancient values with technologically-driven innovations while crafting a region-specific cultural experience that reinforces local identity in an era of global spectaculars. The calculated revival of cultural practices and the imaging of a hypermodern future suggests the marriage of regional authenticity with enlightened statehood as Saudi Arabia is now the driver of futuristic visions purveyed by urbanists, developers, and architects.

Unsurprisingly, the Saudi rulers are seeking not just to blend the historical and contemporary; the identity they seek to construct is also exclusive and exclusionary. From the various billboards that surround the construction, which advertise “branded residences,” “exclusive boutique hotels,” “iconic lifestyle retail brands,” and “fine dining experiences,” it is evident that the DGA positions the Diriyah Gate district as a “premier destination” for luxury tourism and “select residential communities.” As part of this massive endeavor, the government expropriated many of the owners of historic palm groves and farms in the area to assemble large development parcels. Through the use of eminent domain, vast stretches of the surrounding heterogeneous fabric inhabited mostly by modest communities and guest workers were demolished in their entirety

50. Ranju Warriar, “Saudi’s DGDA inks Deal with NWC for Water Projects at Diriyah Gate,” *Construction Week*, November 29, 2020, <https://www.constructionweekonline.com/projects-and-tenders/269207-saudis-dgda-inks-deal-with-nwc-for-water-projects-at-diriyah-gate>.

51. See also Anna Klingmann, “Re-scripting Riyadh’s Historical Downtown as a Global Destination: A Sustainable Model?,” *Journal of Place Management and Development* 15, no. 2 (2022): 93–111, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-07-2020-0071>.

to choreograph a seamless world that evokes the longstanding dichotomy between an Arab progressive nationalism on the one side, and a conservative Islamic nationalism on the other, which demands nothing less than a political rescripting of history.

Neom: The Cognitive Creative Zone



Image 8.5. Diagram showing the envisioned cut of “The Line” from the Red Sea land inwards. Courtesy of Neom.com.

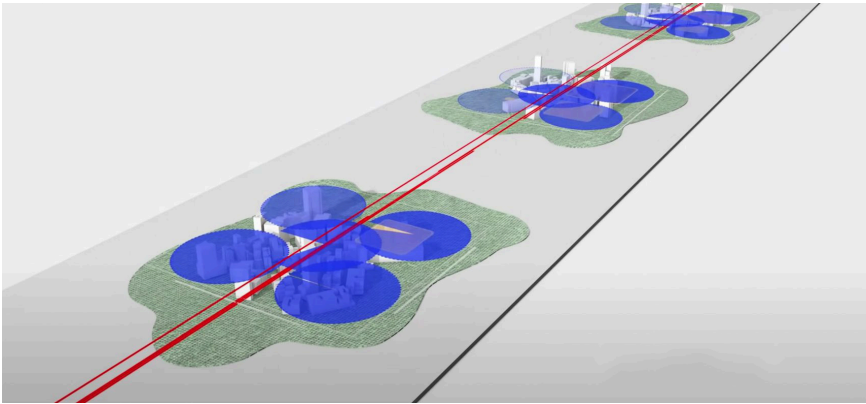


Image 8.6. Diagram showing connected high-density community pods surrounded by nature. Courtesy of Neom.com.

In 2017, the Saudi government announced the controversial meta-zone of “Neom,” which is arguably the most publicized project in Saudi Arabia covering 10,000 square miles, an area thirty-three times the size of New York. The name “Neom” is merged from the Greek prefix “Neo” (new) and the first letter of *Mustaqbal* (Arabic for future). Driven by the concept to create “the first fully cognitive city of the future,” complete with hyper-automation, creative entrepreneurship, and environmental initiatives, Neom is envisioned as a fully integrated conurbation comprising research and development campuses, tourist attractions, leisure and sports destinations, and housing for a population of more than one million inhabitants. Its target group comprises talented entrepreneurs, business leaders, and companies who gather here to develop and commercialize future technology systems and related enterprises.⁵² Stretching 460 kilometers along the Red Sea coastline, major sub-zone components so far include “Oxagon,” a floating, eight-sided city, set to be the largest fully automated floating industrial complex in the world and “The Line,” a hybridized future city/start-up zone, powered by “advanced human-machine fusion,” predictive intelligence, and robotics. Designed as a “start-up the size of a country,” the project aims at attracting only the “best talents,” offering them “technology with unmatched livability at its core.” As the website shows, the project aims to lead the country’s future in energy and livability, rebrand national identity, and, perhaps most importantly, reaffirm the Crown Prince’s power position, as he has aggressively pushed the country’s social liberalization policies. These include the abolition of the religious police, the promotion of public entertainment and entrepreneurship, the creation of public social spaces, and the inclusion of women in the workplace. Cinemas have opened, and women can now attend concerts and drive but are still imprisoned if they demand greater freedoms. More importantly, the Crown Prince has affirmed his position by rearranging the power balance through sweeping arrests among the elite. Neom is another chapter in this process, presented as the pioneering vision of exceptional leadership, which signifies

52. NEOM Company, “HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman announces The Line at Neom,” *PR Newswire*, January 1, 2021, <https://en.prnasia.com/releases/apac/hrh-prince-mohammed-bin-salman-announces-the-line-at-neom-305130.shtml>.

rerouting the Kingdom toward a knowledge economy, technology, tolerance, diversity, and liberalization. The creative class, or, as the Crown Prince calls them, the “dreamers,” are to constitute the core of—if not the whole society of—Neom. As the MBS stated during the launch event: “We try to work only with dreamers. This place is not the place for conventional people and companies. . . . Those who cannot dream should not negotiate with us and should not come to Neom. We only welcome dreamers who want to reach a new world.”⁵³

