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FUELLING CULTURE

Art, Race, and Capitalism on the Arabian Peninsula

By Maia Holtermann Entwistle

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2021
Department of Politics and International Studies
School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London

To my parents

ABSTRACT

This thesis is about how racial capitalism and empire have enabled the creation of the Gulf's cultural infrastructure, which includes Saadiyat Cultural District, Art Dubai, and Doha's Museum of Islamic Art.

Some studies of high culture have illustrated how museum collections are rooted in colonial plunder and ordered by colonial epistemologies. Others have examined the effects of neoliberalisation on contemporary art, showing how capitalism eventually assimilates even counter-hegemonic art. Drawing on ethnographic and interview material collected among cultural milieus in the United Arab Emirates, New York, and London, this thesis intervenes in, and bridges, these two research strands.

Carbon-based financial interdependence between the Gulf and the West is the visible afterlife of colonialism in the region. I argue that these asymmetrical circuits of capital accumulation underpin the new cultural ecology. The theory of racial capitalism emphasises that racialisations are central to the functioning of the world economy, resolving the contradictions inherent in liberal institution-building under the profoundly hierarchical conditions of global markets. Working with these insights, I show how orientalist imaginings of the Gulf contributed to the opening of its art market, and how white epistemologies have legitimised this enterprise and its violent effects. I examine how these cultural infrastructures form part of the Gulf states' post-oil vision, elucidating how their built environments attempt to manage difference by turning the unruly multiplicity of urban space into homogenous and marketable identities.

Bringing these together I argue that, despite centring decolonial aesthetics, the Gulf's cultural infrastructure contributes forcefully to colonialism. Its institutions enshrine the Gulf's colonial relations with subaltern subjects from the postcolonies on its peripheries and demonstrate the persistence of a racial calculus that prioritises whiteness. This infrastructure thus underscores that, rather than provincialise Europe, postcolonialism must stretch its concepts to the changing constellation of power precipitated by maturing capitalist processes.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This thesis follows a simplified version of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) transliteration system. With the exception of the glottal stop hamza (ʾ) and the pharyngeal consonant ayn (ع), which I have tried to minimise, I have not used diacritical marks. Where appropriate, I have adapted long vowels (ou for ū). For Arabic words that have become part of the English lexicon, I have used the Oxford English Dictionary spelling (sheikh, *dhaw*). For institutions or places, I have used the transliterations found in literature published by the entity or on English language signage (Saadiyat, Msheireb, Jebel Ali). Where there are established spellings of names (Sheikh Zayed, Nasser), I have used these. Where there are several common transliterations, I have chosen the one that is closest to the IJMES system (Soqatra not Socotra). Lastly, I use “Al” to denote house of, as in Al Khalifa (House of Khalifa) and Al Nahyan (House of Nahyan).

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[Introduction]

BEYOND WEIGHTLESSNESS¹

Folklore holds that when the brothers Darsa and Samha² fought to the death, their blood transubstantiated into the bright red sap of the Soqotri Dragon Tree. In the Yemeni Arabic idiom, the tree is known as *dam al-akhawayn* (the blood of the two brothers).³ These distinctive trees are among the flora and fauna that are unique to the Soqatra Archipelago. Branded the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean, its biodiversity and the persistence of indigenous languages led to the 2008 decision by UNESCO to recognise Yemen's submission to have the islands inscribed on its list of World Heritage Sites. The background to this designation was the comprehensive legal framework for conservation and environmental protection implemented by Ali Abdullah Salih's government in the 1990s and early 2000s. This framework, administered by the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), included several presidential decrees establishing Soqatra as a protected zone, with the EPA responsible for devising and implementing a conservation zoning plan on the island.⁴

These imperatives coalesced into a series of what were referred to as Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs), with the first commencing on the island in 1997. Each iteration had a slightly different emphasis, from an early focus purely on biodiversity, to later versions addressing questions of heritage conservation and sustainable development.⁵ Among the key issues identified in the technical evaluation undertaken in response to Yemen's nomination of the islands as a World

¹ Declaring the strong poststructural tendency, which severs discourse from social structures, Edward Said writes that it is possessed of 'an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history'. See *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994 [1993]), 366-367.

² Two of the islands in the Soqatra Archipelago are named after these mythical brothers: one Darsa, the other Samha.

³ Another version of this legend is that it is the blood of the many-headed Hydra killed by Hercules. See Quentin Mueller, "Tensions Mount over Yemen's Contested Islands," trans. Charles Goulden, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September 2021.

⁴ UNEP, "Support to the Integrated Program for the Conservation and Sustainable Development of the Socotra Archipelago," (United Nations Environment Project, January 2014).

⁵ Nathalie Peutz, *Islands of Heritage: Conservation and Transformation in Yemen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018). Against claims of an "integrated" approach, Peutz argues that different initiatives active on the island reveal the divergent and sometimes contradictory imperatives of conservation versus development.

Heritage Site, was the lack of a long-term, sustainable financing plan for conservation of the protected areas.⁶ At the time the evaluation was carried out in May 2008, funding was provided piecemeal by a handful of organisations, largely located in the West. In 2014, a substantial chunk of funding was awarded through a Global Environment Fund project that was co-sponsored by the United Nations Environmental Agency.⁷ Despite the largely top-down funding structure of the ICDPs, heritage discourse has also been mobilised at the grassroots as a challenge to rule from the Yemeni mainland. Secessionist groups have made recourse to the importance of preserving Soqotri languages and traditions as a way of asserting the island's distinctive political identity.⁸

Meanwhile in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Abu Dhabi hosted a conference in 2016 called the 'Safeguarding Endangered Cultural Heritage Summit.' Organised in partnership with the French state and with the support of UNESCO, also headquartered in France, the event was attended by the rulers of the different Emirates, as well as the French President, François Hollande. Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, President of Yemen, was among the other heads of state to attend. At the conference forty countries pledged to raise USD100 million and agreed to the creation of an International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas. Muhammad bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the future President of UAE, *de facto* ruler of Abu Dhabi, and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, declared the conference an important step toward protecting 'national heritage that is increasingly threatened... as a result of civil wars and conflicts and the destruction of heritage sites by terrorists groups, and the illicit trafficking by groups that aim to obliterate the international heritage of humanity.'⁹ It is not coincidental that those agents of cultural destruction singled out by Muhammad bin Zayed include Islamist groups against whom a brutal crackdown

⁶ David Sheppard, Tarek Abul Hawa, and Khaldoun al-Omari, "World Heritage Nomination - IUCN Technical Evaluation Socotra Archipelago (Yemen) - ID No. 1263" (International Union for Conservation of Nature, May (2008): 6-7.

⁷ UNEP, "Support."

⁸ Peutz, *Islands*.

⁹ Artforum, "France and the UAE Pledge \$45 Million for New Cultural Heritage Fund," *Artforum*, 5 December 2016. The UAE also donated over \$50 million to UNESCO to rebuild cultural heritage destroyed in the conflict with ISIS in Mosul. See Artforum, "UAE Donates \$50 Million to UNESCO to Rebuild Cultural Heritage in Mosul," *Artforum*, 25 April 2018.

has been waged within the UAE and, with the exception of Qatar, in the other Arab Gulf states.¹⁰

2016 was also the year in which a rumour started circulating that Yemen's President had signed an agreement to lease Soqatra to the UAE for ninety-nine years. While the formal lease of the island did not materialise, these reports nevertheless articulated an anxiety about the UAE's mission to control the island. Since the conflict began, the UAE has directed millions of dollars of investment and aid to Soqatra, and in 2018 soldiers from its expeditionary guard were deployed to establish a military base on the archipelago, which it claims is necessary for its fight against Houthi rebels on the Yemeni mainland. In that year, rumours also began to swirl about the UAE's intention to hold a referendum on its annexation of Soqatra. Saudi Arabia, who were also eying the island with interest, managed to negotiate a partial withdrawal of Emirati troops in 2018, but by that point the UAE-backed secessionist Yemeni group, the Southern Transitional Council (STC) had begun to land troops on the island from the Yemeni mainland.

While the STC have commanded low levels of support on the island since their founding in 2007, it was the UAE's presence that catalysed their assertion of control over Soqatra. With the global gaze focused on the unfolding Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020 the STC assumed active control of the island, seizing strategic locations and arresting opposition figures.¹¹ The UAE has also been pressing ahead with its tourist developments on the island and, since 2017, has been granting travel permits and operating direct flights from Abu Dhabi to Soqatra.¹² Photographic evidence circulated online in 2018 and 2019 suggests that Dragon Trees have been looted by the UAE from the Soqatra Archipelago, used to decorate Emirati homes and its urban

¹⁰ See Courtney Freer, *Rentier Islamism: The Influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gulf Monarchies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) for a discussion of the formation and treatment of Islamist groups by the different Arab Gulf states.

¹¹ SAM, "The STC Militia Practices Violations in Socotra with the Support of Saudi Forces," *SAM Organization for Rights & Liberties*, 5 November 2020; Paola Tamma, "Has the UAE Colonised Yemen's Socotra Island Paradise?," *The New Arab*, 17 May 2017.

¹² Confirming the changing constellation of power in the region, in May 2021 MEMO reported that Israelis constitute the key constituency of tourists that the UAE is bringing to the island. Images circulated on Twitter purport to show a group of Israeli tourists on the island with an Emirati security detail and guides. This tallies with reports from local guides that the UAE has been attempting to establish a monopoly over tourist travel by making flight sales part of integrated package holidays composed of exclusively Emirati providers.

landscape.¹³ As the trees are a protected species, it is illegal to export any part of them elsewhere.

It is thus a deep irony that the UAE should claim to be bulwark against terrorism and acting in the interests of humanity writ large. Even more so that it should be providing aid to Soqatra, an island territory of a nation ravaged by a war in which the UAE is among the principal belligerents, furnished with arms and military coordination from the United States, the United Kingdom and France. Over one hundred thousand people have been killed in the conflict, including twelve thousand civilians. Hundreds of thousands more have been injured and displaced. Due to the coalition targeting key infrastructures, Yemen has also been in the grip of a deep food security crisis that has pushed up to five million people to the brink of famine. The war has also had repercussions for fine art and cultural heritage. Since it began, two of Yemen's four World Heritage Sites – the Old Walled City of Shibam and the Old City of Sana'a - have been inscribed on its list of World Heritage Sites in Danger. The Old City of Sana'a was explicitly added due to security threats posed by the war, while Shibam was added due to concerns around local conservation efforts, as well as environmental threats, the former of which will no doubt have been significantly impaired by the conflict.¹⁴

This irony is not lost on many Soqotris. Despite their heavy reliance on aid from the UAE,¹⁵ and the longstanding linkages between the Arab Gulf states and Soqatra,¹⁶ substantial portions of the island's inhabitants reject the UAE and its STC allies' moves to wrest the island away from Yemen by both stealth and outright force. Indeed, for those critical of the UAE, humanitarian, conservation, or military justifications are paper-thin pretexts for the regional power's presence on the island. The real reason is its promise as a tourist destination and, perhaps even more importantly, its strategic location along shipping routes in the Gulf of Aden and wider Indian Ocean. It offers

¹³ MEMO, "UAE steals endangered trees from Yemen's Socotra", *MEMO*, 23 October 2019.

¹⁴ UNESCO, "Decisions adopted by the World Heritage Committee at its 39th session," *WHC-15/39.COM/19* (Bonn: 2015).

¹⁵ The Emirates News Agency reports that, since 2015, different Emirati aid organisations have sent more than USD110 million in aid to Soqatra. See Tariq Alfaham, "UAE's US\$110 mn development, relief aid enabled Socotra to overcome challenges, dire conditions," *WAM*, 31 July 2021.

¹⁶ Due to work-based migration, there are sizable Soqotran diasporas in the Arab Gulf states, including in the UAE. During the Dhufar rebellion (1963-1976) Soqotris also conscripted in Oman's armed forces to quell the communist rebels. See Peutz, *Islands*.

a launching pad from which to defend both the Bab al-Mandab, a narrow strait between the coast of Djibouti and Yemen through which ships headed for Suez must pass,¹⁷ and ports controlled by Dubai Ports World in the Horn of Africa. Yemen's General Authority for Conservation of Historic Places has called on UNESCO to use international law to prevent the UAE from further colonising Soqatra, and dredging its coastline, but to little avail. As the timing of the UNESCO endorsed conference held in Abu Dhabi indicates, neither the institution nor any major global powers have shown any appetite for condemning this colonial endeavour.

In their colonial designs on Soqatra, the UAE's actions are redolent of those of Britain and its imperial rivals who, as early as the sixteenth century, sought control of the island due to its propitious location.¹⁸ British and Dutch East India Company documents indicate that from the early seventeenth century the island was used as a victualling station,¹⁹ with ships collecting food stores and purgative aloes before sailing on to India and to the territories then referred to as the East Indies. The arrival of steam power decidedly changed the calculations of British naval planners.²⁰ They began actively looking for strategic locations along their communications lines in which to establish coaling stations. In his capacious history of the British protectorate of Aden, R. J. Gavin characterises Soqatra as a 'bell-wether for British intentions in the Gulf of Aden area.'²¹ In 1834 Captain Ross of the private Indian Navy was despatched by the British East India Company to Soqatra. He concluded an agreement (No. LXXII) that

¹⁷ Ships are particularly vulnerable to interception while passing through these narrow crossings. It is for this reason that the technocratic discipline of logistics refers to them as "chokepoints" – their management and securitisation is a key preoccupation of maritime logistics.

¹⁸ The first of the European maritime empires to arrive in Soqatra were the Portuguese. They conquered the island in 1507, taking it from the Mahra Sultanate, later the Mahra State of Qishn and Soqatra. The Mahra Sultanate had settled the island in the 1480s, using it as a strategic location from which to fight their rivals in the Hadhramaut, and it swiftly reverted to their rule after the Portuguese abandoned the island in 1511. By the time the Portuguese arrived, the Soqatra Archipelago was already well known, its existence chronicled by travellers from remote geographies. Medieval texts indicate that the island was used as a navigational landmark for trade routes in the Indian Ocean. It was also reported to have had a trading port from which goods such as medicinal aloes, the sap of the dragon tree, frankincense, myrrh, and ambergris were exported, collected by vessels *en route* to the port of Aden. For a more detailed discussion of this history see Jansen van Rensburg, "The Maritime Traditions of the Fishermen of Socotra, Yemen," (PhD Thesis, University of Exeter, 2012); and Peutz, *Islands of Heritage*.

¹⁹ Victualling is the naval term for replenishing food and other supplies.

²⁰ A Parliamentary Select Committee convened in 1837 by the former Governor-General of India William Bentinck MP, decided that all the East India Company's ships were to be replaced by steam powered vessels. See Peter Mitchell, "Under Pressure: Steamships, Global power and Communications, and the East India Company — Part 1," *Snapshots of Empire*, 7 March 2016.

²¹ R. J. Gavin, *Aden under British Rule, 1839-1967* (London: Hurst, 1975), 198.

allowed the company to erect a depôt for the landing and storage of coal. Meanwhile, between 1822 and 1829, Captain Stafford Bettesworth Haines of the Bombay Marines, had been commissioned to survey a variety of locations in the Gulf of Aden and the Persian Gulf. Among them was Soqotra, as the British anticipated they would be able to purchase the archipelago from the Mahra Sultan, Amr ibn Sa'ad al-Tawari. Britain's acquisitive advances were however rebuffed.

The Sultan of Mahra's refusal to sell Soqotra ended up being of little consequence to the British who had already alighted on Aden as a preferable location as Soqotra Archipelago's harbours were effectively closed for five months of the year due to the rough seas stirred up by south-westerly monsoon winds.²² Against the backdrop of the abolition of the slave trade and mounting criticism of the East India Company, India Office Records indicate that the British Government understood that a pretext for the seizure of Aden would need to be contrived. The grounding of the *Deria Dowlut*, an over-insured vessel belonging to a local potentate, the Nawab of Carnatic, that sailed with British protection in 1837, provided the perfect opportunity.²³ Citing the vessel's plunder and the 'brutal indignities' suffered by its passengers, among which it was stressed there were many women, the British demanded compensation from Aden's ruler, the Sultan of Lahij. While he agreed to give up the port to the British as damages, the Sultan refused to surrender his sovereignty over the Muslim and Jewish residents of Aden. In response, the British bombarded Aden until the Sultan fled, leaving his son-in-law to sign a protection treaty with the British. Haines, who had led the brutal campaign against Aden, was installed as its Political Agent.

Only with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the sudden importance of Red Sea shipping routes, was British interest in Soqotra again piqued. This interest culminated in the signing of a protectorate treaty in 1876, thereafter renewed twice, with the Sultan binding himself solely to the British in exchange for an initial sum of USD3,000 and an annual subsidy USD360 (agreements No. LXXIII, LXXIV,

²² Peutz, *Islands of Heritage*.

²³ Gavin, *Aden*; Laleh Khalili, *Sinews of War and Trade: Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula* (London: Verso, 2020). Correspondences between British imperial officials show earlier instances of piracy on the *Deria Dowlut*. Tellingly, these did not provoke a military response from the British. See IOR: F/4/649/17851, [45v – 46v] (81/266 – 83/266), J. H. Guy, Bombay Marines, to Captain C. W. Elwood, British Political Agent in Porebunder, 23 July 1817.

LXXV).²⁴ Gavin suggests that the protectorate agreement negotiated by the British in Soqatra became a template for the protection agreements they would go on to secure with other rulers of territories on and around the Arabian Peninsula.²⁵ Soqatra itself remained a British protectorate until independence in 1967, enabling the British army to station a garrison on the island during the Second World War.

This thesis is about the intimacies of art, race, empire, and capitalism on the Arabian Peninsula. As the island of Soqatra has largely been preserved for its natural and “intangible” heritage, its political history might seem a strange place to begin a thesis that will focus on so-called “tangible” culture – art objects and built heritage sites. Yet, Soqatra’s biography incisively captures the nub of this thesis. Its inclusion in a thesis about “high culture”²⁶ feels peculiar because of the divides between the tangible and the intangible, the natural and the cultural, and the material and the ideational, that govern the transnational high cultural sector. Such categories are not natural - they are the product of discourses promulgated by institutional, disciplinary, and commercial machineries in what, elaborating the terminology of imperial government, and subsequently postcolonial theory, I refer to as the West’s “high cultural metropolises.”²⁷

²⁴ IOR:L/PS/20/G3/12, [35v] (79/822), “A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries Vol XI,” 1933.

²⁵ Gavin, *Aden*.

²⁶ I use the term “high culture” to refer to fine art and heritage. While there are substantial critiques of the synthetic division between high and popular culture, I use it rhetorically to gesture to the boundary policing endeavours through which the field and its corresponding market are constituted, and to the gilded nature of much of the sector.

²⁷ From the Greek, *metropolis* (meaning mother city), the term metropole was originally used by the European empires to refer to their European territories, while colony was used to designate their colonial possessions, that were usually, although not exclusively, overseas. Postcolonial theory likewise uses the terms to describe this colonial organisation of international space. I use the term “cultural metropole” to refer to those countries that continue to be the commercial and epistemological centres of the Enlightenment model of fine art and heritage, what this thesis likewise refers to rhetorically as “high culture” – particularly France, the United Kingdom, and Germany in Western Europe, and the United States. I should caution, however, that although these geographies remain epistemologically dominant, the rapid expansion of Chinese buyers has altered the ratio of market dominance, with China becoming one of the top three art markets in terms of turnover, over France and Germany. This mirrors shifts in global markets in general, demonstrating that the term metropole should be attached to spaces in a contingent, rather than reified, way. Moreover, colonial relations predate the emergence of European empires, while global capitalism has led postcolonial states to establish colonial relations with other postcolonial or subaltern contexts.

The premium that the cultural metropolises have historically placed on the conservation of material culture has had racialising implications. In the Middle East, the most prized forms of cultural production have traditionally been things such as poetry, theatre, and storytelling.²⁸ Until recently, the high-cultural value-matrix led locally celebrated immaterial cultural forms from Soqatra, and the Middle East more generally, as well as their audiences, to be largely excluded from the field of high culture. It also implied the superiority of the Western geographies whose states and societies held material cultural output dear. The Arab Gulf states pivot to material culture, which will be described in the pages of this thesis, forms part of a bid to be seen as part of the Western epistemological community, rather than simply as its oil depôt.

These divisions are also a metonym for the structuring power of Western Enlightenment discourses about culture and the arts over the transnational cultural sector, referred to in the industry as the “art world.” Paradoxically, while material culture has been valued over its immaterial forms, art objects and other material traces of human existence are dematerialised through their interaction with the institutional machineries of high culture. Art objects are subdivided chrono-geographically into art historical fields, with corresponding art markets, and put in the service of contributions to the immaterial realm of human knowledge. Consequently, in many cases, the ultimate objects of study behind art objects are racialised and formerly colonised peoples. The masters of this knowledge, on the other hand, have historically been Western cultural professionals, and their domain a key space where racial ideas, which licence uneven distributions of power and resources, have been constructed. The case of Soqatra therefore sensitises us to how the configuration of the material and the immaterial/ideational within the field of high culture is both a racial and a colonial question.

As will be addressed, in the museum, postcolonial museology is reckoning with these divisions and their racialising effects. However, as the case of Soqatra also indicates, the dematerialisation of high culture extends far beyond museum collections. Indeed, this interplay between the material and immaterial dimensions of high culture is absolutely central to the racialised violence that circulates through the *kehaliji* sites of

²⁸ Incidentally, these cultural forms are less easily commodified.

its transnational field. Only by mobilising a dematerialised idea of high culture as an imperative, abstracted from the profoundly material and racialised markets in which cultural infrastructures are rooted, could the UAE use the pretext of heritage conservation to justify its presence on Soqatra. In reality, its presence is an explicitly colonial act, rooted in material expropriation, capitalist enterprise, and bloody war.

As an explicitly colonial act, the UAE's appropriation of Soqatra additionally offers perhaps the clearest statement of how the processes of establishing cultural infrastructures in the Gulf that began in the 1990s are underpinned by colonial relations. The echoes of European mercantile imperialism in the actions of the UAE - looting and championing Soqatra's appropriated cultural heritage - thus pose one of the key theoretical questions that this thesis hopes to answer. Namely, how can we understand colonial relations and racial categories between different postcolonies under the conditions of late globalising capitalism?

You might at this point be wondering about the thesis title. It is called *Fuelling Culture* and, as yet, I have made little mention of oil or petrodollars. The Gulf's hydrocarbon deposits, and the surpluses accrued from their extraction, processing, and sale, are this thesis' *mise-en-scene*. Several studies have already begun to diversify our understandings of how global hydrocarbon and petrochemical dependency have shaped the materialities of our world, beyond energy systems themselves.²⁹ The Gulf's surfeit of these much-prized liquids has led to the region's rapid establishment as an important nodal point of global capitalism, lubricating its states with prodigious oil

²⁹ Timothy Mitchell has drawn out the political implications of hydrocarbon extraction for democracy: while coal's physical properties created conditions favourable to worker organising, the move to oil - easily extracted and transported - attenuated worker power, and thus democratic institutions. Elaborating Mitchell's arguments, On Barak has shown how, in the Middle East, colonial dependencies were forged through British coal, cautioning that the nineteenth and twentieth century history of hydrocarbons should not be read as one of transition but of carbon intensification. Barak also attempts to draw out the stakes of coal for culture, exploring the processes of re-mystification that occurred as this fossil fuel began to circulate through the Ottoman Empire. Adam Hanieh has reconstructed the history of petrochemicals, showing how plastic driven consumer capitalism enshrined American global hegemony. In the field of Art History and cultural criticism, Amanda Boetzkes has argued for the crucial role of contemporary art in visualising the intimate relationship between plastic, waste, and petroculturalism. See On Barak, *Powering Empire: How Coal made the Middle East and Sparked Global Carbonization* (Oakland: University of California Press); Amanda Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism: Contemporary Art and the Drive to Waste* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2019); Adam Hanieh, "Petrochemical Empire: The Geo-politics of Fossil-Fuelled Production," *New Left Review* 130, Jul/Aug (2021): 21-51; Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011).

wealth. This wealth has been aggressively incorporated into global markets, as have downstream businesses and other key industries that oil wealth and capitalisation in the Gulf have spawned. Although there is a distinct skew in this incorporation towards Western markets, there is also a marked shift eastward, as the Gulf strives to position itself as a bridge between eastern and western markets.

This jostling is driven by the spectre of global decarbonisation, and by the pressure to diversify and liberalise applied by handmaidens of capitalist structural adjustment such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Excepting Bahrain, Dubai, and the northern emirates in the UAE, there is no scarcity of oil reserves in the Gulf. These pressures have nonetheless made the “post-oil future” the central concern of state-led development. While the first cultural institutions constructed along the lines prescribed by cultural metropolises in the West were not conceived as agents of diversification, they have nevertheless retroactively become important pieces in these development strategies – *visions*, as they have been named.

Since the early 2000s a bumper crop of new or redeveloped cultural districts and institutions, art fairs and festivals, and heritage complexes have opened: Saadiyat Cultural District, the Cultural Foundation, and Abu Dhabi Art in Abu Dhabi; Alserkal Avenue, Art Dubai, Bastakiyya Heritage Quarter, and the Museum of the Future in Dubai; the Museum of Islamic Art, Mathaf, the Qatar National Museum and Msheireb in Qatar; Sharjah Art Foundation, Maraya, and the Sharjah Museum in Sharjah; MiSK, Al Ula, and Ithra in Saudi Arabia; Sheikh Abdullah al-Salem Cultural Centre in Kuwait. This is by no means an exhaustive list, nor does it take account of the welter of mooted but unrealised projects. As part of the imaginaries of post-oil futures, reading these emergent cultural infrastructures for their congealed social relations can therefore offer crucial insights into the racial and imperial horizons of the capitalist future they attempt to bring into being. However, to bring into view the colonial, racial, and capitalist dimensions of these institutions and futures requires reconciling the two perspectives from which the study of high culture has been approached. Before moving on to a discussion of how a theory of art grounded in the insights of racial capitalism would be the agent of this rapprochement, I will therefore give general overview of these two strands of research.

I. LOCATING THE POLITICS OF HIGH CULTURE

The critical research that has been conducted into the politics and sociology of fine art and high culture can be grouped into two primary strands - museums and heritage as colonialism, and the neoliberalisation of contemporary art - each of which has a tributary in the study of high cultural production and institutions in the Middle East. The first explores how, as repositories of colonial plunder that are ordered by colonial epistemologies, cultural institutions are agents of colonialism. Dan Hicks' recent book *The Brutish Museums*, which uses the Benin Bronzes as a heuristic for how cultural loot became a tool in the arsenal of colonial governance, approaches the colonialism of fine art from a historical perspective.³⁰ Traditionally, Britain's punitive and brutal massacre and ransacking of the Kingdom of Benin has been cast as a retributive act, after a British protectorate expeditionary force were killed while going against the direct refusal of the Oba (the king of Benin) to admit a British delegation sent to open the kingdom to trade. Hicks argues this campaign signalled a shift in British imperial strategy toward culture as one of the key theatres of the struggle to assert British colonial control by contributing forcefully to the discursive regime of white supremacy. Hicks' primary objective is to render visible the violence through which these objects came to the art market. Despite many eventually finding their way into the collections of our major historic museums, and irrespective of watertight provenances, Hicks contends the bronzes are indelibly marked with this violence.

Devising a historically grounded 'theory of taking' sets the stage for his major political intervention, namely, to argue that both market actors and museums use provenance, pedagogy, and racialised conservation diktats as smokescreens for this originary violence, justifying the refusal of Western institutions to return these stolen artefacts to what is now Nigeria. A number of writers, notably some from Nigeria itself, have struck a word of caution about the simplicity of Hicks' theory of restitution.³¹ However, his case for restitution draws on and further crystallises ideas

³⁰ Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

³¹ See for example, Adewale Maja-Pearce, "Strewn with Loot," *The London Review of Books* 43, no. 16 (2021): 20-22.

that have been gaining ground in recent years, spurred by notable campaigns such as Rhodes Must Fall³² and its offshoots outside South Africa, and the publication of the Sarr-Savoy report in 2018, commissioned by the French President, Emmanuel Macron.³³

While, as Hicks' work indicates, the body of historical research that traces the colonial history of objects convened in the national collections of Western historical and ethnographic museums is no doubt attuned to the epistemological dimensions of colonial loot, there is a relatively substantial literature that focuses directly on how culture is drafted into processes of colonial meaning-making. As has already been suggested, within industry adjacent disciplines, in particular museum, curatorial, and heritage studies, there is a wealth of research on the colonial structure of the norms in which their professional practices are anchored. At its core, this literature turns on a critique of the universalism inherent in the autonomous theory of art - "art for art's sake."³⁴ This theory extricates aesthetics from the social realm in which it is produced, rooting arguments for its inherent value in the notion that creativity is the purest distillate of humanity, and thus claiming that the arts and culture are uniquely placed to communicate with audiences and to heal political rifts.

This universalist idea, given its purest expression in the 2002 Declaration of Universal Value and its conceptual corollary of the "Universal Museum," has been critiqued on the basis of the developmental hierarchies enshrined in the conventional chrono-geographic organisation of the museum. Organising collections in this manner, under the banner of the Universal Museum, sanctions a particular teleological narrative

³² Brian Kwoba et al. eds., *Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonise the Racist Heart of Empire*, (London: Zed Books, 2018).

³³ Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage, Toward a New Relational Ethics" (Ministère de la culture de France & UMR 7220, November 2018). See also the landmark promise by the Dutch Government to return items stolen during the colonial period. The decision to establish an independent commission was taken on the recommendations of a taskforce of curators from the country's major museums. Additionally, Germany has agreed to begin restitution of some Benin Bronzes in 2022, after contact with the Benin Dialogue Group, and has commissioned an audit of all its ethnological collections. How many and which Bronzes will be returned is yet to be decided.

³⁴ The modern origins of autonomy can be traced back to Kantian ideas about aesthetics and the sublime, by way of twentieth century Marxist debates over autonomy as a bourgeois idea, modernist abstraction, and romanticism. For Marxist debates see, among others, Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005 [1951]); Theodor Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2006 [1977]); and Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999 [1955]).

of global history and elides the connections and expropriations that have allowed the West to emerge as the crucible of a particular Enlightenment model of cultural production.³⁵ By virtue of giving them a larger footprint in the museum in the context of the autonomous idea of art, it also establishes the cultural production of the West, and therefore its societies, as superior. The museological and curatorial approach that flows from the autonomous theory of art and the universal museum, with minimal contextualising information, has also been critiqued for presuming and universalising a Western Enlightenment subject of culture, familiar with a practice of looking unalloyed by context.³⁶ Building on the poststructural anchor of this critique, some scholars have adopted Foucault's theory of governmentality to explore museums and heritage as a form of cultural governmentality that enlists audiences into processes of nation-state formation and subjectification.³⁷

Straddling museum conservation and heritage, Western cultural norms, and their institutional machineries such as museums and UNESCO, have likewise been critiqued as vehicles of colonial relations. The artificial distinction between tangible and intangible, and the dematerialisation of material culture, that ground these norms, both of which were discussed in the opening vignette about Soqotra, is the ballast of this critique. These norms allow cultural objects and heritage sites to be cordoned off from local communities in service of their incorporation into the abstracted and hierarchical space of global history.³⁸

³⁵ See Mieke Bal, "Telling, Showing, Showing Off," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 3 (1992): 556–94; T. J. Barringer and Tom Flynn, eds. *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997); and *Museums, Power, Knowledge: Selected Essays* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); Hicks, *Brutish*; Curtis Hinsley, "The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Fair Columbian Exposition," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 344–65; Simon J Knell, ed. *The Contemporary Museum: Shaping Museums for the Global Now* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). There is also substantial overlap between these critiques and the often self-reflexive epistemological critiques of anthropology as the handmaiden of empire that produces and objectifies the very cultures it claims to uncover through study.

³⁶ Bennett, *Museums, Power, Knowledge*.

³⁷ Bennett, *Birth*; Chiara De Cesari, "Creative Heritage: Palestinian Heritage NGOs and Defiant Arts of Government," *American Anthropologist* 112, no. 4 (2010): 625–37; Nikolas Rose, "Governing Advanced "Liberal" Democracies" in *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, eds. Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 144 – 162.

³⁸ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

For many indigenous communities, these objects are part of a living cosmology of spirits and religious practices. Indigenous critiques of conservation and heritage have therefore explored the complicated, sometimes traumatising effects of dematerialising objects by subordinating them to Western museological practices.³⁹ The museum's ocular regime prioritises the eye over other senses, shielding objects behind glass cases and only allowing them to be handled by glove-wearing cultural professionals in the cloistered offices of museum buildings. Such critiques drink deeply from the critique of the Enlightenment episteme's sensory ratio, in which the civilised and rational Western subject is identified with the eye, and by extension the mind.⁴⁰ Colonised parts of the world by contrast have historically been denied the sense of sight entirely, with colonial discourse likening indigenous people to the blind or as living in a state of perpetual darkness.⁴¹ Historical research has revealed hierarchies of norms, geographies and senses as vestiges of the nineteenth and early twentieth century historical and ethnographic museums. Beginning with the cabinet of curiosities, these functioned as tools to catalogue and display the colonised and thus, along with ethnographic photography and film, became commodified pageants of Othering, eliciting a heady mix of desire and fear in nineteenth century audiences.⁴²

The complementary arguments to the above are those that deal with cultural production in former colonies as a space of colonial encounter, in which practitioners and audiences contend with the enduring colonial structure of this social field.

³⁹ Ien Ang, "The Art Museum as Monument: Cultural Change Contained," in *Memory, Monuments and Museums: The Past in the Present*, ed. Marilyn Lake. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006), 138–52; Denis Byrne, "A Critique of Unfeeling Heritage," in *Intangible Heritage*, eds., Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 243–66; Conal McCarthy, "Indigenisation: Reconceptualising Museology," in *The Contemporary Museum: Shaping Museums for the Global Now*, ed. Simon J Knell, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 37–54. See also artistic movements such as Chicano Art. Ian McLean's *Rattling Spears* (London: Reaktion, 2016), offers an interesting study of Aboriginal Art and its commodification, providing a window onto the paradoxes of the relationship between art museums, the market, indigeneity, and resistance.

⁴⁰ Constance Classen, "Museum Manners: The Sensory Life of the Early Museum," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (2007): 895–914; Constance Classen and David Howes, "The Museum as Sensescape: Western Sensibilities and Indigenous Artifacts" in *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Edwards et al. (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 199–222; Elizabeth Edwards et al., "Introduction," in *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Edwards et al. (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 3-16; Laura U. Marks and Dana Polan, *The Skin of the Film* (Duke University Press, 2000).

⁴¹ Classen and Howes, "Sensescape."

⁴² Classen and Howes, "Sensescape"; Edwards et al., "Introduction"; Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007); Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

Extending her preoccupation with high culture and the arts as a site of reckoning with histories of colonialism,⁴³ Jessica Winegar approaches critiques of art's autonomy from a different angle.⁴⁴ She considers how, following the War on Terror, majority-Muslim states have leant on culture as an interlocutor of the humanity threatened by growing anti-Muslim sentiment and, in particular, as an advocate of the peaceability of Muslim people and societies. Given that the Arab Gulf states are non-Western postcolonies, while the research on its museums and heritage are suffused with the insights of research grounded in former European and American metropolises, studies from both a critical and technical perspective have tended to approach the question from the same geographic vantage point as Winegar, examining the tensions that emerge as Enlightenment museology and heritage norms are inscribed into the region.

In both spheres arguments are made for what is termed the 'lack of fit between the Western approach of heritage management and indigenous social systems and values.'⁴⁵ In the main, these studies underscore the need for alternative museological and heritage models that resonate more with "local" conceptions of museums and culture. Surveying their role as cultural consultants in the region, Darren Barker and Eric Langham⁴⁶ call for an 'active, engaged heritage model,'⁴⁷ while Karen Exell advocates looking for insights in the personalised and idiosyncratic approach of Sheikh Faisal of Qatar's popular private museum.⁴⁸ Considering the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Al Ula, formerly called al-Hijr, in Saudi Arabia, Alaa Alrawaibah,⁴⁹ suggests that greater degrees of 'community engagement' are necessary, particularly considering the superstitions about the site that percolate among locals. Straddling the

⁴³ Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

⁴⁴ Jessica Winegar, "The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror," *Anthropological Quarterly* 83, no. 3, (2008): 651–81.

⁴⁵ Denis Byrne quoted in Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico, "Introduction: (De)constructing Arabian Heritage Debates," in *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula*, eds. Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 7.

⁴⁶ Eric Langham and Darren Barker, "Spectacle and Participation: A New Heritage Model from the UAE," in *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula*, eds. Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 85–98.

⁴⁷ Exell and Rico, "Introduction."

⁴⁸ Karen Exell, "Collecting an Alternative World: The Sheikh Faisal Bin Qassim Al Thani Museum in Qatar," in *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula*, eds. Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 51–70.

⁴⁹ Alaa Alrawaibah, "Archaeological Site Management in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Protection or Isolation?" in *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula*, eds. Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 143–56.

humanist and colonial critiques, Exell evaluates these new museums in the Gulf as stewards of a particular utopian humanism that responds directly to the post-9/11 conjuncture, comparing them with an entirely different Islamic utopianism to which such institutions are an anathema.⁵⁰

Alexandre Kazerouni's analysis of the new cultural infrastructure in the Gulf is perhaps the most well-known due to his discoveries concerning the roots of the Saadiyat Cultural District in Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan's offset programme, a scheme that allocated a proportion of the funds spent on arms in the 1990s into a pot of money for domestic investment and development. His assessment pivots on a distinction between older, local museums and 'mirror museums,' an institutional form under which he brackets the new suite of institutions such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi (LAD), the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (GAD), and the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) in Doha.⁵¹ These 'mirror museums,' so called because they actively strive to mirror the cultural institutional model favoured in the Western centres of the high culture industry, are argued to be central to consolidating the authoritarian control of the ruling faction in each state. Kazerouni suggests this rash of institutions emerged after the First Gulf War (1990-1991) as conduits of cultural diplomacy, designed to endear the regimes to powerful Western states. Local cultural bureaucracies that had administered the former institutions were replaced by an administrative structure staffed disproportionately by Western employees who report directly to the rulers by way of their political protégés, most notably the al-Mubarak siblings in Abu Dhabi. To the extent that his thesis rests on the idea of supplanting preexisting indigenous cultural milieus with an imported cultural institutional blueprint, both epistemological and organisational, Kazerouni's argument must be considered a variant of the branch of research concerned with the Western/indigenous axis, and thus also implicitly with colonialism.