More recently, in 2021, the Crown Prince announced “The Line,” conceptualized as a 170-kilometer linear city of hyper-connected AI-enabled communities powered by 100% clean energy, reaching from the tip of Ras Gasabah on the Red Sea inward across the mountains towards the Altubaiq Natural Reserve (see image 8.5). Within this massive corridor, clusters of high-density communities, surrounded by nature, will replicate as needed, joined by a single ultra-high-speed transit line (see image 8.6). Pedestrian walkways will replace streets as AI-enabled micro-mobility services powered by a 100% renewable energy grid will render cars obsolete, while 95% of the land will be “natural.” The population of Neom will grow organically in sync with its automation and robotics developments, set to reduce labor-intensive manual tasks, which will, in turn, ensure the growth of a highly skilled labor force that will fill creative and strategic positions.⁵⁴ Following a simplistic vertical layering model that recalls Corbusier’s modernist utopias, the Line’s systems separate into three distinct infrastructure levels. A “pedestrian layer” defines the ground level and comprises radially organized community modules, each of which will accommodate 80,000 people. Compact mixed-use planning ensures that all services and access to nature are within a five-minute walking distance of the residences. The “service layer” below accommodates all necessary technologies, including last-mile logistics, to run the digital aspects of the city. Finally, the “spine layer” contains all transportation that will connect the urban communities at high speed. A vast tunnel accommodates driverless vehicles, ultra-high-speed transit,

53. Hend Aly, “Royal Dream: City Branding and Saudi Arabia’s NEOM,” *Middle East - Topics & Arguments* 12, no. 1 (2019): 99–109, <https://doi.org/10.17192/meta.2019.12.7937>.

54. “What is the Line?,” *NEOM*, <https://www.neom.com/en-us/regions/whatistheline>.

and next-generation freight operations, ensuring that people can get from one end of the city to the other in an unbelievably short time of only twenty minutes. Meanwhile, an “advanced technology platform” coordinates smart services throughout the community and delivers a “hyper-energy-efficient urban environment.” The city will run on its own operating system, called “Neos,” which will connect various data points and IoT devices to optimize services and energy use, ensuring that no power is wasted. Meanwhile, extensive data analytics will optimize traffic patterns, power demands, temperature, and air quality while buildings and services throughout the communities will be outfitted with “health indicators” that continually evaluate maintenance requirements. Whereas most smart cities today typically use 1% of available data, Neos seeks to extract 90% of the communities’ information, which, aside from objective metrics, also includes residents’ data. The ultimate idea is that the Line eventually will know its users better than they know themselves, learning unceasingly in a continuous feedback loop between technology and residents.⁵⁵ A combination of consumption-oriented data extraction and objectified metrics will enable the system to be reactive and proactive, customize services according to personal needs, and establish a highly cognitive environment. Neos will be an omnipresent surveillance system that knows where residents are at all times; it will monitor their health and respond if someone has an accident, sending in drones to take video footage and routing appropriate services to deliver medical help. Communication between the systems will be built on blockchain technology and protected by next-generation quantum cryptographic systems. Each user will receive a digital identifier which will process personal preferences, inform service providers, and modify real-time actions in the real world.⁵⁶ Furthermore, residents “are encouraged” to share behavioral data, such as leisure or shopping habits, and “will receive highly responsive ultra-customized urban experiences” in exchange. This well-known

55. “Neom’s Head of Tech on what Daily Life will be like for Neomians,” *The National Business*, January 21, 2021, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/technology/neom-s-head-of-tech-on-what-daily-life-will-be-like-for-neomians-1.1151293>.

56. Daphne Leprince-Ringuet, “A City that knows your Every Move: Saudi Arabia’s New Smart City might be a Glimpse of the Future,” *ZD Net*, February 18, 2021, <https://www.zdnet.com/article/a-city-that-knows-your-every-move-saudi-arabias-new-smart-city-might-be-a-glimpse-of-the-future/>.

formula of “value exchange” allows, of course, for a far deeper profiling, as real-time analytics—and the continuous accumulation of more and more predictive forms of behavioral surplus—translate into real-time action. In the meantime, Saudi Arabia has already signed a contract for Huawei’s 5G network to run part of its system, supporting IoT devices, VR, AR, autonomous vehicles, and many other applications.

Even though most of the project is still in various stages of construction, an international team of engineers, architects, and designers working on the Line are already providing an unsettling snapshot of what the cognitive city is aiming for in terms of delivering a highly controlled “protected” environment that delivers “ultimate safety, comfort, and convenience” to its prospective users. Because the system is designed to produce prediction, continuously improving the system means eventually closing the gap between prediction and certainty. While to some Neom may signify the dystopic vision of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the cognitive rescripting of territories is only the logical next phase of neoliberalist capitalism in which governments and corporations have allied in the deployment of digital technology consolidating and extending their power over all domains of society.⁵⁷

57. See also Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2019).

Qiddiyah: The City of Tomorrow



Image 8.7. Qiddiya Speed Park Stadium & Hotel designed by Coop Himmelb(l)au. Courtesy of Wolf D. Prix / Coop Himmelb(l)au.



Image 8.8. Qiddiya Racetrack designed by Coop Himmelb(l)au. Courtesy of Wolf D. Prix / Coop Himmelb(l)au.