For all this research's virtues, the market is a spectre, never quite expressed, that haunts this strand of thinking. In Hicks' we see the intersection between cultural institutions and the art market, in as much as sanitised provenances are contrived

⁵⁰ Karen Exell, "Utopian Ideals, Unknowable Futures, and the Art Museum in the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 7, no. 1 (2017): 49–64.

⁵¹ Alexandre Kazerouni, *Le miroir des cheikhs: Musée et politique dans les principautés du golfe Persique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2017).

through market mechanisms and property rights.⁵² Hicks also describes the particular mercantilist form of imperial rule pursued by the British as ‘corporate-militarist colonialism,’⁵³ suggesting the integral role of corporate wings of the British government such as the Royal Niger Company, who pushed hard for the forcible opening of the Kingdom of Benin to trade. Likewise, in Winegar, there are intimations of the market to the extent that it is through the market that actors buy, and sometimes buy back, the culture through which to narrate alternative histories. And yet none of these analyses venture an account of cultural institutions that thoroughly considers how its colonialism is formed by the logics and imperatives of the market, and how these colonial institutions contribute to the functioning of global economies as a whole.

A common refrain among cultural professionals is that the presence of money and patronage in cultural production is a tale as old as time. There are, however, dissenting voices. Indeed, there are whole artistic traditions that recognise and attempt to resist the increasing subordination of cultural production to market imperatives - institutional critique, performance art,⁵⁴ and socially-engaged practice, to name but a few. While, as I have already intimated, academic silos have impeded historical sociological analyses of cultural production and institutions, there are some notable exceptions within the academy, particularly from Art History itself. Both Brian Holmes⁵⁵ and Julian Stallabrass⁵⁶ have charted the effects of the increased dependence of contemporary artists and institutions upon private sponsors and capital. Stallabrass observes the formal similarity between the protean freedoms of art, and the mercurial, uncertain social forms induced by free market capitalism,⁵⁷ what he terms their ‘disavowed affinity.’⁵⁸ Particularly relevant to the arguments of this thesis, is Stallabrass’

⁵² In smuggling cases where an object has been sold but an export licence has not been granted, unless a bilateral or multilateral agreement has been signed, national jurisdictions have tended to neither recognise nor enforce the penal judgements of the offended state. They have therefore *de facto* chosen to uphold individual property rights.

⁵³ Hicks, *British*, xiii.

⁵⁴ See Jen Harvie, *Fair Play – Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁵⁵ Brian Holmes, “Liar’s Poker. Representation of Politics/Politics of Representation,” *Springer* 1, no. 3 (2003).

⁵⁶ Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ He summons Marx’s famous reworking of Prospero’s final soliloquy in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*: “all that is solid melts into air.”

⁵⁸ Stallabrass, 6.

adjacent contention that forms of political art and curation concerned with hybridity, creolisation and difference,⁵⁹ similar preoccupations to the purely discursive tendency within postcolonial theory, were forged in the crucible of post-1989 capitalist-driven globalisation.

Elaborating the homology between art discourse and capitalism, scholar-practitioners⁶⁰ and social theorists⁶¹ have drawn attention to how late capitalism has subsumed the principles and organisation of artistic work. Analysing the artistic mode of production, Dave Beech cautions that the absence of capitalism's overt structures, such as wage labour, shields artists from the commodification of their time, leading them to merely emulate the corporate spirit of wage labour.⁶² Yet, for the most part, scholars exploring the relationship between art and capitalism's mode of production have reversed Beech's assessment. They argue that the labour models of late capitalist economies, which rely heavily on casualised and embodied labour occurring outside the social barter of the wage, increasingly resemble the profoundly hierarchical yet notionally free and flexible labour model upon which cultural production relies. Gregory Sholette dubs this invisible, emotionally, and intellectually invested labour force the cultural sector's 'Dark Matter'⁶³, while Andrew Ross designates it 'No Collar' labour. Locating its emergence in the radical, creative spirit of 1968, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello⁶⁴ also chart how what they call artistic critiques of the market (i.e., those pivoting on its homogenising and stultifying effects) were metabolised by capitalism through an embrace of individualism, freedom of expression, and creativity as cornerstones of entrepreneurialism.

Sholette is also part of an artistic movement which contends that for practitioners, a way out of this quagmire of complicity is to be found in socially-

⁵⁹ For this viewpoint's mission statement see Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition," *Research in African Literatures* 34, no.4 (2003): 57-82. Postcolonial curation will be discussed at length in chap. 6.

⁶⁰ Dave Beech, *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical, and Marxist Economics* (London: Brill, 2015); Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010); Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art* (London: Verso, 2017).

⁶¹ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2018); Andrew Ross, *No-Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

⁶² Beech, *Art and Value*.

⁶³ Sholette, *Dark Matter*.

⁶⁴ Boltanski and Chiapello, *Spirit of Capitalism*.

engaged art and activism.⁶⁵ Yet in her survey of the ‘social turn’⁶⁶ in art, part of the wider critical turn observed by Joselit,⁶⁷ Claire Bishop critically examines what it means for artists and curators to continue to position socially-engaged practice as “art,” and to be hailed as worthwhile interventions by art critics precisely because they reject aesthetic and artistic pretensions in favour of social efficacy.⁶⁸ As Bishop writes, “[t]he aspiration is always to move beyond art, but never to the point of comparison with comparable projects in the social domain.”⁶⁹ Elaborating critiques of liberal tolerance and multiculturalism,⁷⁰ Bishop submits that establishing socially-engaged practice as *sui generis* deracinates both art and politics from their respective matrixes of critique. The critical turn in art thus dilutes politics into ethics, with artworks assessed for their moral purity rather than for either their aesthetic or political effects.

Starting with the contemporary art world’s eager embrace of Lebanese so-called “Post-War” art, Hanan Toukan injects these structural and theoretical arguments with regional specificity.⁷¹ She palpates the many contradictions of Lebanon’s contemporary art scene to argue that its inscription as a counter-hegemonic locale, within the asymmetries of the post-Cold War globalised funding environment, has yielded an overtly radical artistic practice, averse to the imperial fetishisation of Lebanese art, that inadvertently reproduces the very colonial hierarchies that stimulate this aversion. Scholars of space and architecture have likewise given analyses of the political economics of contemporary art a different kind of grounded specificity. They have explored how the built environment of the contemporary art world is rooted in logics of deindustrialisation and gentrification. Due to the consonance between subversion and difference, and contemporary art’s ideology of freedom, commercial galleries and even art museums have fetishised the social multiplicity, poverty, and industrial

⁶⁵ See also *Field: The Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*.

⁶⁶ Artistic practices rooted in communities and community organising.

⁶⁷ David Joselit, “An Allegory of Criticism,” *October* 103, Winter (2003): 3–14.

⁶⁸ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).

⁶⁹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 19.

⁷⁰ Theorisations of the depoliticising effects of liberal tolerance and multiculturalism suggest its critical move is to establish these discourses as virtues, while ontologising and commensurating difference, thereby placing both beyond the socio-political realm in which they are constructed and enacted, and therefore effectively beyond politics. For examples of this argument see Slavoj Žižek, “Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 225, Sept/Oct (1997): 28–51; and Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2006).

⁷¹ Hanan Toukan, “Art, Aid, Affect: Locating the Political in Post-Civil War Lebanon’s Contemporary Cultural Practices,” (PhD Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2011).

architecture common in less affluent parts of the city. Billed as regeneration, contemporary art has often constituted the vanguard of gentrification, presaging the arrival of developers keen to further commodify the contemporary art affect, while simultaneously narrowing the scope for the very thing they want to market.⁷²

Reading across these two critical bodies of literature, the nexus of postcolonialism, race, capitalism, and art emerges as the key problematic. Despite the two strands of historical sociological research on fine art and high culture described above advancing our understanding of this intersection significantly, both are deficient in important respects. The major stumbling block of the theoretical and substantive critiques of museums as vehicles of colonialism is that they rest on an understanding of colonialism/postcolonialism that remains rooted in the original binary geographies of metropole/colony, and centre/periphery – what Neil Lazarus pithily dubs its ‘civilisational terms.’⁷³ The effect of postcolonialism’s lurking essentialism is to naturalise these geographies, occluding a more comprehensive assessment of how colonial relations are threaded through the transnational field of high culture. To illustrate its role as a technology of Othering, high culture is also inadvertently reified as intrinsically “Western” without attending to the many discontinuities and differences contained within ideas of the “West” or “Europe.” Equally reified is the indigenous authentic subject, who is seen as a riposte to the racialised foil to Western identity constructed in the museum, and with whom contextually sensitive museological discourses would organically communicate.

This latter issue is particularly problematic in the studies that address museums in the Gulf due to the *kafala* sponsorship system for importing workers. This system has created a situation in which migrants significantly outnumber citizens, within a labour market that turns on racial constructs and segregation, and is set against the background of nativist programmes to indigenise the workforce. In the UAE and Qatar, citizens make up less than 10 percent of the entire workforce. Thus, while some works acknowledge the challenge that these dynamics pose to museological concerns around indigeneity or the “local community,” they are merely acknowledged in passing

⁷² See the volume *Urban Memory* eds., Mark Crinson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005) for a particularly edifying and varied discussion of the intersection between contemporary art, postindustrial urbanism, memory, and capitalism.

⁷³ Neil Lazarus, “What Postcolonial Theory Doesn’t Say,” *Race & Class* 53, no. 1 (2011): 3–27.

as a wrinkle of complexity. Likewise, while some have acknowledged that questions around whether a Western discourse is being imposed from outside reinforces the problematic binaries that postcolonialism both challenges and reproduces,⁷⁴ there are precious few suggestions for ways of reconsidering the issue that avoid this political dead end other than stressing the complex, varied, and contingent hybridity of the process by which heritage norms are transferred or resisted.⁷⁵

By contrast, while Toukan explicitly engages the intersection between the globalisation and liberalisation of the art world, and postcolonial aesthetic practice, for the most part, historical sociological explorations of the relationship between contemporary art and capitalism tend to gloss over colonialism. Where they do imply postcolonial theory, and therefore colonialism, it is as a subset of postmodern contemporary art. This neglect is in large part due to the outsized attention given to the pact between capital and the ostentatious and visibly gilded field of contemporary art relative to other fields of art that, though less spectacular and less financialised, are more clearly linked to colonialism. Chin-Tao Wu's work draws explicitly on the postcolonial vocabulary of core and periphery to counter claims of both the biennial form and postmodernism as symptoms of colonial distributions of power disintegrating. Yet even her work does not articulate colonialism as its shadow term.⁷⁶ As a consequence, colonial durabilities within the art/capitalist intersection have been largely overlooked.

Given these aporias, one might think that each strand would naturally act as a corrective to the other. However, while they overlap, these two bodies of research do not map sufficiently neatly onto one another as to be considered complementary. This is in part a problem of method, as each take different sites and historical timeframes as their object of analysis. The former examines museological and heritage assemblages in the *longue durée*, exploring art market capitalism in as much as it cuts across and constitutes much of the history of Western cultural colonialism. The latter, by comparison, is concentrated on a much narrower historical timeframe. Largely

⁷⁴ Trinidad Rico, "Islamophobia and the Location of Heritage Debates in the Arabian Peninsula," in *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula*, eds. Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 19–32.

⁷⁵ We are by now aware that this argument is homologous with liberal arguments concerning the benefits of capitalist-led globalisation.

⁷⁶ Chin-Tao Wu, "Biennials sans Frontiers," *New Left Review* 57, May/June (2009): 107–115.

taking the 1980s as a watershed moment, it attends almost exclusively to the processes by which contemporary art is subordinated to market logics and its critiques recuperated by capital. More fundamental than these methodological discrepancies, however, are the incompatibilities between the theoretical schema of each.

While the exact proportion varies across the gamut of studies addressed above, the basic difference between the two strands rests on the relative explanatory power they afford the ideational and the material, with those works rooted in postcolonial theory prioritising the former, and those rooted in Marxism prioritising the latter. The compatibility of these two conceptual machineries is among the most enduring preoccupations of those working within or across both traditions.⁷⁷ The postcolonial condition of the Gulf states, and the explicit centring of postcolonial museological and curatorial praxes by cultural professionals and institutions that are based in the Gulf, yet deeply enmeshed with institutions in the West, make the necessity of the tools of postcolonial theory abundantly clear. However, without the contingent and shifting geographies of power that are integral to many analyses of late capitalism, one is left unable to critically interrogate the complex social relations by which these institutions are produced and which they in turn produce, relations that are at once racially striated and geographically asymmetrical in ways that exceed the West/Global South, White/non-White axes. Indeed, it would be fair to say that the politics of cultural infrastructure in the Gulf would be unintelligible without comprehensive reference to the two - and in equal measure.

Within the fields of political sociology and international studies there has been a recent revivification of the theory of racial capitalism, with scholars putting it to productive use to think through a range of different contexts and events.⁷⁸ Building on

⁷⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994); Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London: Verso, 2014); Lazarus, “Doesn’t Say”; Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); Rahul Rao, “Recovering Reparative Readings of Postcolonialism and Marxism,” *Critical Sociology* 43, no. 4–5 (2017): 587–98; Sara Salem, *Anticolonial Afterlives in Egypt: The Politics of Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁷⁸ Ida Danewid, “The Fire This Time: Grenfell, Racial Capitalism and the Urbanisation of Empire,” *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 1 (2020): 289–313; John Narayan, “The Wages of Whiteness in the Absence of Wages: Racial Capitalism, Reactionary Intercommunalism and the Rise of Trumpism,” *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 11 (2017): 2482–2500; Satnam Virdee, “Racialized Capitalism: An Account of its Contested Origins and Consolidation,” *The Sociological Review* 67, no. 1 (2019): 3–27. Racial capitalism has also been particularly generative for studies of the relationship between populations, debt, and investment. See for example Zenia Kish and Justin Leroy, “Bonded

these invaluable interventions, the central contribution of this thesis is to show how a bridge across the manifestation of the impasse between Marxism and postcolonialism in the study of high culture is to be found in the theory of racial capitalism. It is therefore to an elaboration of this theory that I now turn.

II. TOWARDS A RACIAL CAPITALIST THEORY OF ART

To advance a theory of art grounded in racial capitalism would seem to presuppose the necessity of a theory of capitalism. Given the bewildering number of definitions that capitalism has generated, this is a freighted endeavour. As has been observed, scholars hewing to the traditions of Marxism, liberalism, poststructuralism or many other intellectual traditions for that matter, all mean something different when they use the word capitalism.⁷⁹ I am most persuaded by those arguments that see capitalism not as a unified totality or an immutable ideology, but as a set of material processes of capitalisation undergirded by a clutch of interrelated yet plastic ideas such as free market competition, property rights, monetisation,⁸⁰ and latterly financialisation.⁸¹ Capital is by its very nature, infinitely plural; the vigour and dynamism of its search for new markets a product of the logic of competition between innumerable wielders of capital.⁸² The counterpart to its hydra-like structure is therefore the pragmatic pursuit of profit unencumbered by a stringent or uniform ideology.

Life,” *Cultural Studies* 29, no. 5-6 (2015): 630-561; Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—an Introduction,” *American Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2012): 361–85; as well as several contributions in the edited volume *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, eds. Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

⁷⁹ Johan Mathew, *Margins of the Market: Trafficking and Capitalism across the Arabian* (Oakland: University of California Press: 2016).

⁸⁰ Marx elaborated capitalism’s distinctive form of monetised exchange in which money is used to make more money (i.e., Money-Commodity-Money), rather than earlier exchange systems in which commodities were traded for money to buy other commodities (i.e., Commodity-Money-Commodity).

⁸¹ Nasser Abourahme and Omar Jabary-Salamanca, “Thinking against the Sovereignty of the Concept: A Conversation with Timothy Mitchell,” *City* 20, no. 5 (2016): 737–54; Timothy Mitchell, “The Properties of Markets,” in *Do Economists Make Markets?*, eds. Donald MacKenzie, Fabian Muniesa, and Lucia Siu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 244–75; Mathew, *Margins*; Erik Swyngedouw, “Globalisation or “Glocalisation”? Networks, Territories and Rescaling,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17, no. 1 (2004): 25–48. For arguments concerning neoliberalism as a specific order of reason see Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and de-Democratization,” *Political Theory* 34, no. 6 (2006): 690–714; and *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2015).

⁸² Virdee, “Racialized Capitalism.”

Taken together, competition and pragmatism deliver not a single system of capitalism but varied and connected capitalisms, that coexist with and amalgamate the other economic systems onto which they are superimposed. Due to this layering, capitalism is in a constant state of emendation and relayed flux, as capitalist ideas and structures chafe against, and are adapted by, the pre-existing socio-technical dynamics and institutional path dependencies of particular locales and contexts.⁸³ The competitive tendency of capital to stalk the planet for new markets to devour, which will be addressed in Chapter One, nevertheless entails the linking of disparate geographies and cultures. Despite liberal capitalism's putative claims to the equality of all under the system, capitalist 'intimacies,' as Lisa Lowe calls the linking of different places through its modes of production,⁸⁴ are necessarily structured around a series of material hierarchies and differentials.

Racial capitalism's key intervention is to insert race into the theorisation described above as the technology that mediates these hierarchical encounters. It is therefore potentially somewhat misleading to add the qualifier "racial" to this theory of capitalism, as it does not consider race to be one dynamic within the wider system. Rather, it argues that capitalism was always inherently and by necessity a racist project. Only racism and racialisations could resolve the tensions generated by the 'uneven and combined' manner through which capitalism linked different places and sources of labour.⁸⁵ This was only rendered more acute with the incremental intertwining of capitalism with liberalism's emergent ideology of equality during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Barbara W. Fields drills incisively down to the indispensability of racism to economic life within a liberal order when she writes that: '[t]hose holding liberty to be inalienable and holding Afro-American slaves were bound to end up holding race to be a self-evident truth... When self-evident laws of nature guarantee freedom, only equally self-evident laws of equally self-evident nature can account for

⁸³ Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, and Nik Theodore, "Variegated Neoliberalization: Geographies, Modalities, Pathways," *Global Networks* 10, no. 2 (2010): 182–222.

⁸⁴ Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

⁸⁵ Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nisancıoğlu, *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2015); Justin Rosenberg, "Uneven and Combined Development: "The International" in Theory and History" in *Historical Sociology and World History: Uneven and Combined Development over the Longue Durée*, eds. Alexander Anievas and Kamran Matin (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 17–30; Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008 [1930]).

its denial.⁸⁶ While she was writing with particular reference to the relationship between capitalism, slavery, and the universal claims of liberalism in the making of America, the crux of her analysis applies to the history of capitalist processes as a whole. To talk of capitalism is thus, in short, to talk of racial capitalism.

While this theory of capitalism reverses the relationship between race and economics,⁸⁷ the stress on race as the technology through which to rationalise contradictions, and justify violent dispossession, super-exploitation, and enslavement, is not a substantial departure from postcolonialism or critical race theory (CRT). Theories of racial capitalism recognise the postcolonial/CRT claims that many of our extant racial assemblages, and more precisely, the encoding of skin colour with race - its *epidermalisation* - are to an overwhelming degree the product of slavery and colonialism's 'racial cacophony.'⁸⁸ What sets the theory of racial capitalism apart from these other conceptualisations of race is that it locates the origins of race - including its assumption of biological features - in Europe,⁸⁹ and assesses colonialism and slavery through the prism of the larger unfolding history of capitalist development.

Cedric Robinson was, until recently, a much-overlooked lightning rod for these ideas.⁹⁰ Ploughing the hinterlands of both the traditions he braided together - historical sociology and black studies - Robinson assiduously excavated the rich tradition of black radicalism. In *Black Marxism*, the ambitious and prescient work he published in 1985, Robinson extended earlier scholar-activists' important theorisations of the intersection

⁸⁶ Barbara Fields quoted in Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy, "Introduction: The Old History of Capitalism," in *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, eds. Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 8.

⁸⁷ For early examples of this configuration of race and capitalism see W. E. B. Du Bois, "The African Roots of War," *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1915; C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2001 [1936]); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2014 [1944]).

⁸⁸ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1985), 309. Although he was the first to formulate racial capitalism as a general theory of capitalism, Robinson was not the first person to use the political nomenclature. It originated with Neville Alexander and the black intellectuals of the "National Forum" in Hammanskraal to describe the specific racial expression of capitalism in apartheid South Africa. See Heribert Adam, "Racial Capitalism versus Capitalist Non-Racialism in South Africa," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7, no. 2 (1984): 269-282.

⁸⁹ See Chapter Three in Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014) for a discussion of how Christian ideas of innocence and purity took on distinctly biological forms with the idea of *limpieza de sangre* (cleanliness of blood) during the crusades and the Spanish inquisition. Dunbar-Ortiz shows how this idea was mobilised to disenfranchise Moriscos and Conversos (Muslim and Jewish converts to Christianity respectively).

⁹⁰ Robin D. G. Kelley, "What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism?," *Boston Review*, 12 January 2017.

between economic systems, race and class, positing the existence of a theory of Black Marxism that challenged the universal validity of Western Marxism's class typology. In the introduction he summarises his key contention that 'the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions.'⁹¹

In the first section of the book, Robinson sketches a history of how an idea of whiteness and white supremacy began to coagulate within medieval Europe. It emerged palimpsest-like in opposition to racial constructs of migrant workforces such as Nordic mercenaries, and Slavic and Irish labourers, within proto-capitalist feudal systems, many of whom were the subjects of intra-European colonialism and slavery, as well as to the idea of the 'Moor,' a racialised collective term for the Muslim societies in southern Europe.⁹² Echoing Edward Said, Robinson singles out the conclusion of the Reconquista – the crusades against the Muslim dynasties that ruled parts of southern Europe - as of central, though not ruptural, importance to the structural power of Europe and whiteness: in 1492, the armies of the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, expelled the Nasrid dynasty from the Emirate of Granada. Robinson shows how racial constructs percolated at different levels of European society, stressing how preexisting racialised fissures within Europe's subaltern were seized upon to neutralise the brewing class conflicts that agrarian and industrial capitalism generated, and which were given further stimulus by the spread of insurrectionary ideas from revolutionary France. Early colonial conquests likewise benefitted from the swirl of racialised notions such as "savagery" and "barbarism" that were mobilised against the Irish, and Muslim societies in Europe. Not only could these existing discourses be adapted to be used against indigenous peoples in the Americas, and legitimate uneven distributions of seized wealth, but the subaltern classes created by racialised forms of disenfranchisement within Europe were incentivised to take part in brutal colonising ventures abroad with the promise of better circumstances, bringing with them ideas of racial and religious purity, whether Catholic or Protestant.⁹³

As Satnam Virdee emphasises, instead of collapsing class differences into a racial homogeneity, the theory of racial capitalism creates conceptual space by locating the

⁹¹ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 2.

⁹² The Almohad, Almoravid, and Nasrid dynasties in the Alhambra, and the Fatimid and Aghlabid dynasties in Sicily.

⁹³ Dunbar-Ortiz, *Indigenous*.

history of racism within the unfolding history of capitalism.⁹⁴ This allows one to overcome the partitions - both geographic and epidermal - upon which accounts that locate race's emergence in the crucible of the colonial and transatlantic encounters rest. In creating this space, racial capitalism also offers a way to repair the fault line that has been opened between certain strands of CRT and postcolonialism on one side, and Marxism on the other. This flexibility and redemptive capacity are, as the last section proposed, indispensable to this thesis, which examines not only how colonialism, and the racialised economic relations it imparted, has shaped the emergence of a high cultural infrastructure in the Gulf, but also how these infrastructures contribute to, and alter, the persistence of colonial relations after empire.

Thinking historically about the twin processes of capitalisation and racialisation has both spatial and temporal implications. In line with the spatial and infrastructural turn in the social sciences, racial capitalism gives one latitude to consider how infrastructural investments enshrine certain directions of capital flows, creating and reshuffling international space through the particular ways they bring places together and distribute capital, while simultaneously inscribing particular racialised divisions in space. Cities, and their built environments, which will be tended to in Chapters Three and Four, are an integral part of these spatial dynamics. Across the board cities are crucial nodes of capital accumulation as well as spaces in which differences grate against one other, and bodies are racialised through urban planning and policing.⁹⁵ In former colonies, cities also reveal the physical signs of colonialism's capitalist urges, indicating the aggressive, albeit partial, supplanting of subsistence and barter economies, with plantations, industry, and exchange, thus transforming rural and urban landscapes into impoverished cities with sprawling shanty towns.⁹⁶

Through a historical aperture, one can consider how the hard infrastructures of the built environment are themselves dependent upon colonial sediment in the form of racial constructs, racialised legal infrastructures (sometimes called soft

⁹⁴ Virdee, "Racialized Capitalism."

⁹⁵ Doreen Massey, *World City* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, "Cities and the Geographies of "Actually Existing Neoliberalism," *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 349–79.

⁹⁶ In "Doesn't Say," Lazarus makes his arguments about the ahistoricism and anti-materialism of postcolonial theory partly by considering how "postcolonial" literature figures the experience of colonialism through the image of the city and the landscape. Among the texts he mentions is *Cities of Salt* by the Saudi writer Abdulrahman Munif.

infrastructures), and the flows of capital they enable. Ann Stoler refers to this vestigial form of empire as imperial “duress,” an image that instantly conjures the forceful material and epistemic slipstreams to which the racial capitalist analytic sensitises us. Yet, unlike the perversely absolute political geography of postcolonial theory, historicising racism, imperialism, and slavery as part of capitalism allows for consideration of the halting yet tangible shifts in the global gradient of economic power and interdependency. These changes have been structured by shifts in global economic and energy systems, mediated by the geological lottery of resource distribution, of which the Arab Gulf states are among the major beneficiaries. Such historical changes open up new axes of super-exploitation and dispossession, and thus new and/or recombinant racialisations to maintain the systematic segregation of the international labour market⁹⁷ and institutional unevenness across geographic scales.⁹⁸

Tracing the coeval genealogies of capitalisations (material power) and racialisations (epistemic power), also creates the space to consider how changes to each occur at different paces. Thus, as this thesis will explore, despite the ascendance of new powerful centres of capitalism, in the current historical conjuncture the distribution of epistemic power bestowed by Western imperialism and slavery persists. Particularly durable has been the continued dominance of white subject-positioning within racialised global hierarchies, and the cleavage between material and epistemic questions that white epistemologies manufacture and by which they are reproduced. And yet, as Chapter Five explores in the context of postcolonial aesthetic production, the intimate relationship between race and capitalism, which racial capitalism stresses, might also gesture tentatively toward the possibility that new hegemonic racial formations will begin to emerge that will challenge whiteness, while still acting as a vector of colonial relations. The emphasis on historical sensitivity in racial capitalism is therefore a mode of grappling with emergent futures and their structural determinants, and more specifically with the racialised economic dynamics that are facilitating the colonisation of the future.

⁹⁷ For a discussion of the racial differentiation of the colonial labour market see Lowe, *Intimacies*; and Mishal Khan, “The Indebted Among the “Free” in *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, eds. Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 85-110.

⁹⁸ Brenner et al., “Variegated Neoliberalization.”

It is my contention that there is an elective affinity between the dynamics of the high culture industry and the theory of racial capitalism. The art world is a transnational field that is profoundly structured by colonial duress, in which histories of plunder and market categories cannot be extricated from those of colonial meaning-making. High cultural milieus are in the midst of a self-conscious reckoning with these uncomfortable realities. They continue to rely on the defence that art is a “social good,” with high culture positioned variously as a space within which radical political critiques are welcomed and can proliferate, and as a conduit of liberal humanism - especially when it is being exported to non-democratic contexts such as the Gulf. Such positioning rings hollow when calls for restitution are met with over-rationalised prevarication, and when the art industry as a whole has become increasingly dependent upon private sources of capital. More so, when considered from the vantage point of the disparities in wealth and power that underpin these uneven cultural cartographies. It becomes clear that the continued and disproportionate location of high culture in the former metropolises - largely for the enjoyment of the wealthy - is premised on racialised forms of (super-)exploitation, dispossession, and political repression in surplus rich parts of the world. In exchange for much desired capital, regimes in the Arab Gulf states and elsewhere receive tacit forms of consent, and political quietism, from the torch-bearing institutions of liberalism. It is, in short, a transnational field replete with profound ironies and contradictions. A theory of art grounded in racial capitalism would show how i) race is the agent of the dissociative acts that buff away or make bearable these seemingly unavoidable ironies; and ii) how the racialised meaning-making that goes on in the art world allows for the reproduction of the colonial dynamics of capital accumulation that are constitutive of globalising capitalist economies.

In this thesis I try to do just that. As a starting point, and building on the arguments of the last section and the introductory vignette about Soqatra, I take heed of Antonio Gramsci⁹⁹ and Stuart Hall’s shared conviction¹⁰⁰ that the breach between the ideational and the material is a mystification that enables the many contradictions of liberal capitalism to persist, a persistence that is only aided by the left’s critical

⁹⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971).

¹⁰⁰ Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988).

traditions getting bogged down in this quagmire. Given their orientation toward meaning-making, cultural institutions are nevertheless particularly well suited to this sleight of hand. Using racial capitalism, I will try to make such a contrivance untenable, illustrating that: i) alongside constructing, conveying, and translating ideas, the process of creating a high cultural sphere on the Arabian Peninsula is an infrastructural endeavour and is therefore profoundly material, rooted in global circuits of capital, people, and (un)conventional commodities; ii) these material trajectories have been sculpted by the equally material histories of colonialism, slavery, and commerce in the Gulf;¹⁰¹ iii) that the field is riven with durable racial assemblages such as the lawless frontier of resource extraction, the primordial illiberalism of Arab societies, and the naturalised civilisational ideas that art market structures commodify (and which the theoretical machineries of postcolonialism in some ways recapitulate); iv) that these capital intensive investments in culture ensure westward capital flows and re-inscribe the dominance of the cultural metropolises in the art world's transnational field; and finally v) that, despite these westward flows, the increased reliance on capital derived from the Gulf's hydrocarbon industries indicates how economic liberalisation and global oil-dependence is shifting the dial of power towards other parts of the world.

The centring of postcolonial discourses within the Gulf's expanding cultural institutional sector entails its abstraction from these shifting yet still highly uneven and segregated geographies of super-exploitation, dispossession, and capital accumulation. By reconstructing the material dynamics that form the ballast of the Gulf's cultural infrastructure - by "rematerialising" them - I also aim to show how this counter-hegemonic discourse remains firmly rooted in colonial relations. In so doing, I hope this thesis will furnish the body of critical research devoted to the essential task of stretching both Marxism and postcolonialism with a geographically, historically, and geologically specific case study, suggesting that, as neither the extreme periphery nor the centre of centres, the carbon-rich Gulf states offer a particular fertile site for such an endeavour.

Insisting on approaching the entanglement of art, race, and capitalism historically, appreciating all the 'powerful contingency'¹⁰² that such a mode of thinking

¹⁰¹ Due to the art fair and biennial industries, these are continuously arranged and rearranged in more and less permanent infrastructures.

¹⁰² Charles Tilly quoted in Virdee, "Racialized Capitalism," 7.

implies, is also a question of political commitments. Rather than suggesting the incontrovertibility of racial constructs, and the distribution of resources they licence, being attentive to the changing complexion of racial-economic formations also holds out the possibility of their eventual overthrow. The first step to such an emancipatory project, however meagre, is generating the tools to correctly diagnose how systems of racial capitalism are reproduced, and thus the fissures from within which to prise open the emergent future. In mapping the anatomy of racial cultural capitalism from the Gulf, it is my hope that this thesis might, in some very small way, participate in this global struggle for racial and economic justice.

III. METHODOLOGY

Insofar as it draws on, and attempts to bridge, two rich traditions of social theory - and entirely eschews scientific Marxism - it should be clear that this study is an interpretative one. Notwithstanding the fact they were inchoate when I began my research, taking shape iteratively over the duration of the project, the political lens and commitments detailed in the last section have also inevitably, indeed knowingly, shaped this research from the outset. They have determined the fieldwork sites I selected, and guided the questions I have asked and the dynamics to which I was most alive while in the field.

When I designed the research in 2018, my core objective was to assess how colonial histories and capitalism percolate through the Gulf's new cultural institutions. It was also animated by the desire to move beyond accounts that exceptionalise the politics and sociology of the Arab Gulf states, and by a recognition that the so-called "art world" is a highly itinerant, transnational, albeit also asymmetrical, field. This desire dictated my choice to conduct a multi-sited ethnography across the Gulf states and former imperial capitals in Europe and America. Multi-sited ethnography is well-suited to the preoccupations of this study in as much as it is a method designed to grapple with social fields unfolding within the increasingly complex dynamics of disorganised and fractured globalised capitalism.¹⁰³ Unlike what George Marcus calls

¹⁰³ George E. Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (1995): 95–117.

the ‘conventional single-site mise-en-scene’¹⁰⁴ of classical ethnographic research, which takes a single set of subjects as its starting point, multi-sited ethnography assumes that, under capitalism, social fields are necessarily produced and emergent across a range of different sites.

While the pandemic did not drastically hamper my research, as I completed the majority of my fieldwork in 2018-2019, it did prevent me from visiting cultural institutions and milieus in Kuwait, Qatar, and Paris, as I had intended. Christopher Kelty’s remarks that a project which attempts forensic inquiry in every location of a distributed phenomenon ‘is not only extremely difficult, but confuses map and territory’ provide some comfort here.¹⁰⁵ I ended up conducting fieldwork exclusively in the cities of Sharjah, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, and London and New York. I conducted forty semi-structured interviews, and a further thirty-four informal conversations (see Appendix I) with cultural professionals and practitioners working between these locations. It almost goes without saying that many of these informal conversations, particularly those with interlocutors that were already friends or that would become so, were immeasurably richer and more illuminating than the formal interviews. This was particularly true as some of interviews ended up being conducted online due to the restrictions on travel. While virtual communication technologies did allow me to reach out to some that I had wanted to speak with, the online format stiffened interactions that would otherwise have been mollified by the non-verbal dynamics of in-person interaction.

Many of the insights of the thesis derive from the personal narratives relayed to me during these interviews and conversations. However, the nuance of the transnational field of art, and of the particular dynamics that the thesis foregrounds, could not be captured by one single source of material. These insights were therefore supplemented by the affective insights and ethnographic impressions gleaned from seven months spent across my different fieldwork sites, impressions I have attempted to recreate with the ethnographic vignettes that are interspersed throughout the thesis. Throughout my fieldwork I attended talks, festivals, art fairs, and exhibitions - both permanent and temporary - at cultural institutions and galleries (see Appendix II).

¹⁰⁴ Marcus, “Ethnography,” 99.

¹⁰⁵ Christopher Kelty, quoted in Deborah Cowen’s *tour de force* survey of modern logistics networks, *The Deadly Life of Logistics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 18.

These experiences gave greater urgency and, in the Gulf, a poignant site-specificity, to the mounting disquiet I have felt at the near obligatory demand by mainstream cultural milieus for art that offers a radical critique, concerns which I address comprehensively in Chapter Five.

Throughout the thesis I also make use of a wide range of additional material, including catalogues, auction sale data, cultural criticism, trade journals, reports and websites, news articles, archival material, corporate financial records, economic reports, and data from UNCTAD, the IMF, the World Bank, and the Conference Board, as well as YouTube videos, and satellite imagery. I also undertake close readings of some official development plans produced by governments of the Gulf states - the obligatory “vision” documents produced by all - and of buildings and artworks. Given my desire to historicise these cultural institutions and their cultural development vision for a post-oil future in the context of the Gulf’s colonial encounters and inheritances, the research also draws heavily on the wealth of historiographies of the Arabian Peninsula and wider Indian Ocean.

Despite thinking historically, in the main, this thesis looks at the suite of cultural institutions in the Gulf that have been constructed or retooled since the late 1990s. Other studies have looked more closely at how earlier episodes of cultural institution building in the Arab Gulf states relate to the one considered in this study.¹⁰⁶ Due to my concern with complicating the contentious claims of colonial import versus authentic indigenous product, however, I have chosen to stay confined to the institutions midwifed by cultural consultants and professionals working in the centres of the high culture industry in Europe and America. Where I do fold in the history of these earlier institutions, it is to show how the new institutions, and their Western architects and beneficiaries, have participated in the process of overwriting the messy, cosmopolitan histories of the Arabian Peninsula states, with a synthetic, homogenous, and marketable “Arab” identity.

Multi-sited ethnography is, as Marcus stresses, ‘de facto comparative,’ with comparisons emerging ‘as a function of the fractured, discontinuous plane of movement and discovery among sites.’¹⁰⁷ Employing a historical lens in conjunction

¹⁰⁶ See for example Kazerouni, *Le miroir des cheikhs*.

¹⁰⁷ Marcus, “Ethnography,” 102.

with a multi-sited ethnographic approach allowed me to map connections, translations and (dis-)continuities across geographic sites and through time, to capture some of the system-level dynamics of racial cultural capitalism without reductive generalisations from the specifics of a single site. That said, I am conscious that in my desire to draw the silhouette of the system, using a diversity of sites and materials, I may unwittingly have overdrawn the similarities between the different Arab Gulf states and their institutions. I do not analyse cultural infrastructures in either Oman or Bahrain and, while there is significant historical overlap and connections across the states in the region, particularly as concerns their colonial experience and labour models, which I do tease out, I want to stress that there are important differences. These differences have contributed to the articulation of competition at a regional scale, and the particular shape of their economic integration within global markets. Oman, for example, remained largely neutral during the Qatar diplomatic crisis, leveraging this neutrality to act as a peace broker, and to benefit from the traffic of people moving between Qatar and the other GCC states involved in the blockade. And while Oman has adopted heritage and culture, as well as tourism, it is also of a less spectacular variant than is found elsewhere in the Gulf. Bahrain by contrast has very little in the way of new cultural infrastructures, although it has acted in concert with the Saudi/Emirati axis vis-à-vis Qatar.

Perhaps a more profound limitation of the research is that while the Gulf's subaltern subjects - the migrant construction workers and Bedouin communities - are pivotal to its argument, their voices are entirely absent from my discussion. As explanation for this, I can only offer that I was conscious of the high political charge that the question of labour in the Gulf has acquired of late, and of the very real, material vulnerabilities these subjects face in the Gulf states. I therefore decided to rely on the research that had already been conducted by organisations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Gulf Labor,¹⁰⁸ as well as by individual researchers such as Michelle Buckley, Andrew Gardner

¹⁰⁸ Michelle Buckley et al., "Migrant Work & Employment in the Construction Sector," Report, International Labour Organization, 2016; HRW, "The Island of Happiness: Exploitation of Migrant Workers on Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi" (Report, Human Rights Watch, 2009); Jill Wells, "Construction" Workers in the Middle East: Exploratory Study of Good Policies in the Protection," Report, International Labour Organization, February 2018: 1-50; Andrew Ross ed. *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor* (New York: O/R Books, 2015).

and Anh Nga Longva,¹⁰⁹ with migrant workers in the Arab Gulf states and in the feeder states on the eastern side of the Indian Ocean.

Those I spoke with were, without exception, drawn from the highly educated, often politically liberal or left-wing milieus of the high cultural sector. For the most part, those I approached were willing to talk with me and shared their insights generously. It being an intellectualised sphere posed certain challenges, as many had preempted and rationalised my more probing lines of inquiry. Fortunately, these rationalisations were often illuminating, and the political commitments to decolonialisation that I discerned among many helped me to flesh out some of the paradoxes that I examine in these pages. I am also conscious that many of those I spoke to, even those with explicitly commercial motives, are sincerely enthusiastic and committed to their respective fields, and their reflections on the field were thoughtful and sensitive. I am therefore keen to emphasise that the critiques I offer across these pages do not hang on individuals and their intentions, but on how their intentions and contributions have been shaped and co-opted by the warp and weft of the high culture industry, and how this nested market contributes to the broader functioning of global racial-capitalist economies.

IV. CHAPTER OUTLINE

The place to begin the story of the new cultural infrastructures in the Gulf states was almost troublingly obvious. Taking up calls from critical scholars of the Gulf to de-exceptionalise its study,¹¹⁰ and in line with the commitment to show how cultural infrastructures are constituted through the interplay between materiality and ideas, I commence in Chapter One with the alienated substrate out of which the art world issues – the art market. However, instead of starting in the Gulf as most conventional analyses of the new suite of institutions have done, I begin with the dynamics of the

¹⁰⁹ Michelle Buckley, “Locating Neoliberalism,” *Antipode* 45, no. 2 (2013): 256–74; and “Construction Work, “Bachelor” Builders and the Intersectional Politics of Urbanisation in Dubai” in *Transit States*, eds. Alshehabi et al. (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 132–150; Andrew Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Anh Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018 [1997]).

¹¹⁰ Ahmed Kanna, Amélie Le Renard, and Neha Vora, *Beyond Exception* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020); Neha Vora and Natalie Koch, “Everyday Inclusions: Rethinking Ethnocracy, Kafala, and Belonging in the Arabian Peninsula,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 15, no. 3 (2015): 540–52.

Western art markets in the 1990s and early 2000s. This chapter traces how the market imperatives of commercial and non-commercial actors were both intensified and altered in the white heat of economic globalisation and competitive liberalisation that followed the release of capitalism from its national container. In doing so, it complicates the mainstream view of these institutions as authoritarian gestures of cultural diplomacy. Instead, highlighting how these capital investments have yielded long-term westward capital flows, I suggest they were equally the product of the needs of a liberalised Western high cultural sector in the grip of a crisis of accumulation. I show how vestiges of empire, and racialised ideas about the Gulf as an ‘emerging market’ brimming with petro-carbon liquidity, have moulded the establishment of a high cultural infrastructure in the Gulf, determining the exact assortment of actors, institutions and contexts involved in its creation.

Chapter Two refocuses this lens onto the Gulf, examining the constituent elements of its art market: the particular subsets of the art market through which its incorporation to the global art market world was brokered, the collectors and the sources and location of their capital, and the scene’s commercial actors and personnel. I probe the contradictions that develop as this emergent local scene interacts with the racially segmented mobilities, and uneven yet increasingly offshore system of economic governance, in which the wider global art market is embedded. I draw particular attention to the slippery distinction between public and private funds, as well as the notions of identity, indigeneity, and decolonialisation that are shot through its market circuits. By focusing on particular individuals and actors, this chapter also begins to show how, despite an external appearance of a highly planned approach to cultural policy, the logic of these institutions is far more contingent, messy and short-term, driven less by the state than by individual collectors and their personal relationships with dealers, as well as by factional and regional rivalries.

Chapters Three and Four are two sides of the same coin, each dealing with the inflexion point between race, colonialism, development, and space in the built environment of these cultural infrastructures. Chapter Three takes their architecture as its subject matter, mapping the different markets from which the manual labour, materials, thinking labour, and technologies originate. In Chapter Four, I examine these projects as part of a programme of cultural urbanism designed to steward the Arab

Gulf states into a post-oil future. Across both chapters I explore how cultural architecture and urban planning discipline and commodify difference in ways that reproduce dominant racialised ratios of power. In particular, I flesh out the disciplinary and applied histories of (post-)modernist architecture and urban planning to show how they are profoundly threaded with racialised ideas, priming the overwhelmingly Western cadre of architects, urban planners, and engineers for their conscription into the project of nation-state building through nativist heritage and spectacular architecture.

To the extent that they supply the labour and built heritage, despite having been neglected by much of the literature on the Gulf's burgeoning high cultural sector, the built environment of these institutions and districts also presupposes the Arabian Peninsula's internal Others - its disproportionately South Asian construction workers, as well as its Bedouin communities. In Chapter Three, I use automation theory to explore how instead of stimulating diversification toward a new post-oil economic model, spectacular architecture actually reinforces the current segregated labour model that underpins the Gulf's stagnant economies. Extrapolating this analysis, I reveal how white epistemologies enable the continued racialised violence in which this capital accumulation is rooted, legitimising long-term capital flows from the Gulf to former imperial metropolises in the West. In Chapter Four, I build on the literature about oil and urban development in the Gulf, using CRT to examine the violence inherent in seemingly anodyne cultural and heritage zoning policies. The chapter shows how these policies, structured by wider patterns of suburbanisation, have precipitated the displacement of Bedouin communities and the substantial communities of migrant labourers. While the Bedouin are treated ambivalently by the state, in turns dispossessed and instrumentally assimilated, migrant labourers are further marginalised and securitised, cutting them off both symbolically and physically from the long-standing migrant communities that had formerly sustained tenuous forms of belonging. Affluent non-nationals by contrast are concentrated in close proximity to these cultural infrastructures, disclosing how the state attempts to interpellate them into its long-term horizons as subjects of culture.

Chapter Five moves to the curatorial orientations and aesthetic output of the cultural institutions themselves. The point of departure for this chapter is the

dissonance between the Gulf's art scene positioning itself as an incubator of postcolonial and decolonial aesthetics, and the Arab Gulf states' colonial relations with subaltern subjects from the wider Indian Ocean region. I use the metaphor of "the wake" to probe the temporality - and temporal ellipses - of the presence of these postcolonial discourses in the Gulf, situating my analysis in the context of the region's histories of colonialism and slavery. Despite the seeming affinities between the discourse of postcolonialism and the Gulf as a postcolony, this chapter examines the limits of postcolonialism when not inserted forcefully into the actually existing political realities of the current historical conjuncture. It thinks through the paradoxes of postcolonial aesthetic practice under racial capitalism, exploring how the shifting dynamics by which certain racialised subjects are co-opted and others neglected challenge us to stretch our conceptualisations of colonialism to fit the continually evolving constellation of power precipitated by maturing capitalist processes.

The conclusion comes good on this thesis' commitment to interrogate the Gulf's new cultural infrastructures as profoundly enmeshed in the wider circuits of the art world, which histories of colonialism have heavily skewed toward the West, and which are themselves a constitutive part of uneven yet globalising circuits of power and capital. Using Aimé Césaire's theory of the imperial boomerang,¹¹¹ I show how intercourse with the Gulf leads the racialised legal, urban, and political dynamics that sculpt the region's cultural sector to be carried back into the cultural metropolises. The effect of this colonial boomerang is, I argue, an erosion of democracy and its machineries in the liberal West. In this anaemic public sphere, I propose that cultural institutions have become sites for consuming radical politics as a curiosity, altering the terrain on which hegemony is established in ways that should prompt us to reassess the sovereignty of our social theoretical ideas.

¹¹¹ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1950]).

[Chapter One]

FRONTIERS OF ART INCORPORATED¹

William Lawrie is one of the two gallerists behind Lawrie Shabibi, a contemporary art gallery based in Dubai's cultural complex, Alserkal Avenue. Previously employed by Christie's, Lawrie was instrumental in realising their first sale in Dubai in 2006. When I interviewed him, Lawrie would not be drawn on the question of *Salvator Mundi* except to quip that it was not a contentious painting because it did not contain a cross.² Among the art world professionals that I spoke with in the Gulf, London, and New York, mention of *Salvator Mundi* provoked an almost identical response to Lawrie's: a weary sigh, followed by a quick remark or two to shimmy the conversation onto different terrain. Reluctance to talk about the painting could be chalked up to any one of a number of relatively mundane reasons: fatigue and boredom with this line of enquiry; concerns about the ramifications of disrespecting its royal buyers, presumed to be the Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman as a gift to his mentor, the crown prince and future president of Abu Dhabi, Muhammad bin Zayed; or a lack of expertise and connoisseurship on Da Vinci.³ And yet, there is perhaps a deeper and more revealing reason for their silence.

Discovered in the online catalogue of an 'obscure auction house in New Orleans, the St Charles Gallery,' *Salvator Mundi* was bought in 2005 by 'small-time Old

¹ "Art Incorporated" is the satirical title of a book by Julian Stallabrass, which considers Contemporary Art's penetration by finance and big capital.

² William Lawrie, interview with author. Later in our discussion he suggested that this religious symbol was about the only controversial subject matter in the Gulf, primarily due to its effect on its resale value. Buyers sometimes presumed that religiously conservative collectors might not want to acquire artworks containing Christian iconography.

³ I also toyed with avoiding *Salvator Mundi* entirely, concerned its spectacular and soap operatic qualities might occlude a more profound examination of the art market. I was also conscious that the particular fascination with this object has orientalist undertones, stemming in part from its association with rulers from the Gulf - the doubt around the painting's authorship, and its extraordinary market performance, seen for many as confirmation of the lack of sophistication of its buyers. In his piece for the LRB, Charles Hope betrays such orientalist assumptions, casting aspersions on the extent of due diligence undertaken by the painting's current owner and their advisors prior to its purchase.

Masters dealer⁴ Alex Parish for USD1,175. In 2017, it made headlines by setting the record for the highest price paid for an art object at auction, USD450 million. When Parish landed on the online listing he got in touch with another dealer, Robert Simon, to help him buy the painting. Simon is an art historian by training, having completed a PhD at Columbia University on the Mannerist painter Agnolo Bronzino. Before setting up his own gallery specialising in European Baroque and Renaissance Art, he had worked as an appraiser. Simon's major coup was to secure the backing of several high profile and respected art historians, including the former director of Britain's National Gallery Nicholas Penny, and the Da Vinci specialist Martin Kemp, known for going to bat for other purported Da Vinci discoveries.⁵ In 2008, preparations were already underway at the National Gallery for a blockbuster Da Vinci exhibition, entitled 'Leonardo Da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan.' Having been impressed by the painting when Simon had shown it to him in New York, the newly appointed Penny convened a panel of Leonardo scholars to assess if the painting was an autograph Da Vinci before deciding whether to exhibit it as part of the show.

Whatever was said, the senior curators at the National Gallery decided to premier the painting as a signature work at the exhibition, set to open in November 2011. Inside the catalogue, the show's curator, Luke Syson, included a detailed provenance for the painting as it passed from the court of Charles I to private collectors and finally to obscurity before its rediscovery in 2005. The modest press statement published by the National Gallery announcing the inclusion of a newly discovered Da Vinci stated that the painting 'will be presented as the work of Leonardo, and this will obviously be an important opportunity to test this new attribution by direct comparison with works universally accepted as Leonardos.'⁶ The statement also ambiguously invoked the 'other scholars in the field' that had viewed

⁴ Ben Lewis, *The Last Leonardo: The Secret Lives of the World's Most Expensive Painting* (London: William Collins, 2019), 19. The story of the *Salvator Mundi* related here draws heavily on Lewis' highly entertaining and thorough biography of the disputed painting, as well as a review essay on the book by Art Historian, Charles Hope, published in *The London Review of Books* in 2020.

⁵ Kemp, Simon, and the junior art historian, Margaret Dalivale, have recently published a book with Oxford University Press entitled *Leonardo's Salvator Mundi & the Collecting of Leonardo in the Stuart Courts*. Dalivale was central to tracing the provenance of the painting which, for those convinced that Leonardo was the painting's author, has become the definitive history. Although Kemp is Emeritus Professor of History of Art at Oxford, Lewis speculates that Dalivale's desire for the work to be recognised as an autograph work stemmed, in part, from the challenges of securing a permanent academic post in the current marketised funding model for Higher Education.

⁶ Charles Hope, "A Peece of Christ," *The London Review of Books* 42, no. 1 (2020): 19–21.

the painting and mentions that a ‘separate press release on the *Salvator Mundi* is issued by the owner.’⁷ For obvious reasons, Simon’s press release listed the names of the five scholars on the panel, averring that ‘the study and examination of the painting by these scholars resulted in an *unequivocal consensus* that the *Salvator Mundi* was painted by Leonardo.’⁸ The Christie’s catalogue for the sale cited the scholarly endorsements described above, their wording echoing Simon’s press release: ‘[t]he study and examination of the painting by these scholars resulted in a *broad consensus* that the *Salvator Mundi* was painted by Leonardo Da Vinci.’⁹ In the subsequent furore around the painting’s attribution to Da Vinci, several of the scholars present at the panel organised by the National Gallery have contradicted this account, claiming they were actually extremely equivocal in their assessment of the painting during that discussion.¹⁰ It is impossible to judge how truthful each of these diverging accounts are as, though the meeting has been speculatively raked over, it was not minuted.

Despite the ringing endorsement from the National Gallery, the scholarly and journalistic doubt that dogged the painting dented its commercial appeal from the outset. To establish its market value Simon consulted, among other things, the Mei Moses Fine Art Indices, a price statistics database developed by two American economists, setting a target price of USD125 - 200 million. Paradoxically, this price was financially burdensome for the dealer-owners who, in order to sustain this value for the painting, had to insure it at its projected price. Several high-profile buyers were approached with the painting and declined to buy. Two other financial backers, Warren Adelson and Edward Shein, had since bought shares in the painting, hoping to assist with – and cash in on - its sale.

When the painting was finally sold in 2013, it was sold by Yves Bouvier, an art market entrepreneur who pioneered the freeport model (see Chapter Two). At that time, Bouvier was acting as a consultant for the Russian potash fertiliser magnate, Dmitry Rybolovlev. According to Lewis, when the oligarch expressed an interest in the painting, Bouvier contacted Sotheby’s and asked them to arrange a viewing on

⁷ Quoted in Hope, “Peece.”

⁸ Quoted in Hope, “Peece,” emphasis mine.

⁹ Quoted in Lewis, *Last*, 178, emphasis mine.

¹⁰ Lewis, *Last*, 165-178.

behalf of Simon et al., to ensure the joint owners did not learn Rybolovlev's identity.¹¹ The viewing took place at Rybolovlev's daughter's multi-million-dollar apartment in New York. Afterwards, the joint owners agreed to sell the painting to Bouvier for ~USD88 million, far below their target price. Bouvier had already lined up its onward sale to Rybolovlev for USD127.5, plus his one percent commission. This back-to-back sale guaranteed Bouvier's investment, netting him a handsome profit. In the subsequent scandal engulfing the relationship between the two, Rybolovlev took both his former adviser and Sotheby's to court on charges of fraud, claiming he had been defrauded by Bouvier to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. In fact, it is supposed that the painting's second market test at Christie's in 2017 was, in part, to finance these expensive legal proceedings.

In their 2017 auction catalogue, Christie's cited the Louvre's curator of Renaissance paintings, Vincent Delieuvin's, endorsement of the work, although he had made no other pronouncements in support of its authorship. At the time of the auction, Delieuvin had already commenced preparation for the Da Vinci exhibition that was scheduled to open at the Louvre, Paris in late 2019 to coincide with the five-hundred-year anniversary of the artist's death. When Delieuvin's exhibition opened *Salvator Mundi* was not among the works on display. While the exact reason for its omission remains unclear, it is somewhat curious given the Louvre's close relationship to the Louvre Abu Dhabi.¹² Many of the works on display at the franchise institution were loaned by a consortium of seventeen French museums and heritage bodies via the organisation Agence France-Muséums (AFM), the establishment of which formed part of the bilateral agreement to create the Louvre Abu Dhabi. Among the loans to the Louvre Abu Dhabi there is another Leonardo, *La Belle Ferronnière*, which, unlike *Salvator Mundi*, did feature in the anniversary exhibition in Paris.

Although many of the scholars on the panel distanced themselves from the attribution at the time of its premiering in 2011 at the National Gallery, the spectacle of the *Salvator Mundi's* status as the most expensive painting ever sold has afforded those scholars associated with it a public platform that they might otherwise not have

¹¹ See Lewis, *Last*, Chapter Seventeen, 232-270, for a full account of the initial sale of *Salvator Mundi* to Dmitry Rybolovlev.

¹² I was told that the Louvre had wanted to exhibit the painting without a definitive attribution to test it against other autograph works.

had. Carmen Bambach is a specialist in Da Vinci drawings, and curator of Spanish and Italian prints and drawings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. She was included on the panel and has since become outspoken in her rejection of the attribution. In her monumental four volume survey of Da Vinci's life and works, published in late 2019, Bambach attributes the painting to Giovanni Boltraffio, Da Vinci's most famous assistant. When contacted in 2019 by the National Gallery to have her name added to the list of art historians that saw the painting in 2008, she refused on the grounds that '[i]f my name is added to that list, it will be a tacit statement that I agree with the attribution to Leonardo. I do not.'¹³ Other scholars have been similarly circumspect in their assessment of the painting. Lewis reports that of the remaining four scholars on the panel convened by Syson and Penny of the National Gallery, two are convinced it is an autograph work (of which one is Martin Kemp), while two attribute it to Da Vinci's studio.¹⁴

Loïc Gouzer was the 'rule-breaking rainmaker'¹⁵ co-chairman of Post-War and Contemporary Art at Christie's.¹⁶ He is credited with engineering several of the art world's record-breaking sales. Going against the professional grain, Gouzer decided not to auction the painting at the Old Masters sale as would have been expected, but to include it in the much more speculative and lucrative Modern and Contemporary auction. Christie's went to great lengths to inflate the painting's value, employing a host of market theatrics that included touring the painting prior to the sale, and using a contemporary visual grammar and design for all the literature they produced to give the painting an aura of the iconic.¹⁷ When the gavel came down on *Salvator Mundi* at

¹³ Dalya Alberge, "Leonardo Da Vinci Expert Declines to Back *Salvator Mundi* as His Painting," *The Guardian*, 2 June 2019.

¹⁴ Lewis, *Last*. See chap. 15, 187-199, in which he details how another Da Vinci expert, Frank Zöllner, who Lewis describes as having been 'conspicuously excluded' from the National Gallery panel, found himself in a bind when writing the second edition of his monumental *Leonardo Da Vinci: Complete Paintings and Drawings*. Upon his request to include the work he was sent a written notice which read '[t]he owners of the painting, and the copyright owners of the photograph have required the following caption and credit line for its use: Leonardo da Vinci (Italian, 1452–1519) *Salvator Mundi*.' These instructions did not, however, dictate how the image was to be described in any accompanying text. Sceptical of the attribution, Zöllner included the image with its obligatory caption, but in the text he describes it as a '[w]orkshop painting done after 1507 or much later with possible participation of Leonardo.'

¹⁵ Henri Neuendorf, "After Making Market History with Da Vinci and David Hockney, Dealmaker Loïc Gouzer is Leaving Christie's for Parts Unknown," *Artnet*, 17 December 2018.

¹⁶ Gouzer is currently involved in pioneering a model of art finance that allows investors to buy shares in works of art.

¹⁷ Lewis, *Last*.

Christie's on 15th November 2017 the winning bid of USD400 million came from an anonymous bidder. The buyer was quickly revealed to be a peripheral member of the Saudi royal family, Prince Badr bin Abdullah, who was initially reported to be a proxy bidder for Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. On 8th December 2017 the Saudi embassy in Washington made a public announcement that Prince Badr bin Abdullah had been acting as an intermediary for the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism (DCT), which was buying the piece for the very newly opened Louvre Abu Dhabi. Insiders maintain, however, that the piece was indeed bought by Muhammad bin Salman, either as a gift for his closest regional ally and mentor, Muhammad bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, or to herald his belated arrival to the art market.¹⁸ The other bidder on the item, who lost out to its Gulf buyers, is believed to have been the Chinese billionaire art collector, Lui Yiqian. Despite its price-tag and its trumpeted arrival in Abu Dhabi - the museum took to Twitter to announce its arrival in English, French and Arabic in December 2017 - at the time of writing, the painting has yet to be shown at the Louvre Abu Dhabi. Since 2019 it is believed to be hanging aboard the *Serene*, a yacht belonging to Muhammad bin Salman.¹⁹

I visited the Louvre Abu Dhabi in March 2019. Instead of the *Salvator Mundi*, a painted wood statue of Christ acquired by the Louvre Abu Dhabi stood at the end of the gallery devoted to 'The Universal Religions.' The sculpture originates from Bavaria and is dated to 1515-1520. Iconographically, it is quite different from *Salvator Mundi*, a popular composition depicting Christ poised with his right hand raised in the benediction and an orb in his left. *Man of Sorrows* shows Christ bearing his stigmata, wearing the crown of thorns common to works depicting the Passion. Conventionally, the orb in *Salvator Mundi* has a cross on top of it. The disputed painting does not, however, adhere to this convention, nor does *Man of Sorrows* contain a cross, hence the comment by William Lawrie with which I opened this section. Despite these compositional differences, the absence of *Salvator Mundi* is made all the more conspicuous by the inclusion of this sculpture, among the first things one sees as one enters the gallery and the only depiction of an adult Christ in this room.

¹⁸ Rahul Rao observed aptly that this is rather reminiscent of Khedive Ismail building the Cairo Opera House (now referred to as the Khedivial Opera House after it burnt down in 1971) and commissioning Verdi to write *Aida*, which premiered at the opera house in December 1871.

¹⁹ Kenny Schacter, "Where in the World Is 'Salvator Mundi'?" Kenny Schachter Reveals the Location of the Lost \$450 Million Leonardo," *Artnet*, 10 June 2019.

When it first broke, the news of *Salvator Mundi*'s record-breaking 2017 sale caused a stir in art world circles. In the immediate aftermath, the “super-curator” and art historian Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev tweeted “[p]ublic museums separated scholarly judgement and presentation of art, from art as private investment. If auction house, buyer and museum are one and the same, you create Leonardo with 200 years lack of provenance. detail: it is a bad painting. history will haunt you.”²⁰ The tenor of Christov-Bakargiev’s tweet illustrates the contempt with which she and many others in the art world hold those scholars and museum managements that are perceived to have allowed the non-commercial portions to be defiled by money. Although we might question whether the romantic ideal Christov-Bakargiev summons has ever obtained, she is nevertheless right that, working hand-in-glove, the National Gallery, a handful of experts, dealers, and auction houses turned this painting into an instrument for generating enormous revenues.

A myopic focus on whether this is an autograph work or not, however, somewhat misses the point. As Charles Hope astutely asks, what is it that makes Da Vinci specialists or indeed specialists of any kind uniquely positioned to make these calls?²¹ This painting was discovered in an extremely poor condition and with a biography littered with extensive historical lacunae (i.e., periods during which its whereabouts cannot be accounted for with any certainty). Determinations of its authorship are therefore an exercise in subjective judgement. As a consequence of holes in the historical archive and sheer temporal distance, Hope points out that much connoisseurship of Renaissance Art is rooted in a conceptual architecture based on relatively thin evidence. Hope suggests that in the context of these lacunae, the insights that trained painters have about painting could offer commensurate clues to its authorship as would these highly wrought conceptual architectures. And yet, due to the jealously guarded institutional and disciplinary foundations of connoisseurship, *Salvator Mundi* was lent institutional and popular legitimacy because of its inclusion in *Leonardo Da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan*, and the scholarly framework that the National Gallery erected in order to justify this inclusion.

²⁰ Quoted in Lewis, *Last*, 292.

²¹ Hope, “Peece.”

Penny responded to the essay by Hope in *the London Review of Books* to counter his assertion that the National Gallery was ‘persuaded’ to include the work by Simon and become complicit in his ‘marketing ploy.’ Instead, he suggested it was ‘rather courageous’ of Simon to agree to include it in the National Gallery’s show.²² Yet the fact that all of those with a direct commercial stake in the painting have reproduced the framework erected by the museum renders such a claim somewhat tendentious. Indeed, it suggests that expertise is so valuable and central to commodity construction as to make it worth invoking, even if this involves drawing attention to debate and detractors from within the community of experts. One might even go so far as to suggest that in leasing their name, the Louvre was also indirectly involved in the creation of this spectacular commodity by incentivising the purchase of art objects by the Gulf states. Rarely do paintings by Old Masters such as Da Vinci come to the market and yet they are an expectation of the “Universal Museum” model which the Louvre brand prescribes. Likewise, the association with an august institution such as the Louvre affords obscene price points a veneer of legitimacy. Perhaps most damning for Simon is a testimony from Michael Franses, an Islamic carpet dealer and specialist, that was given to Ben Lewis in 2020. Franses maintains that in 2009 he had been commissioned to find a buyer for the painting, a fact of which Simon was very much aware.²³ Museums are usually cautious in exhibiting works they know are definitively destined for the market precisely because of the distorting effects their imprimatur has on price. Securing the backing of the National Gallery was, therefore, a real stroke of luck.

The trajectory of this painting, which emerged from obscurity in the hinterlands of the art market to become in, twelve short years, the most expensive painting ever sold, thus provokes a host of questions. If Penny is to be taken at his word and it was the National Gallery that approached Simon about the painting, what can have motivated them to defy professional best practices and actively strive to include a work they must have known, given both its original owners were dealers, was inevitably

²² Nicholas Penny, “Letters,” *The London Review of Books* 42, no. 1 (2020): 4.

²³ Ben Lewis, “Salvator Mundi,” *The London Review of Books* 42 no. 3 (2020): 4. Interestingly, as a dealer of Islamic Art, Franses was one of the early fulcrums in the creation of the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar. The Qataris had apparently been willing to offer approximately USD160 million for the painting. It may very well be that Franses was allowed to take a stab at selling the painting due to his proximity to new collectors and state institutions in the Gulf.

bound for the market sooner or later? Why also would art historians such as Martin Kemp and Margaret Dalivalle pin their colours so firmly to the mast of this hotly contested painting? As art objects have no inherent financial value, what transformations were necessary for this painting to achieve such an extraordinary market value? How did the ontology of the painting have to change for part of the appraisal process to include the consultation of a price index? The answers to these questions tell the story of the deep and fundamental changes wrought by the liberalisation and financialisation of the cultural sector in the historic centres of the art world. The reason *Salvator Mundi* is a useful searchlight for this thesis is that the answers to the questions it prompts also help us to explain the final and, for the purposes of this thesis, most pressing question it asks. Namely, why were all the buyers of *Salvator Mundi* - its original Russian buyer, Rybolovlev, the other bidder on the painting thought to be the Chinese businessman, Liu Yiqian, and finally, its Gulf buyer(s) - from resource rich, commodity exporting markets outside the West?²⁴

Although *Salvator Mundi* achieved its record shattering auction price in 2017, to answer these questions requires tracing the history of structural changes to the art market in the period straddling the millennium prior to the 2008 crisis. These structural changes must in turn be situated in the context of the imperial linkages of late-capitalist countries in the liberal West to what, in the 1990s and 2000s, were referred to enthusiastically and anxiously as “emerging markets.” In historicising the emergence of its Gulf buyers as part of a crisis occurring in the metropolises the art world, whose unfolding is structured by the political and economic lineaments established by empire, this chapter seeks to offer two correctives to current narratives concerning the creation of cultural institutions in the Gulf. Firstly, it challenges those accounts that locate the primary impetus for the emergence of cultural institutions in the Gulf in the material and symbolic practices of modernist nation-state building. Secondly, by situating the more recent history of the established centres of the art market in the *longue durée*, the arguments of this chapter will act as a corrective to the simplicity of both the account that depicts globalisation in the art world simply as a smooth process of incorporating

²⁴ According to IMF data, China, Russia and Saudi Arabia have all run substantial current account surpluses since 2008, with the exception of Saudi Arabia in 2015 and 2016, following the global collapse in oil prices.

more of the globe into the art world's *status quo ante*,²⁵ and that of a predatory capitalism that is unvariegated in its spread. In so doing, it will also begin to spin the theoretical threads that will be unspooled throughout this thesis. Taking its cue from the theory of racial capitalism, it suggests that the crucible in which the nascent cultural infrastructure in the Gulf is forged are the imperial intimacies and racialised dependencies that bind established centres of the high culture industry to frontiers of capital in “emerging markets,” thereby challenging the standard political cartography that conventional accounts of politics in the Gulf tend to enshrine.

1.1 SWAG: THE ART MARKET, 2000-2008²⁶

2006 was a year of record setting sales in the art market. Tobias Meyer of Sotheby's was reported to have negotiated the sale of Jackson Pollock's *No. 5, 1948* for USD140 million, while Willem de Kooning's *Woman III* was reputed to have fetched USD137.5 million in a private transaction.²⁷ The spectacular and unparalleled prices achieved by art objects in 2006 confirmed that the art market was in the grip of an extraordinary boom. Clare McAndrew, a cultural economist who runs the art finance consultancy firm, Art Economics, which commercial art organisations such as Art Basel and TEFAF (the European Fine Art Fair) commission to produce annual reports on the state of the art market, estimates that between 2000 and 2007 the art market as a whole nearly tripled, with 2007 registering an annual turnover of just under USD66 billion.²⁸ This monumental (forgive the pun) growth in revenue streams had an institutional corollary: between 2000 and 2005 the total number of art fairs worldwide rose from thirty-six to sixty.²⁹

²⁵ For critiques of the smooth account of globalisation see Stefano Baia Curioni, “A Fairy Tale: The Art System, Globalization, and the Fair Movement” in *Contemporary Art and Its Commercial Markets*, eds. Maria Lind and Olav Velthuis (London: Sternberg, 2012), 115-151; and Wu, “sans Frontiers.”

²⁶ SWAG stands for Silver, Wine, Art, and Gold. It was coined by American economist Joe Roseman in 2011 to refer to the new importance of these assets to investors and their investment portfolios. It is also a *double entendre*, meaning loot or booty in British English slang.

²⁷ Elizabeth von Habsburg et al., “Art Appraisals, Prices, and Valuations” in ed. Clare McAndrew *Fine Art and High Finance* (New York: Bloomberg, 2010), 31-62.

²⁸ Clare McAndrew, Suhail Malik, and Gerald Nestler, “Plotting the Art Market: An Interview with Clare McAndrew,” *Finance and Society* 2, no. 2 (2016): 155.

²⁹ Baia Curioni, “A Fairy Tale.”

2006 was also a significant year for the Gulf's incipient cultural scene. It was the year that the art market behemoth Christie's auction house held its inaugural sale in Dubai.³⁰ Art Dubai, a joint venture of the British financier turned art market entrepreneur Ben Floyd, and the London based gallerist John Martin, also launched in that year with the help of the British consultancy firm Brunswick Arts and with the backing of the Dubai's government. It is not merely coincidental that these events were occurring at the same moment. Rather, the beginnings of a commercial art infrastructure in the Gulf, and the central role of Western actors in these beginnings, represent the pursuit of what David Harvey has famously termed a "spatial fix"³¹ – the practice of 'dispersing or exporting capital and labour surpluses into new and more profitable spaces.'³² Such "fixes" become necessary when capitalism hits a blockage due to some form of systemic constraint, towards which it is inherently and structurally prone. One such form of crisis is a crisis of accumulation, arising when capital is unable to find an outlet for its surpluses. The art market boom that took place in the years spanning the millennium was precisely this, a crisis of accumulation in the Western centres of the art world. The reason the boom occurred at this precise moment is due to the effects of neoliberalisation,³³ of which both financialisation and liberalisation³⁴ are a subset, being felt in the art market.

Presiding over an astronomical growth in income inequality, between 1980 and 2014, neoliberalisation has driven a 77 percent growth in the average incomes of the

³⁰ Sotheby's held its first exhibition in Dubai the previous year, the same year that Christie's held their first show, a prelude to their first auction, which will be discussed in chap. 3.

³¹ David Harvey, "Globalization and the "Spatial Fix," *Geographische Revue* 3, no. 2 (2001): 23–30.

³² David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 96.

³³ The notion of neoliberalism is a promiscuous and contested idea. Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," *Theory & Event* 7, no. 1 (2003) describes its 'bewildering political nomenclature,' while Hall calls it a 'field of oscillations,' and Peck et al., "Variegated," term it a 'rascal concept.' Marxists and poststructuralists diverge on the extent to which they see neoliberalism as something novel and distinctive. The former claim that neoliberalism is merely an intensification and expansion of capitalism, that draws more geographies, subjects, and spheres into its circuits of capital, and its forms of exploitation and dispossession. For the latter, neoliberalism is characterised by the emergence of a new rationality of economisation, and the process by which an arithmetic premised on self-augmentation, self-actualisation, and competition insinuates itself into all spheres of life. While loyalists of each camp maintain that their theories are inimical, in line with the overarching commitment of this thesis to viewing material and ideational realms as coextensive, I maintain that there is nothing inherently incompatible about the two. In fact, both are essential to any definition of neoliberalism and, more pertinently, to an understanding of how the political processes that neoliberalism describes possess distinctly racialised features and implications.

³⁴ Financialisation refers to the process by which techniques of finance and their evaluative criteria (such as fungibility) are applied to more markets and commodities, while liberalisation describes the process by which public funding and assets are eroded in favour of private financing and private ownership.

top 10 percent, a sizeable increase but one dwarfed by that experienced in the incomes of the 0.01 percent which grew by 486 percent in the same period. Average income for the remaining 90 percent reduced by 3 percent.³⁵ The pattern of income inequality roughly mirrors the trajectory followed by art prices - much like income inequality, art prices largely decreased during the first half of twentieth century but have been rapidly increasing in the decades since neoliberal economics became market orthodoxy, with the concomitant uneven wealth distribution described above.³⁶ In 2011 the economists William Goetzmann, Luc Renneboog and Christophe Spaenjers published an article in *American Economic Review* entitled 'Art and Money,' which sought to use econometrics to empirically investigate whether this symmetry between income distribution and art prices was merely coincidental. The article tested the hypothesis that higher equity returns and personal incomes - put simply, more wealth at the top - produces higher prices for art objects.³⁷ Their findings indicate that 'a 1 percentage point increase in the share of total personal income earned by the top 0.1 percent triggers an increase in art prices of about 10 percent'³⁸ and they conclude that there is a clear income effect on art, writing that the 'income of the highest earners, seems a *key factor* in the price formation in the art market.'³⁹ This study, although perhaps somewhat unsurprising in its findings, substantively demonstrates from a microeconomics perspective the extent to which the art market is beholden to the vicissitudes of the global economy that is itself financialising, or, to put it differently, of a capitalist economy within which a particular form of finance capitalism has become hegemonic. That said, neither bloated incomes nor income inequality are sufficiently historically specific to explain precisely how the art market overheated in the years subsequent to the millennium.

Since the 1980s a variety of organisations such as Artnet, Artprice, and Artfacts had been systematically collecting and cataloguing the data generated by auction sales. It was, however, only in the early 2000s that these companies began to offer easy access to their databases. The public availability of this data facilitated the creation of financial

³⁵ McAndrew et al., "Plotting," 157.

³⁶ William N Goetzmann et al., "Art and Money," *American Economic Review* 101, no. 3 (2011): 224.

³⁷ To compile an art price index, Goetzmann et al., "Art and Money," used auction sale data collected by Gerald Reitlinger, spanning all the way back to the eighteenth century, while they created indices for equities and income inequality using data sets on stock prices and inequality covering the periods 1830-2007 and 1908-2005 respectively.

³⁸ Goetzmann et al., "Art and Money," 224.

³⁹ Goetzmann et al., "Art and Money," 224, emphasis mine.

tools for art. In 2002 two professors at the New York University Stern Business School, Jianping Mei and Michael Moses, created the Mei Moses Fine Art Indices - the tool that Simon consulted when conducting a valuation of the *Salvator Mundi* for its initial sale in 2013. Against those maintaining the conventional position that art is not fungible, Mei and Moses' index design attempted to standardise art objects by controlling for factors such as size, aesthetics, maker, colour, and quality by analysing repeat sales. Accompanying the creation of this financial instrument, Mei and Moses published an article called 'Beautiful Asset: Art as Investment,' in which they used the data gleaned from their index to 'demonstrate that art could be an important asset class in many respects, worthy of addition to the long-term investment portfolios of individuals and institutions.'⁴⁰ Believed to be the gold standard in art market indices, it was purchased by Sotheby's Auction House in 2016. On their website Sotheby's claims that the index allows the company to generate 'objective art market analysis to complement the world-class expertise of its specialists.'⁴¹

Scientising the value of artworks induced a 'mimetic isomorphism,'⁴² with the art market after the 1980s increasingly coming to mirror the investment strategies and organisational blueprints of conventional financial vehicles and institutions. This deepened epistemic shifts in the ontology of the art object toward a view of art as a commodity.⁴³ Alongside these epistemic changes, scientisation yielded a bumper crop of new art funds that modelled their fee structure and investor criteria on "conventional" or "ordinary" private equity funds.⁴⁴ Unlike earlier art funds that largely adopted the mutual fund model, in line with the practices of regular private equity funds, the funds founded in the 1990s and 2000s pursued a more aggressive, speculative investment strategy searching for high returns. At the same time, a variety of new art market research firms were created, analysing and reporting art market

⁴⁰ Jianping Mei and Michael Moses, "Beautiful Asset: Art as Investment," *Journal of Investment Consulting* 7, no. 2 (2005): 45–51.

⁴¹ Sotheby's, "The Sotheby's Mei Moses Indices."

⁴² Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell quoted in Olav Velthuis and Erica Coslor, "The Financialization of Art," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Finance*, eds. Karin Knorr Cetina and Alex Preda (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2012), 477.

⁴³ Already in 1989, the cultural economist William Grampp had published *Pricing the Priceless*, in which he argued unequivocally and unapologetically that works of art are commodities comparable to all other commodities, and that profit maximisation is the overarching motive of all those invested in the art market.