Positioned as the “capital of entertainment, sports, and the arts in Saudi Arabia,”⁵⁸ Qiddiya presents another technology-driven meta-zone planned to boost the Kingdom’s offering in large-scale entertainment, repatriating the billions of dollars Saudis spend on outbound entertainment annually. As a core tenet of Vision 2030, Qiddiya has a dual economic and social purpose: to advance economic diversification and unlock new professional pathways while enriching the lives of youths in the Kingdom. According to the project’s website, “Qiddiya will be a disruptive destination recognized on the world stage as the home of the most innovative and immersive experiences”⁵⁹ themed around five cornerstones: Sports & Wellness; Nature & Environment; Parks & Attractions; Motion & Mobility; and Arts & Culture. The project offers multiple entertainment parks, wellness facilities, sports, leisure, residential communities, high-brow cultural facilities, shopping, and “creative villages” to redefine urban living.⁶⁰ Masterplanned by Danish *starchitect* Bjarke Ingels, the 24/7 city covers 366 square kilometers—roughly the size of Las Vegas—and wants to play a similar role for Saudi Arabia and adjacent neighbors, albeit not only as a place for pleasure and indulgence but also as an educational testing ground for new “healthy” behaviors in a “safe” social space that reflects the country’s shariah laws. By merging urbanism, iconic architecture, technology, and nature into a layered palimpsest of multiple narratives in order to reform citizen’s lifestyles, Qiddiya, therefore, more accurately represents a kind of utopian territory, “an escape from the crime, the traffic, the chaos and the pollution from the metropolis” reminiscent of Disney’s original EPCOT concept. Designed to be an experimental prototype community, EPCOT would be Disney’s utopian city, a meticulously planned city where every resident would have access to nature, a wealth of leisure experiences, and the latest technology. Citizens would be guaranteed employment and plenty of leisure time to explore the shopping malls, pristinely groomed green spaces, and Disney’s theme parks. EPCOT would also be a pedestrian-friendly city with many public transit options where residents would quietly travel

58. Refer to <https://qiddiya.com/>

59. Ibid.

60. “Diriyah Gate Development Authority.”

via monorail and electric people movers, while cargo and supplies would be delivered via a system of tunnels beneath the city. Residences would be located on the city's fringes, bordering a generous greenbelt dotted with parks, golf courses, and other recreational amenities, while a climate-controlled city center would house the satellites of international corporations.⁶¹ The idea was that the companies could use the residents as testers for new products so people living at EPCOT would have access to the cutting edge of technology. While Disney never had a chance to realize his EPCOT vision, its concept was eventually developed as a theme park of futurism, combining several themed areas referred to as "neighborhoods": World Celebration (focusing on creativity, imagination, and storytelling), World Nature (focusing on ecology and conservation), and World Discovery (focusing on science, technology, and adventure).⁶²

Bringing Disney's EPCOT concept to fruition in a hybridized city/theme park, Qiddiya similarly encompasses several themed "cores" that merge concepts of environmentalism with the celebration of digitally advanced technologies. The spectacular site of the project is located at the Tuwaiq escarpment, which stretches over more than 600 kilometers through central Saudi Arabia and once overlooked an ancient trade route that used to cross the Arabian Peninsula from Yemen into the Levant and Persia. The cliffs drop down 200 meters into an ancient ocean bed and give visitors an uninterrupted view of the horizon. While an array of themed destinations will be built in the valley as a vast, connected entertainment zone, a proper city is situated on the site's cliffs. The "Resort Core" represents the amusement area of Qiddiya, where four theme parks, skating and skiing facilities, and a large outdoor entertainment venue surround specialty retail, dining, and entertainment centers. Adjacent is the "Motion Core," which, reminiscent of Epcot's World of Motion, comprises an array of "action-oriented," technology-enhanced experiences (see images 8.7 and 8.8). The "Eco Core," in contrast, offers passive experiences inspired

61. Matt Patches, "Inside Walt Disney's Ambitious, Failed Plan to Build the City of Tomorrow," *Esquire*, May 20, 2015, <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/news/a35104/walt-disney-epcot-history-city-of-tomorrow/>.

62. Austin Lang, "The History of Disney's Epcot: From City of Tomorrow to the Eternal World's Fair," *All Ears* (blog), April 19, 2020, <https://allears.net/2020/04/19/the-history-of-disneys-epcot-from-city-of-tomorrow-to-the-eternal-worlds-fair/>.

by nature and outdoor sporting adventures. Overlooking the valley from the Tuwaiq escarpment edge, the “City Center” comprises a pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use district, which merges residential, retail, and workplace environments that connect via a system of funiculars and other advanced infrastructure to the Resort Core below. Arts and entertainment create an integrated town center with galleries, a performing arts theatre, and a multiplex cinema dotting the central walkways as primary anchors. In parallel, creative villages offer art- and media spaces and educational facilities. Large-scale sports venues, equestrian facilities, and a golf community surround the town center, expanding to the escarpment edges where a network of biking trails along the cliff’s edge complete the master plan.⁶⁵

The reincarnation of Disney’s “City of Tomorrow” comes as no surprise as Qiddiya’s CEO Phillipe Gas is a seasoned Disney veteran who has worked for the company for thirty years designing resorts in Europe and China. According to Gas, “Qiddiya will be a place that enables the youth of Saudi Arabia to fulfill their ambitions. It will be a place where they [will not only] enjoy, [but] appreciate, aspire, advance and nurture their potential; a place that unlocks opportunities and new professional pathways to help build a more prosperous and progressive society.”⁶⁴ Like Epcot, Qiddiya will therefore not only be a playground for hedonistic pleasures but moreover serve as a themed testing ground for a new national lifestyle infrastructure that grooms citizens’ social behaviors through choice architecture and gamification structuring will predetermine situations to shape appropriate actions, aligning with the country’s national vision. Through engineering seamlessly linked virtual and physical contexts that prompt particular behaviors, users are encouraged to “co-create their involvement.” The twist here (as in all virtual worlds) is that “nudging” and “herding” intend to “encourage” choices that accrue to the “Imagineers,” not to the individual. According to Gas, this is where technology comes into the picture. “Augmented reality, virtual reality, and many of the effects we can play with and use will draw people into the experience.