⁴⁴ Velthuis and Coslor, "Financialization," 477.

trends using the tools, representational conventions, and idiom of market finance.⁴⁵ Many of the tools developed by these companies were marketed at lenders. Despite the widespread practice of high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) and ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) borrowing against tangible assets, the challenges associated with calculating value had previously made lenders wary of art, preferring to lend against fixed assets such as property. The arrival of tools for modelling risk fundamentally altered this arithmetic.⁴⁶

During this period, various shocks to Western financial markets had also contrived to make money ‘virtually free.’⁴⁷ Among other things, these shocks included what in 2005 Ben Bernanke, the chair of the Fed at the time of the 2008 banking crisis, would christen the ‘global savings glut.’ Broadly, the notion of a ‘savings glut’ connoted the process of petrodollars and Chinese savings hoovering up traditional dollar-denominated assets, in particular, government bonds such as Treasuries and Government Sponsored Enterprise issued agency debt.⁴⁸ In response, the Director of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, applied heavy downward pressure on US interest rates such that by mid-2003 the rate was set to below 1 percent, a level not seen since 1958. In the United Kingdom, real interest rates were likewise slashed from ‘around 3.9% in 1997 to 1.6% in 2005.’⁴⁹ Preference for safer investments among investors from the Gulf and China set those from elsewhere in search of new assets for speculative investment.⁵⁰ These macroeconomic shuffles provide a financial picture of cheap credit converging with the newfound willingness of banks to view art objects as collateral. Art was thereby opened up as a new source of potential liquidity for pre-

⁴⁵ Velthuis and Coslor, “Financialization.”

⁴⁶ Clare McAndrew, ed. *Fine Art and High Finance* (New York: Bloomberg, 2010); McAndrew et al., “Plotting”; Olav Velthuis, *Talking Prices*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁴⁷ Olav Velthuis, “Accounting for Taste: The Economics of Art,” *Artforum International* 46, April (2008): 304-309.

⁴⁸ Adam Tooze, *Crashed* (London: Penguin, 2018).

⁴⁹ Sir John Gieve, “Sovereign Wealth Funds and Global Imbalances,” Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin Q2 Report (2008): 201.

⁵⁰ Mazen Labban has traced the connections between narratives of peak oil and financialisation. The spectre of oil scarcity has become a domain of financial intervention and speculation, bringing the future into the present through the host of financial instruments – swaps, options, and futures – grouped under the derivative banner. See Mazen Labban, “Oil in Parallax: Scarcity, Markets, and the Financialization of Accumulation,” *Geoforum* 41, no. 4 (2010): 541-552. In his discussion of the 1973 oil crisis that wasn’t, Timothy Mitchell likewise tentatively suggests that this crisis, and fears it provoked around the power wielded by Middle Eastern oil producing states, sowed the seeds of global deregulation. See Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*.

existing collectors while others were encouraged to begin investing in art as an asset against which to both borrow and make money, leading to a wave of financialisation and a corresponding boom in prices.⁵¹ This spike in prices since the millennium might be thought of as a crisis of over-accumulation.⁵² To resolve it required new strategies to continue to push up prices and provide an outlet for the capital fixed in these objects. The manifold effects of these strategies were felt across the entire art world, transforming social relations in and between the commercial and non-commercial parts of the sector, each of which are distilled in the biography of *Salvator Mundi*.

The first and perhaps most obvious effect of these high prices was to intensify strategies for inflating the value of art objects. This was particularly acute given that price reduction in the art market is widely perceived as a taboo; Olav Velthuis notes that, in its search for price as opposed to profit maximisation, the art market goes against the grain of conventional economic theory, to which the notion of price elasticity is paramount.⁵³ Commercial actors thus sought to inflate the value of lesser-known art objects such as paintings from a particular, less famous series, or certain specialised objects. This has been termed the ‘reference price effect’⁵⁴ - if a record-breaking price is attained, this price acts as a benchmark for future sales allowing for the price commensuration of similar objects. In the early 2000s, the capacity to inflate prices via this route was significantly augmented due to the systematic collection of art market data combined with digital technologies and real time news turbocharging the spectacle and theatre of the market. Such an effect is telling insofar as it wholly inverts the relationship between monetary value and artistic or cultural value, with the latter being derived from the former. It makes explicit the centrality of money and what economist Thorstein Veblen famously termed ‘conspicuous consumption’ to the

⁵¹ Velthuis and Coslor caution against viewing the financialisation of art as a smooth and uncontested process. Rather, they suggest that it occurs in waves - the price boom in the 2000s was in fact the third wave of financialisation. Velthuis and Coslor identify two preceding waves: the first began in the late 1960s with the creation of the first art index in 1967 by the London based newspaper *The Times* an augury of the increasingly acceptable instrumental view of art as an investment opportunity. This wave also saw funds such as the British Rail Pension Fund starting to invest in artworks. In the 1980s, the creation of the art market databases, discussed above, precipitated the second wave of financialisation, characterised by an initial scientisation of art objects. Despite the lurching and fragmented penetration of the art market by finance capitalism, the most recent phase, and that which is of primary interest to this chapter, arguably represents the most thorough disciplining of art by quantitative economic rationalities.

⁵² Harvey, “Spatial Fix.”

⁵³ Velthuis, *Talking*, 158.

⁵⁴ Von Habsburg et al., “Appraisals,” 60.

ontology of art objects. *Salvator Mundi* was a product of these market theatrics, its trajectory attesting to the capacity of the market to confer value and commodity potential beyond the sum of its parts. Not only were the various PR stunts pulled by Christie's in 2017 designed to drive up the value of the painting, but the major price it attained at its first market outing signalled its public approval. Indeed, the commodity success of the painting at its previous market test, itself a product of the scholarly consecration signalled by its inclusion in the National Gallery exhibition, appears to have helped to buff away the problems in its history. As such, it is evidence of the fact that the public approval implied by a high price often has the perverse effect of creating a provenance for works - what one dealer described to me as a 'kind of alchemy.'

The second and related effect of the boom was to intensify the marketisation of expertise. Unlike conventional commodities, which derive what Arjun Appadurai calls their 'commodity candidacy'⁵⁵ from their conformity to the standard attributes of that commodity class, the commodity candidacy of art objects derives from their singularity within a certain class of commodity, as distinct from other commodities.⁵⁶ Historically, dealers would extract value from art objects on the basis of scarcity and the challenge of sourcing them.⁵⁷ Globalisation and development superannuated this mechanism of value extraction by overcoming geographic barriers to access and technological barriers to production. In order to restore their relevance and capacity to extract value from art objects in a saturated marketplace, dealers shifted focus onto the idiosyncrasies of handicraft and taste, and the idiom of authenticity and provenance - in a word, to connoisseurship. Though it is not novel, this commodification of expertise was significantly augmented by the financialisation of art and the drastic increase in prices ushered in by the boom. To begin with, the market value of an artwork is largely determined through an appraisal. This process has been recognised as the site where expertise and finance become most explicitly entangled - having established connoisseurship as the key determinant of value, the experts in command of this connoisseurship become arbiters of great sums of money. Thus, Hope's

⁵⁵Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value" in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 13.

⁵⁶ Appadurai, "Politics of Value."

⁵⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (New York: Telos Press, 1981); Brian Spooner, "Weavers and Dealers: The Authenticity of an Oriental Carpet" in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 195-235.

observation concerning the jealously guarded role of scholars as arbiters of authenticity and provenance in the case of the *Salvator Mundi*.

In the early 2000s, the newfound willingness of banks to lend against art amplified the business of appraising. Due to the responsibility banks have to their shareholders, banks tend to favour auction houses - the art market answer to the stock market exchange - both to appraise the work leveraged against and as vendors in the event of debtor default. As a consequence, the opening up of art as collateral strengthened the most explicitly commercial actors within the market. These actors were in turn encouraged to poach experts from the non-commercial sector. After completing his PhD, but before becoming a dealer, David Simon, the original owner of *Salvator Mundi*, had worked for a time as an appraiser. There is also scope for experts to extract revenue on the other end of the transaction. Given the astronomical price-tags affixed to many art objects, buyers also want to be assured of the quality of their purchases. In addition to strengthening the hand of dealers, scholars have been induced to pass through the revolving door and undertake freelance consultancy work for individual collectors and institutions.⁵⁸ The effects of this can be seen in the Gulf, where major buyers often support substantial retinues of lavishly remunerated consultants, their ranks comprising both dealers and scholars formerly affiliated to institutions in the West. Liberalisation did not, however, merely induce scholars to pursue financial self-interest. In the following section, I will explore how neoliberalism also transformed the rationalities of public institutions, leading them to increasingly think in the highly individualised terms of the competitive marketplace.

1.2 MERCENARY MUSEUMS

In the introduction section, I suggested that *Salvator Mundi* provokes the question as to why the National Gallery, knowing the question mark that hung over its authorship and provenance, and that it was inevitably bound for the market, were induced to include it in their 2011 exhibition *Leonardo Da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan*. One simple reason might be found in the revenue generating capacity that loans afford to ostensibly public non-commercial cultural institutions. In this case, the loaning of

⁵⁸ Velthuis, "Accounting for Taste," 309.

Salvator Mundi would have been a money spinner for the National Gallery. A Da Vinci exhibition is always likely to be a box office hit, yet the premiering of a never-before-seen Da Vinci painting would guarantee its pull in a highly competitive marketplace, providing a fillip to its visitor figures. Standard adult tickets for this exhibition were priced at GBP16. Price fluctuations from exhibition to exhibition are in part dictated by the difference in insurance premiums on the works exhibited, thus explaining some variety⁵⁹ between shows. Picasso is, however, an artist whose works have achieved comparable market values and the cost of indemnifying the works would have been high. Standard tickets at a Picasso exhibition held at the National Gallery in mid-2009, which included over 60 of his paintings, cost GBP12. It is pushing the analysis too far to assume that the inclusion of the *Salvator Mundi* alone accounts for the 33 percent price difference between these two shows and yet its inclusion would likely have played some role in this increase, ensuring the willingness of attendees to pay such a high price.

Due to their role in triangulating scholarship with public displays, and the perception that they are custodians of the romantic ideal of art, museums confer an economic premium on those objects which enjoy their imprimatur. Securing the sale of a given object to a noteworthy cultural institution is therefore highly desirable precisely because it signals the consecration of both the dealer that negotiates the sale and the object itself. As *Salvator Mundi* illustrates, a similar effect to that achieved by selling to a museum is possible simply by securing the temporary display of a work or works. Scholars and museums thus wield extraordinary power to imbue objects with profit potential - in the Bourdieusian lexicon, alongside dealers, museums and their staff are the market's 'symbolic capitalists,' rubberstamping quality.⁶⁰

In this landscape of huge prospective prices and profits, museums have also come to operate as a peculiar annex to commercial organisations and spaces: their permanent collections act as an archive of blue-chip art works which, albeit located permanently outside the commodity circuit, nevertheless act as price references for those objects that remain in circulation. In a variant of this argument, Jean Baudrillard

⁵⁹ This may, for example, account for the discrepancy between the price of this exhibition and the Jan Gossaert show which immediately preceded it, where a standard ticket was priced at GBP10.

⁶⁰ It should come as no surprise that there is a largely one-way revolving door between profit and non-profit segments of the art world. The commercial sector recruits scholars to work as either freelance or staff curators, researchers, consultants, and appraisers.

proposes that the museum is analogous to a bank, underwriting ‘the universality of painting.’⁶¹ As well as allowing their services to be enlisted by the commercial sector, museums use their institutional power to extract gifts from donors - for example, a collector may donate an object to a museum as a *quid pro quo* for that museum exhibiting their entire collection. In the early 2000s, such practices became more appealing as a consequence of the spike in prices described above, placing many objects out of reach for public institutions with slim acquisitions budgets. Donations may also serve as a fig-leaf for the museum, distracting possible critics from the museum’s participation in generating wealth for collectors.

The apparent willingness of the National Gallery to trade their imprimatur for the ability to pull in high numbers of fee-paying visitors by exhibiting *Salvator Mundi* is, however, a symptom of a deeper shift toward a more (neo)liberalised funding environment for cultural institutions. Although there is significant contestation over the formal ontology of neoliberalism, there is more consensus regarding the descriptive definition thereof, where neoliberalisation is understood as the process of bringing all spheres of social life under the jurisdiction of private property and individual enterprise. At the most general, the liberalisation of arts funding has meant supplanting direct grants with indirect funding via public subsidies to individual donors and sponsors, in conjunction with an overall tightening of the state purse strings. State-led transformations to public funding regimes for the arts have necessitated the search for alternative sources of revenue, inducing bitter competition over these funds. Although public funding for the arts increased after the Second World War, the post-war period also heralded a surfeit of new museums, heightening competition between institutions.⁶²

The corollary to these changes to the funding environment precipitated a paradigm-shift in institutional decision-making processes towards what Robert Janes characterises as ‘museum corporatism.’⁶³ In particular, the insecurity of revenue streams has augured the application of economic rationalities to museum governance, where performance is measured and standardised through quantitative performance

⁶¹ Baudrillard, *Political Economy of the Sign*, 122.

⁶² Katja Lindqvist, “Museum Finances: Challenges beyond Economic Crises,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27, no. 1 (2012): 1–15.

⁶³ Robert R. Janes, “Museums, Corporatism and the Civil Society,” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 50, no. 2 (2007): 219–237.

indicators such as visitor levels, visitor satisfaction, ticket sales and audits. Economising all spheres of life through the application of performance metrics and measurements is the kernel of the competitive neoliberal rationality, what Will Davies calls ‘normative neoliberalism.’⁶⁴ Not only would *Salvator Mundi*’s premiering likely guarantee a significant injection of cash, it would also guard against the possibility of the institution seeing any reduction in its public subsidy. Blockbuster exhibitions such as that at which *Salvator Mundi* had its only outing at a public institution are one way of managing the relentless demands that using performance indicators as the basis for awarding public subsidies imposes on cultural institutions. Janes quotes the director of an important American art museum as saying “[i]f you want to stay competitive in the cultural arena, you can only do it by investing large sums. That means you have to spend 200 to 300 million just to keep up with the next guy.”⁶⁵ Public institutions must therefore be in a near constant state of renewal and refurbishment, either via renovations or the creation of new wings and galleries. In substantive terms, beyond the neoliberal remodelling of subjects into consumers, the shift toward neoliberal rationalities and market imperatives has therefore necessitated major capital investments as visitor levels are contingent upon an exciting offering.

In the years leading up to the 2008 crash, the museum sector witnessed staggering growth, with the opening of new museums and museum redevelopments scheduled to coincide with millennium celebrations. In London, both the gargantuan Tate Modern and the British Museum’s refurbishment of the Great Court opened to the public in 2000. In Paris, the contemporary art museum Palais de Tokyo re-opened after its refurbishment in 2002, while Musée Quai Branly opened in 2006. This expanded museum infrastructure witnessed a concomitant increase in visitor figures. To use the British example again, by 2003 museum attendance had risen by 7.6 million since 1999, a percentage increase of 32 percent.⁶⁶

In the Gulf there was also an efflorescence of new or reived institutions. 2005 saw the creation of Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) and the signing of a deal between the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in New York and the Abu Dhabi

⁶⁴ Will Davies, “The New Neoliberalism,” *New Left Review* 101, Sept/Oct (2016): 121-134.

⁶⁵ Janes, “Museums, Corporatism,” 221.

⁶⁶ Sara Selwood and Maurice Davies, “Capital Costs: Lottery Funding in Britain and the Consequences for Museums,” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 48, no. 4 (2005): 442.

Investment Authority (ADIA) to build a cultural hub in the emirate on Saadiyat Island, which was to comprise a new outpost of the institution. The Guggenheim project and the cultural district in which it was to be located was the outcome of a meeting between Thomas Krens, the controversial entrepreneur-cum-director of the Guggenheim Museum, and Muhammad bin Zayed, crown prince of Abu Dhabi and *de facto* ruler of the powerful emirate. During the meeting, Krens pitched the idea of building a cultural district on Saadiyat Island and creating a super-biennial on Yas Island, with pavilions along its waterways in a manner reminiscent of the Venice Biennale.

Several developments took place in quick succession thereafter - in 2007 a bilateral agreement between the French and Emirati states to create the Louvre Abu Dhabi was signed; in 2008, the Museum of Islamic Art opened in Doha housed in an I. M. Pei designed building; finally, in 2009, a partnership to closely consult on the development of the Zayed National Museum (ZNM) was ratified between the British Museum and what is now called the Department of Culture and Tourism. Each of the deals involved substantial cash flows from the Gulf into these established centres of the art world - the deal with the Guggenheim is reputed to have earned the New York institution at least USD114 million,⁶⁷ a figure dwarfed by the USD1 billion believed to have been paid to the Louvre by Abu Dhabi.

The argument of this chapter is that these capital investments are intimately related. Not only have these onerous demands for renewal made curators and museum managements more beholden to corporate sponsors, they also become much more likely to look for franchising or consultancy agreements such as those conceived and negotiated by the Guggenheim, the Louvre and the British Museum in the Arab Gulf states. Indeed, both these imperatives might be thought of as an attempt to resolve the problems that neoliberalisation has caused for cultural institutions by unlocking the cultural capital tied up in the name and reputation of these august institutions. Returning to Harvey's elaboration of the economic logics of crises of accumulation, he suggests that in addition to a spatial fix, such a crisis might be relieved temporarily through a temporal fix (i.e., through the absorption of surpluses in long-term capital investment projects such as infrastructure). The cultural infrastructure partnerships and associated consultancy arrangements negotiated by major museums in the

⁶⁷ Negar Azimi, "The Gulf Art War," *The New Yorker*, 19 December 2016, 19–25.

established centres of the West might therefore be considered a spatio-temporal fix, combining the opening of “new” markets with the promise of revenues for the duration of the deal. Indeed, although *Salvator Mundi* did not eventually arrive at the Louvre Abu Dhabi, the franchising deal that created the institution for which it was originally destined generated huge sums of money for the French parent museum.

As aforementioned, the bilateral deal between France and Abu Dhabi that agreed to the creation of the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the leasing of the Louvre’s name 30 for years has been valued at over EUR1 billion: approximately EUR500 million for the lease of the name alone, and the rest financing the lease of objects from a consortium of seventeen French museums and heritage bodies through AFM, the private entity constituted to oversee the franchising of the Louvre.⁶⁸ Financing for the Louvre Abu Dhabi came from the Offset Programme created by Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan in the 1990s. This scheme allocated a proportion of the public funds disbursed in arms deals, usually with Western states, into a reserve for domestic investment and development. These funds would eventually form the start-up capital for Mubadala, the Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) created by Muhammad bin Zayed. Under the stewardship of its director, Khaldoun al-Mubarak, Mubadala is responsible for the development of the Saadiyat Cultural District alongside the Tourism Investment and Development Company (TDIC) on behalf of the DCT. AFM is constituted as a private consultancy firm tasked with overseeing the development of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, but its largest shareholder is the Louvre itself. This deal was also prefigured by an earlier deal that founded the Louvre Atlanta, a project which involved a three-year lease of objects to the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. In exchange for the loan, the Louvre Paris received EUR13 million from three major sponsors - Coca-Cola, Delta Air Lines and UPS.⁶⁹ The economic liberalisation that compelled the search for new outlets of the cultural capital tied up in these institutions has nevertheless been felt unevenly across different sites of the art world.

⁶⁸ AFM was registered on the French Company Register on 23 August 2007.

⁶⁹ In response to this initiative and the Louvre Abu Dhabi deal, which had just been signed, three current and former directors of French Museums - Françoise Cachin, Director of the Musées de France (formerly director of the Musée D’Orsay); Jean Clair, the General National Heritage curator; and Roland Recht, a professor of Art History at the Collège De France, published a letter in *Le Monde* decrying the practice of paying loans. They claimed that seen to undermine the cultural sector’s mandate of contributing to “knowledge.”

Kevin Mulcahy categorises Western cultural patronage and funding regimes into four distinct traditions: royal patronage which begins with the Bourbons and morphs into a centralised cultural policy; princely patronage or a decentralised cultural policy administered at the municipal level; liberal patronage characterised by private or semi-autonomous institutions and funding bodies; and finally the social-democratic tradition where culture is perceived as integral to the welfare state.⁷⁰ These traditions are deeply intertwined with questions of history and imaginings of the nation.⁷¹ In keeping with its more muscular and interventionist state, captured most clearly by the concept of *laïcité*, Mulcahy argues that France conforms to the royal tradition of patronage, administering funding to the Musées de France (Museums of France) centrally through the Ministry of Culture. Under French Law, this appellation is granted to either public institutions or those with not-for-profit motives. Those working in the cultural sector have historically boasted of the generosity of the French funding model as compared to their European and American counterparts. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the political and economic centrality of liberalism to both the United States and the United Kingdom, Mulcahy categorises the cultural funding regimes in both as conforming to the liberal model. Without wanting to generalise too much, as there are meaningful distinctions between the two forms of cultural policy, particularly as concerns their systems of tax incentives for donations to cultural institutions,⁷² the basic contours of this model are relatively slim funds allocated by central government to a semi-autonomous body charged with administering those funds at arm's length from the government - the Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the United Kingdom and United States respectively. These operate in conjunction with the indirect subsidies provided to cultural institutions via financial incentives for

⁷⁰ Kevin V. Mulcahy, "Cultural Patronage in Comparative Perspective: Public Support for the Arts in France, Germany, Norway, and Canada," *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 27, no. 4 (1998): 247–63.

⁷¹ Alternatively, cultural funding policy has been grouped into two paradigms: the "private paradigm" and the "state paradigm." See Vivian F. Wang, "Deductions and Donations: Tax Policy as a Manifestation of Attitudes About Art in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada," *Art, Antiquity & Law* 14, no. 1 (2009): 81-102.

⁷² The United States maintains a policy of tax deductions, with up to 50 percent of the value deductible from the marginal rate of tax. The UK, by contrast, maintains Gift Aid Scheme, where the government pays an additional 25 percent of the value of the donation to the institution. See Sigrid Hemels, "Tax Incentives as a Creative Industries Policy Instrument," 2017 for a discussion of how this provides an incentive to wealthy donors as they "can claim the difference between the tax rate they pay and the basic rate of 20 percent on their donation plus gift aid." Both countries also offer significant inducements to posthumous donations as a way of circumventing inheritance tax.

businesses and individuals, thus providing direct stimulus to the private art market. As well as spawning private institutions, the net effect is to make individual collectors and corporate sponsors particularly indispensable to public institutions.

The core maxim of neoliberalism as domestic fiscal policy has been the pursuit of a small and financially prudent state, in tandem with heavy investments in instruments of state violence and discipline such as the police. Although state support for cultural institutions was already limited in the US prior to the 1980s, neoliberal reforms broadly entailed a squeeze on public funding, with both Thatcher and Reagan implementing substantial cuts to art subsidies. In 1982, the Republicans made an effective cut to the NEA by freezing its budget, and began actively cutting the budget when they took control of congress in 1994.⁷³ Chin-Tao Wu likewise details how during the Thatcher era, public funding was reduced to make room for more corporate sponsorship under intense lobbying from the Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA), while the Gift Aid scheme of ‘tax free giving’ was introduced under the Conservative administration of Prime Minister John Major.⁷⁴ After the 2008 financial crisis, the British Conservative Government reprised the harsh austerity measures of the 1980s. In 2010 it stripped away 30 percent of Arts Council England funding, though national museum funding was only reduced by 15 percent to protect the free entry policy.⁷⁵ In so doing, the new government came good on the Conservative Party’s 2010 election promise to rejig the tax system to further encourage a ‘US style culture of philanthropy’ to take root in the United Kingdom.⁷⁶

As has already been mentioned, these active changes to the public funding regimes for the arts were part of the wider political and economic agenda of neoliberalism. Central to this agenda - the progeny of what Tony Norfield has called the ‘Anglo-American system’⁷⁷ – was the lessening of financial regulation in the United

⁷³ Gregory B Lewis and Michael Rushton, “Understanding State Spending on the Arts, 1976–99,” *State and Local Government Review* 39, no. 2 (2007): 107–14. They note that cuts were mitigated by funding at the state level but describe this financing as ‘small, not particularly visible, and not particularly salient.’

⁷⁴ Chin-Tao Wu, “Embracing the Enterprise Culture: Art Institutions since the 1980s,” *New Left Review* 1/230, July/Aug (1998): 28.

⁷⁵ Charlotte Higgins and Owen Gibson, “Fears for London 2012 Legacy as Sport along with Arts is Cut by 30%,” *The Guardian*, 20 October 2010.

⁷⁶ Michael Kimmelman, “In Europe, the Arts Ask for Alms,” *The New York Times*, 21 January 2010. In 2021, this agenda came to its logical conclusion, with George Osborne, the architect of British austerity in the last decade, being appointed as the British Museum’s fundraiser-in-chief.

⁷⁷ Tony Norfield, *The City: London and the Global Power of Finance* (London: Verso, 2016).

States and the United Kingdom. With its euromarkets booming since the 1950s, the City of London was already the global financial capital by the 1980s, closely followed by New York.⁷⁸ This is not to suggest that other European countries did not have substantial financial sectors, but that much of their trade was conducted through the financial markets located both in London and New York.⁷⁹ With both active and tacit assistance from the Bank of England and the Federal Reserve, these financial centres loosened regulations and pioneered the methods, infrastructures, and organisational blueprints that have now come to be associated with financialisation. Creating a financial musculature of which London and New York were the nerve centres was a neo-imperial agenda, intended to augment American, and sustain British, power and influence. These neo-imperial moves structured the emergence of a particularly liberal entrepreneurial cultural sector within these two cities and national jurisdictions, both historic centres of the art world.

The distinction between French and Anglo-American funding environments and art markets should not, however, be overdrawn. In France, the levels and direction of the centralised public subsidy began to be gently reengineered in the late 1990s and early 2000s in favour of a more competitive model of cultural financing. Despite both professionals and publics taking objection, already in the late 1990s major cultural institutions in France had begun soliciting corporate sponsorship. In 1997, the Near-Eastern Antiquities Wing of the Louvre was renamed the Sackler Wing, following a substantial donation from the now disgraced Sackler family, whose philanthropic largesse and cultural patronage have acted as a smokescreen to obscure the ill-gotten source of their wealth in the pharmaceutical industry.⁸⁰ ADMICAL, the Association for the Development of Industrial and Commercial Sponsorship, was founded in 1979 along with three others by Jacques Rigaud, its President until 2008. Rigaud is unabashed in extolling the virtues of both corporate sponsorship and his mercenary

⁷⁸ Adam Hanieh, *Money, Markets, and Monarchies: The Gulf Cooperation Council and the Political Economy of the Contemporary Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Norfield, *City*.

⁷⁹ Tooze, *Crashed*.

⁸⁰ In 2019, after protests against the naming, the Louvre removed the Sackler name from the gallery. The Louvre said this was because the sponsorship period had expired. See Patrick Radden Keefe, "The Family that Built an Empire of Pain," *The New Yorker*, 23 October 2017, 34-49, for details of how Sackler Family billions are the direct product of the opioid crisis currently ravaging the US.

approach in equal measure: ‘everybody has to gain from it.’⁸¹ Christophe Monin, a business school graduate who directed communication and fundraising at the Louvre from 1988 to 2014, claims to ‘owe Jacques Rigaud everything.’⁸²

In 2002, the French Government passed Loi n° 2002-5, a piece of museum legislation that contained Article 238 bis-0 A.⁸³ The article amended French taxation law, introducing tax incentives to encourage corporations to donate art to the Musées de France. Upon receiving a donation, the French state deducts 90 percent of the cost of the work from taxes due provided this amount does not exceed 50 percent of one’s total tax bill. Given how costly such a subsidy might end up being for the French state, they used the preexisting category of ‘national treasure,’ (*trésors nationaux*) - guaranteed under European Union Law - to determine eligibility for the scheme, establishing a body to adjudicate which objects fall into this category. This amendment was further systematised by Loi n° 2003-709. The legislation, which came into force on 1st August 2003, focused specifically on sponsorship, associations, and foundations.⁸⁴ According to several dealers I spoke with for this study, these tax incentives were introduced to compete with American tax legislation. This legislation provided substantial financial enticements for donations and had therefore allowed American museums to suck up a disproportionate number of donations.

Both French and Anglo-American funding traditions can be contrasted with that of the German state, whose funding model, Mulcahy suggests, fits within the lineaments of the princely tradition.⁸⁵ Until 1998, cultural policy in Germany was entirely devolved to the *Länder* or regional states. Direct spending by the German state on the cultural sector dwarfs the spending in other European states. According to a 1998 report commissioned by Arts Council England,⁸⁶ in 1993 direct per capita spending on the arts in Germany totalled eighty-five dollars, amounting to 1.79 percent of total government expenditure and 0.36 percent of GDP. By comparison, France spent 1.31 percent of annual expenditure on the arts (1993), the United Kingdom spent

⁸¹ Georgina Oliver, “Corporate Sponsorship: A Sea Change for French Museums,” *Museum International* 51, no. 2 (1999): 25.

⁸² Georgina Oliver, “Corporate Sponsorship,” 25.

⁸³ Loi n°2002-5 du 4 janvier 2002 relative aux musées de France.

⁸⁴ Loi n° 2003-709 du 1er août 2003 relative au mécénat, aux associations et aux fondations.

⁸⁵ Mulcahy, “Cultural Patronage in Comparative Perspective.”

⁸⁶ Arts Council of England, Policy Research and Planning Department, “International Data on Public Spending on the Arts in Eleven Countries,” (Research Report 13, March 1998).

0.65 percent (1995/96), and the United States a mere 0.13 percent (1995).⁸⁷ This healthy funding model for the arts militates against the pressures placed on cultural institutions to seek alternative sources of funding, while the power wielded by the *Länder* acts as a check on changes wrought to the funding model by central government. It might therefore seem unsurprising that of the major historic art markets, it is America, Britain and France that have been central to the creation of a cultural infrastructure in the Gulf.

The difference in funding models is, however, insufficient as an explanation for why the German art market has not expanded into the Gulf. Firstly, the German state has made moves to liberalise its funding regime. In 1998, Germany also created a Federal Ministry of Culture, whose mandate was in part to create the conditions to encourage public-private partnerships. Michael Naumann, the inaugural Secretary of Culture, introduced a more comprehensive scheme of tax incentives for donations and philanthropy.⁸⁸ Moreover, the German economy, and thus its art market, has by no means been free from financialisation.⁸⁹ In 2007, Deutsche Bank was ranked 12th in the list of corporations with the highest levels of corporate control (i.e., owning over 50 percent of a company's shares);⁹⁰ of the 11 other companies above Deutsche Bank in this ranking, one was French, one Swiss and all others were either British or American. Deutsche Bank and the German regional banks, the Landesbanken, were also hit hard by the shocks of the 2008 recession due to their heavy investments in the American subprime mortgage market.⁹¹

Secondly, Germany is also a cultural metropole, a former empire whose museums were swelled with colonial loot, with a thriving commercial gallery and contemporary art scene. It might be countered that, in terms of turnover, the German art market is substantially smaller than those in the three other cultural metropolises discussed in this chapter – the United States, the United Kingdom, and France - due

⁸⁷ National Endowment for the Arts, "International Data on Government Spending on the Arts" (Report, 2000).

⁸⁸ Peter M. McIsaac, "Public-Private Support of the Arts and German Cultural Policy," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 13, no. 4 (2007) 371-391.

⁸⁹ Tooze, *Crashed*.

⁹⁰ Norfield, *City*, 123.

⁹¹ Tooze, *Crashed*, 74.

to the overwhelming dominance of their auction markets.⁹² Considered from the perspective of total global transactions, however, the picture looks rather different. According to statistics compiled by the French art database, Artprice, between 2002 and 2006, an average 12.38 percent of total global transactions were conducted through Germany, only just behind the United States and the United Kingdom, at 14.06 percent and 14.84 percent respectively, while France eclipsed them all, conducting 18.02 percent of total global sales (see Table 1.1).⁹³

Table 1.1 *Share of global annual number of art transactions as a percentage (%)*

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Average
France	16.8	17.5	19.4	17.6	18.8	18.02
United Kingdom	15.2	14	15.8	14.5	14.7	14.84
United States	10.3	13	14.8	15.8	16.4	14.06
Germany	11	13.2	12.3	12.7	12.7	12.38
Other	46.7	42.3	37.7	39.4	37.4	40.7

Source: Artprice, *Art Market Trends* (2002 – 2006)

The thriving German commercial gallery scene, both historic and current, gives further depth to this picture. Kunstmarkt Köln was the first ever commercial art fair. It opened in 1967 and was the progeny of German dealers Rudolf Zwirner and Hein Stunke. Yet, it was Swiss super-collector and dealer Ernst Beyeler who really injected the dynamism into the art fair model when he created Art Basel in 1970. Art Basel is the largest art fair in the world, and it has expanded to include two offshoots in Miami and Hong Kong. Analysing exhibitors at Art Basel from 1970-2011, Stefano Baia Curioni and Olav Velthuis show that while there has been a relative decline in the proportion of German galleries since the fair began, they have nonetheless disproportionately outnumbered other countries – in 1970 German galleries made up

⁹² For economic data on turnover see *The Art Market*, a report published annually by Art Basel in conjunction with UBS (formerly published by TEFAF), and assembled by art market economist, Clare McAndrew.

⁹³ It should be noted that, in 2006, China dislodged the German art market from its position as the fourth largest market in terms of turnover. McAndrew suggests this was a watershed moment, with China since occupying an extremely powerful position in the global art market. See “An Introduction to Art and Finance” in *Fine Art and High Finance*, ed. Clare McAndrew (New York: Bloomberg, 2010), 1-31. This claim is borne out by economic data on annual turnover collected in *The Art Market Report* which shows a stratospheric increase in Chinese turnover.

over 40 percent of all exhibitors, and only as late as 2005 was this relative position (~19 percent) overtaken by American exhibitors (~23 percent).⁹⁴

The situation does not appear to have changed a great deal since then. Based on my analysis of the data published by Art Basel between the years 2015 and 2019, German galleries outnumbered both British and French, with an average of 54.5 German galleries per annum having exhibited during this period as compared to 89.2 American galleries, 47.5 British galleries and 33.8 French (see Table 1.2).⁹⁵ Based on UNCTAD figures, of the economies of the liberal West, Germany was the second largest exporter of creative goods in 2012, after the US, with a market share of 8.1 percent.⁹⁶ Given its evidently thriving industry and cultural export market, there must be other factors dictating the relative absence of German players from the cultural sector in the Gulf.

Table 1.2 *Art galleries exhibiting at Art Basel, 2015 – 2019*

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Average	Per capita average
United States	88	92	88	88	90	89.2	0.27
Germany	56	55	53	54	55	54.5	0.65
United Kingdom	43	47	50	50	51	47.5	0.71
France	31	32	34	36	36	33.8	0.54
Switzerland	33	29	29	30	29	30	3.51

Source: Art Basel

Norfield situates the emergence of finance capitalism in the context of imperial rivalries between the former European imperial powers and the United States.⁹⁷ This competition determined the shape of the French economy as a whole with the social-democrat President Francois Mitterand implementing reforms to emulate, albeit in a subordinate position and with modifications, the neoliberal model forged in Britain and the United States.⁹⁸ In Europe, both the United Kingdom and France positioned

⁹⁴ Stefano Baia Curioni and Olav Velthuis, “Making Markets Global,” in *Cosmopolitan Canvases: The Globalisation of Markets for Contemporary Art*, eds. Stefano Baia Curioni and Olav Velthuis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 17.

⁹⁵ After Switzerland, Britain has the highest per capita number of exhibitors at 0.71/million, followed by Germany with 0.65/million, France with 0.55, and finally the United States at 0.27.

⁹⁶ UNCTAD, “Creative Economy Outlook and Country Profiles: Trends in International Trade in Creative Industries” (Report, United Nations, 2015).

⁹⁷ Norfield, *City*.

⁹⁸ Norfield, *City*, 13.

themselves against Germany, the dominant power. Germany had consolidated its position of economic supremacy and control within the European Union (EU) as the largest financier of EU budgets; Norfield gives it the epithet ‘paymaster of the European system.’⁹⁹ After the reunification of Germany following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, this economic power expanded into Eastern Europe. Although the United Kingdom, France and Germany all saw an overall decrease in the volume of trade with developing countries and other non-European developed countries (outside Japan, the United States, and Canada) in favour of trade with other EU members states between 1980 and 1990, both the United Kingdom and France have relied much more heavily on this trade than Germany.¹⁰⁰

Norfield suggests that these geographical patterns must be understood as a product of their different imperial histories, where Germany was primarily an imperial power within Europe unlike their other imperial rivals. Elements of these trading patterns, especially Germany’s relative dependence on European trade, are mirrored in the cultural industries.¹⁰¹

Table 1.3 *Destination of cultural exports, 2003 and 2012*

Year	Country	America %	Europe %	Asia %*
2003	United Kingdom	32	48	14
2012	United Kingdom	49	25	21
2003	United States	50	28	19
2012	United States	42	31	25
2003	Germany	7	86	7
2012	Germany	6	83	9
2003	France	15	64	14
2012	France	11	60	24
2003	Switzerland	19	55	25
2012	Switzerland	16	44	39

Source: UNCTAD Creative Economy Outlook and Country Profiles: Trends in international trade in creative industries, 2015

* These geographic regions correspond to the M49 standard used by the UN’s Statistics Division. America comprises North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean; Europe comprises Eastern, Northern, Southern and Western Europe; Asia comprises Central, Eastern, South-eastern, Southern, and Western Asia. All the GCC states are classified as Western Asia.

⁹⁹ Norfield, *City*, 63.

¹⁰⁰ Norfield, *City*.

¹⁰¹ Norfield, *City*.

Between 2003 and 2012, Germany increased its cultural exports to Europe from 83 percent to 86 percent with only a 2 percent increase in exports to Asia. By contrast, France, the United States, and the United Kingdom, all saw decreases in the volume of their cultural exports to Europe, in favour of substantial increases in the volume of cultural goods exported to Asia over the same period (see Table 1.3).¹⁰² Extrapolating from Norfield's analysis then, the central role played by Britain, France and the United States in opening Gulf markets to cultural capitalism, is a direct consequence of the thicket of political and economic relations determined by their imperial histories in the region, and the racialised perceptions of the Gulf as an extremely lucrative "emerging art market," primarily comprising ignorant parvenus.