63. Charles Read, “Qiddiya: Inside the Multi-Billion Dollar Saudi Giga-Project,” *Blooloop*, December 17, 2020, <https://blooloop.com/brands-ip/in-depth/qiddiya-philippe-gas/>.

64. *Ibid.*

[First] they will become actors in the experience, and then [they will] want to live the experience.” By fusing digital means of modification with real-time actions, this process involves a mix of operant conditioning in the form of curated contexts and subliminal cues that eliminate interpretations that might interfere with the targeted outcome. For this to happen, all deviant forces and behaviors must be actively curtailed to maintain the consistency of the narrative. As Gas states, “I think [the project’s] beauty will be this kind of harmony. The story of Qiddiya has to be consistent throughout. So, even though we work with our partners to define their creative concepts, they will all go into this one story.”⁶⁵

Territories Reformed: Eco-luxe on the Red Sea



Image 8.9. Rendering showing the Red Sea Resort's "coral villas," providing 360-degree-views of the surrounding sea. Courtesy of TRSC (The Red Sea Company).

65. Ibid.



Image 8.10. Rendering showing Red Sea International Airport, designed by Foster Partners. Courtesy of TRSC / Foster Partners.

Essential cornerstones of Saudi Arabia’s luxury tourism ambition are the resort zones of “The Red Sea Project” and Amaala, both of which are currently reshaping Saudi Arabia’s natural and marine environments into “technologically advanced and eco-friendly tourism destinations” aimed at attracting high-net-worth eco-conscious luxury travelers. Both projects respond to current trends in the ecological luxury tourism market, “where travelers are increasingly seeking exclusive, healthy and safe experiences while (you guessed it) safeguarding the environment.”⁶⁶ Competing with neighboring Dubai and other Middle East countries, these and similar developments aspire to position Saudi Arabia as the “next world-class destination for regenerative luxury tourism.” Like other large-scale tourism enclaves in the Global South, the projects aspire to attract domestic and international investment through relaxed legislation, the promise of freehold ownership, and partnerships with top-tier global brands and companies.

66. Jerry Clausing, “Red Sea Development Co.’s John Pagano on Saudi Arabia Tourism,” *Travel Weekly*, April 5, 2019, <https://www.travelweekly.com/On-The-Record/Red-Sea-Development-Co-John-Pagano>.

The Red Sea Project, situated on the Western coast of Saudi Arabia between the small towns of Umluj and Al Wajh, comprises a site of 28,000 square kilometers along a stretch of a 200 kilometers-long virgin coastline. Lined by ninety uninhabited islands on the seaside and a varied landscape of desert and mountainous areas in the coast's hinterland, this meta-resort zone encompasses a vast territory, which was, until recently, only visited by occasional diving groups and ordinary Saudi families in search of the perfect camping site. This peaceful idyll will soon give way to a staggering number of fifty resorts surrounded by exclusive residential communities (see image 8.9), spread across twenty-two of the islands and six inland sites, imagined by WTAG from Singapore in collaboration with British engineering company Buro Happold. Designed to wean the Saudi economy off a dependence on falling oil revenues and to create jobs for the Saudi population, the planners' mission is to transform islands, coast, and part of the backcountry into an "exquisite, barefoot luxury, regenerative tourism destination, built around a natural environment, coupled with a rich cultural heritage." To ensure the resort zone's exclusivity while mitigating potential environmental impacts of over-tourism, "annual visitors will be capped at one million."⁶⁷

Further north, Amaala is planned as another complementary destination, albeit positioned with a more cultural twist to provide guests with a transformative offering in three distinct thematic zones, "which will awaken the imagination with a focus on wellness and sports, art and culture, sun, sea, and lifestyle."⁶⁸ While "Triple Bay" will be a holistic wellness retreat with state-of-the-art medical and sports facilities that include "globally respected healing arts inspired by local traditions," the "Coastal Development" will include a cultural center, a museum of contemporary art, a center for film festivals, a performing arts venue, and a biennale park. Finally, the "Island," the third development, will present an exclusive enclave where residents and visitors can "relax in intimate

67. The Red Sea Development Company, "2020 Sustainability Report: Laying the Foundation for a Sustainable Destination," https://issuu.com/theredsea/docs/trsd_c_sustainability_report_english.

68. "A Hidden Jewel," *AMAALA*, retrieved February 12, 2021, <https://www.amaala.com/en/master-plans>.