1.3 TENDRILS OF IMPERIAL TRADE

Before the discovery of oil, the British were the major imperial power in the Gulf. During the nineteenth century, the Gulf was a key strategic node in what James Onley has called British India's 'informal empire.' Following the building of two telegraph lines in the Gulf and the opening of Suez in 1869, the Gulf waters became the central corridor by which Britain was connected to its Indian possessions. Although the volume of trade between the Gulf and British India was relatively insignificant, the British incorporated ports along the Arabian coastline into the Bombay to Bandar shipping route, which was operated by the British India Steam Navigation Company. Onley argues that a political motive underpinned the creation of British trade links with the Gulf¹⁰³ - by creating Arab dependency on the British as trading partners, they could cement their hold over these states, which were central to creating a *cordon sanitaire* around India to shield it from encroachment by other imperial powers.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² The percentage increase of exports to Asia among the developed economies was most marked in Switzerland (see Table 1.2). This is likely due to the fact that these figures include *all* cultural goods and services, and thus luxury goods of which Switzerland is a major exporter.

¹⁰³ James Onley, "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century," *New Arabian Studies* 6 (2004): 30–92; James Onley, "Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf," *Journal of Social Affairs* 22, no. 87 (2005): 29–45.

¹⁰⁴ Although small fry export markets, the construction of this string of ports allowed the British to offload goods produced in India that would not be making their way back to European markets. The kandoura, the distinctive white robe commonly worn by Emirati men, is in fact a relatively novel invention that arose only after the British began flogging less desired white cottons, produced in Indian textile factories, to consumers in the Gulf.

Indeed, it was French encroachment on British India from the west following the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798, and the creation of a military alliance with the Shah of Persia, which initially motivated the British to seek out treaties with sheikhs in Muscat in the early 1800s.

During the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire also began to expand its links with the Arab Gulf states. Due to their alliance with the Germans, this meant increased German influence in the Gulf region. To militate against the expanding Ottoman and German influence and ensure their monopoly over these shipping lanes and communication channels, the British signed a series of protection treaties with tribal rulers in exchange for exclusive access to the waters. They also erected a system of imperial governance around a network of British and “local” agents, who were charged with building a material and legislative infrastructure to protect British commercial interests in the region.¹⁰⁵ In so doing, the British established the ruling elites of the future nation-states, the geographic borders of the territories over which they would come to govern, and many of their practices of government.

When oil was discovered, the geo-strategic interest in the Gulf was transformed into an explicitly material one. Middle Eastern oil was first discovered in Iran, and subsequently Iraq. The Ottomans and the Germans initially jointly held the Mosul oil concessions through Deutsche Bank. According to the terms of the 1920 San Remo Oil Agreement, signed between the British and the French after World War One, these concessions were to be divided between the British based Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later BP), Shell, and a consortium of French oil companies, Compagnie Française des Pétrole, thus broadly eliminating German commercial petroleum-based activity in the region.¹⁰⁶ Against the grain of conventional histories of oil production, Timothy

¹⁰⁵ Omar Hesham AlShehabi, “Policing Labour in Empire: The Modern Origins of the Kafala Sponsorship System in the Gulf Arab States,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 2 (2021): 291–310; Fahad Ahmad Bishara, *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Khalili, *Sinews*; Mathew, *Margins*; Onley, “Informal Empire.”

¹⁰⁶ These included a variety of European companies based variously in the Netherlands, Belgium, and also, Germany. Germany has been deeply involved in the shipping trade, both manufacturing and owning ships. Ships manufactured in East Germany were bought by Gulf based shipping firms as early as the 1970s. In 2017, the German container shipping company Hapag-Lloyd merged with the United Arab Shipping Company, in which Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar were all shareholders. The shipping lines are operated by Hapag-Lloyd, while the majority shareholders are the Qatari and Saudi SWFs, as well as a German/Chilean maritime firm, and the City of Hamburg. See Khalili, *Sinews*, 152.

Mitchell argues that oil companies sought to monopolise the production of oil so as to 'sabotage' it¹⁰⁷ - i.e., to limit its availability on the market and thereby facilitate the extraction of maximum profits. The cartel arrangement was central to this business strategy.

Up until nationalisation, oil concessions in the oil rich countries of the Middle East were controlled by the Seven Sisters cartel, composed of five major American oil companies, and the British companies, Shell and BP. With the waning of British global power in the aftermath of World War Two, which was catalysed by Harold Wilson's decision in 1968 to withdraw British forces from anywhere east of Suez,¹⁰⁸ American influence in the Gulf grew more pronounced. Though the British maintained their preponderant influence in the Trucial States, Saudi Arabia forged close links with the United States in large part through the oil concession granted to American enterprises in 1933. Shortly thereafter, in 1938, ARAMCO, the company formed from a partnership between the Standard Oil Company of California and the Texas Fuel Company, struck oil in Dhahran. After World War Two, these oil giants were joined by two further companies when Standard Oil of New Jersey and Standard Oil of New York¹⁰⁹ purchased shares totalling forty percent of the company.¹¹⁰

The oil trade therefore thickened the trading networks with the Anglophone West established during the British colonial period. Oil production created dense commodity circuits that went far beyond its trade. The vast, capillary maritime infrastructure necessitated by the flows of oil leaving the Gulf provided significant commercial opportunities for shipping and construction companies based in, among other places, Europe. Such commercial networks are braided with militarisation, and have yielded a substantial and continuous arms trade from companies located in Britain, America, and elsewhere. The 'corporate security extensions'¹¹¹ of the British and United States military apparatus also became enmeshed in constructing and policing these transport infrastructures, both land and sea. The British were famously

¹⁰⁷ Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*.

¹⁰⁸ Jean-Loup Samaan, "French Policy in the Gulf: The Other Western Ally," in *External Powers and the Gulf Monarchies*, eds. Jonathon Fulton and Li-Chen Sim (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 74–89.

¹⁰⁹ These companies were later renamed Chevron, Texaco, Exxon and Mobil.

¹¹⁰ Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 9.

¹¹¹ Khalili, *Sinews*, 132.

involved in brutally crushing the Arab nationalist inspired Dhufar rebellion in Oman.¹¹² In Bahrain, the former British colonial police officer stationed in Kenya, Ian Henderson, who achieved notoriety for his involvement in the bloody suppression of the Mau Mau rebellion in 1952, was employed as the Head of the General Directorate for State Security Investigations, gaining the grisly epithet the ‘butcher of Bahrain.’

Gulf oil wealth was likewise aggressively incorporated into Western financial markets. Sara Bazoobandi has shown the colonial origins of the Gulf Cooperation Council Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWFs).¹¹³ For example, the Kuwait Investment Board (KIB), headquartered in London, was founded in 1951 by the British as a subsidiary of the British Bank of the Middle East (BBME) with the dual objectives of diversifying the Kuwaiti economy and ensuring the long-term stability of Kuwait as a market for British commodities. In a secret compact that the Nixon administration brokered with Saudi Arabia in 1974, the kingdom agreed to prop up the American economy and finance its spending by recycling oil revenues into US Treasuries.¹¹⁴ In exchange, America would continue to buy oil from Saudi Arabia, sell it arms and provide military aid.¹¹⁵ While GCC holdings of US Treasury securities remained stable and consistently under USD50 billion until 2004, in that year the Arab Gulf states began to expand their holdings dramatically, increasing at an annual rate of 29 percent.¹¹⁶

Given that Britain and the United States loom large in the history above, the strong presence of France in the emergent cultural scene in the Gulf might seem, on the face of it, somewhat anomalous. Territorially, France’s only footprint in the region

¹¹² For an account of the revolutionary moment of the Dhufar Rebellion See Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires in Oman, 1965-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹¹³ Sara Bazoobandi, *Political Economy of the Gulf Sovereign Wealth Funds: A Case Study of Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

¹¹⁴ Andrea Wong, “The Untold Story Behind Saudi Arabia’s 41-Year U.S. Debt Secret,” *Bloomberg*, 31 May 2016.

¹¹⁵ Wong further details how deaccessioned diplomatic cables obtained from the National Archives, reveal that King Faisal of Saudi Arabia stipulated that the deal was contingent on his country’s involvement in the US debt market remaining completely secret. To provide cover for Saudi purchases, the Treasury created “add-ons,” which the Treasury were not obliged to include in official published auction totals, thus obscuring Saudi Arabia’s involvement. When the Treasury began publishing monthly breakdowns of US debt ownership, an exception was made for Saudi Arabia, which was only included as part of a group of countries listed as “oil exporters.”

¹¹⁶ Hanieh, *Money*, 40-41. Financial shocks and reduced oil prices caused by Covid-19 saw the GCC states significantly reduce their US Treasury securities holdings in 2020.

was in Djibouti, smaller than those of either the Germans or the Portuguese. What the French lacked in land, however, they made up for in the urgency of their desire to humble British power in the Indian Ocean. An intelligence document issued by the Government of India, Intelligence Branch entitled 'French Possessions in the Gulf of Aden,' show that the British were particularly skittish about growing French presence around the Red Sea, and from the East African coast, during the nineteenth century.¹¹⁷ Perim, an island in the Bab al-Mandab, was seized by the British as a bulwark against French influence flowing from the Suez project and French merchants operating in Zanzibar.¹¹⁸

While British anxiety may in part have been due to their imperial contestation with the French in the wider Middle East, there is considerable evidence that though they did not come to fruition, the French had ambitious designs on the Gulf region, conducting several excursions along the Yemeni coast at Shaykh Said.¹¹⁹ Ironically, the General Act of the Brussels Conference (1889 - 90), intended to clamp down on the slave trade, provided the French with the perfect opportunity to augment their influence.¹²⁰ European maritime law precluded British anti-slavery patrols from boarding vessels flagged to other European powers.¹²¹ Since the abolition of the slave trade, it had therefore been open season on vessels flying the red flag conventionally flown by Arab ships or those flying none at all, many of which were freighting legitimate cargo. When ratifying the General Act, France exempted itself from the stipulations concerning *dhows*. Frustrated with constant raids by British anti-slavery patrols, non-European vessels plying the Indian Ocean, both those carrying slaves and other contraband, and those conveying legal goods,¹²² thus began flagging to France.¹²³ Later France signed diplomatic treaties with the emerging rulers of the nation-states that were coalescing over the twentieth century, such as the 1931 Treaty of

¹¹⁷ IOR: L/PS/20/60, "French Possessions in the Gulf of Aden. Compiled by Captain E. J. E. Swayne, 16th Bengal Infantry," 1895.

¹¹⁸ Gavin, *Aden*.

¹¹⁹ Gavin, *Aden*. For a comprehensive survey of French Relations with the Sheikdoms in the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf see also B. J. Slot "French Relations with the Independent Shaikhdoms of the Lower Gulf," *Liva: Journal of the National Center for Documentation & Research* 1, no. 2 (2009): 10–21.

¹²⁰ Mathew, *Margins*.

¹²¹ Lauren Benton, "Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 4 (2005): 700–724.

¹²² Some of these vessels would previously have flagged to Spain or Portugal.

¹²³ Mathew, *Margins*.

understanding and friendship between the Republic of France and the Kingdom of Hijaz, Najd, and other provinces.¹²⁴ In the early twentieth century, the French scholar and explorer Antonin Goguyer attempted to persuade the French to establish a beachhead at either Khor Fakkan or Dibba, and build a railway traversing Sharjah from the Gulf of Oman to the Persian Gulf.¹²⁵

Thinking exclusively in terms of the drama of imperial rivalries and geopolitics, however, obscures the dependencies and collaboration between different European sources of capital and enterprise. Not only did rivalries ebb somewhat after the signing of the Anglo-French Detente in 1907, French companies, such as that run by the Aden-based shipping magnate Antonin Besse, were contracted by British companies in the Indian Ocean.¹²⁶ These maritime infrastructures wove a filigree of lanes and ports around the Persian Gulf and beyond, imbricating different European enterprises, embedding them in the Gulf, and relaying imports back to European markets. Tellingly, a large endowment from Besse to Oxford University in 1950 established St. Antony's College, a graduate college specialising in the study of the Middle East.¹²⁷ That Saudi Arabia hosted branches of French banks in 1940 to finance commercial enterprises on the Peninsula before the evolution of a local banking infrastructure, also testifies to the relatively sizeable French expatriate communities living in the Gulf in the early half of the twentieth century.¹²⁸

With the slow demise of formal empire, political relations between France and the Arab Gulf states became more pronounced. In 1967, President De Gaulle met King Faisal, on the first official visit of a Saudi monarch to France. These political and economic relations were given a further fillip in the late noughties as a consequence of the Obama administration's policy of thawing political relations with Iran,¹²⁹ and its

¹²⁴ Samaan, "French Policy," 75.

¹²⁵ Khalili, *Sinews*; and B. J. Slot, "French." See also Satnam Virdee, "Forward to the Past: Race, the Colour Scale and Michael Banton," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, no. 7 (2012): 1143–1150, for a discussion of how imperial rivalries between France and Britain also spurred the legal-encoding of the epidermal hierarchies that began to emerge on Tobacco plantations in the British colonial outpost of Virginia. The French passed the *Code Noir* in 1685, which mimicked the British's harsh punishments for miscegenation between white women and African men, and the stripping of children of English men of their status as free British subjects.

¹²⁶ Besse's shipping company was contracted by Shell Oil Company to transport its oil products.

¹²⁷ Khalili, *Sinews*, 71.

¹²⁸ Khalili, *Sinews*, 166.

¹²⁹ Iran is the main regional enemy of the Saudi-UAE axis, while domestically these states have clamped

initial support for the elected Muslim Brotherhood leadership in Egypt after Mubarak was deposed.¹³⁰ French military personnel and contractors also operated in the Gulf, although later than their British and American counterparts, and arms deals were signed with Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia. In 1979, Saudi commanders contracted three policemen from the Intervention Group of the National Gendarmerie to coordinate the special forces operation against a group of insurgents led by Juhayman al-Utaybi, the first major contribution of French military personnel in the region.¹³¹

This lattice of economic and political - and therefore also military - relations between Britain, the United States, France, and the Gulf established the foundations of an economic relationship that David Wearing has characterised as ‘uneven interdependence.’¹³² Wearing is at pains to point out the extent to which dependence is very much mutual. Indeed, following 2008, investors from the Gulf were called upon to rescue Western banks and other businesses from self-inflicted ruin. Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) bought 4.9 percent of Citigroup, Kuwait Investment Board (KIB) purchased 5.7 percent of Merrill Lynch, while Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) bailed out Barclays by buying an 8.9 percent share and purchased an enormous 20.4 percent of the London Stock Exchange.¹³³ Barclays additionally approached Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, brother of Muhammad bin Zayed and deputy prime minister of the UAE, who purchased approximately GBP3.5 billion of shares on behalf of Abu Dhabi’s government investment vehicle International Petroleum Investment Company, although shareholders were told that Mansour was acting in a personal capacity.¹³⁴

When the stock markets crashed it was widely suspected that the economic contraction it augured in the financial capitals of the world would lead to a crash in the art market, as occurred in 1987 after Black Monday. These suspicions were initially

down on the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups. Qatar have, however, charted a different course, maintaining relations with Iran and adopting an accommodation approach vis-à-vis the Muslim Brotherhood, while Oman has adopted a neutral stance, brokering relations between Qatar and the other four states during the Gulf crisis (2017-2021).

¹³⁰ Samaan, “French Policy.”

¹³¹ Pascal Menoret, “Fighting for the Holy Mosque. The 1979 Mecca Insurgency” in *Treading on Hallowed Ground: Counterinsurgency Operations in Sacred Spaces*, eds. C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 117–39.

¹³² David Wearing, *Anglo-Arabia: Why Gulf Wealth Matters to Britain* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

¹³³ Bazoobandi, *Gulf Sovereign Wealth Funds*.

¹³⁴ BBC, “Barclays Misled Shareholders about Source of £3bn,” BBC, 11 February 2013.

realised, with prices for the highly and consistently desired Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works tumbling by as much as 30 percent by the end of 2008, but the suspected long-term drop in prices did not materialise.¹³⁵ In fact, the art market rebounded very quickly - in 2013 it grossed EUR47.42 billion in sales, thus making it the most lucrative year ever after 2007.¹³⁶ Much as with global financial markets, the presence of capital from the Gulf enabled the faster recovery of the art market as collectors were encouraged to put their works up for sale, rather than biding their time as had taken place during previous economic downturns of this scale.

Jussi Pylkkänen is the current Global President of Christie's Auction House and the key strategist spearheading Christie's move into the Gulf markets. In a conversation with *Emirates247* in 2010, Pylkkänen claimed that there was 'fierce demand from *global* art collectors.'¹³⁷ As if predicting the gargantuan sales of the future decade, of which *Salvator Mundi* is the most spectacular example, Pylkkänen went on to suggest that at the time, the major general trend was 'a real hunger for the best possible works on offer – the masterpiece market. When a rare opportunity to acquire a particular work of art presents itself, the result is exceptional and, often, record-breaking, price' [*sic*].¹³⁸ Thus far this chapter has explored how changes to the financial architecture of the cultural sector set in motion the inexorable search for new markets to sustain its vertiginous prices, drawing attention to how this search was structured by imperial histories in the region - in short, for what Harvey has dubbed a 'spatial fix.'¹³⁹

Harvey's attentiveness to the way that neoliberal capitalism is inherently expansionist and imperial is captured most incisively by his concept of 'accumulation by dispossession.' He notes how the association of globalisation with neoliberalism is less indicative of its actual globalising tendencies than of the rescaling and politics of scale that are endemic to neoliberalisation. In keeping with the tradition of Marxist geography, of which Harvey is one of the central thinkers, Erik Swyngedouw maintains that production and capital accumulation under neoliberalism have undergone a

¹³⁵ Gregory Sholette, "Delirium and Resistance after the Social Turn," *Field: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism* 1, Spring (2015): 100.

¹³⁶ Sholette, "Delirium," 100.

¹³⁷ Reena Amos Dyes, "Art Market Picks up Again," *Emirates 24/7*, 14 March 2010, emphasis mine.

¹³⁸ Amos Dyes, "Picks up."

¹³⁹ Harvey, "Spatial Fix."

‘restless process of deterritorialisation/reterritorialisation.’¹⁴⁰ In so doing, Harvey, and Marxist geography as a field, go some way in complicating the sclerotic Eurocentric metaphysics of scientific Marxism, challenging the importance of the wage to the power of capitalists over labour, and thus the centrality of proletariats of the Global North as the revolutionary subject of history. Marxist geography also denaturalises concepts such as the nation-state that orthodox Marxism takes for granted. Nevertheless, his account of neoliberalism has been criticised for not giving sufficient attention to how these modes of dispossession are built on the inheritances from colonial expropriation and threaded with racial constructs.¹⁴¹ As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, scholars of racial capitalism argue that the European scientific Marxist tradition continues to see culture - and therefore cultural constructions such as race - as epiphenomenal to economic relations and modes of production, and drastically underestimate the extent to which capitalism was imbricated with slavery and colonialism.

Returning to Plykkänen’s pronouncements concerning the strong demand for masterpieces from the global art collectors, “global” is a euphemism for buyers from what developmental discourse terms “emerging markets.” And, while Pylkänen attempts to put a positive gloss on the works favoured by these buyers - ‘masterpieces’ in his idiom - he nevertheless echoes a racialising trope of Gulf buyers that I encountered among a variety of different dealers. One referred to Gulf buyers as ‘trophy hunters,’ another suggested that many have viewed the Gulf as a good place to apply the ‘greater fool theory’ (i.e., the theory that there will always be a “greater fool” willing to buy commodities at massively inflated prices). While crises in the art market and wider cultural sector were, as I have argued, crucial to encouraging the expansion of cultural capitalists into the Gulf, racialisations concerning the Gulf, its surfeit of petrodollars, and thus its possible profits and perils, are shot through the search for a spatial fix. Viewed through the lens of recent history, racialisations concerning the commercial prospects of opening the Gulf art market slot into the Janus-faced racial capitalist preoccupation with ‘emerging market’ wealth and the possible bonanzas that would follow their further integration into the world economy.

¹⁴⁰ Swyngedouw, “Glocalisation,” 26.

¹⁴¹ Chakravartty and da Silva, “Accumulation.”

1.4 “BACK THEN IT WAS ALL ABOUT EMERGING MARKETS”¹⁴²

The economist Antoine van Agtmael coined the term “emerging market” in 1981. Agtmael was working for a branch of the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, as part of a marketing exercise designed to attract Western investors to a new global investment fund for countries that had previously been referred to as ‘developing.’¹⁴³ He pitched the fund idea at a meeting at the investment bank Salomon Brothers in New York under the heading ‘Third World Equity Fund.’ Many at the meeting responded positively but a banker from JP Morgan struck a note of caution about the name, suggesting that investors would be put off by the connotations of ‘third world.’¹⁴⁴ Van Agtmael pondered for some time, finally coming up with the name ‘emerging markets’ which he would subsequently write he felt communicated ‘progress, uplift, and dynamism.’¹⁴⁵ Such progressivist teleologies and temporalities have been comprehensively dismantled by critical development studies. They point to the racism and Eurocentrism that underpins labels like ‘developed,’ ‘less developed’ and ‘emerging,’ despite development discourse’s self-professed colour blindness. By flattening history into a linear process, the West comes to attain a position of absolute, unattainable superiority - the crucible of development, advancement, and innovation.¹⁴⁶ These problematic racialising underpinnings have not however prevented such terms being eagerly embraced, with the GCC states regularly classed as an emerging market.

In a report published by the consultancy company Strategy&, a subsidiary of the British multinational consultancy firm, PricewaterhouseCoopers, the Middle East,

¹⁴² This is how William Lawrie described the art market atmosphere in the cultural metropolises during the early 2000s.

¹⁴³ At this time, the World Bank and IMF had also imposed structural adjustment plans across Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East.

¹⁴⁴ Their unease over the implications of this term is somewhat ironic given its origins were not at all pejorative. Originally in French, “tiers monde” was coined by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy, who derived it from the term “tiers état.” Sauvy sought to imply that the Third World would be the radical vanguard of change at a global level, in the same way as the Third Estate had been for the French Revolution.

¹⁴⁵ The Economist, “Defining Emerging Markets,” *The Economist*, 5 October 2017.

¹⁴⁶ For an overview of the role of race in development see Robbie Shilliam, “Race and Development” in *The Politics of Development: A Survey*, ed. Heloise Weber (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 31-48. For another version of this argument see Branwen Gruffydd Jones, “Good Governance and State Failure: The Pseudo-Science of Statesmen in our Times,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (2013): 49-70.

and particularly its wealth management centres in the Gulf, were claimed to be the ‘standout’¹⁴⁷ region in terms of wealth creation to be capitalised upon by business, while its GCC focused report described the region as the ‘most consistent of the emerging markets.’¹⁴⁸ They appraised the levels of private wealth in the Gulf between 2010 and 2013 in a report on opportunities for banking and financial services, calculating that between 2010 and 2013 privately held, investable, liquid wealth in the GCC grew annually by 17.5 percent.¹⁴⁹ The report also calculates that the real number of households classified as affluent, high-net-worth, or ultra-high-net-worth, increased to between 1.5 and 1.6 million, as did their combined wealth which doubled from USD1.1 trillion to USD2.2 trillion. Between 4400 and 5200 households are estimated to have a combined wealth of somewhere between USD702.5 - USD755.5 billion, with each family having at least USD50 million in liquid assets, with an average of USD150 million per household.¹⁵⁰ According to figures compiled by the Peterson Institute for International Economics, as of 2007, SWFs in ‘emerging markets’ held in excess of USD2 trillion in assets on top of the trillions in reserves that their central banks held.¹⁵¹ In that same year, McKinsey appraised the value GCC SWF assets at USD1.5 trillion, while in 2016, Sarah Townsend estimated the value of the combined assets of GCC SWFs to be well in excess of USD2 trillion.¹⁵² Adam Hanieh puts a ‘conservative estimate’ of USD6 trillion on the ‘collective value of disposable wealth and foreign

¹⁴⁷ Alan Gemes et al., “Global Wealth Management Outlook 2014-15: New Strategies for a Changing Industry” (Strategy& Report, 2014): 8.

¹⁴⁸ Daniel Diemers and Jihad K. Khalil, “GCC Private Banking Study 2015: Seizing the Opportunities” (Strategy& Report, 2015): 4.

¹⁴⁹ The report was commissioned in the wake of 2008, which hit heavily leveraged parts of the Gulf, such as Dubai, hard. The authors point to their swift recovery as indicators of the region’s economic vitality. This recovery was buoyed by the spike in oil prices, exports of which flowed out with increasing alacrity to China and the US due to their recovery strategies of infrastructural investment, and by the stabilising interventions of the more financially robust economies in the region such as Abu Dhabi. It was also, however, aided by their ability to summarily deport parts of the migrant workforce, details which the report predictably makes no mention of.

¹⁵⁰ As the report was focused on investable assets, these estimated increases do not account for the capital held in fixed or illiquid assets such as property, collector’s items such as art, or business equity, and may therefore significantly understate the true extent of wealth held by families in the Gulf.

¹⁵¹ Tooze, *Crashed*.

¹⁵² Sarah Townsend, “The Gulf’s Sovereign Dilemma,” *Arabian Business*, 9 April 2016. The US-based company, the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, also publishes fund rankings by total assets. At the time of writing, the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) was the ranked third largest in the world, after the Norway Government Pension Fund (1), and the China Investment Corporation (2), which only recently overtook ADIA. Of the top twelve funds, six are located the Gulf.

assets of GCC governments, SWFs, private Gulf firms, and individuals.¹⁵³ Such an analysis of the value of private wealth in the Gulf provides succour to Hanieh's claim that the usual mono-focus on oil rents obscures how the up and downstream production of oil has been central to the formation of a neoliberal capitalist class, and a set of tightly enmeshed corporations and conglomerates active at national, regional, and global scales that far exceed oil production.¹⁵⁴ The obsessive concern of Western consultancy firms with calculating the wealth in the GCC is, however, also indicative of the allure of the 'emerging market.'

This excitement was nevertheless matched by a comparable anxiety about the increased influence over the Western states wielded by "emerging market" state-backed investors. The lopsided trading patterns that arose after the neoliberal transformation largely benefitted resource rich states such as the Arab Gulf states. This enabled them to invest heavily in Western sovereign bonds, which in turn provoked fears among Western politicians and pundits about the political influence these investments afforded.¹⁵⁵ Although he does not engage with the racial fears this anxiety translated, Adam Tooze nevertheless describes this as the 'wrong crisis,'¹⁵⁶ pointing out that fears concerning the trade deficits and vulnerabilities around what *The Atlantic* in 2004 called 'economic extortion'¹⁵⁷ served to distract from the crisis brewing in the United States subprime mortgage market.

In the aftermath of 2008, when state investors from the Gulf states bought major stakes in the banks and companies convulsed by its shocks, politicians, pundits, and shareholders expressed dismay at the pervasive presence of Gulf capital in institutions at the heart of Western markets.¹⁵⁸ Such concerns were not confined to the financial markets. Known for her hawkish liberal interventionist foreign policy, in 2006 Hillary Clinton headed a bipartisan group of United States congresspersons alongside Chuck Schumer that sought to force the onwards sale of six ports in the United States of which Dubai Ports World had assumed control when it bought the ports

¹⁵³ Hanieh, *Money*, 31.

¹⁵⁴ Hanieh, *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and *Money*.

¹⁵⁵ In 2005, the US current account deficit came to USD792 billion.

¹⁵⁶ Tooze, *Crashed*.

¹⁵⁷ Sherle R. Schweninger, "America's "Suez Moment," *The Atlantic*, 2004.

¹⁵⁸ Peter Thal Larsen and Kate Burgess, "Barclays Hit by Backlash over Mideast Deal," *The Financial Times*, 31 October 2008.

management arm of the British shipping company P&O.¹⁵⁹ Dubai Ports World eventually sold its stakes in the American ports after being leant on by Abu Dhabi.¹⁶⁰

Contradictory racialisations have a much deeper provenance than the developmentalist discourse that arose after the creation of institutions of global financial governance. As discussed in the section on racial capitalism in the introductory chapter, conveniently fickle racialisations have been critical to the logic of imperial capitalism. Racial constructs have allowed empires to bring together different markets and sources of labour - that 'of four continents' - while pitting different workforces against one another. They provided the structure by which workers could be incorporated or marginalised from the labour market based on racialised characterisations, while forestalling meaningful integration into society as full subjects with proper entitlements and material security. Such dynamics contour the imperial histories described above, creating the narrative formulas through which to both incorporate the Gulf into imperial networks and influence, and justify the racialised approach to the communities and rulers of the Arab Gulf states - shades of paternalism, looming threat, and visceral distaste.

An instructive example can be found in the 1973 oil crisis. Mitchell argues that Western oil companies fabricated the oil crisis in order to drive up the prices of oil and increase their own profit margins following a wave of nationalisations and the raising of the price at which Western companies agreed to buy oil from producers - the posted price.¹⁶¹ As part of this fabrication, they concocted an image of the rulers of OPEC's Arab Gulf states as intransigent and perfidious, intent on crippling Western consumers.¹⁶² In reality, the decision to increase the posted price - effectively a rate of tax - was in response to the enormous windfalls that the Seven Sisters oil companies

¹⁵⁹ Foreshadowing the normalisation of relations with Israel, Idan Ofer, founder and CEO of the major Israeli shipping company ZIM, wrote to Clinton in support of DP World, claiming that 'during our long association with DP World, we have not experienced a single security issue in these ports or in any of the terminals operated by DP World, and have received exemplary service that enhances our efficiency and the smooth running of our operations.' See American Shipper, "Israeli carrier Zim sides with DP World," *Freightwaves*, 3 March 2006.

¹⁶⁰ Khalili, *Sinews*, 96.

¹⁶¹ This is the price at which Western companies agreed to buy oil from oil rich countries, effectively a tax rate paid by oil companies to the host nation on their profits. It was maintained artificially low up until the 1970s.

¹⁶² For a full and fascinating account of this fabricated crisis see Mitchell, *Carbon*, 177-99. Interestingly, Mitchell also locates a seedbed of the scientised and reductive economics, that would gain ascendancy in the coming decade, in the supply-demand model that was used to describe the "oil crisis" to everyday Americans.

had accrued due to the artificially low posted price, against a backdrop of massive inflation and increased market prices for oil. Meanwhile, the decision to cut production was an attempt to force political movement on the question of Palestine.

In general, where they acceded to British-led development plans and opened to Western businesses, these same rulers were described by imperial officials and historians as sage and far-sighted visionaries, licencing celebratory accounts of empire and the imperial hand in development in a manner that obscured their overweening role in initiating and directing these projects.¹⁶³ It should however be added that, as Todd Reisz maintains, where those rulers did not pursue the development works according to the plans devised by the British and favourable to their commercial interests, they were described in much the same fashion as Sir James Craig, Political Agent for the Trucial States between 1961 and 1964, described Sheikh Saqr bin Sultan Al Qasimi, the ruler of Sharjah at the time: ‘feckless or content.’¹⁶⁴

Guided by his Arab-nationalist leanings, Saqr had simply tried to restore his port without Britain’s self-interested, overbearing tutelage, the need for which was largely due to disruptions to the silt in the shallow waters of the Gulf Littoral caused by the British-led dredging of Dubai Creek. The intrinsic role of racialisations in the Gulf’s emergent cultural sector is therefore part of this much longer history. Both the idea that it is a site of promise for cultural capitalists from the United States, Britain, and France, and that it is a locus of both gifted and perspicacious buyers such as Sheikh Saud Al Thani, the first chairman of Qatar’s National Council for Culture, Arts, and Heritage (NCCA), and of unsophisticated and inchoate audiences, unschooled in the refinements of fine art and high culture, have antecedents in its imperial history. Indeed, the thick silt of imperial relations and discourses, which will be continually dredged through the thesis, are the seabed of the Gulf’s cultural waters, shaping the currents that have driven the creation of its cultural infrastructure - the swell and shape of its domestic market, its architecture, even the content displayed within it.

¹⁶³ Khalili, *Sinews*; Todd Reisz, *Showpiece City: How Architecture Made Dubai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

¹⁶⁴ Reisz, *Showpiece City*, 87.

1.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have used *Salvator Mundi* as a searchlight to think through the changes to the art world from the vantage point of its newest major outpost in the Gulf. Attempting to complicate those arguments that prioritise “modernising” nation-building and political grand-strategy on the part of Gulf leaders, I have suggested that the catalyst for the sudden growth spurt in cultural infrastructures is in part to be found in the financialisation of the art market and the liberalisation of funding models in the cultural metropolises of the West. As the tale of *Salvator Mundi* shows, the cultural sector has been reshaped by market imperatives, rationalities, and techniques. For dealers and other commercial actors, this meant the search for new client bases that could support the runaway rise in prices. For museums, it compelled the search for stable sources of revenue through touring exhibitions, loans and, perhaps most crucially, the establishment of long-term infrastructural projects and consultancy relationships. In short, tracing out from *Salvator Mundi*, the chapter has sketched the anatomy of the art market’s global political economy at the moment when the Gulf started to develop a cultural infrastructure, arguing that the search for what Harvey terms a ‘spatial fix’ helps us to make sense of these coeval transformations.

On their own, however, dynamics internal to the established centres of the art market in the West are unable to explain the outsized influence of milieus from France, the United Kingdom and the United States in the Gulf’s expanding cultural infrastructure. Put differently, it cannot account for why it was these specific states that sought a spatial fix in the Gulf. In the latter half of this chapter, I have argued that an answer to this is to be found in the dense, historically contingent tangle of political and economic relations established by their colonial histories in the region. These created the circuits of capital which have relayed wealth, commodities, and expertise back into these imperial centres. By centring the importance of imperial relations and racialisations to the critical operations of cultural capitalism, this chapter has also begun to tread the theoretical arguments of this thesis.

As described in the introduction, *Salvator Mundi* provoked a huge amount of handwringing about the contaminating effect of capital on the art world. Its record-breaking price was, however, merely a symptom of the near total penetration of the art world by big capital, a process that had been underway for nearly three decades at

the time of this sale. One cannot help but feel that the acute distaste that many felt at this particular sale was a consequence of the Middle Eastern origins of its buyers. Taking a cue from this sentiment, the final part of the chapter examined how capricious racialisations with colonial roots are endemic to the search for a spatial fix. Pivoting on the lucrative promise of the Gulf as an ‘emerging market’ fat with oil surpluses, these racialisations infuse the incorporation of Gulf capital by Western art capitalists, and preserve the self-image of the West as the crucible of liberal values, civilisation, and sophistication. The next chapter will elaborate these arguments further, exploring the specific shape and complexion these dynamics assume as the art market begins to embed itself into the Gulf.

[Chapter Two]

CULTURAL CIRCUITS IN AND OUT OF THE GULF

Madinat Jumeirah is a hulking five-star resort – Dubai’s largest – located in the Jumeirah district. A Mittal Investment Corp project, the resort, which opened in 2003, contains three hotels, an ersatz souk, and myriad restaurants and bars scattered around a network of waterways. Its mock Islamic architectural style – a jumble of architectural features indigenous to the Gulf such as the distinctive wind towers (*barjil*) as well as features from other parts of the region – conjures a geographically and temporally non-specific “Orient” for its largely foreign clientele. Guests can either waft from place to place by *abra*, a boat used to traverse the waterways of Dubai Creek, or meander through the largely pedestrianised network of streets. Those not staying in the resort tend to enter in an altogether more functional fashion, navigating the gargantuan subterranean car parks to find the exit closest to their target destination. For six days every March portions of the art world – often *en route* to Art Basel: Hong Kong – descend on Madinat Jumeirah for the annual art fair Art Dubai.

On a sunny and windy day, I headed to Madinat Jumeirah to meet one of my interlocutors for the second day of the fair. She suggested that we meet in the late afternoon and that she would take me as her guest into the VIP Lounge. Nestled away in a secluded corner of the art fair complex, the lounge was a space in which the fair’s most exalted guests could mingle and talk business, away from the hustle of the exhibition floor. Having been ushered into the lounge, I lurked uncomfortably in the background, as Dina¹ exchanged greetings with friends and colleagues. Consummate salespeople, they were all conversant in the charms and quips that are an obligatory component of social interaction in this gilded sphere. Pleasantries over, we picked up a free drink and sauntered down some broad steps to a seating area on a little promontory that jutted out into a man-made lagoon. We sat here and talked, as the

¹ This is a pseudonym to protect the identity of my interlocutor.

wind broke into a gentle breeze whose caresses caused the water to lap gently against the banks of the lagoon. At some point she leaned in somewhat conspiratorially and said, ‘you know this lounge used to be the *Abraaj* VIP Lounge.’

The Abraaj Group is a Dubai-based private equity firm owned by the Pakistani businessman, Arif Naqvi. Its investment portfolio is focused on “emerging markets” in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. At its height, the group is reported to have managed USD14 billion of emerging market assets. In 2018, the company went into provisional liquidation after four investors in Abraaj’s Growth Markets Health Fund, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation, accused the group of mismanaging funds and hired Ankura Consulting to investigate on their behalf. At the time of writing, a judge had ruled that Naqvi could be extradited to the United States from the United Kingdom to stand trial on sixteen counts of fraud and money laundering.² The businessman is alleged to have siphoned off USD385 million from his company’s investors over a period of nine years. Among the documents subpoenaed by the courts were those from the secrecy jurisdiction of the Cayman Islands where the group was registered and where a legal document had also been filed with the Grand Court seeking the restitution of USD109 million to the company’s investors.³

Before this criminal case engulfed the company, the Abraaj Group had been Art Dubai’s main sponsors, providing USD2 million in annual sponsorship - USD1 million to the general costs of the fair, including the VIP lounge, and USD1 million to fund the Abraaj Art Prize. Arif Naqvi’s wife, Fayeza Naqvi, was on the fair’s board, while the prize formed a key component of the company’s corporate social responsibility scheme. The Abraaj Art Prize was designed to conform to the Abraaj Group’s corporate strategy, discovering and boosting the profile of “emerging artists” from the region. Although there was slight variation year on year, the fundamental notion was that several artists would be shortlisted and given money to create a piece after which a winner would be chosen from the shortlist on the basis of their commission. The final prize, awarded in 2018, was won by the much-garlanded

² Jane Croft and Simeon Kerr, “UK Court Rules Abraaj Founder can be Extradited to US,” *The Financial Times*, 28 January 2021.

³ Simon Clark and William Louch, “Abraaj Liquidators Sue Fund Backed by Gates Foundation,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 16 July 2020.