resorts.”⁶⁹ Tourists will fly directly into the zones via greenfield airports (see image 8.10), from which they will be chaperoned by private boats, effectively shielding them from the varied socio-spatial context of the zones’ surroundings. Swiftly whisked to their hotels, they will avoid any “risky” cultural encounters with the conservative population in the vicinity. As the security and safety of the guests are of the utmost importance, digital devices will be ubiquitously present in the resort zones. “Smart services” will monitor anything from environmental conditions and guest experiences to logistics and performance of security, mobility, utilities, buildings, administration, public realm, retail, logistics, health care, and education in a panoptic form of seamless surveillance. To achieve the status as the world’s first while meeting (and ideally exceeding) the expectations of eco-conscious luxury travelers, the Red Sea Project will be powered by the world’s largest off-grid renewable energy grid comprised of interconnected solar and wind energy storage systems. An on-site seawater reverse osmosis desalination plant powered by renewable energy will provide potable water, while wastewater will be treated and used for irrigation. Organic-rich waste and food waste, in turn, will be converted to compost used in the project’s nursery, growing turf grass and other indigenous plants needed to green golf courses, hotels, and residential properties. Non-recyclable waste will be incinerated appropriately to generate ash that can produce bricks when mixed with cement. Meanwhile, the project will also include obligatory programs for the local population via paid work in the sustainability sector, such as cleaning marine debris, while providing them educational guidance that highlights the importance of sustainable waste disposal. A green mobility plan linked to a networked digital monitoring system of “context-aware” sensors will ensure a “sustainably optimized” transport network that supports “community connectivity” and a “personalized end-to-end guest experience” through a seamless arrival and departure process, optimized management of environs and facilities, and fully integrated security and site operations. Biometric technology installed across the resort’s borders and conveniently connected to law enforcement systems will identify visa

69. Frank Kane, “INTERVIEW: Amaala — the ‘audacious’ Red Sea Riviera Project,” *Arab News*, September 27, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1740556/business-economy>.

verifications, watch lists, entry/exit registration, and enable cashless payments along with “touch-free experiences,” thus constantly monitoring guests’ locations, their medical statuses, and their activities. Through augmented and virtual reality, “relevant promotions” inform potential travelers before and during their visit to the destination, while an automated check-in and check-out provides “an unobstructed” walk-through of the project’s borders with zero waiting queues.⁷⁰

Both resorts reiterate the now all-too-familiar saga of creating a decontextualized tourist fantasy of pristine, isolated, and unpeopled landscapes through the restaging of natural resources. In the effort to rescript pre-existing definitions of place into showcases of consolidated state power, vast territories are converted into enclosed enclaves driven by powerful local elites and patrolled by security forces. Conveniently, the uncanny paradox of ecological luxury resorts offers the pretense that everyone, irrespective of social class, employment, and income, is “in it together,” united in striving to hand over a sustainable planet to future generations, strategically masking exclusionary interests. These include the marginalization and disempowerment of specific segments of society and other disturbing elements often referred to as “eco-threats.” Scripted around the well-known narratives of health, wellness, and sustainability, these destinations constitute highly controlled, depoliticized, three-dimensional testing sites that enact the neoliberal ideology of consumerism through aphoristic narratives about sustainable progress and equality, invoked not to question the steep power inequalities of neoliberal capitalism but rather to prevent the critique of unequal power structures rampant in contemporary societies.⁷¹

As Goffmann has demonstrated in the 1960s, gated enclaves depend on minutely staged settings enhanced by emblematic role-play, choreographies, group formations, and instructions, constantly observed and programmed by a panoptic gaze that strips visitors of their identity kit.

70. The Red Sea Development Company, “2020 Sustainability Report.”

71. Christian Fuchs, “Critical Social Theory and Sustainable Development: The Class, Capitalism and Domination in a Dialectical Analysis of Un/Sustainability,” *Sustainable Development* 25, no. 5 (2017): 443–458.

Guided by specific cues, performative rituals reinforce the enclaves' symbolic values, reproducing them as dramaturgical spaces where visitors are "cleanly stripped of many of [their] accustomed affirmations, satisfactions, and defenses, . . . subjected to a rather full set of mortifying experiences: restriction of free movement, communal living, [and a] diffuse authority of a whole echelon of people."⁷² Once the subjects begin to settle down, the main outlines of their fate tend to follow those of a whole class of segregated establishments in which they "spend the whole round of life on the grounds, and march through their regimented day in the immediate company of a group of persons of their own institutional status."⁷³ As such, these purified territories resemble "total institutions"⁷⁴ that, abstracted from their socio-cultural surroundings and securitized from the surrounding population, depend upon continual policing and monitoring to assure their thematic coherence. Accordingly, one of their most important features is the consistent maintenance of a clear boundary, which demarcates which activities may occur and who may be admitted. While these criteria, to various degrees, hold for all enclavic spaces, at least earlier resort versions evoked the rhetoric of freedom as spaces of individual autonomy where "you could just let go," where no one would make you conform to expectations about yourself. In contrast, ecoluxury's technology-powered panoptic worlds constitute stringent, self-optimizing regimes in which sobriety and other behavioral modifications are recast as wellness practices demanding the exertion of self-imposed pressures. Subtly nudged to comply in a specific manner by prescribed algorithmic protocols, guests learn to orient themselves in terms of the "system," in which situations are pre-structured and appropriate behavior is rewarded through the granting of certain "privileges."

While "behavioral surplus" was not known in the 1970s, Foucault's panoptical surveillance anticipated the continuous intensification of behavioral modifications and the gathering might of instrumental power. In this respect, Foucault highlighted modern technologies' effectiveness

72. Erving Goffmann, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 148.

73. Goffmann, *Asylums*, 147

74. *Ibid.*

in the self-imposed modification of people's behaviors while introducing the notion that observation by an invisible force induces "voluntary" techniques of self-optimization, whereby people effectively recondition their belief systems and activities.⁷⁵ In the panoptic space, the actions of invisible observers entail the continuous recording of behaviors. The more behavioral data they accumulate, the more powerful they become. As their power increases by accumulating knowledge through consistent observations, modes of interaction become increasingly more targeted, resulting in a constant feedback loop. The formation of knowledge and accumulated power regularly reinforce one another, ultimately resulting in the subject's complete docility and compliance. First, effecting normalization, the process eventually leaves the subject "singing in its chains."⁷⁶ In a more advanced and sophisticated manner, today's virtualized "worlds" rely on the instrumentalization of behaviors for the purpose of modification, prediction, monetization, and control, enabled by a ubiquitously connected material architecture of sensate computation that renders, interprets, and actualizes human experience in real time, exploiting contemporary anxieties.⁷⁷ In this respect, Saudi Arabia's meta-resort zones—controlled by the computational architecture of networked devices and consistently reinforced by choreographed imagery and rescripted spaces—might foreshadow the next reiteration of surveillance capitalism in which automated machine processes seamlessly blend with virtualized territories, aiming to impose a new collective order based on total certainty.

The Arrival of the Metaverse

Meta-zones, socio-economic reforms, and nation branding create a synergistic triangle which will position Saudi Arabia as a powerful player in the years to come. The virtualized rescripting of Saudi Arabia's territories as meta-worlds closely intertwines with the rebranding of Saudi

75. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, eds. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, (Brighton: Harvester, 1988). See also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

76. Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 11.

77. *Ibid.*, 353.

Arabia as a nation and with its expressed desire to be an influencer in the global economy. Within the context of global competition, all meta-zones are positioned to exceed established standards, seeking to benchmark against upcoming cognitive ecological cities. However, looking at the leaps and strides of real estate examined here, one can also detect the driving forces of neoliberal economic policies coupled with nationalist ideology and power, evident in the ruling class's role in setting the overall agenda for each development. In negotiating nationalist aims with the contradictions of global free-market capitalism, specific ideologies and narratives for each destination are strategically deployed which target behavioral modification of both internal and external audiences. Predictably, these high-end enclaves follow the tried-and-true track of other global cities that have been value-engineered through a lucrative brew of neoliberal principles. Poised to transform Saudi Arabia into a bifurcated topography of the technology-savvy super-elite versus the rest, this enclavic model of urbanism entails an intensified securitization of large-scale, surveilled, and privatized zones as a result of the secession of transnational elites from the "commons" and the entrenchment of inequality, as has been the case in many other "globalizing and global nations."

While Saudi Arabia's meta-zones proclaim to offer a future-oriented and progressive vision to a global audience—resting on established platitudes of saving the environment—the examples above clearly demonstrate that these destinations posing as lifestyle infrastructures are narrowly confined, programmed, and policed, nullifying the fundamental rights associated with individual autonomy. Their instrumentarian power comprised of behavioral surplus, data science computational power, algorithmic systems, and automated platforms rests in the hands of a political and economic super-elite who are crafting total social environments, aiming to profit from their monetization, prediction, and control. If realized as planned, these virtualized worlds will finally dispel lingering fictions of freedom and dignity in the name of "harmony and wellbeing," forever rendering the dreams of urban heterogeneity and personal liberty mere aphorisms of a bygone era. From the viewpoint of surveillance capitalism, Saudi Arabia will undoubtedly set an uncanny precedent for the cogni-

tive, controlled, sustainable cities of a not-too-distant future where the global ideology of environmental protection, nationalist discourses, and data-driven surveillance technologies are eagerly interlacing in the comprehensive curation of highly customized, commoditized, and monitored metaverses populated with compliant cosmopolitans.

Bibliography

"A Hidden Jewel." *AMAALA*. <https://www.amaala.com/en/master-plans>.

Al-Mana, AbdulRahman. "The Destruction of Mecca & Medina's Historic Landscapes." *Cities from Salt* (blog), October 3, 2019. <https://www.citiesfromsalt.com/blog/the-destruction-of-mecca-and-medinas-historic-landscapes>.

Allan, Malcolm. "Experience Masterplanning." *City Nation Place*, February 9, 2017. <https://www.citynationplace.com/experience-masterplanning>.

Aly, Hend. "Royal Dream: City Branding and Saudi Arabia's NEOM." *Middle East—Topics & Arguments* 12, no. 1 (2019): 99–109. <https://doi.org/10.17192/meta.2019.12.7937>.

Andraos, Amale. "The Arab City." *Places Journal* (May 2016). <https://doi.org/10.22269/160531>.

Anholt, Simon. "Anholt Nation Brands Index: How does the World see America." *Journal of Advertising Research* 45, no. 3 (2005): 296–304.

———. *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities, and Regions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

———. "Should Place Brands be Simple?" *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 5, no. 2, (2009): 91–96.

Bagaeen, Samer. "Brand Dubai: The Instant City; or the Instantly Recognizable City." *International Planning Studies* 12, no. 2, (2007): 173–197.

Berli, Asunciòn, and Josefa D. Martín. "Factors influencing Destination Image." *Annals of Tourism Research* 31, no. 3, (2004): 657–81.

Bonakdar, Ahmad, and Ivonne Audirac. "City Branding and the Link to Urban Planning: Theories, Practices, and Challenges." *Journal of Planning Literature* 35, no. 2 (May 2020): 147–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412219878879>.

Castells, Manuel. *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

Clausing, Jerry. "Red Sea Development Co.'s John Pagano on Saudi Arabia Tourism." *Travel Weekly*, April 5, 2019. <https://www.travelweekly.com/On-The-Record/>

Red-Sea-Development-Co-John-Pagano.

Dinnie, Keith, T.C. Melewar, Kai-Uwe Seidenfuss, and Ghazali Musa. "Nation Branding and Integrated Marketing Communications: An ASEAN Perspective." *International Marketing Review* 27, no. 4 (2010): 388–403.

Dinnie, Keith. *Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice* (2nd Edition). Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2016.