Lebanese Jordanian artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan. Previous winners of the prize include the Algerian French artist Kader Attia, whose work was chosen along that of Diane Arbus for the first exhibition at Hayward Gallery, London, after its two-year closure for renovations. When Art Dubai ended, the prize-winning works, of which there are now nearly fifty, were transferred straight into the Naqvi family's large private collection. As part of the liquidation, PwC and Deloitte, the accountancy firms handling the process, sold many the works from the family's private collection at sales conducted by the auction house Bonhams in London, while a significant number of works from this collection are also believed to have been sold by Christie's.⁴ Works from the Abraaj Art Prize did not, however, appear in either of the sales at Bonham's or Christie's but have subsequently been bought wholesale by the Jameel Arts Centre (JAC), a newly opened private foundation in Dubai Creek funded by the Saudi billionaires, the Jameel family.

Dina beckoned some of her friends over to us. They pulled up some low pouffe-like mounds and sat down as Dina continued explaining the ignominious fortunes of the fair's former sponsor. 'It's all so different now that it is no longer the Abraaj VIP Lounge' one of her friends chirruped nervously. After combing over the latest developments of the scandal, our conversation shifted back to the usual fair fodder - programming and turnover. As we sat in the faltering daylight and chatted about these more predictable matters, I pondered the conversation we had just had and the palpable seam of anxiety I felt running through it. Why the disquietude? Why even at an art fair, the *raison d'être* of which is trade, and where sales occupy much of the conversational play time, did the entanglement of this criminal case with the fair and its cultural output trigger such discomfort?

As discussed in the introductory chapter, despite its thorough penetration by capital, art continues to be construed as the crucible of ineffable and irreducible value, a distillation of the human capacity for creativity and imagination, and therefore as sacred - what social theory calls the idea of its 'autonomy.' This conception of art additionally enables its excision from the messy space of utilitarian calculation and subjectivity, repositioning it on an objective plane. The Abraaj Art Prize is only one

⁴ Tim Cornwell, "Abraaj Group Liquidators to Sell 200 Works from Art Collection at Bonhams," *The Art Newspaper*, 10 October 2018 [Online].

example of the art world becoming embroiled in a criminal scandal and thereby contaminating this idea. Yet for those involved in the art market in the Gulf, or working with artists from the Middle East, the regional dimensions of the scandal brought unwanted attention to this corner of the art market, tapping into racialised notions of the Middle East as an atavistic place of war and corruption.

The story of the Abraaj Art Prize therefore introduces the centrality of the interaction between money, movement, and race to the emergence of a cultural scene in the Gulf. This chapter seeks to probe the political tensions that arise as these interact in the inscription of the Gulf as a particular site of the art world's transnational field. Tracing the art market circuits in and out of the Gulf, what we might think of as the dialectic between on-shoring and offshoring, allows us to explore how the Gulf's cultural sector is being shaped by its marginal position within the global art market, and how its dynamics contribute to the structure of the art world as a whole. The chapter explores three constituent elements of this new cultural infrastructure: the constructed, distinctive identity of its market; the collectors, and their capital and acquisitions; and finally, its personnel. Each section considers the Gulf's positioning as a particular site of the transnational cultural sector, arguing that its many paradoxes are the product of the local/global binary within the profoundly uneven and hierarchical structure of the postcolonial international system.

2.1 SELLING CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

Christie's began the planning for their Dubai exhibition in 2004. Encouraged by Dubai's booming real estate market, the auction house saw the exhibition as a chance to test the waters, allowing them to gauge the interest in a possible auction. As the International Head of Islamic Art at Christie's, William Robinson travelled frequently for work. At some point in 2004, when William Lawrie was deputising for his boss while Robinson was away, Lawrie attended a meeting held in the Christie's boardroom where plans for the exhibition were being drawn up. The exhibition had originally been intended as a small affair, showcasing jewellery and pieces of Iznik pottery. The latter are considered among the most significant objects produced across the Islamic empires, and are prized by collectors and museums. Younger and more junior than everyone else in the room, and brimming with ideas, Lawrie thought that the plans

were too modest. Just before the meeting, he had been shown some objects of Islamic Art by a runner. This practice has waned in recent years due to increased transparency and its knock-on effect in terms of reducing opportunities for arbitrage, but at the time running art objects was still commonplace.⁵

Among the items Lawrie had been offered by the runner were pieces of the *kisma*. The *kisma* is the cloth covering that is draped over the Kaaba annually on the ninth day of *dhul-hijja*, the holy month of Hajj. The pieces Lawrie was shown were large black segments of silk cloth, including the *hizam* (or belt), which were embroidered with elaborate calligraphy in gold and silver thread.⁶ Lawrie thought that with their profound religious connotations and ‘big and flashy’ appearance, these pieces would find a receptive audience in the Gulf. His seniors at Christie’s were convinced and began looking for a larger venue, eventually settling on Madinat Jumeirah, which I described in the introduction to this chapter and where Art Dubai is now held. The pilot exhibition, held in 2005, was a success, confirming their suspicions that expansion into the Gulf was a worthwhile pursuit. Thus the auction was decided, and working with a recently appointed local rep, William Lawrie was charged with putting it together.

According to William Robinson, Lawrie’s boss at the time, that first sale in 2006 was a roaring success. He recalls that the room was jam-packed with somewhere between eight and nine hundred people. To stay abreast of bids, spotters had to be stationed down the length of the room. Despite the Islamic bias of the exhibition that was the auction’s prelude, due to his fondness for modern and contemporary art, Lawrie jettisoned the Islamic portion of the auction. In the end, it focused entirely on European, Indian, Middle Eastern, and Iranian modern and contemporary art, with the decision to separate out Iranian from Middle Eastern. Robinson thinks that the reason for the sale’s extraordinary success were twofold. Firstly, he felt it was clear that the Emiratis were determined for the sale to be seen as a success. At the sale he remembers that there was a big group of Emiratis who bought a lot, and he speculated that they had been encouraged to do so. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly he

⁵ Runners take items on consignment from other dealers to try to sell the object above the original asking price, taking home the difference.

⁶ Lawrie suggested that they were comparable to the *kisma* held at the Topkapı Palace Museum, although I could not identify the item he described.

thought, was the fact that the sale catered to the different diasporas already living in Dubai. The sale therefore became a proxy for regional rivalries and nationalist sentiment, with Robinson⁷ recalling that:

‘at the end of the Iranian section all the Iranians clapped, at the end of the Indian section all of the Indians clapped because each one had been very successful, and of course from our point of view as an auction house, that’s perfect, and it really set the stage for subsequent sales’

Much like the Abraaj Art Prize, what this story illustrates very clearly is that the embedding of an art market in the Gulf has entailed and benefitted from the cultivation of discrete cultural identities. Recent museological theory has challenged the epistemological foundations of organising fine art and material culture by geographic and cultural distinctions. Current categorisations are argued to be artefacts of the political imagination of empire, which, from the vantage point of Europe, generalised religious commitments, social structures, and geographies into aesthetic traditions. To give an example, why does Chinese porcelain necessarily have more in common with Chinese ink painting than with Iznik pottery, which it is known to have influenced? These boundaries nevertheless have deep roots in Art History and curation as well as in the trade itself. Galleries and displays are traditionally divided chronogeographically, first into regions, and then thematically and/or by sub-regions, while dealers and gallerists themselves specialise in fields that likewise tend to have a geographic basis.

Elaborating the distinction between identity and difference, Bonnie Honig⁸ postulates an antagonism between the two:

‘[d]ifference is...that which resists or exceeds the closure of identity. It signals not a difference from others but a difference that troubles identity from within its would be economy of the same. Difference

⁷ William Robinson, interview with author.

⁸ Bonnie Honig, “Difference, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home” in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Chichester: Princeton, 1996), 258.

is what identity perpetually seeks (and fails) to expunge, fix, or hold in its place. In short, difference is a problem for identity, not one of its adjectives'

Prior to this sale, there were a handful of collectors in Dubai and the Gulf region more broadly. Thinking with this distinction, the success of these racialised marketing ploys has depended not simply on the cultivation of affinities between constructed cultural categories within Art History and the constructed identities of its buying publics, but on the ability to control difference by sustaining affinities as stable, thus maintaining their commercial appeal. Commercial success therefore additionally depends on the ability to sublimate one identification into another. The story of the Christie's sale illustrates this well. The auction house shifted from an exhibition focused on Islamic Art (tapping into Islamic identifications) to an auction selling modern and contemporary art from countries within the broader Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia (tapping into nationalist and/or regional identifications). That being said, Islamic Art was nevertheless the sphere through which buyers from the Gulf were initially enticed into the global art market.

In 2017 an exhibition opened at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH) entitled *Bestowing Beauty: Masterpieces from Persian Lands*. The works on display were from the Hussein Afshar Collection, one of the most significant collections of Islamic Art in private hands. Prior to the agreement of a five-year loan to MFAH, much of the collection had been on loan to the ruling Al Sabah in Kuwait. Its owner, Hussein Afshar, is an Iranian businessman and collector of Islamic Art who moved to Kuwait after living in Paris during the 1960s. Insiders in the Islamic Art market credit him with having introduced Sheikh Nasser Al Sabah to the practice of collecting alongside his friend business partner and fellow collector Jasim al-Humayzi. Because of his Iranian background, Afshar is left out of the official telling of the Al Sabah Collection, which is narrated as beginning in 1975 - at a TedX talk his wife and fellow collector, Sheikha Hussa Al Sabah, described the first object her husband collected as a Mamluk enamelled glass bottle from the mid-fourteenth century that he bought from a dealer in London. However, William Robinson speculated that his earliest purchases may in fact have been liaised privately by Afshar. He recalled that Afshar had told him about a Golden Horn Iznik dish of which he had been the buyer of record at auction, but

which he had subsequently persuaded Nasser Al Sabah to buy from him to encourage his protégé's acquisition of blue-chip works. With the collection they amassed, Nasser and Husa Al Sabah founded Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyya (DAI) in 1983, one of the first museums in the Gulf conceived along the lines of the Western style museum.

Then in 1995 *ARAMCO World*, a publication on arts, culture and tourism circulated by Saudi ARAMCO, printed an article on London's booming trade in Islamic Art. The article made mysterious reference to 'a young shaykh of Qatar who prefers to remain anonymous...' but who was buying in 'sufficient quantity to buoy the market single-handedly.'⁹ That unnamed Sheikh was Hassan Al Thani who, in the early nineties, was thought of as the 'new great hope' of the Islamic Art market. This proved to be only partially wrong. In 1993, Robinson met Sheikh Saud Al Thani, future chairman of the NCCAH, for the first time. At that point Saud was acting on behalf of his brother, Sheikh Hassan Al Thani. For several years after that Sheikh Saud would visit Christie's and consult with Robinson about works of art, building a reserve of knowledge. During this period, he also made the acquaintance of Oliver Hoare, a celebrated dealer of Islamic Art and his alleged accomplice in defrauding the Qatari state, which will be discussed in the next part of this chapter. Finally in April 1997, shortly after Robinson had invited him to a board meeting at Christie's, Saud attended one of the biannual sales of Islamic Art in London, inaugurating a spending spree that would see him christened as the 'number one spender on art' in 2004.

At that sale, Saud bought an Umayyad fountainhead that would come to be known as the Doha Hind, a purchase that nearly doubled all existing records for sales of Islamic Art, while in April 2004 he was estimated to have spent USD28 million on Islamic Art alone over the course of the two days of Islamic Art auctions in London.¹⁰ Due to Saud, Christie's and other auction houses went on to register some extraordinary and unprecedented results. One example of such was an octagonal wooden panel from a Mamluk *minbar* which Christie's London had estimated at

⁹ Louis Werner, "London's Islamic Art Market," *Aramco World* 46, no. 3 (1995): 43.

¹⁰ Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Qatari Declared World's Most Active Art Collector," *The Daily Star*, 19 July 2004.

between GBP4000 - 6000.¹¹ On 11th April 2000, the day of the auction, the panel sold for GBP531,750, exceeding its upper estimate by over 8850 percent.

Spikes in the prices for Islamic Art were not completely unheard of prior to the arrival of Sheikh Saud. A surge in oil wealth in Iran during the 1970s prompted a run on Qajar objects, while in the 1990s Iznik pottery became a hot commodity following the sudden minting of private wealth in Turkey.¹² These bursts of activity notwithstanding, before Sheikh Saud appeared on the scene, Islamic Art had been a relatively discrete, niche corner of the art market, the province of a small but committed group of long-standing collectors. Sheikh Saud's emergence and the profoundly competitive environment that accompanied him galvanised sales, changing its stakes in ways that outstripped his personal role in driving up prices. Consequently, his ignominious departure from the Islamic Art market did not have a catastrophic effect on prices in the long-term. Following the fall from grace of his main rival, Sheikh Nasser Al Sabah also made the strategic decision to step out of the market, ostensibly hoping prices would come down.¹³

As can be seen from Table 2.1, the market for Islamic Art appears to have rebounded very quickly, such that in 2012, the billionaire property mogul and famed collector of Islamic Art, Nasser D. Khalili would describe how the market had shifted from a situation of relative opportunity and lack of competition to a fiercely competitive environment: '[t]wenty years ago, there would be 20 magnificent pieces and four people buying...[n]ow there will be four major, important pieces if you're lucky and 50 people buying.'¹⁴ Although he had the privilege of hindsight, Robinson

¹¹ Curiously, the minbar from which the panels were taken are believed to have been commissioned by the Mamluk Sultan al-Malik al-Mansour Hussam ad-Din Lachin al-Mansouri for the Ibn Tulun Mosque. As will be discussed in chap. 4, the fountain at the mosque's centre was the inspiration for I. M. Pei's design for the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha.

¹² Werner, "London's Islamic Art Market," 43.

¹³ Interestingly, while prices did not come down in the immediate aftermath of Sheikh Saud's departure from the market, they have since reduced somewhat. Some of this trade may have shifted to the regional market in modern and contemporary art. Auction figures from the Christie's Dubai-based sale of Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art, show that the sale has returned some very strong results, particularly between 2006 and 2011.

¹⁴ Judith Dobrzynski, "An Ever-Busier Bazaar for Islamic Art," *The Wall Street Journal*, 31 August 2012. The trade of Islamic Art had become sufficiently vibrant as to prompt an article examining art as a speculative investment. The authors of the article, published in 2008, note that returns to Islamic art outperformed those to debt and equity markets. See William McQuillan and Brian Lucey, "The Validity of Islamic Art as an Investment," *Research in International Business and Finance* 36(C) (2016): 388–401.

maintains that Sheikh Nasser Al Sabah’s mistake was not to realise that auctions are a ‘game.’

Table 2.1 *Christie’s Islamic Art Sales, 1998-2008*

Year	April	October	Annual
1998	1,683,705	1,591,883	3,275,588
1999	2,863,891	1,969,925	4,833,816
2000	4,658,746	6,734,135	11,392,881
2001	1,478,057*	1,630,637	3,108,694
2002	2,537,125	2,620,379	5,157,504
2003	3,728,138	1,366,947	5,095,085
2004	6,450,398	2,062,223	8,512,621
2005	1,968,320	907,120	2,875,440
2006	2,149,240	1,073,760	3,223,000
2007	3,853,920	5,949,350	9,803,270
2008	11,828,740	10,434,500	22,263,240

Source: Christie’s Auction results

*The April 2001 sale of Islamic Art took place on 1st May

Chapter One elaborated how the indexing of auction prices and real time news have transformed the mechanisms for designating value, inverting the relationship between economic value and artistic value, where artistic value is increasingly derived from the extraordinary displays of the former. The concept of exchange value, rooted in the generalised abstraction and commensuration of different elements, cannot explain how such extraordinary prices are achieved. Seizing on this inability, Jean Baudrillard argues that it forces a revision of the concept of economic value.¹⁵ The auction, he contends, is the purest expression of what he describes as the ‘generalised political economy’;¹⁶ its game, analogous to ‘poker or *fête*,’ manifests the ‘moment of expenditure’ that inheres in every purchase under conditions of late capitalism’s culture industry.¹⁷ Even ‘in its banality’ this moment ‘presupposes something of a competition, a wager, a challenge, a sacrifice and thus a potential community of peers and an *aristocratic measure of value*.¹⁸ What intervenes is therefore a *sumptuary operation* - i.e., the

¹⁵ Baudrillard maintains that the idea of the dominant class simply capturing the value inherent in signs is not sufficiently attentive to the processes by which sign value itself is produced. An exclusively materialist political economy cannot account for the *source* of the sign value that the dominant class wields.

¹⁶ Baudrillard, *Political Economy of the Sign*.

¹⁷ Baudrillard, *Political Economy of the Sign*, 113.

¹⁸ Baudrillard, *Political Economy of the Sign*, 112-113.

conversion of wealth into the display of its abnegation or destruction. The logic by which the relationship between artistic and economic value are reversed is symptomatic of this political economy of the sign. In an auction, wealth is very clearly manifested, but as is ‘a manifest destruction of wealth... value, deployed beyond exchange value and founded upon the latter’s destruction, that invests the object purchased with its differential sign value’ that of ‘the money spent, sacrificed, eaten up according to a logic of difference and challenge.’¹⁹ In an auction, the competitive destruction of money transmutes - in Baudrillard’s idiom ‘transubstantiates’ - exchange value into an indivisible sign value. As the general equivalent of exchange is money, the destruction of exchange value also destroys the territory of formal, if not actual, equality on which it is established.²⁰ Due to its indivisibility, the sign value generated in the auction thus institutes a durable relation of non-equality, what Baudrillard terms an ‘aristocratic relation.’

Although Baudrillard is partly using the auction as a heuristic to explain the production of sign value, his analysis is nevertheless instructive when applied to the auctions of Islamic Art discussed here. The bitter bidding wars between Sheikh Nasser of Kuwait and Sheikh Saud of Qatar rendered Islamic Art an important site for these sumptuary displays by buyers from the Gulf. Viewed through this lens, it is unsurprising that, despite Sheikh Nasser’s hopes that the removal of his main opponent would lead to a fall in prices, within three years the market was once again returning strong results. Indeed, despite many of these prices being driven by contestation between Sheikh Saud Al Thani and Sheikh Nasser Al Sabah, they were by no means the only buyers in the market.²¹ Brendan Lynch, former director of Islamic Art at Sotheby’s and currently the owner of specialist dealership Oliver Forge and Brendan Lynch Ltd, told the *Wall Street Journal* in 2012 that Gulf buyers ‘drove the market in the last 10 years.’²² Indeed, just under sixty percent of all the deals transacted by the Islamic departments at the three major auction houses during the years 1998 to

¹⁹ Baudrillard, *Political Economy of the Sign*, 115.

²⁰ It should be added that these rules of the game also pose certain problems for the financialisation art objects, discussed in chap. 1, due to the number of variables and inherent unpredictability.

²¹ Georgina Adam and Lucian Harris, “Sheikh Saud’s London Spending Spree,” 2 June 2004; Oliver Hoare, *Every Object Tells a Story: Oliver Hoare’s Cabinet of Curiosities*. (London: Oliver Hoare & Pallas Athene, 2015).

²² Dobrzynski, “An Ever-Busier Bazaar for Islamic Art.”

2007 were with buyers from countries in the Middle East.²³ The boom spurred by Sheikh Saud established Islamic Art as a terrain of contestation, rendering it a site within which a particular aristocratic relation and community is founded among buyers residing in the Gulf, both within and across elites of its six states, marking its buyers out for distinction.

Nevertheless, Islamic Art remains a relatively small and, in the decade after the millennium, crowded market as compared to the major markets in modern and contemporary art. In terms of turnover, the Islamic Art market is always dwarfed by the market in modern and contemporary art. Unlike Islamic Art for which there is a relatively limited supply of items circulating on the market, all of which are confined to the secondary market, the contemporary art market is continually being replenished by new works.²⁴ Due to the fact that this market has the highest turnover, it is also a site of very significant market speculation which has further driven up prices, encouraging collectors to bring works to the secondary market. As a consequence, responding to the saturation of the Islamic Art market with buyers, the regionally specific modern and contemporary art market opened up as a new domain within which to constitute a collecting base in the Gulf. Indicating the centrality of identity constructs to the operation of the art market, at the first Christie's sale, the Modern and Contemporary field was divided into up into categories, each catering to different perceived identities within the diaspora.²⁵

We might think of Christie's transition from an emphasis on Islamic art to modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art as a commodified version of Spivak's now disavowed notion of the 'strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest,'²⁶ where reduced identity constructs are marshalled to make political claims until they outlive their strategic utility or necessity. Venetia Porter

²³ McQuillan and Lucey, "Validity," 5.

²⁴ The primary market refers to the trade in new works, usually sold by gallerists (hence the significance of gallery representation to artists). By contrast, the secondary market refers to the trade in works already in circulation (i.e., they have been previously sold and are returning to the market).

²⁵ See Manuela Ciotti, "Post-colonial Renaissance: "Indianness," Contemporary Art and the Market in the Age of Neoliberal capital," *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2012): 637-655, for an adjacent discussion of how modern and contemporary art from India has been inscribed into the art market's international circuits through an emphasis on its Indian features, with its value deriving heavily from this association.

²⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 205.

described the purchasing criteria for her patrons circle, which buys contemporary works for the British Museum's collection,²⁷ as works on paper often with a strong calligraphic element. My objective here is not to impugn the work of this patrons circle, as these parameters do on some level resonate with the British Museum's collection and mandate. Nor is it to trace the physiognomy of the constructed field of modern and contemporary Middle Eastern Art. Rather, it is to underscore how the market, and those seeking to benefit from it, utilise and translate motifs and aesthetic elements, implying continuities between different identifications and the political geographies within which culture is produced so as to sustain and expand collecting bases. Ruha Benjamin starkly captures the dangers inherent in the commercial use of seemingly natural yet ultimately synthetic ethnic categories when she writes that 'there is a slippery slope between effective marketing and efficient racism.'²⁸

Much as had happened in the Islamic Art market, following the incorporation of the Gulf, modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art returned some unprecedented results. In 2008, a work by the Iranian painter Farhad Moshiri broke all existing records for an artwork by a Middle Eastern artist, selling for over USD1 million. The painting, which used glitter and Swarovski crystals to spell the word 'love' in Persian on a painted canvas, was sold at the Bonham's sale of Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian, Indian and Pakistani Art held in Dubai in March 2008.²⁹ Nevertheless, the interpellation of collectors and the establishment of an art market in the Gulf is not as simple as a stereotyping calculation of assumed interest and preferences on the part of commercial actors such as auction houses. Rather, these interpellations are situated within and against a broader racialised geopolitical landscape, one that is steeped in the developmentalist discourse and hierarchies discussed in the previous chapter.

In this racialised geography, the Middle East must contend with the hackneyed and familiar characterisations of the region as a war-torn space of religious extremism. Indeed, the figure of the Muslim extremist that stalks Western social imaginaries has

²⁷ The patron's circle is named CaMMEA (Contemporary and Modern Middle Eastern Art).

²⁸ Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), 33.

²⁹ As elsewhere, the art market in the Gulf took a dive in 2008. Dealers claim this was actually good for business, as it weeded out less serious collectors.

deep roots. As both Cedric Robinson,³⁰ and Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nisancioglu,³¹ have indicated, the technological and scientific innovations of the Ottoman and other Islamic empires were crucial to the technological innovations through which the West has narrated its development as a miraculous endogenous process. Despite these profound dependencies, the figure of the ‘blackamoor’ in Spain before the conclusion of the Reconquista in 1492, and the spectre of the Ottoman Empire on the borders of Christendom, were pivotal to the formulation of whiteness as somehow counterpoised and antithetical to Islam. Since 9/11 and other Islamist attacks, this racial assemblage has been turbocharged by multiple Western wars against the region.

In this racialised landscape, culture produced with connections to either the Middle East or to Islam has been burdened with the task of presenting counter-hegemonic representations.³² Underpinning such an idea is a much-critiqued humanist notion concerning the unique communicative power of art to build bridges of understanding between communities, what Winegar calls an investment in art as constituting ‘the supreme evidence of a people’s humanity.’³³ This sense of the incumbency of counter-representation is a theme that is reprised far and wide.³⁴ Toukan has illustrated the hold that this view wields over many curators of contemporary art in Lebanon, as well as the Western funders of many of the country’s exhibitions and cultural spaces.³⁵ Even the ostensibly radical scholar of empire, alterity and decoloniality, Walter Mignolo,³⁶ implies the burden of positive re-representation for buyers and producers of Islamic Art. Referring to the ‘political sovereignty of capital’ that natural resources have afforded Qatar and, by extension, other resource rich postcolonies, Mignolo argues that Qatar has the power to challenge the hegemonic

³⁰ Robinson, *Black Marxism*.

³¹ Anievas and Nisancioglu, *West Came to Rule*.

³² See Dima Hamadeh, “Bridges, Hearts, Cash: Neoliberal Markets of Cultural Understanding,” *The Contemporary Journal* 1, no. 10 (2018): 1-10; Toukan, “Art”; Winegar, “Humanity Game.”

³³ Winegar, “The Humanity Game,” 652.

³⁴ The redisplay of the galleries of Islamic Art at the MET in New York was not a direct consequence of 9/11 - it was due to the closure of the galleries following the disruptive renovation of the Greek and Roman galleries below. Nevertheless, when we spoke, the MET’s Emerita Curator of Islamic Art, Sheila Canby, expressed her sense that it was imperative to: ‘try to present the counter argument, to show that the cultures are deep and profound, and have had historically huge influence on European and North American and other cultures, and that they are not an isolated cauldron of extreme ideas.’

³⁵ Toukan, “Art.”

³⁶ Walter Mignolo, “Enacting the Archives, Decentering the Muses: The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha and the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore,” *Ibraaq* 006 (2013): 1-24.

narratives of European “modernity”³⁷ by depicting the splendour of the Islamic empires in their Museum of Islamic Art.

Evidencing the insidious potency of this burden of representation, at a TedX talk in 2010, Sheikha Mayassa Al Thani, the sister of the current ruler of Qatar and a major art collector, posited that Qataris are ‘revising ourselves through our cultural institutions and cultural development.’³⁸ In the same breath, Sheikha Mayassa tasks culture with ventriloquising alternative representations of Islam and inhabitants of the Middle East, while also casting it as the agent through which to reshape subjectivities in line with the ideal humanist subject from which the burden of representation issues.³⁹ William Robinson likewise recalls how, rather than denting sales as one might expect, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 led Kuwaiti collectors to present a show of strength through energetic activity in the Islamic Art market. The preoccupation of collectors from the region with both Islamic and Middle Eastern modern and contemporary art is therefore borne out of a dialectic between an internalisation of what Winegar calls the ‘humanity game’ and their ready availability due to the identitarian manoeuvres of art market actors.

Although the enterprise of bringing an art market to the Gulf pivoted on claims to constructions of regionally specific characteristics, due to the GCC states’ political-economic structure, the embedding of its cultural sector also had a countervailing tendency in the offshoring of capital and cultural objects. In the next section, I will discuss how collectors and patrons from the Gulf have utilised the secretive spaces of international finance to offshore capital and obscure ownership of art objects, as the trade in cultural contraband has shifted away from the West to special economic zones in the Arab Gulf states and elsewhere. The interpenetration of its legal infrastructures and relationships materially stitch the Gulf to the international sphere in ways that exceed the racialising machineries of the art market described in

³⁷ Where I use the term “modernity” I do so to refer not to an actual phenomenon, but to a fantasy. Modernity is a racialising development discourse, mobilised in the first instance by an imperial Enlightenment Europe, and subsequently by states keen to suggest parity between themselves and the dominant West.

³⁸ Sheikha Al Mayassa, *Globalizing the Local, Localizing the Global* (Talk, Ted Women Conference: 2010).

³⁹ Although he is primarily known for building the Museum of Islamic Art, Sheikh Saud’s personal collecting interests went far beyond this field. Among art dealers, he is spoken of reverently for his catholic tastes, spanning wildlife and species preservation, through photography and cameras, architecture and Art Deco.

this section. That said, the following section will add a wrinkle of complexity to this account by attending to how the uneven application of the legal mechanisms governing the art world continues to reinforce its normative centres and actors.

2.2 OFFSHORING CULTURE

Oliver Hoare is perhaps most famous for having been rumoured to be Princess Diana's lover. Brandished across the British tabloid press with descriptors such as "suave" and "debonair," Hoare cut a classically dapper figure, pictured with Princess Diana in a tailcoat at Guard's Polo or against the backdrop of a central West London street, dressed casually in slacks and blazer. Although his fame derived in large part from his purported association with the British Royal Family, Hoare had also garnered significant celebrity in his professional milieu as a dealer of Islamic Art, especially subsequent to his forming a professional relationship with Sheikh Saud, which culminated in the Sheikh's ignominious removal from his post as chairman of Qatar's NCCAH.

Hoare and Saud met in 1997. By this time Hoare had already established a reputation as a, if not *the*, pre-eminent dealer of Islamic Art. Prior to meeting Sheikh Saud, he had been one of those most involved in assisting Sheikh Nasser and Sheikha Hussa Al Sabah amass the famous Al Sabah collection of Islamic Art described earlier in this chapter. Those in the art world that knew Hoare were effusive about his charms and charisma. One curator of Islamic Art at the British Museum spoke with reverence about their various interactions, describing Hoare mirthfully as a *bon viveur* with a penchant for wine and expensive cigars. Hoare quickly became a central pillar in Sheikh Saud's retinue of cultural consultants, travelling with him across the globe as he sought to negotiate the acquisition of works for both his private collections and the Qatari museums for which he was responsible as chairman of the NCCAH.

Sheikh Saud also appears to have been an enigmatic and fascinating individual, with an obsession for collecting, and the financial capacity to acquire the best of any seam of creative output he found engaging. In a memoir-cum-catalogue published for an exhibition that he organised, Hoare recounts how Sheikh Saud operated an open door policy, where anyone in possession of an interesting object was welcome to visit him when he was in residence at one of his several homes in London, New York, or

Paris.⁴⁰ His idiosyncratic and ecumenical tastes extended to the practice of collecting itself. Believing collecting to be an art in its own right, he fashioned himself on earlier celebrated collectors. However, instead of looking to the famed collectors of the mid to late twentieth century such as Peggy Guggenheim, the Lauder family or Leon Black for inspiration, he sought to emulate collector-aesthetes of earlier eras such as the Maharaja of Indore, renowned for his opulent and extravagant lifestyle and his obsession with Art Deco, commissioning and amassing a collection of some of the most famous works of the style. Yet more interesting than his admiration for the Maharaja of Indore was his obsession with the French aristocrat and collector Comtesse Martine de Béhague, who travelled the world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century collecting art, and who is celebrated for her taste and discerning “eye.” Art world mythology maintains that Sheikh Saud did not simply style himself in the image of Comtesse de Béhague, but believed he was, in fact, her reincarnation.

In 2005 it was reported that Sheikh Saud had been placed under house arrest in February of that year and removed from his official post following accusations that he misused public funds. *The Art Newspaper* managed to obtain copies of the invoices sent by Oliver Hoare to Sheikh Saud, which indicated that objects were being invoiced by Hoare for up to 1100 percent of the price at which they had been purchased by an anonymous bidder at auction. One such piece was a Mughal emerald that Christie’s auction records describe as engraved with Shi’a blessings on one side, and a rosette nestled in poppies on the other. Though it sold at auction on 27th September 2001 for GBP1,543,750, the invoice Sheikh Saud received from Oliver Hoare was for GBP12,000,000.⁴¹ *The Art Newspaper* also discovered that Saud and his intermediaries had been the anonymous buyers of this item and others that sold at auction for similarly astronomical markups.⁴² A formal investigation was launched into their activities by Qatar Petroleum and the file was subsequently transferred to Qatari legal authorities. Although it remains unconfirmed, it is suspected that, as Sheikh Saud and his intermediaries were the anonymous buyers, Hoare and other dealers were creating

⁴⁰ Hoare, *Every Object*.

⁴¹ The Art Newspaper, “Mystery of London Dealer’s Inflated Invoices for World’s Biggest Collector, the Head of Qatar’s National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage,” *The Art Newspaper* 158, May (2005): 7.

⁴² The Art Newspaper, “Revealed: How Sheikh Saud Embezzled Millions from his Cousin the Emir of Qatar,” *The Art Newspaper* 159, June (2005): 1.

invoices for him with massively inflated prices. As the works were destined for the Museum of Islamic Art, it licenced his use of state funds. Once the sale was complete, Sheikh Saud could recycle the funds into his own personal collection. Following his arrest, the *Art Newspaper* reported that Sheikh Saud's private 'collection was impounded by the Qatari authorities and transferred from his various London properties to the Qatari Embassy in South Audley Street'⁴³ where, I was told, much of it is believed to remain. The charges against Saud were later dropped.

Much like the Abraj Art Prize, this incident illustrates how the Gulf's cultural sector is shaped by the international landscape of financial governance in which it is ensconced. Shedding light on the slippery delineation between private and state funds, it reveals how the broader environment of secrecy jurisdictions and light-touch regulations for art have created scope for widespread offshoring and occasional malfeasance, providing opportunities for collectors in the Gulf - particularly those from the ruling families - to amass and hide their wealth in art objects, and to fund cultural projects and institutions with offshored wealth. Before examining how precisely these dynamics have structured the emergence of the Gulf's cultural sector and of the art world as a whole, a brief discussion on the social theory underpinning the state and the private sector in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.

Examining the centrality of Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWFs) to the developmental strategies of the Gulf and more broadly to the evolution of neoliberal capitalism, Bazoobandi,⁴⁴ an expert in GCC SWFs, tenders the thesis that these state investment machineries contradict the basic premise of most theories of neoliberalism, that the private sector is paramount and responsible for financialisation. Such an assessment either uncritically accepts the descriptive account of neoliberalism posited by its advocates or misreads the thrust of the social theory on neoliberalism. This social theory attempts to break down the functionalist division between private sector and state, arguing instead that the private domain relies on continuous intervention from the state, and international level extensions of its power, to create the conditions in which it can engulf the public sector.⁴⁵

⁴³ *The Art Newspaper*, "Revealed," 8.

⁴⁴ Bazoobandi, *Gulf Sovereign Wealth Funds*.

⁴⁵ See, for example Dieter Plehwe, Quinn Slobodian, Peter Mirowski, eds. *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism* (London: Verso, 2020).

In a regionally specific variation of these arguments, Hanieh has suggested that in their operations, GCC states are not only internal to the private sector, but constitute its central axis, distributing business and contracts among those proximate to its sphere of influence, thereby constituting the private capitalist class.⁴⁶ He writes:⁴⁷

‘rather than seeing the state as a competitor, obstacle, or hindrance to private capital accumulation and ‘free markets’ - a view expressed in much of the Weberian and ‘rentier state’ approaches to the Gulf (and Middle East) - we should view the state as an institutional form that articulates and intermediates the power and interests of the capitalist class itself (again, a class that must be understood as inclusive of - but broader than - the ruling families)’

Members of the ruling families therefore largely operate as private actors with substantial access to public funds through which they can amass private wealth, but are also beholden to the vicissitudes of the state in as much as they, and therefore their funds, are considered internal to it. That Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman of Saudi Arabia’s recent purge masquerading as an anti-corruption drive included many members of the capitalist class indicates that it is not only the ruling families that are affected by this blurring of boundaries. Rather, the tightly enmeshed relationship between private and public interests, and the extent of sovereign power, is such that even private funds can be requisitioned by the state.⁴⁸ When the Saudi Press Agency, the government’s mouthpiece, announced the conclusion of the purge, they stated that 400 billion Saudi Riyals (roughly USD106.6 billion) had been reclaimed by the treasury in the form of ‘real estate, companies, cash, and other assets.’⁴⁹ With an acquisitions process that is often routed through the historic centres of the art market and the

⁴⁶ Hanieh, *Money*.

⁴⁷ Hanieh, *Money*, 67.

⁴⁸ Hanieh, *Money*. Wealthy businesspersons across the GCC states are also deeply invested in, and benefitting from, majority state-owned enterprises. Shell companies are a great help in burying these linkages, and the structure of beneficial ownership and mutual dependency they imply between the ruling families and capitalist class. See Florence Wolstenholme, “The Secret Lives of UAE Shell Companies,” *MERIP* 291, Summer (2019); and “King Abdullah Economic City: The Politics of Constructing a New City in Saudi Arabia,” (MSc Diss., SOAS, University of London, 2019).

⁴⁹ SPA, “Statement by the Royal Court: Anti-Corruption Committee Concludes its Tasks,” Saudi Press Agency, 30 January 2019.

increased significance of art as an investment and an asset class, this slippery distinction between private and state funds therefore encourages the concealing of private sources of wealth through which to acquire objects, their registration in secrecy jurisdictions, and even the material offshoring of objects for fear that they might be requisitioned.

Many wealthy Gulf citizens have concealed significant portions of their wealth by incorporating their businesses offshore, using companies operating in tax havens such as the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca, the leaked documents of which came to be known as the ‘Panama Papers.’ Analysis of the Panama Papers, the Paradise Papers, and the Offshore Leaks, show that super-collector, and former prime minister and foreign minister of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Jasim, is linked to eight entities incorporated in secrecy jurisdictions. His second cousin, former Emir of Qatar and father of Sheikha Mayassa, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, is also the majority shareholder of a company registered in Panama, as is her husband, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Jasim Al Thani. Also implicated in the leaks is Art Jameel, through its founder and director, Fady Muhammad Abdullatif Jameel, and his father, Muhammad Abdullatif Jameel, a Saudi businessman who was awarded an honorary knighthood in the United Kingdom for his contribution to arts and culture. Muhammad Abdullatif Jameel, who is chairman and CEO of the Saudi multinational ALJ Group, is either director, beneficial owner, or shareholder of eighteen entities incorporated in these tax havens, while his son is similarly connected to three entities. The Jameel family have lavished their patronage on cultural institutions. They paid for the redisplay of the V&A’s collection of Islamic Art in 2006 before the creation of Art Jameel, which now sponsors the museum’s annual Jameel Art Prize. Likewise, in 2017 it established the Art Jameel Fund in collaboration with the Metropolitan Museum to help the institution acquire modern and contemporary art from the Middle East. In 2018 it also opened the Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai which, as described in the introduction to this chapter, acquired the collection of works that Arif Naqvi built through the Abraaj Art Prize and his sponsorship of Art Dubai. Unsurprisingly, Naqvi is also linked to three entities registered in Bermuda.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The connections of royalty, businesspersons, and art collectors and patrons from the Gulf to clandestine spaces for offshoring money traced here are just the tip of the iceberg. Analysis of the

Due to the limits placed upon the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists' (ICIJ) leaked data, I have not been able to trace the art collections held in shell companies by wealthy collectors from the Gulf. Nevertheless, the paper trail of the leaked Panama Papers does reveal how art objects have been internalised into these practices of offshoring wealth. The leaks showed billions of US dollars' worth of art held by shell companies in tax havens the world over. *Salvator Mundi's* former owner, Dmitry Rybolovlev, had his entire collection registered in tax havens by companies tracing back to two family trusts.⁵¹ Picasso's *Les Femmes D'Algers "Version O,"* previously a part of the famed Ganz collection and now belonging to Sheikh Hamad bin Jasim Al Thani, was also owned by a company incorporated on the Pacific island of Niue prior to its initial sale in 1997. Disclosures in the Panama Papers reveal that, prior to the sale, the collection had been sold privately to a company owned by the British billionaire and Christie's largest shareholder at the time of the sale, Joseph Lewis. The sale was thus revealed as a scheme to flip the collection, cashing in on the Ganz provenance.⁵² Despite these revelations, when the OECD cracked down on tax havens following the 2016 revelations in the Panama Papers, art was left largely undisturbed.⁵³ In combination, and given the heavy representation of super-rich citizens and collectors of the Arab Gulf states in these secrecy jurisdictions, it seems highly likely their art collections will be among the holdings acquired by companies and special purpose vehicles registered in these secrecy jurisdictions.