Diriyah Gate Development Authority. "Development Overview." 2021. <https://www.dgda.gov.sa/our-destinations/diriyah.aspx>.

"Diriyah Gate Development Authority Starts Work on a Major Heritage Project." *Arab News*, July 1, 2020. <https://arab.news/8g8e7>.

Donfried, Mark. "How Saudi Arabia is Building a New National Brand." *Arab News*, January 13, 2018. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1224971>.

Easterling, Keller. *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*. New York: Verso, 2014.

Edensor, Tim. "Staging Tourism." *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, no. 2 (2000), 322–344.

Elsheshtawy, Yasser. *Dubai: Behind an Urban Spectacle*. London: Routledge, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203869703>.

Fan, Ying. "Branding the Nation: What is Being Branded?" *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 12, no. 1 (2006): 5–14.

Fetscherin, Marc. "The Determinants and Measurement of a Country Brand: The Country Brand Strength Index." *International Marketing Review* 27, no. 4, (2010): 466–479.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

———. "The Subject and Power." In *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, edited by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. Brighton: Harvester, 1988.

Freire, Joao R. "Place Branding in the Middle East." *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 8 (2012): 46–47. <https://doi.org/doi: 10.1057/pb.2011.35>.

Fuchs, Christian. "Critical Social Theory and Sustainable Development: The Class, Capitalism and Domination in a Dialectical Analysis of Un/Sustainability." *Sustainable Development* 25, no. 5 (2017): 443–458.

Godinho, Varun. "Two-thirds of Saudi Arabia's Population is under the Age of 35." *Gulf Business*, August 10, 2020. <https://gulfbusiness.com/two-thirds-of-saudi-arabias-population-is-under-the-age-of-35/>.

Goffmann, Erving. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Anchor Books, 1961.

Govers, Robert, and Frank Go. *Place Branding: Glocal, Virtual and Physical Identities, Constructed, Imagined and Experienced*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Hameed, Mustafa. "The Destruction of Mecca: How Saudi Arabia's Construction Rampage is Threatening Islam's Holiest City." *Foreign Policy*, September 22, 2015.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/22/the-destruction-of-mecca-saudi-arabia-construction/>.

Hao, Andy W., Justin Paul, Sangeeta Trott, Chiquan Guo, and Heng-Hui Wu. "Two Decades of Research on Nation Branding: A Review and Future Research Agenda." *International Marketing Review* 38, no. 1 (2021): 46–69. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-01-2019-0028>.

Hassan, Salah, and Abeer Mahrous. "Nation Branding: The Strategic Imperative for Sustainable Market Competitiveness." *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2019): 146–158. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHASS-08-2019-0025>.

He, Jiaxun, Cheng Lu Wang, and Yi Wu. "Building the Connection between Nation and Commercial Brand: An Integrative Review and Future Research Directions." *International Marketing Review* 38, no.1 (2021): 19–35. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-11-2019-0268>.

Healy, Noel, and Tazim Jamal. "Enclave Tourism." In *The Sage International Encyclopedia of Travel and Tourism*, edited by Linda L. Lowry, 418–419. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483368924.n160>.

Jalabi, Raya. "After the Hajj: Mecca Residents Grow Hostile to Changes in the Holy City." *The Guardian*, September 14, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/sep/14/mecca-hajj-pilgrims-tourism>.

Kane, Frank. "Frankly Speaking: Saudi Arabia Doubling Down on Diriyah Gate Project, says DGDA CEO." *Arab News*, June 13, 2021. <https://arab.news/46naz>.

———. "INTERVIEW: Amaala — the 'audacious' Red Sea Riviera Project." *Arab News*, September 27, 2020. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1740556/business-economy>.

Kavaratzis, Mihalis. "Place Branding: A Review of Trends and Conceptual Models." *The Marketing Review* 5 (2005): 329–342.

Kavaratzis, Mihalis, and Mary Jo Hatch. "The Dynamics of Place Brands: An Identity-Based Approach to Place Branding Theory." *Marketing Theory* 13, no. 1 (2013): 1–18.

Khaku, Mohammed. "Never-ending Destruction of Historical Sites in Mecca and Medina, Cradle of Islam." *Arab American News*, May 15, 2021. <https://www.arabamericannews.com/2021/05/15/never-ending-destruction-of-historical-sites-in-mecca-and-medina-cradle-of-islam/>.

Kinninmont, Jane. "Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia's Social Contract: Austerity and Transformation." *Chatham House: The Royal Institute of International Affairs* (July 2017): 1–44. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-07-20-vision-2030-saudi-kinninmont.pdf>.

Klingmann, Anna. "Re-scripting Riyadh's Historical Downtown as a Global Destination: A Sustainable Model?" *Journal of Place Management and Development* 15, no. 2 (2022): 93–111. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-07-2020-0071>.

———. "The Rise of Shopping Malls within the Framework of Gulf Capitalism." In *World of Malls: Architectures of Consumption*, edited by Andres Lepik and Vera Simone Bader, 175–183. Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2016.

Kotler, Philip, and David Gertner. "Country as a Brand, Product and Beyond: A Place Marketing and Brand Management Perspective." *The Journal of Brand Management* 9, no. 4-5 (2002): 249–261.

Lang, Austin. "The History of Disney's Epcot: From City of Tomorrow to the Eternal World's Fair." *All Ears* (blog), April 19, 2020. <https://allears.net/2020/04/19/the-history-of-disneys-epcot-from-city-of-tomorrow-to-the-eternal-worlds-fair/>.