Where members of the ruling family are concerned, ambiguity between state and private coffers cuts both ways. Although not consistently the case,⁵⁴ particularly

cache of leaks conducted by *Süddeutsche-Zeitung* showed that, taking the ruling families of the Gulf states alone, 180 members were heavily implicated in the offshoring of wealth through a labyrinthine web of shell companies, offshore trusts, secret bank accounts, special purpose vehicles, and financial advisory firms. See Munzinger and Obermaier, "The Kings of Offshore Business," *Süddeutsche-Zeitung*, 2016.

⁵¹ Georgina Adam, *The Dark Side of the Boom* (London: Humphries Lund, 2017).

⁵² The whole collection sold at auction in 1997 for USD206.5 million, at the time the highest ever figure achieved for the sale of a single collection. The company that bought the collection was Simsbury International Corp. It bought the works from Spink & Son, an offshoot of Christie's auction house. As per Adam, *Dark Side*, 178, 'the deal was that the Simsbury-owned works would go into Christie's auction and that Lewis and Spink would split the difference.'

⁵³ Vanessa Houlder, "Noose Tightens on Tax Havens in Global Crackdown," *The Financial Times*, 7 December 2016.

⁵⁴ In line with Louvre acquisition practices, the DCT is allocated a defined acquisitions budget, and purchases are largely made by committee through the different institutions. Despite this less individualised process for acquisitions, the state bodies responsible for managing cultural institutions

during the phase when cultural institutions in the Gulf were incipient, acquisitions have often been made by individual members of the ruling families acting on behalf of the state, thus effecting a blurring of their funds and state funds. Sheikh Saud was evidently given significant latitude to purchase objects from dealers for the museums under his stewardship using state funds. In a similar vein, the Al Sabah collection was acquired by Nasser and Hussa Al Sabah as individuals and subsequently bequeathed to the state. In the official telling, upon receipt of this gift the state paid for the creation of the DAI, where the collection would be housed, but it is believed that Nasser and Hussa also paid for this in a personal capacity without endorsement from the state.⁵⁵ Alongside registering their wealth in offshore jurisdictions, this ambiguous relationship between state funds and private funds has nevertheless led Gulf collectors to retain substantial portions of their collections outside the jurisdiction of the GCC, stored in homes and freeports.

After *Salvator Mundi*, the second most expensive painting ever bought is *Les Femmes D'Algers "Version O."* Much like *Salvator Mundi*, this painting is conspicuously absent from the museums in Doha. The popular explanation offered for why this painting has not been publicly exhibited is that it contains figurative representation and female nudity. It is proffered that this content would offend the religiously conservative sensibilities of significant portions of the populations in the Gulf. When placed in the context of the works currently on display at the museums in Qatar, such an explanation appears redolent of the classically orientalist assumptions of Islam as fundamentally censorious and intolerant. Rather than religious intolerance, it is the extent of sovereign prerogative to seize wealth and the insecure separation between state coffers and their representatives in the ruling family which accounts for the reluctance to bring items into the jurisdiction of the GCC states. In 2018, Sheikh Hamad bin Abdullah Al Thani⁵⁶ leased part of a floor of the Hôtel de la Marine in Paris for a period of twenty years to house his collection of Indian jewels, known as the Al Thani Collection, in

in the UAE are constituted as agencies, meaning decisions do not have to be ratified by the ministries, but go directly to the political leadership itself. A similar situation obtains in Saudi Arabia, where, in conjunction with Afalula, the Al Ula project is managed by an agency, the Royal Commission of Al Ula, whose chain of command leads directly back to MBS.

⁵⁵ The then Emir of Kuwait, uncle to Sheikh Hussa, did not attend the opening of the DAI in 1983.

⁵⁶ Sheikh Hamad bin Abdullah is CEO of Qatar Investments and Projects Development Holding Company.

addition to a significant donation to the institution to finance its restoration.⁵⁷ Likewise, despite fears that the Al Sabah collection was looted during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, most of the collection was on loan to different institutions in Europe.⁵⁸

The mechanisms of offshoring - of wealth and art objects themselves - coalesce in the arrangement of the freeport. The freeport is a type of special economic zone where normal laws and tariffs have been suspended, and often one which has been engineered to cater especially to art collectors.⁵⁹ Geneva Freeport is the ur art freeport. Founded in 1888, it was originally a cluster of 'sheds near the waterfront' where customs were suspended pending the arrival of goods in their ultimate destination.⁶⁰ Aided by the secretive Swiss banking industry, it quickly morphed into a space for the rich to store their wealth, where it could remain 'in untaxed limbo, in theory, for ever.'⁶¹ It was in the Geneva Freeport that Yves Bouvier, the dealer, consultant, and art mogul, who originally purchased the *Salvator Mundi* before selling it on to Dmitry Rybolovlev, began to experiment with the freeport model. Building on the family business of art transport and logistics, his company, Natural Le Coultre, bought a five percent share in the freeport in which it also rents more than 20,000 square metres.⁶² Since then, Bouvier has exported the art freeport model elsewhere, establishing a major freeport in Singapore. Much like tax havens and other special economic zones, transactions within these spaces are shrouded in secrecy. Often located within airports, and designed with opulent viewing galleries, and high-tech storage and conservation facilities, clients and potential buyers can fly in to visit and/or purchase works with their coterie of art consultants without their visit ever being known to the relevant

⁵⁷ The touring collection has previously been exhibited at The MET in New York, The Victoria & Albert Museum in London, and The Palace Museum in Beijing, among other places.

⁵⁸ Jasim al-Humaizi's collection, on the other hand, *was* in Kuwait. It reputedly took him over ten years to recover the objects that were taken.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of the historical origins of the freeport in colonialism and the slave trade see Linda M Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012). Rupert shows how in 1675 the Dutch established a freeport at Willemstad, Curaçao to facilitate the trade in slaves and goods with nearby Spanish colonies such as Tierra Firme. During this period, the Spanish Crown granted an exclusive contract to provide it with slaves, the *Asiento de Negros*. By providing a space in which its holders could subcontract to other slave traders and thereby circumvent the restrictions imposed by the royal contract, this free trade policy succeeded in establishing Willemstad as a bustling entrepôt with a substantial trade in both legitimate cargo and contraband. See also Nadine Hunt, "Contraband, Free Ports, and British Merchants in the Caribbean World, 1739-1772," *Diacronie. Studi Di Storia Contemporanea* 1 no. 13 (2013).

⁶⁰ Sam Knight, "The Bouvier Affair," *The New Yorker*, 31 January 2016, 62.

⁶¹ Knight, "Bouvier."

⁶² Knight, "Bouvier."

authorities. In a survey of art professionals and collectors undertaken by Deloitte and ArtTactic, 28 percent of respondents said that ‘they had a relationship with a freeport provider,’ while 42.5 percent said that they were ‘likely to use a freeport in the future.’⁶³

In a version of what Aihwa Ong calls the ‘variegated sovereignty’ of free trade zones,⁶⁴ Hito Steyerl characterises the freeport as a space of profound contradiction, ‘a zone of terminal impermanence... of legalized extralegality.’⁶⁵ And, one might add, a form of hiding in plain sight. As Fiona Greenland points out, the interplay between legality and extra-legality, and transparency and concealment, is as constitutive to the trade in smuggled art objects and antiquity as it is to the legal sleights of hand that render these spaces licit.⁶⁶ It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that freeports have become sites of a significant volume of trade in cultural contraband. Following the revelation that antiques trafficker Giacomo Medici had occupied a storage box in the Geneva Freeport from which to conduct his trade in smuggled goods, the European Union has, however, introduced quite strict controls on freeports, intended to clamp down on the trade in illicit items.⁶⁷ In the wake of this crackdown, the trade in smuggled art has shifted eastwards to special economic zones in places such as the Gulf and Singapore where demand for stolen art objects is increasing, while scrutiny and policing is minimal - looted artefacts from Syria, Libya and Yemen discovered in the Geneva freeport were known to have been conveyed to Switzerland via special economic zones in Qatar.⁶⁸ While this particular illegal trade is relatively new, Dubai has been a regional epicentre of smuggling for a long time, relaying goods such as household electronics, gold and textiles to newly independent states across the Indian Ocean.⁶⁹ Consequently, while tax havens, freeports and even museums in the West provide the soft and hard infrastructures through which collectors and benefactors from the Gulf can deposit and obscure their wealth, including that deposited in

⁶³ John Zarobell, “Freeports and the Hidden Value of Art,” *MDPI Arts* 9(4), no. 117 (2020): 117.

⁶⁴ Aihwa Ong quoted in Khalili, *Sinews*, 111.

⁶⁵ Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art* (London: Verso, 2017), 80.

⁶⁶ Fiona Greenland, “Free Ports and Steel Containers: The Corpora Delicti of Artefact Trafficking,” *History and Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (2018): 15–20.

⁶⁷ Greenland “Free Ports.”

⁶⁸ Daniel Boffey, “EU Clamps down on Free Ports over Crime and Terrorism Links,” *The Guardian*, 10 February 2020.

⁶⁹ Christopher Davidson, “Dubai: The Security Dimensions of the Region’s Premier Free Port,” *Middle East Policy* 15, no. 2 (2008): 143-160; Matthew MacLean, “Spatial Transformations and the Emergence of “the National”: Infrastructures and the Formation of the United Arab Emirates, 1950-1980,” (PhD Thesis, New York University, 2017); Mathew, *Margins*.

cultural assets, the Gulf's plentiful special economic zones are fulfilling a complementary function for the art market and capital from the West.⁷⁰

Investigative journalist Misha Glenny dubbed Dubai 'the world's biggest washing machine.'⁷¹ Certainly, the impenetrability of these secrecy jurisdictions in the Gulf has created ample scope for criminal enterprise and money laundering. Yet, much like secrecy jurisdictions in other parts of the world, the majority of trade transacted through the Gulf's special economic zones is technically legal. Many foreign businesses have availed themselves of the privacy these zones afford and their exemption from the rules governing foreign ownership, which dictate that foreign businesses must have a local partner who must own a fifty percent share of the business. Although Dubai International Financial Centre does have some very basic requirements for financial reporting, when the auction houses Christie's and Sotheby's opened offices in the Gulf both registered their businesses in this special economic zone. In 2021, Dubai Culture also announced the creation of Al Quoz Creative Zone as part of the Emirate's overall Creative Economy Strategy. The special economic zone, which encompasses Alserkal Avenue where most of Dubai's commercial galleries are currently located, will provide commercial benefits to businesses registered within it, offering cultural practitioners and entrepreneurs working in the zone access to a 10-year "cultural visa."

Considered as a single, albeit fragmented, infrastructure, the interlocking network of secrecy jurisdictions has thus created the lawful structures of dispossession through which art objects, and the profits from their increasingly speculative trade, are withdrawn from publics in the Gulf, the West, and indeed the rest of the world. In an apt turn of phrase, Nasser Abourahme succinctly suggests that the dynamic of dispossession is 'not simply robbery - it's legalized robbery, or, better yet, law-making robbery.'⁷² Setting aside their complementarity, these shifts nonetheless reveal the uneven application of the law across these highly litigated, deeply legal extra-legal spaces.

⁷⁰ This trend is in lockstep with broader shifts in the global patterning of offshoring. As the EU has imposed tougher restrictions on European tax havens such as Switzerland and the Channel Islands, capital has been quietly relocating eastwards to freeports in the Gulf and other new centres of capitalism. See, for example, Wolstenholme, "Secret Lives."

⁷¹ Misha Glenny quoted in Wolstenholme, "Secret Lives."

⁷² Nasser Abourahme, "Of Monsters and Boomerangs: Colonial Returns in the Late Liberal City," *City* 22, no. 1 (2018): 106–15.

Despite its egalitarian claims, law has been thoroughly critiqued at both an international and domestic level as an instrument of power with racialised underpinnings and biases. Many legal categories themselves are a product of imperial encounters, while the uneven distribution of legal privileges and immunities at both the domestic and international level is rooted in the imperial structure of the world system, and the ways that it prioritises certain subjects for protection while making racialised others vulnerable and/or criminal.⁷³ Several high-profile cases involving Western dealers and collectors illustrate the degree to which art dealers and consultants in the cultural metropolises are able to exploit the ambiguous grey-zone in which they exist to evade scrutiny and charges.

As was discussed in the biography of *Salvator Mundi*, since 2015 Yves Bouvier has been embroiled in an ongoing legal dispute - nicknamed the Bouvier Affair - with the Russian oligarch Dmitry Rybolovlev, who brought a lawsuit against both him and Sotheby's auction house for defrauding him of over one billion US dollars. Swiss authorities were also pursuing Bouvier for a tax bill accrued on these transactions and those of other businesses linked to him via a network of offshore companies. Throughout, Bouvier has maintained that he was merely acting in his capacity as a dealer and, as such, that he was entitled to apply a commission on the purchases he secured for Rybolovlev, while claiming that he has been domiciled in Singapore since 2008 and therefore not liable for Swiss taxes. Although a New York federal court has rejected an application by Sotheby's to dismiss the action against them, in January 2021, Swiss authorities dropped the criminal charges against Bouvier, shifting the focus of the investigation to Rybolovlev himself. Oliver Hoare relied on a similar defence to explain his entanglement with Sheikh Saud and, while Saud Al Thani was placed under house arrest and removed from all his posts, no charges were ever brought by the Qatari authorities against Hoare or the other dealers alleged to have abetted Saud in his scheme. Sheikh Saud, on the other hand, was successfully sued by Bonham's and Sotheby's for payments on which he had defaulted. A judge in London froze Saud's

⁷³ In the context of the Gulf, Khalili, *Sinews*, has explored this uneven application of international law by examining the commercial arbitration tribunal in the shipping industry. Where investor-state dispute-settlement has involved Western corporations and investors, the law has invariably sided with their interests, guaranteeing their protections over actors from the Gulf. Where, however, Gulf states have resorted to the dispute-settlement mechanisms against less powerful states, the tribunal has ruled in favour of their corporate interests.

assets globally. In his judgement he offered a searing declamation of Saud's actions as 'discreditable, dishonourable and disturbing.'⁷⁴

Such uneven treatment also extends to the granting of export licences to works purchased by foreign buyers. As has already been discussed, many museums whose collections have been swelled by colonial plunder and imperial duress, are constitutionally prohibited from deaccessioning and/or profiting from their collection through sales, which has become a convenient defence for the denial of restitution requests since such demands have become more vocal. Further propping up the power of these museums, such legal limits extend to the granting of export licences. Both France and the United Kingdom have an export control system.⁷⁵ This allows the state to delay the granting of export licences to objects that national museums have in their crosshairs while they attempt to raise the capital for preemptive purchase.

Sheikh Saud was caught on the wrong side of the privileges wielded by national museums in the United Kingdom on numerous occasions during the time he was active in the market (1997-2014). Following his purchase of a Mantuan roundel in December 2003 for just under GBP 7 million, Sheikh Saud reportedly hoped that he would be able to lend the item to a British national museum in exchange for an item of which he was fond, the Amenhotep staff from the Temple of Sukh in Egypt, held in the collections of the British Museum.⁷⁶ Only once an application for an export licence has been made does preemptive purchase come into effect. Rather than consider a reciprocal loan, when Saud's solicitors submitted his application, the V&A began to raise the funds to force acquisition of the roundel. Faced with the threat of having the Mantuan roundel requisitioned by the British state, Sheikh Saud dropped his

⁷⁴ Antiques Trade Gazette, "High Court Issues Order Freezing Sheikh's Assets," 12 November 2012. As happened with Arif Naqvi, articles from Sheikh Saud's private collection were auctioned off by Sotheby's in 2014 to repay his debts.

⁷⁵ In France, preemptive purchase can be exercised not only upon application for an export licence but also where a *trésors nationaux* (national treasure) has been sold at auction. See Articles L1223-1 to L123-4 in *Code du patrimoine*, the French heritage legislation. In the UK, a "national treasure" is determined by reference to the Waverley Criteria. These criteria can also be used to rebuff valuations deemed to be set prohibitively high. For details of the UK's export control system, see Frances Wilson, "UK Export Controls and National Treasures," *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 5, no. 2 (2019): 193-208.

⁷⁶ The Art Newspaper, "How Sheikh Saud tried to export national treasure from Britain and France," *The Art Newspaper* 158, May (2005): 6.

application for an export licence, leading to its complete withdrawal from public view.⁷⁷ It is worth noting that even the power to withdraw an application is circumscribed as, having withdrawn an application, one is precluded from making another application for a further ten years.⁷⁸

A similar situation occurred when Sheikh Saud applied for an export licence for an ornately decorated Jahangir (1605-1627) gold and jade flask, which he bought at the Christie's Islamic sale in April 2004. The vessel was referred to as the Clive of India Flask, after the murderous Major-General Robert Clive, the first British governor of the Bengal Presidency. According to its provenance, the flask was gifted to Major-General Clive after he led an East India Company (EIC) regiment to a brutal victory at the Battle of Plassey, an event that laid the foundations for company rule in India. When the National Art Collections Fund (NACF)⁷⁹ began a fundraising drive to purchase the object, Saud swiftly abandoned his export plans. This prompted the NACF's director, David Barrie, to suggest that the inability to compel the purchase of an item without an application for an export licence having been made exposed an inherent weakness in the export stop system designed to keep national treasures in the United Kingdom.⁸⁰ To scrutinise Barrie's viewpoint, it is worth restating two salient details from the object's provenance: i) despite having been on loan to the V&A for over forty years, the flask was not already a part of the British national collection and was not therefore subject to deaccessioning legislation; and ii) the jewel-encrusted flask was the bounty of colonial conquest - it was only on British soil, on loan to its public institutions and subject to British export laws, due to the depredations of British imperial militias. As such, whatever attachments may have formed during the period of the flask's loan to the V&A, the prior and superior claim of the British state to the object, which Barrie's comments intimated, seems dubious at best.

What these cases illustrate is that even at the elite level of the art world, there is an uneven distribution of rights and privileges across the international system, with

⁷⁷ Unable to export the roundel, Sheikh Saud did eventually loan it to the V&A in 2011. After his death in 2014, Saud's heirs have tried to sell the roundel. Another application for an export licence has been made as part of this process.

⁷⁸ This can be used to the advantage of the owner, as appreciations in value during the intervening period can price out museums.

⁷⁹ NACF changed its name to simply "The Art Fund" in 2006.

⁸⁰ *Antiques Trade Gazette*, "Clive of India Flask Remains in UK – Law Change Suggested," *Antiques Trade Gazette*, 22 December 2004.

actors from its imperial and normative centre afforded prerogatives that those from emergent centres are yet denied. The effects of these legal striations on the cultural sector in the Gulf are however far more diffuse and insidious than simply the comparative legal protections afforded to Western cultural capitalists benefitting from the jurisdictional differences. Striated rights of movement, to which I now turn, have also enabled financial and career advancement of Western cultural professionals, shaping the specific preoccupations of the cultural sector and its workforce. My discussion of the complexities and contradictions of these tiered mobilities will be situated in the context of the dual drives among its milieus to both indigenise the Gulf's workforce and resist the regionalist framings of its art scene.

2.3 ANTINOMIES OF INDIGENISATION

As explored in Chapter One, connoisseurship emerged in the late nineteenth century as a mode of ensuring the role of both dealers and academics as custodians of this knowledge, and thus the continued ability to commodify their expertise.⁸¹ The incentives to police its epistemological perimeters became particularly pronounced in the context of a booming art market, where the role of dealers and academics has undergone a partial merger with that of the appraiser. These professionals deploy their expertise to arbitrate highly subjective and contested questions such as artistic merit and, for earlier works, questions of authenticity and/or provenance, in order to attach a price tag, often for their own great financial reward. The individuation of this knowledge has therefore created a market governed by highly personal professional norms and relationships, where the boundaries distinguishing friendship and mentorship from more mercenary motives becomes blurred. The personalised social structure of the art market interlocks with the preference for highly personalised relationships favoured in the Gulf that many of my interlocutors described, referred to colloquially as *wasta*. When coupled with their seemingly limitless financial reserves, Gulf buyers - particularly those acting on behalf of the state - therefore command and receive high levels of personal attention. They often assemble substantial retinues of consultants that may travel with them, as Hoare and others did with Sheikh Saud, and

⁸¹ Baudrillard, *Political Economy of the Sign*; Spooner, "Weavers."

arrange formal introductions and the acquisitions of objects that fit within the intellectual parameters of either the private collection, museum, or latterly administrative body on whose behalf they are acting.

As the Gulf cultural institutions and administrative bodies under whose aegis these new cultural institutions sit began crystallising in the years after the millennium, relationships that began informally through encounters in the milieus and networks of the art world have been increasingly codified into contracted consultancy relationships. Although some dealers have been appointed to such roles, it is more often than not academics that are conscripted into the shifting and growing institutional bureaucracies responsible for the evolution of the cultural sector. Significantly, clauses around residency are often baked into these contracts that licence parts of this army of Western cultural consultants and other contractors to continue residing in cities external to the Gulf, often in London, New York, and Paris, but also further afield. Susan Vogel, a specialist in traditional and contemporary African Art whose course Sheikha Mayassa audited at Columbia University, and who was taken on as a consultant by Qatar Museums Authority (QMA), described how she ensured that her contract clearly stipulated that she was not obliged to live in Qatar while employed. She also suggested that Roger Mandle, the Executive Director and Chief Officer of QMA from 2008 to 2012, never resided in Qatar for any length of time.

This is not merely pernicious for the Gulf's cultural sector, but it also contributes to the further liberalisation of the cultural sector in the historic centres themselves. Working on behalf of clients in the Gulf has the effect of diffusing the norms of private consultancy and strengthening enticements for those working in the public sector to pass through the revolving door. Those involved in the creation of a cultural sector in its early years describe it as a veritable bonanza, with many taking advantage of the fountains of cash on offer. As a sphere, the Gulf also provides opportunities for rapid promotion, enabling forms of career leapfrogging where, upon returning to the cultural capitals of the West, some junior cultural workers have attained a high level of seniority and responsibility with commensurate pay increases. Such swift progression would likely not have been possible had they attempted to climb the career ladder within the cultural metropolises where, as Chapter One described, funds are increasingly scarce and job opportunities constrained. The catalytic effect of the Gulf

upon careers is nevertheless deeply structured by the uneven mobilities between the West and the Gulf. Temporary relocation to the Gulf or movement back and forth to improve career chances in the cultural metropolises is only an option for those holding Western passports, those with sufficient wealth to enable to invest substantially in the West, or those able to secure costly visa sponsorship from Western employers. Applying Hanieh's insights of the Gulf states' role in mediating class formations to these highly personalised relationships, we thus find the Gulf's cultural sector mediating the distribution of power in the cultural sphere beyond its geographic borders, encasing preexisting class formations and systems of accumulation in both its established centres and its nascent new locations. Somewhat paradoxically, given the material wealth of the Gulf states and collectors relative to their host of Western consultants, the historic and continued outsourcing of roles and expertise to the West also materially and symbolically reinforces the dominance of these established centres against the Gulf's nascent sector, enshrining its core-periphery structure.

Such differential mobilities have a correlate in the cultural sector within the Gulf. Sunny Rahbar, one of the founders of Third Line Gallery, which was among the first galleries to take up residence in Alserkal Avenue, opening in 2005, decided to return to Dubai after having spent some time trying to get a job in New York and London. Rahbar is of Iranian origin but grew up in Dubai after her family relocated to the emirate following the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Rahbar explained that she was among the first generation of middle-class residents in the Gulf - expatriates and citizens alike - that had travelled to the West to access the superior education available at its Higher Education institutions.⁸² These temporary migrations coincided with the September 9/11 attacks. In its wake, Rahbar and her contemporaries struggled to find work in Western metropolises, and many had parents who were concerned about the risks that the West's political climate around the Middle East posed to their safety. Consequently, Rahbar was forced to return to Dubai. Upon her return she and her friends determined that they would attempt to generate something of the cultural scene that they had enjoyed in the West and which, at this point, was non-existent in the Gulf. Irit Rogoff observes of the new geographies of the art world that 'the direction of their mobility – which defies the traditional paths from centre to periphery,

⁸² Sunny Rahbar, interview with author.

have rewritten the global map of art.⁸³ The mobilities described here suggest that we should be careful to distinguish between temporary mobilities and permanent. While there is significant scope for temporary movement among art world milieus within its international circuits, we should not overstate the extent to which these transient mobilities translate into relocations that redraw its cartography. Indeed, in the Gulf's cultural sector, uneven mobilities have combined with political turbulence and displacements in other parts of the Middle East, to swell the ranks of its personnel with expatriates from other parts of the region such as Rahbar.⁸⁴

It is against the background of a highly international labour market and massive levels of migration into the Gulf that the programme of indigenising the Gulf's workforce has emerged. This discourse transmutes the preexisting nationalist idea of *asala* (meaning either purity or indigeneity) that Sen⁸⁵ suggests developed in 1970s Kuwait, Qatar, and UAE to articulate claims to the state's resources, precipitating the development of the extensive scheme of subsidies and welfare afforded to the Gulf states' citizenry. Argued to be part and parcel of the liberalisation of the economy, the indigenisation of the white-collar workforce has enabled the UAE to begin a programme of dismantling its energy subsidies, purportedly to deal with the budget deficits forecast by the IMF in 2016, without undermining these deeply ideological ethno-nationalist hierarchies. Indeed, despite the Gulf states claiming these efforts as a necessary step in diversifying their economies and ensuring long-term stability, critical voices argue that indigenisation is a calculated move, intended to continue to appease the strong elements in society that oppose the significant cultural and societal shifts that have accompanied the internationalisation of its population and workforce.

Several of my interlocutors in the UAE suggested that the preoccupation with emiratisation had waned in recent years, having reached its apotheosis in the wake of the Arab uprisings in 2011. Not, however, before these imperatives had embedded themselves into the bureaucracies of the new cultural institutional infrastructures, with

⁸³ Irit Rogoff, "Geo-Cultures: Circuits of Arts and Globalizations," *Open!* 16 (2009): 110.

⁸⁴ Although the liberalisation of property laws, which will be discussed in chap. 4, has given wealthy expats greater levels of security, their residence in the Gulf has historically been contingent on their capacity to work.

⁸⁵ Quoted in MacLean, "Spatial," 13.

citizens appointed to senior administrative positions,⁸⁶ and those with some limited training in curation and museology continually drawn into new projects and appointed to positions well beyond their experience level. Holiday Powers, Assistant Professor in History of Art at VCU Qatar, suggested that the now defunct UCL Qatar MA programme in Museum and Gallery Practice⁸⁷ was often viewed as a conveyor belt into senior positions within the new museum ecology, while Art History was understood by many as a vocational degree.

In a similar vein to the ‘caught between a rock and a hard place’⁸⁸ discourse that Toukan details in her discussion of the domestic institutional growth and international celebrity garnered by the Post-War art scene in Lebanon, cultural workers in the Gulf describe the sector as trapped in a double-bind. On the one hand, they emphasise the necessity of avoiding importing Western models of fine art curation and museum practice, the need to provide a seam of continuity between the different phases of cultural infrastructure in the UAE, and the desire to generate artistic, curatorial, and museological practices that resonate with or are drawn from more “indigenous” sources. On the other, they stress the absence of domestic skills and institutional capacity in the field of fine art, and the pernicious effects of appointing of people without sufficient training to positions of seniority and responsibility within museum employment pyramids. When we spoke, Maya Allison, founding executive director of the NYUAD Art Gallery and the curator appointed to the UAE pavilion at the upcoming Venice Biennial, pointed to the uniqueness of her gallery as a space in which interns could participate in the process of putting together an exhibition from ‘soup to nuts.’⁸⁹ In so doing, she captures the perspective that many hold of the need to build domestic resources through degree programmes, internship schemes and promotion structures designed to train citizens and residents of the Gulf states in the gamut of roles involved in contemporary artistic and museum practice and as well as in its epistemological underpinnings.⁹⁰ This argument frames the surfeit of foreign cultural

⁸⁶ Hussain Rajab, the first Director of the QMA, was recruited by Sheikh Saud from his position as the head of offshore drilling for Qatar Petroleum.

⁸⁷ It ran from 2012 to 2020.

⁸⁸ Toukan, “Art,” 202.

⁸⁹ Maya Allison, interview with author.

⁹⁰ Many cultural workers I spoke to described the logistical challenge of putting together exhibitions in the Gulf. They related that, as late as 2013, there was a lack of quite elementary components of a fine

workers as a necessary stop-gap, filling the lacuna while providing a pedagogical environment through which to develop skills and logistics.

There is an observable tension that sits at the heart of this double-bind in as much as the emphasis on requisite skills presumes a universal model for fine art and museology, with its correlate in importing these skills and their epistemological anchoring from outside, while at the same time recognising the particular origins of this model and the problems inherent in its universalisation. Toukan notes that the two poles in discussions around contemporary art in Lebanon, one pivoting on the ‘political *in* art’ and the other on the ‘politics *of* art,’⁹¹ should be read not as theoretical constructs but contentious claims whose deployment discloses something about Lebanon’s troubled political landscape, and whose mutual exclusivity obscures more than it explains.⁹² Considered in such a way, less important than the tensions internal to the dilemma described, is what this framing relegates to its outside - that which it relegates to its outside incrementally, and that which it doesn’t even consider - and what these silences reveal about the current political moment in the Gulf.

This section opened with a discussion of how variegated, racialised mobilities have constituted the Gulf as a site of career leapfrogging for cultural workers from the West, who are at liberty to settle in both spaces with relative ease, while making the Gulf a space of greater necessity for cultural workers from other parts of the region. Jack Persekian decided to create the March Meeting⁹³ in recognition of how uneven mobilities are also made more acute by the political histories of war and contestation in the Middle East, which add another layer of complexity to travel within it due to vexed borders and often turbulent political conditions. Alongside finding a stable source of financing for artists from the Middle East,⁹⁴ he hoped that this burgeoning

art scene such as framers and lighting specialists, let alone more complex roles such as museum registrars.

⁹¹ Toukan, “Art,” 201-209.

⁹² The nucleus of the former position is that, rather than fixating on the politics of production, artists can intervene in art’s theoretical and discursive field, advancing its political content. By contrast, the politics of art considers art through the lens of how it is shaped by, and shapes, political dynamics.

⁹³ The March Meeting is a series of talks organised by the Sharjah Art Foundation, taking place at the same time as the Sharjah Biennial. Although the March Meeting is now open to anyone (the author attended the 2019 edition), the first was by invitation only.

⁹⁴ Jack Persekian identified this as the prime driver behind his decision to accept the invitation to take up this role at the Sharjah Biennial. In his telling, related to the author, before he arrived, the Biennial had been pursuing a different course, more in thrall to the internationally famous stars of the art world, and less concerned with carving out a discrete identity as a hub for Middle Eastern Contemporary Art.

infrastructure would provide an institutional anchor within the Middle East where cultural workers could gather to begin articulating an alternative to Western hegemonic aesthetic norms and practices. As detailed earlier in the chapter, the regionalist implications of this framing has echoes of the essentialising provincialism through which artists from the Middle East have been absorbed into the art world and the Gulf interpellated into the art market. Many cultural professionals - artists, curators, and dealers - therefore strain against such nationalist or regionalist casings.

Yet Persekian's motivating sentiment also captures the nub of these tiered mobilities and the challenges they pose to cultural workers who do not wield the privileges of movement that Western citizenship confers. The internalisation of the nativist programme to indigenise the workforce as a decolonial manoeuvre subtly suggests the need to slowly edge out not only workers from the West steeped in its biases but also workers from further afield within the Middle East. In the regional emphasis of initiatives such as the March Meeting, one finds a partial and uncanny mirroring of the market imperatives to regionalise - and thus implicitly provincialise - the Gulf's cultural sector relative to the art world and its normative centre, described in section 2.1. Yet, when considered through the lens of the racialised discrepancies in movement, such regionalist impulses do offer professional scope for cultural workers from the broader region denied permanent access to the high culture metropolises. The irony is thus that despite the frustration and discomfort that is felt by cultural practitioners at being bracketed as a provincial - and therefore provocative - subset of cultural production, the creation of a regional hub nevertheless injects a modicum of stability into what is otherwise somewhat challenging terrain for those constrained by their position within the international system. Indeed, it is telling that a rejection of particularism is often felt more urgently for those at greater liberty to live outside the limits of the particularisms that racialised border regimes prescribe.⁹⁵ At this point, it must be stressed that the modulation of mobilities by class operates not only at the regional scale, but also at the national and, moreover, that there are those for whom it is inconceivable that they would work in the arts, let alone emigrate to work in the arts. This brings me on to the other thing that the dilemma facing the Gulf's burgeoning cultural sector places out of view.

⁹⁵ Toukan, "Art."

Since being discovered by institutionalised art milieus from outside the Gulf, Hassan Sharif and the other artists considered part of the local avant-garde have become hot property. Having been nearly destitute for much of his life, Sharif did not expect to be famous. When he began working, his conceptual practice was very remote from the preoccupations of his contemporaries working in the Gulf, while, as described in the introductory chapter, fine art, and material culture as a whole, were still fringe forms of cultural output as compared to mainstays such as poetry and theatre.⁹⁶ Without wanting to minimise the contingency of his discovery, the arrival of a Western(-educated) cadre of cultural professionals tipped the balance in his favour. Unlike the majority of creative practices in the Gulf, despite its geographic origin, Sharif's conceptual idiom aligned with the mainstream tendencies of modern and contemporary art in the West. In the UAE, the artistic practices of Sharif and the other artists involved in the Flying House⁹⁷ therefore provided a local aesthetic output with which to begin to elaborate a fine art paradigm with local features, while maintaining a seam of continuity between the different phases of its infrastructure. It is perhaps unsurprising then that Catherine David, the French super-curator and champion of the Middle East as a locus of critical art practice challenging to the Western paradigm, should have edited the first monograph on Sharif in 2011.

Winegar rightly draws attention to the deeply political nature of curation, how it selects, adjudicates and interprets 'forms of cultural production from a cultural arena, naming them not only "art" but also "good art," and then leaving aside the rest as art that is subpar.'⁹⁸ As Toukan describes in the context of the Post-War generation of artists in Lebanon, their incorporation into the global art world 'systematically over-emphasized'⁹⁹ the otherness of their cultural output, obscuring how its artistic vocabulary and theoretical scaffold are in fact consonant with the traditions they have

⁹⁶ Several of my interlocutors were at great pains to stress that there is a surfeit of cultural production both within and beyond what is conventionally known as "fine art." One mentioned a reality television series called *sha'r al-million*, (Million's Poet). The programme is an Arabic poetry competition, which has been running since 1993 and is extremely popular in the UAE.

⁹⁷ The Flying House was a permanent exhibition space in Al Quoz, Dubai. It has also become a euphemism for the movement of conceptual artists that worked, and exhibited their artworks, in the building.

⁹⁸ Winegar, "The Humanity Game," 655.

⁹⁹ Toukan, "Art," 180. For a site-specific articulation of this argument see Hanah Toukan "Picasso is Mightier than the M16: On Imaging and Imagining Palestine's Resistance in the Global Community," *Cultural Politics* 13, no. 1 (2017): 102-123.

been claimed to challenge. The excited art historical research and curatorial attention given to the Emirati avant-garde pivots on its resonances with evaluative criteria of aesthetic practice rooted in the art world's core. Not only does the focus on these artists therefore over-egg their subversive identity,¹⁰⁰ but in the process of enshrining them in the aesthetic canon, other forms of indigenous cultural production are implied to be of a lesser calibre. Those artists whose works come to be celebrated as “good art” thus become construed as regional interlocutors of a hybrid tradition, situated within a protean framing as *of, yet also transcending*, the region. Somewhat ironically, plotted in this geographic value matrix, artists deemed less “good” end up being associated with a provincialism that their more celebrated counterparts have strained against.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has reoriented the analytical gaze of the last, moving away from the political economy of the art market in the cultural metropolises of the West to refocus on the Gulf. The discussion has been centred on the market mechanisms and legal regimes of the commercial art world, to show how this heavily striated environment has modulated the creation of collecting bases and cultural workers in the Gulf. What one is struck by when one follows the commercial cords that wend their way in and out of the Gulf's nascent art market, is the extent to which, despite the considerable economic power that the Gulf wields, this financial clout does not translate into forms of symbolic or legal sovereignty. These incommensurabilities may, at first glance, seem natural, easily explained by recourse to discourses such as identity and culture, or by way of ideas such as national patrimony. Yet such discourses immediately lose their coherence when read against the backdrop of European imperial history. The art historical fields and looted objects through which Art History was elaborated, as well as the geographies, trade laws, and mobilities, that define the global art market and its inequities, were all brewed in the cauldron of empire.

The incorporation of the Gulf into this highly uneven playing field has had a range of, often complex and contradictory, effects. Evidencing the insights of the theory of racial capitalism, this chapter has examined how the Gulf was, in the first

¹⁰⁰ One might also, in part, trace the hostility to regionalist framings to the popularising of Lebanon's “Post-War” artists.

instance, opened to the art market by typecasting it as a hub for Islamic and modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art, and buyers thereof. Due to the burden of representation imparted by orientalism, these affinities cannot be reduced to confections forced on the region to extract value. Confirming Lowe's claim that racial capitalism is 'lived through those uneven [racial] formations,'¹⁰¹ I have drawn attention to the ways that local collectors participate in the market's race-making practices, focusing their acquisitions on Islamic, and modern and contemporary art from the Middle East and South Asia in order to, at least in part, reckon with the orientalist imagination to which they are subject.