Leprince-Ringuet, Daphne. "A City that knows your Every Move: Saudi Arabia's New Smart City might be a Glimpse of the Future." *ZD Net*, February 18, 2021. <https://www.zdnet.com/article/a-city-that-knows-your-every-move-saudi-arabias-new-smart-city-might-be-a-glimpse-of-the-future/>.

Lukas, Scott. "The Meanings of Themed and Immersive Spaces." In *A Reader in Themed and Immersive Spaces*, edited by Scott A. Lukas. Pittsburg: Carnegie Mellon Press, 2016.

Maneval, Stefan. "Mass Accommodation for the 'Guests of God': Changing Experiences of Hajj-Pilgrims in Jeddah." *Arab Urbanism*. www.araburbanism.com/magazine/hajj-pilgrims-jeddah.

Muñoz-Alonso, Lorena. "Saudi Arabia Destroyed 98 Percent of Its Cultural Heritage." *ArtNet*, November 19, 2014. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/saudi-arabia-destroyed-98-percent-of-its-cultural-heritage-174029>.

Neef, Andreas. "Tourism, Land Grabs and Displacement: A Study with Particular Focus on the Global South." *Tourism Watch*, February 2019. https://www.tourism-watch.de/system/files/document/Neef_Tourism_Land_Grab_Study.pdf.

NEOM Company. "HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman Announces 'The Line' at NEOM." *PR Newswire*, January 1, 2021. <https://en.prnasia.com/releases/apac/hrh-prince-mohammed-bin-salman-announces-the-line-at-neom-305130.shtml>. Related link: <http://www.NEOM.com>.

"Neom's Head of Tech on what Daily Life will be like for Neomians." *The National Business*, January 21, 2021. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/technology/neom-s-head-of-tech-on-what-daily-life-will-be-like-for-neomians-1.1151293>.

Nye, Joseph S. "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy." *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (2004): 255–270.

Osser, Edek. "Why is Saudi Arabia Destroying the Cultural Heritage of Mecca and Medina?" *The Art Newspaper*, November 19, 2015. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2015/11/19/why-is-saudi-arabia-destroying-the-cultural-heritage-of-mecca-and-medina>.

Papadopoulos, Nicolas, and Louise Heslop. "Country Equity and Country Branding: Problems and Prospects." *Journal of Brand Management* 9 (2002): 294–314. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540079>.

Patches, Matt. "Inside Walt Disney's Ambitious, Failed Plan to Build the City of Tomorrow." *Esquire*, May 20, 2015. <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/news/a35104/walt-disney-epcot-history-city-of-tomorrow/>.

Power, Carla. "Saudi Arabia Bulldozes Over Its Heritage." *Time*, November 14, 2014. <https://time.com/3584585/saudi-arabia-bulldozes-over-its-heritage/>.

Quelch, John A., and Katherine E. Jocz. "Positioning the Nation-State," *Place Branding* 1, no.1 (2004): 74–79.

Read, Charles. "Qiddiya: Inside the Multi-Billion Dollar Saudi Giga-Project." *Blooloop*, 17 December 2020, <https://blooloop.com/brands-ip/in-depth/qiddiya-philippe-gas/>.

The Red Sea Development Company. "2020 Sustainability Report: Laying the Foundation for a Sustainable Destination." https://issuu.com/theredsea/docs/trsd_c_sustainability_report_english.

Ren, Yuan and Per Olof Berg. "Developing and Branding a Polycentric Mega-City: The Case of Shanghai." In *Branding Chinese Mega-Cities: Policies, Practices and Positioning*, edited by Per Olof Berg and Emma Björner. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014.

Saarinen, Jarkko and Sandra Wall-Reinius. "Enclaves in Tourism: Producing and Governing Exclusive Spaces for Tourism." *Tourism Geographies* 21, no. 5 (2019): 739–748. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2019.1668051>.

Saarinen, Jarkko. "Enclavic Tourism Spaces: Territorialization and Bordering in Tourism Destination Development and Planning." *Tourism Planning and Development* 19, no. 3 (2017): 425–437.

Sardar, Ziauddin. "The Destruction of Mecca." *New York Times*, September 30, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/01/opinion/the-destruction-of-mecca.html>.

Shoib, Turki. "Place Branding in a Globalizing Middle East: New Cities in Saudi Arabia." PhD. diss, Oxford Brookes University, 2017. https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/file/88098f91-21f6-46a7-9b7a-a271a34f8cd5/1/TurkiShoib_PhD_Thesis_2017_RADAR.pdf.

SNC LAVALIN. "Transforming Cultural Destinations in Saudi Arabia." *SNC-Lavalin*, 2020. <https://www.snclavalin.com/en/projects/diriyah-transforming-cultural-destinations-in-saudi-arabia>.

Wang, Cheng Lu, Dongjin Li, Bradley R. Barnes, and Jongseok Ahn. "Country Image,

Product Image and Consumer Purchase Intention: Evidence from an Emerging Economy.” *International Business Review* 21, no. 6 (2012): 1041–1051.

Warrier, Ranju. “Saudi’s DGDA inks deal with NWC for water projects at Diriyah Gate.” *Construction Week*, November 29, 2020. <https://www.constructionweekonline.com/projects-and-tenders/269207-saudis-dgda-inks-deal-with-nwc-for-water-projects-at-diriyah-gate>.

“What is the Line?” *NEOM*. <https://www.neom.com/en-us/regions/whatistheline>.

Zeineddine, Cornelia. “Employing nation branding in the Middle East United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar.” *Management & Marketing: Challenges for the Knowledge Society* 12, no. 2 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1515/mmcks-2017-0013>.

Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. London: Profile Books Ltd., 2019.