In the central part of the chapter, the pendulum swung away from the Gulf to look at how the actions of its buyers are determined by the lopsided and increasingly offshored regulatory and legal environment of the international art market. In the context of the slippery distinction between state and private funds, and the disproportionate concentration of market transactions and objects in the cultural metropolises, I have shown how Gulf buyers are subject to harsher sanctions and export bans, leading in some instances to the withdrawal of items from public *tout court*, and in general, to the continued hoarding of objects by the West.

This racialised juridical unevenness also extends to mobilities. In the final section, I return to the Gulf to explore how disparities in movement have moulded its burgeoning scene. I have flagged how notions of indigenisation, even those expressed sensitively by cultural workers in an attempt to respond to the overrepresentation of workers from the cultural metropolises, might inadvertently render cultural workers from other parts of the region increasingly precarious. Paradoxically, despite the discussion of the opening section, this would suggest that there are certain virtues to a regional emphasis. Without wanting to sound too fatalistic, even for market actors in the Gulf's gilded art market sphere, it seems the afterlife of empire is a gordian knot.

The next two chapters will move beyond the art market to examine the political economy of the built cultural environment in the Gulf. While this chapter has focused exclusively on race-making and colonial relations between very privileged actors, these two chapters will therefore focus heavily on how the Gulf's subaltern class - (construction) workers, disproportionately from South and Southeast Asia, as well as

¹⁰¹ Lowe, *Intimacies*, 150.

the Bedouin - fit into, and are shaped by, these matrixes of culture, colonialism, and capitalism.

[Chapter Three]

WHO BUILT SEVEN-GATED THEBES?¹

'the road to inequity is paved with technical fixes'
- Ruha Benjamin

*But . . .
Imagine an ignorance that resists.
Imagine an ignorance that fights back'*
- Charles W. Mills

The Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) in Doha is set into the sea like a precious stone. Jutting out into Doha's West Bay on a man-made promontory, it is built in a creamy limestone.² As the sun charts its course across the sky, it interacts with the austere geometric design of the building to create a striking *chiaroscuro*. On its north side, a vast window, the only one in the museum, stretches the full height of the building, providing vistas of the vertiginous Doha skyline across the bay at every level of the central atrium. The building, which opened on 22nd November 2008, was designed by the famed Chinese American modernist I. M. Pei. Pei was an early recipient of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, awarded to him in 1983. Over the course of his long career, which spanned seven decades, Pei designed many museums, gaining particular recognition for his design of the glass pyramid entrance to the Louvre Museum in Paris. Pei was not, however, the initial architect chosen to design the Museum of Islamic Art.

In 1997, shortly after Sheikh Saud had begun acquiring objects in earnest, Qatar launched an architecture competition for the museum that was to house the collection of Islamic Art he was amassing. Lacking the requisite experience domestically, Qatar enlisted the help of the Aga Khan Foundation to organise the competition, including

¹ The title of this chapter is taken from the poem by the Marxist poet Bertolt Brecht, "Questions from a Worker who Reads." This translation is by classics scholar Edith May Hall and was posted to Twitter on 10 February 2021.

² The building is constructed from Magny and Chamesson limestone. Although tonally similar to adobe, a local mudbrick building material, as well as the red brick of the ablutions fountain on which the building is based, this limestone is native to France, from where it was exported to Qatar.

assembling the panel of judges. The competition was won by the Palestinian Jordanian architect Rasim Badran. Other entrants included Richard Rogers and the British Iraqi architect, Zaha Hadid, who has since become hugely famous for her futuristic designs and, more recently, for her callous comments about the workers engaged to build her design for al-Wakrah stadium in Qatar, which will be discussed in this chapter. Badran is a Palestinian Jordanian architect based in Amman who is considered part of the Hasan Fathi school.³ One of the judges was Luis Monreal, the director of La Caixa Cultural Foundation in Barcelona. Oliver Hoare, the dealer of Islamic Art who facilitated Saud's introduction to the inner circle of the Western cultural milieu in which he moved, describes fondly how Monreal took a shine to the Sheikh and endeavoured to introduce him to as many major players in the art world as he could.⁴

In the officially sanctioned book on the creation of the Museum of Islamic Art, Pei explains vaguely that his involvement came about after 'Badran's project unfortunately did not go forward.'⁵ What actually transpired was that, having become acquainted with many heavy hitters in the established centres of the global art world, Sheikh Saud's ambitions for the project grew. It became important to him that one of the leading global names in architecture - a starchitect as they have been dubbed - should undertake the design of the museum he was spearheading. Despite having been personally selected by Sheikh Saud from the two shortlisted entrants, Badran was released from his duties at considerable cost to the state.⁶ During the intervening period between Badran's appointment and letting go, Monreal had assumed the post

³ Hasan Fathi was a twentieth century Egyptian architect. He is known as having pioneered what Salah Hasan has termed 'alternative modernisms,' incorporating vernacular architectural technologies and styles into modernism's political vision of the role of architecture, and particularly for using adobe. Using local materials, and historically proximate styles, he maintained, was essential to the cost efficiency and social efficacy of building projects with a welfarist agenda. In *Joyriding*, Menoret, 69-70, describes how in the 1950s, Fathi was drafted in to help Dioxadis design neighbourhoods for the working classes in Baghdad. Their designs were lauded by *the New York Times* as agents of anti-communism. As a part of the Hasan Fathi school, Rasim Badran's approach is therefore characterised by an attempt to infuse his buildings with local architectural principles, elements, and palates. He has been very prolific in the Middle East, and his work often displays commonalities with so-called "Islamic" or "Arab" architecture. The Arriyadh Development Authority (ADA) in Saudi Arabia famously appointed Badran, along with fellow architect Salih al-Hathloul, and British engineering firm, Buro Happold, to redraw the existing master plans for the Governance Palace District in Riyadh. See Bsheer, *Archive Wars*, 127-164.

⁴ Hoare, *Every Object*, 122.

⁵ Philip Jodidio, *Museum of Islamic Art: Doha, Qatar* (Munich: Prestel, 2008), 43.

⁶ Hoare, *Every Object*, 122.

of General Manager of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Geneva. He had also introduced Sheikh Saud to Pei.

Since stepping down from his firm, Pei Cobb Freed, in 1989, Pei had only been tempted out of retirement by a few projects - largely museum complexes. When Sheikh Saud initially proposed that he undertake the design of MIA, Pei politely declined. Saud was tenacious, however, determined that architecture's *eminence grise* should contribute to the making of Doha. With the help of Monreal, who was also in attendance, Saud arranged a meeting in Paris between Pei and his cousin the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad, and his wife, Sheikha Muza. A second meeting was organised with Pei in New York. Oliver Hoare was charged with compiling a catalogue of the extant collection to seduce Pei, convincing him of the seriousness of Saud's intentions and the calibre of institution he was in the process of building. After this meeting, Pei finally yielded to Saud's overtures and agreed to design the museum.

Applying his historically infused neo-modernist approach to his new commission, Pei felt his structure must 'grasp the essence of Islamic architecture.'⁷ Pei visited many famous Islamic buildings, in pursuit of one that distilled the essential quality he wanted his building to evoke. He visited the Grand Mosque in Cordoba, but found it too 'lush and colourful.'⁸ The Jama Masjid, a mosque in the Mughal capital of Fatehpur Sikri, was too palpably 'Indian.'⁹ Even the Great Mosque in Damascus, an Umayyad structure and the oldest surviving major mosque in the world, Pei felt recalled too heavily the Byzantine church and Roman temples formerly erected on the site. At the heart of the ibn Tulun Mosque, Pei finally alighted on what he felt expressed the pure, unadulterated kernel of so-called "Islamic" architecture: a small ablutions fountain set discretely into the austere and unassuming surroundings of this Abbasid Mosque which nestles beside the more spectacular Sultan Hassan Mosque (1356-1363) in the midst of Cairo's historic quarter.

In seeking a pure expression of Islamic architecture, Pei felt he differentiated himself from the younger generation of starchitects who had been commissioned to embellish the Gulf's various urban environments with their dazzling designs. He believed that no design in the region should entirely forgo the wellspring of Islamic

⁷ Quoted in Jodidio, *Museum of Islamic Art*, 44.

⁸ Jodidio, *Museum of Islamic Art*, 46.

⁹ Jodidio, *Museum of Islamic Art*, 44.

geometry and its design principles. Addressing the announcement that Zaha Hadid, Jean Nouvel, Tadao Ando, and Frank Gehry had all accepted commissions to design museums for the Saadiyat Cultural District, Pei said he believed that, unlike himself, ‘[t]hey are trying to do something novel. I think that what they are interested in is the “Shock of the New” as the Australian critic Robert Hughes put it in a book he wrote in 1991.’¹⁰ Nevertheless, the other two referents for his design were geological: the desert and the sea, and their relation to the sun, natural elements which Jean Nouvel also took, in conjunction with the ‘Arab dome,’ as the principal anchors of his design for the Louvre Abu Dhabi.

Spectacular, symbolic architecture by world renowned architects is seemingly as fundamental to the cultural infrastructure that is being erected in the Gulf as their collections.¹¹ Jean Nouvel was involved in the Abu Dhabi project before the Louvre franchise was agreed. Likewise, in her foreword to the first official book on the Louvre Abu Dhabi and its collection, Rita Aoun-Abdo, the Cultural Director of Abu Dhabi’s Department of Culture and Tourism, expresses her ‘hope that visitors will draw as much from this unique architectural venue as they do from each of the works the collection houses.’¹² As scholars of space and architecture have long argued, the built environment articulates and mediates socio-political realities.¹³ In keeping with these arguments, this chapter explores how, in their pursuit of the prestige bestowed by world-famous largely Western architects, these new cultural infrastructures midwife specific constellations of power and systems of capital accumulation. More specifically, in line with the overarching concerns of this thesis, it proposes that symbolic

¹⁰ Jodidio, *Museum of Islamic Art*, 45.

¹¹ In the Gulf, art and modernist architecture have been articulated together since at least the 1960s. The first space occupied by the Sultan gallery, which described itself as the ‘first professional Arab art gallery in the Gulf’ was in the Thunayn al-Ghanim building on the Sheraton Roundabout in Kuwait City. Built in 1954, the building was designed by another famed Egyptian modernist architect, Sayyid Karim. When it opened, the building also housed the British consulate, as well as the first English bookshop in Kuwait, and subsequently, a Rolls Royce dealership. For a comprehensive discussion of modernist architecture in Kuwait see works by Asseel al-Ragam *inter alia* “The Politics of Representation: The Kuwait National Museum and Processes of Cultural Production,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 6 (2019): 663-674; and “Kuwaiti Architectural Modernity,” *The Journal of Architecture* 24, no. 3 (2019): 366–384.

¹² Rita Aoun-Abdo, “Belonging to a Moment, Belonging to a Place” in *Louvre Abu Dhabi: Birth of a Museum, English Language Edition*, ed. Laurence des Cars (Paris: ADTCA, Musée du Louvre & Skira Flammarion, 2013), 21.

¹³ A. Kanna, *Dubai, the City as Corporation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, eds. and trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); Harvey, *Spaces*; Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE, 2005).

racialisations and the racialised hierarchies of the labour market constitute the *sine qua non* of this museum architecture. Racial assemblages are at once crucial to the conception and construction of these buildings, and to their political power, while at the same time functioning as the framework through which the Western institutions and the actors that benefit from their construction strive to absolve themselves of their complicity in these racialised systems of power and capital accumulation.

After the completion of the construction of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, satellite imaging company, EarthCam, collaborated with the museum to produce an official timelapse of the construction site from 2009-2017. From a bird's eye view, we watch as a barren wasteland is rapidly transformed. Traversed by a swarm of trucks and bulldozers, the landscape is instantly threaded with asphalt veins and deep channels dug for the foundations, while a lattice of cranes whizz back and forth across the screen. Within minutes an implacable grid of scaffolding, steel trusses, and towers slice up the frame, as the arc of the canopy reaches steadily across the skyline, before being clad with interlocking metal stars. Rousing music plays as if summoning the vast cathedral from the dust. What is almost entirely absent from this corporate vision, except as momentary flickers, are the panoply of workers behind this industrial spectacle.

Against this self-actualising abstraction, each of the chapter's three sections therefore attempts to thrust the architecture of these cultural institutions back into the messy realm of human work and social relations without which it could not be built. The chapter is structured in three parts, each examining one of the deeply interrelated processes - the figurative and literal building blocks - of materialising these museum structures: architectural design, engineering and its technologies, and finally, construction. Each section looks beyond the frame of the timelapse, trained steadfastly on the construction site, to map how these projects link different locations of the highly international construction sector, and how these projects fit into the Gulf states' strategic objective of carving out a place for themselves in the capitalist world system beyond oil.

As Lisa Lowe writes, 'racial capitalism suggests that capitalism expands not through rendering all labor, resources, and markets across the world identical, but by precisely seizing upon colonial divisions, identifying particular regions for production

and others for neglect, certain populations for exploitation and still others for disposal.¹⁴ In plotting the geographic asymmetries between the areas that have supplied manual labour and materials, versus those that have supplied the thinking labour and technology, as well those spaces through which resistance has been routed, I argue one begins to understand the political economy of racism in the Gulf, of which these buildings are both artefacts and vehicles.

3.1 THROUGH A GLASS, BRIGHTLY¹⁵

Jean Nouvel, the French architect responsible for the design of the Louvre Abu Dhabi used language reminiscent of I. M. Pei when talking about his sources of inspiration - the sun, sea, Arab dome, and Arab city were all described as ‘archetypes’ that he integrated into his ‘museum city’ design. While Pei used the geometric forms of the building to draw attention to the sun, Nouvel harnessed its aesthetic potential through the dome structure. The dome is a latticework, built by tessellating thousands of unique steel pieces. When the sun passes through the open spaces in this lattice, it creates shifting shards of light that dapple and striate the collection of cubed buildings, courtyards and pathways that comprise the museum complex. Nouvel’s intention was to summon the winding paths of the traditional Arab souq where, he suggests, ‘loose boards or holes in the walls create lines of sun in the dust in the air, illuminating the goods and customers in the shadows.’¹⁶

Nouvel’s design is in many ways analogous to Pei’s, an attempt to conjure the essential quality of the built environment of the Middle East. Indeed, all the designs for museums and other cultural complexes by architects and their firms tend either to draw inspiration from highly generalised forms and symbols associated with the

¹⁴ Lowe, *Intimacies*, 150.

¹⁵ This is a modification of the biblical saying of Saint Paul “through a glass, darkly,” which W. E. B. Dubois famously adapted in *the Souls of Black Folks*.

¹⁶ Jean Nouvel, “The Museum and the Sea” in *Louvre Abu Dhabi: Birth of a Museum, English Language Edition*, ed. Laurence des Cars (Paris: ADTCA, Musée du Louvre & Skira Flammarion, 2013), 23. The Gulf states have sought to delineate the body politic as the land, sea and people as a unified being, implicitly excluding all that deemed “foreign” (i.e., foreign workers). Pg. 35 of the *Urban Structure Framework Plan*, published by the Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Committee in 2007, opines that ‘[f]or many generations the tribes of Abu Dhabi were unique in that they spent part of each year fishing and pearling from an island base and part of each year farming and ranching in desert oases. The people feel a strong attachment to both water and land and they understand the interface between the two.’

Middle East, or to directly invoke symbols from other parts of the region. Tadao Ando's design for the maritime museum is inspired by the *dhow*, a sailing boat common to the Persian Gulf.¹⁷ Arabic script - motivational poems penned by the emirate's ruler, Muhammad bin Rashid - adorns the metal carapace of the Museum of the Future in Dubai, designed by the South African expatriate Shaun Killa. Though not a museum, Foster + Partners also claim that old Arab cities inform their design for Masdar City¹⁸ with Shibam in Yemen singled out as a key source of inspiration.¹⁹

In his book on Dubai, Ahmed Kanna examines how the imaginary of the *tabula rasa* has been mobilised by Western architects 'going south.'²⁰ When arriving in the Gulf architects may feel liberated from the conservation, construction, and even financial constraints placed upon them in other contexts. These racialised and orientalisating imaginaries of the frontier are not specific to architecture but rather are bound up with the wider geo-economic imaginaries of racial capitalism.²¹ Architecture is, however, itself beset with a series of historically conditioned immanent constraints that are imbricated with race and racialised notions of difference.

Postcolonial historians and cultural theorists have long argued that "liberal modernity" should be understood both as a set of material processes but also as a cultural field to which difference is the constitutive element. Difference itself is argued to be a product of the modernist impulse to order, which assimilates and categorises Otherness as difference.²² Cultural production under conditions of capitalist industrialisation, slavery, and imperial expansion did not, however, merely respond to the congenital changes wrought on society by these processes. Culture was also generative and constitutive of this modernist episteme, indelibly marked by and

¹⁷ Roberto Fabbri, "Identity Lost and Found: Architecture and Identity Formation in Kuwait and the Gulf" in *Gulf Cooperation Council Culture and Identities in the New Millennium*, eds. Magdalena Karolak and Nermin Allam (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 115-134.

¹⁸ Masdar is a smart city in Abu Dhabi.

¹⁹ Gökçe Günel, *Spaceship in the Desert* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

²⁰ Kanna, *City as Corporation*.

²¹ See for example, Tsing, *Friction*.

²² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Lowe, *Intimacies*; Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1991 [1978]). Paradoxically, the modernising gesture generates systemicity and universality in its very categorisations and separations - demarcations of difference only derive their force and significance from their relative position in the global matrix of difference, configured around a single time-space axis.

marking a new, globalising social order predicated on ideas of development and difference.²³

Architecture was no exception to this. Its pioneers maintained that transformations in production, materials, and fabrication techniques demanded new architectural styles and principles to solve the problems of social malaise posed by advanced capitalist society.²⁴ This formal and theoretical radicalism and, more particularly, the will to utilise new materials and elaborate an entirely novel formal language, was saturated in the racialised ideology of so-called “liberal modernity.” On the one hand, it presupposed the highly racialised Enlightenment notions of evolution and progress, while on the other it reproduced the hierarchies of the global order, dividing modernist architectural styles into those appropriate for the developed “universalist” West and those appropriate for the still “particular” elsewhere. Irene Cheng submits that in forcibly rejecting ornamentation and other historically and geographically specific elements, brutalist architecture in the West did not reject the racial theories that underpinned nineteenth century architecture but sublimated them, implicitly suggesting ornamental architectural styles and techniques to be traditional and un-modern.²⁵ This architecture also pathologised the very nature of difference, the universalist and utilitarian pretensions of its functional aesthetic prescribing assimilation and similarity. In locations outside the West, architectural modernism was similarly beset by racialisations, relying on nationalist or regionalist conceptions of appropriate form and material.²⁶

Postmodern architecture emerged in response to the failure of modernism to deliver on its racially inflected infrastructural promise of social improvement and advancement. Much of the impetus and vitality of early postmodernism came from the drive of its practitioners and theorists to distance themselves from the salvatory convictions of the generation that preceded them. The particular historical moment

²³ Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism*. See also Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007).

²⁴ Diane Ghirardo, “Past or Post Modern in Architectural Fashion,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 39, no. 4 (1986): 2–6.

²⁵ Irene Cheng “Structural Racism in Modern Architectural Theory” in *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, eds. Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 134 - 152.

²⁶ See also Mark Crinson, *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson, eds. *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

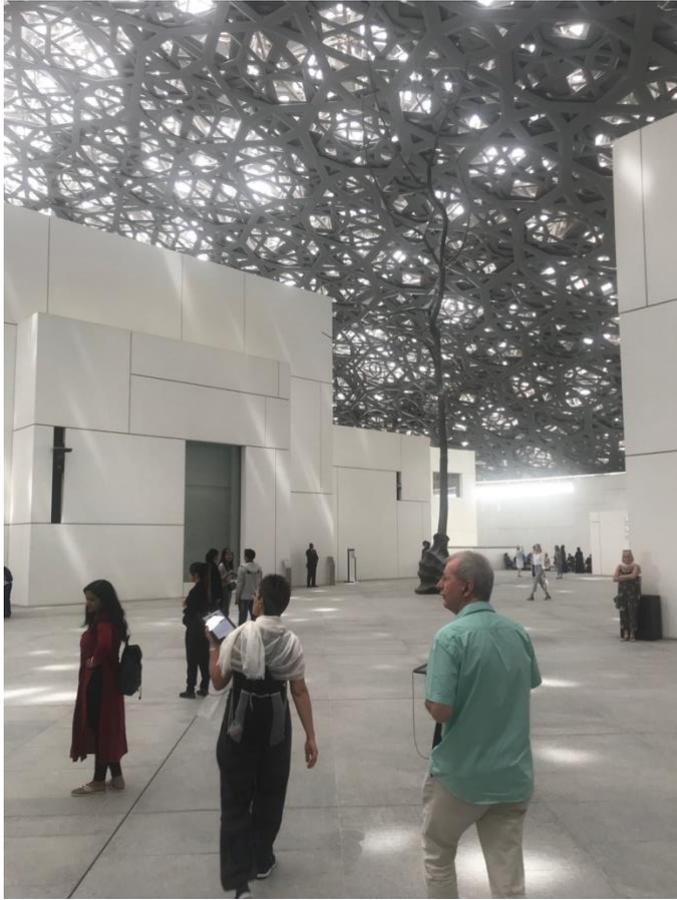


Figure 3.1 Concourse under the dome, Louvre Abu Dhabi, Saadiyat Cultural District, Photo by author



Figure 3.2 Still from Official Louvre Abu Dhabi Timelapse 2009 – 2017, EarthCam

that augured the disillusionment with modernist ideas also witnessed radical transformations in construction technologies. It became possible for buildings to be erected completely independently of architects. Developments occurring outside architecture thus took what began as a drive within architecture to carve out a privileged intellectual domain of design to its logical conclusion, entirely depriving architects of tangible buildings themselves.²⁷ To recover the relevance of their discipline architects therefore positioned themselves as those uniquely in command of style and aesthetics. There are multiple branches of postmodernism - primary among them the two branches Diane Ghirardo identifies as theoretical and stylistic postmodernism.²⁸ Despite a coruscating indictment of stylistic postmodernism - 'stylistic Postmodernism's exclusive preoccupation with style can be seen as a pathetic acceptance of the trivialisation of the profession' - she nevertheless diagnoses a common nostalgia for architecture's representational capacity and ability to make meaning across both streams. The defining formal features of architecture after modernism - in which one would include Pei's later works - is an attempt to reinstate both ornamentation, and the elements of historical and cultural specificity jettisoned by their modernist predecessors.²⁹

Ghirardo also posits that in its attempt to resolve the crisis provoked by the failure of modernism, postmodernism entirely abandons any view of the discipline as an adjunct to a broader social or political programme. It is in such a context that one must understand the unsavoury comments by Zaha Hadid that she had 'nothing to do with the workers' and that it was not 'her duty as an architect to look at it'³⁰ when

²⁷ This merely completed a process that had been underway since architecture emerged in the fifteenth century, evolving in tandem with the secularisation of power, and its performance and monumentalisation in civic architecture. Crystallising architecture as a distinct discipline involved figuring the architect as the professional in command of the formal, aesthetic dimensions of building, as distinct from artists, engineers, and builders. With this ghettoisation of knowledge, the field of architectural knowledge and intervention was defined and limited to the imaginative act of "design," conceived in the mind, and rendered in architectural drawings and models. Architecture's emergence as a discipline therefore involved the conversion of buildings from situated, socially embedded, affective contexts, to cerebral spaces conceived and experienced exclusively in the visual register. See Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980).

²⁸ Ghirardo, "Post Modern."

²⁹ As Ghirardo argues, stylistic postmodernism cobbles together different historical periods in a form of ludic and ironic pastiche and kitsch. The theoretical justification given for this highly stylised and irony laden vocabulary is that the buildings thus acknowledge the limits of architecture, and reveal the fundamental contingency of history and power.

³⁰ Hadid quoted in James Riach, "Zaha Hadid Defends Qatar World Cup Role Following Migrant Worker Deaths," *The Guardian*, 25 February 2014.

confronted with the hundreds of migrant construction worker deaths in Qatar since construction began on her design for the al-Wakrah football stadium. This abdication of responsibility for the economic and political relations in which built environments and construction are enmeshed by architects and their firms is a pernicious consequence of the retreat from architecture as a strategic enactment of a political agenda. Thorny questions of racially differentiated capital accumulation - both symbolic and material - predicated on a segregated labour market, as well as racialised forms of memorialisation, commemoration and erasure can be entirely sidestepped by way of these intellectual justifications.

In this new architectural style shorn of politics, culture simply becomes a part of the palette. Although it has been proposed, in part by postmodern architects themselves, that this ludic interplay reveals the contingency of culture and difference, when situated in the context of postmodernism's broader retreat from politics and political commentary, superficial stylistic engagements with culture end up as mere racial caricatures.³¹ Moreover, in their predominantly self-imposed confinement to - indeed celebration of - superficial cultural elements, postmodern architects are willingly conscripted into the economic and political arsenal of their clients.

This is the context of the turn to heavily aestheticised symbolic architecture of the emerging cultural infrastructure in the Gulf. Whatever their aesthetic accomplishments, the complexes and their architects evidence the basic logic of orientalist thinking, reducing deeply socially enmeshed and varied assemblages such as Islam or "Arabness" to caricatures based on the perceptions of foreign architects. Orientalist power is not merely reductive, however, it is also generative. The racialised symbolic register of museum complexes in the Gulf thus serve an explicitly historiographic function, inscribing (geo-)political constellations of power in steel, glass, and aggregate, and prefiguring specific configurations of the future, rooted in a version of the Gulf and its culture imagined by these starchitects.

Until the latter half of the twentieth century, the Arabian Peninsula existed on the political and economic fringes of the Middle East. However, pitched as dimensions of an essential Islamic and/or Arab architecture respectively, these museums become

³¹ Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson, "Introduction" in *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, eds. Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel O. Wilson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 7.

metonyms for the societies to which these traditions are pivotal, cultivating and grafting both ethnic homogeneity and long-standing historical significance onto the Gulf states. These historical and geographic distortions thereby communicate and mediate the changing balance of power in the Middle East region. They arrogate the diverse - and invented - symbolic language and culture of other parts of the Middle East, projecting the power of the Gulf over historic centres of power such as Cairo and Beirut, and position the Gulf as the Middle East's political, historical, and cultural fulcrum. They also paper over the present and historic hybridities of the Gulf states themselves. Historians of the Indian Ocean have shown how tightly interwoven the history of the Gulf is with that of the societies and territories on the eastern side of the Indian Ocean.³²

Reductive architectural invocations of Islam and Arabness also violently obscure or distort the deep and highly uneven political fissures and ruptures that exist within the Gulf states themselves, and between Gulf states and other countries in the Middle East. Sandwiched between the Sheikh Khalifa Grand Mosque and the Ministry of Defence, sits *wabat al-karama* (Oasis of Dignity). Built as a tribute to honour the Emirati soldiers that have died in conflict with Yemen, the monument was designed by the British Pakistani artist Idris Khan, working around the clock with a team of architects and designers. Although this is the first conflict in which the UAE's military has been engaged on the ground and it has suffered at least 120 casualties,³³ as discussed in the introduction, the conflict has wrought untold death and destruction on Yemen. Over one hundred thousand Yemenis have been killed, injured, displaced, and driven into a deep food security crisis, with over five million on the cusp of starvation.

Commemorating and aestheticising the UAE's losses and pain in this manner mourns the toll wrought by the conflict on the joint Saudi-UAE coalition while silencing the extraordinary human cost of the campaign on Yemen. The violence of this commemoration is deepened by the fact that while Yemen's architectural history is being destroyed by the Saudi-Emirati bombing campaign, the Foster + Partners designed Masdar City invokes the Yemeni city of Shibam as the inspiration for its

³² Bishara, *Sea of Debt*; Mathew, *Margins*; Onley, "Informal Empire" and "Politics of Protection."

³³ This figure is taken from Critical Threats, a security monitoring database set up by the neoconservative think tank, the American Enterprise Institute.



Figure 3.3 wahat al-karama #1,
Photo by author



Figure 3.4 wahat al-karama #2,
Photo by author

design. None of the architects working on Masdar had ever been to Shibam due to the conflict with which the country is riven. Their inspiration derived from bird's eye view photographs of the city taken by George Steinmetz that were printed in *the National Geographic* in 2005.³⁴ Thus, in addition to literally colonising the Soqatra Archipelago as outlined in the discussion which prefaced this thesis, the UAE is symbolically colonising Yemen's cultural heritage. It is worth recapitulating that, although not a direct consequence of the war, Shibam was inscribed on the list of World Heritage Sites in Danger in 2015 due to environmental and maintenance factors, the latter of which will no doubt have been severely constrained by the war.

The arrogation of power mediated by the architecture of the Gulf's cultural infrastructure does not merely register at the level of the symbolic. One of the constituent elements of the 'cultural logic of late capitalism'³⁵ in Jameson's lexicon, or of 'supermodernity'³⁶ in Marc Augé's, is the shallow commodification and marketisation of "local" culture. By importing and claiming elements of "local" culture from other parts of the region, albeit highly reduced and distorted elements, these starchitects also enable the further commodification of the urban environment. To compete with one another, as well as with other parts of the Middle East and other emerging metropolises that marshal orientalisations to draw in capital, the Gulf states are keen to pitch themselves as the heartlands of these romanticised, racialised notions of Middle Eastern culture and history. Starchitects therefore contribute, sometimes knowingly, to the marketing efforts of the Gulf states in which they are located.

Using the built environment as an instrument of economic and political power does, however, have a chequered history in the Gulf states. The overhaul of the Gulf's urban environments began in 1940s when Kuwait's ruling Al Sabah family commissioned the British architect Anthony Minoprio to draw a masterplan for the city, which was subsequently implemented with the help of the British ex-army General William Hasted who had been appointed Controller of Development for Kuwait in 1952. At first blush, many welcomed these transformations and the

³⁴ Günel, *Spaceship*, 51–53.

³⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

³⁶ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).

provision of new utilities that accompanied them.³⁷ But, already by the late 1960s, the initial embrace of modern architecture had begun to shade into a nostalgia for both traditional urban and architectural forms and the social arrangements they inscribed. Since then, nostalgia for tradition, the local, and the “authentic” has been a key discourse for the expression of political dissent, used to critique the leadership spearheading the hugely interventionist changes to the urban environment that have bulldozed older built environments and the societal structures they articulated and maintained.

Noura al-Sayeh suggests with regard to Bahrain that ‘[t]he negotiation between modernity and local tradition was never fully resolved; ...it was mostly assimilated as a stylistic movement rather than as a political project; never completely absorbed and only partially consumed.’³⁸ By reinterpreting symbols and forms derived from history and culture writ large, the architecture of these cultural institutions contributes to this stylistic effort to recuperate elements of “tradition” and heal the fractures wrought by the ideologically driven modernisation agenda.³⁹ This recuperation effort is intimately intertwined with generational shifts in the leadership of the Gulf states, as the new generation of leaders attempts to capture and discipline this nostalgia, flattening tradition into symbols of Arabness that remain compatible with the continued high-tech redevelopment of the Gulf’s urban environment.⁴⁰

The political logics underpinning this historical palimpsest and stylistic assimilation are clearly evident in the new National Museum of Qatar which opened in 2019. Like the clasp of a necklace, the Sheikh Abdullah bin Jasim Al Thani Palace, site of the former National Museum which opened in 1978, conjoins two ends of the futuristic semi-circle of cantilevered discs that make up the museum structure. The

³⁷ See Asseel Al-Ragam, “Kuwaiti Architectural Modernity,” 374. Al-Ragam relates how in 1964, the Kuwaiti magazine, *Sawt al-Khalij*, founded by Bakir Ali Yousif Khuraibet, published an article entitled “Phoenicia: A Miracle Happens in Kuwait” which declared that Kuwait is ‘witnessing a nahda... the speed with which this movement is taking place guarantees Kuwait’s position among the advanced nations of the world’; see also Fabbri, “Identity Lost and Found.”

³⁸ Quoted in Fabbri, “Identity Lost and Found,” 122.

³⁹ In a tacit acknowledgement of this discourse, Abu Dhabi’s *Urban Structure Framework Plan* (USFP) speaks insistently of the framework’s role of in guarding against loss: loss of heritage sites, the erosion of the specificity of Emirati social arrangements and structures, and finally, of the destruction of indigenous natural environments and ecosystems. Chap. 4 will address the USFP in more depth.

⁴⁰ See Madawi al-Rasheed, *The Son King* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), for a discussion of MBS’ appointment as the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, to succeed his father, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. The shift to patrilineal succession in some of the Gulf states contradicts the traditional fratrilineal path.

original national museum was the initiative of Sheikh Khalifa, who was deposed in 1972 in a bloodless coup by his son, Sheikh Hamad, and was intended to preserve the ‘evidence of Qatar’s history and the one-time way of her people before it was irrevocably lost.’⁴¹ To celebrate the sea, and display maritime artefacts that had been central to the emirate’s economy and history before oil and gas, a marine area was dredged on the east side of the complex, looking out on the Persian Gulf. The inspiration for Jean Nouvel’s complex, by contrast, is based on the desert rose, a geological curiosity formed as gypsum particles abundant in sand coalesce into crystals. Although the desert rose is indigenous to the Arabian desert, it is not unique to the Gulf, nor has it been central to Qatar’s national symbolism.⁴² The self-contained marina, central to the symbolism of the previous museum, has been filled in.

During my fieldwork, I attended a *majlis* at the Cultural and Scientific Association in Dubai. The attendees were overwhelmingly middle-aged and elderly men, although there was also one woman who attended in addition to myself. Several of the men at the *majlis* described the sense of alienation they felt upon learning that Jean Nouvel’s design for the Louvre Abu Dhabi claimed to be rooted in the architectural vernacular and environment of the region. To them, the building’s volumes, dimensions, and materials felt entirely unfamiliar. Instead, the nod to Arab cultural elements was understood as a disingenuous and artificial attempt to retrieve the sense of place and specificity erased in the massive and rapid development of the Gulf and its cities, without forgoing the state’s objective of commodifying the urban environment.⁴³

⁴¹ Qatar Wizarat al-‘Ilam, *The Qatar National Museum: Its Origins, Concepts and Planning* (Ministry of Information, 1975); see also Mariam Ibrahim Al-Mulla, “The Development of the First Qatar National Museum,” in *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula*, eds. Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 117–125, for a discussion of this museum as a nation-building exercise by Sheikh Khalifa after he deposed his cousin in 1972.

⁴² It should be added here that my argument is not one about an authentic national culture or symbolism. Pearl diving and the marine history conjured by the former museum are as much an invention as the desert rose, erasing, in particular, the histories of the nomadic peoples that lived both inland or tacked between coast and desert. For an expanded version of this argument see Jocelyn Sage Mitchell and Scott Curtis, “Old Media, New Narratives: Repurposing Inconvenient Artifacts for the National Museum of Qatar,” *Journal of Arabian Studies* 8, no. 2 (2018): 208–41.

⁴³ See Oliver Picton, “Usage of the Concept of Culture and Heritage in the United Arab Emirates” for a version of this argument. Though recognising that the impulse to preserve translates an anxiety about the pace of modernisation, Picton somewhat credulously reads the impulse to preserve as a riposte to globalisation, and heritage symbols as “authentic.” See also Exell, “Collecting an Alternative World,” for a version of this argument *à propos* the nostalgia of collectors in Qatar.

Despite the effort to recuperate and incorporate elements of traditional architecture and culture, for those nostalgic for the urban environment before its redevelopment, such as these men, the symbolic language of this wave of museum complexes, refracted through starchitects and their foreign firms, arguably effect a double estrangement. Not only did the pace and scale of the redevelopment erase most of the traces of local history preserved in society and social memory - what historian Pierre Nora calls *milieus de mémoire*⁴⁴ - the attempts to recall and reinstate it are based on orientalist narratives of Arabness and authenticity distorted to serve the interests of the state. Indeed, the reinterpretation of old symbols and their replacement with new symbols of Arabness generated as part of a secular, museum-building agenda indicates a generational pivot in the sources of political authority and legitimacy, from one rooted in notions of tradition and religion, to a secular authority rooted in a muscular, Arabised neoliberal nationalism. Irrespective of the competition at the level of political symbolism, the different phases of erecting cultural infrastructures do resemble one another in the technological implications of their mooring and construction. Much like the designs for earlier cultural institutions necessitated dredging, and a novel palette of materials and techniques, the audacious designs of the new suite of buildings obliged the use of Byzantine computational modelling techniques. Bringing critiques of automation theory to bear on my discussion, I will now move on to examine the political effects of this computational turn in the context of the economic diversification strategies of the Arab Gulf states.

3.2 DESIGNED BY AN ALGORITHM

Both the showpiece architecture of the Gulf's emergent museum infrastructure and the cultural institutions themselves represent a pillar of the GCC states' diversification agenda. Accompanying significant structural reforms driven by IMF and World Bank forecasts about the GCC, these major capital investments are intended to contribute to the leisure offering of these states, increasing their appeal as tourist destinations and

⁴⁴ Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past Volume 1*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

attracting resettlement by skilled workers.⁴⁵ In conscripting spectacular architecture and a cultural offering into the effort to plot the Gulf states on the highly competitive global tourist map, these states are pursuing a formula for economic regeneration and sustainability first piloted in post-industrial cities of the West - what has come to be known as the “Bilbao effect.” Frank Gehry’s design for the Guggenheim Bilbao was hailed as a shimmering titanium-clad example of the possible economic uplift that the marriage of culture, architecture, and tourism could provide.

The Gulf is no stranger to the political and economic power of showstopping architecture. Since the arrival of Western engineering and construction companies, construction - often of the record setting kind - has become a core mechanism through which to symbolise political and economic sophistication and prowess as well as a tool through which regimes in the Gulf, and different factions within these regimes, have sought to establish control, shore up their power, and attract capital.⁴⁶ During the first wave of construction, power was projected in large part through the introduction of novel utilities and infrastructures such as asphalted roads, hospitals and electricity. The British used high visibility infrastructural development programmes in their desperate attempts to stem the tide of Arab-nationalist sentiment coursing through the Gulf states in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁷ Competing infrastructural projects inflected with British imperial and Arab-nationalist agendas were, however, rapidly superseded by a more aggressively competitive preoccupation with architecture, and more specifically with building height, by which point the wings of Arab-nationalist sympathising rulers, bureaucrats and merchants had also been clipped. In 1978, with the opening of the World Trade Centre, Dubai secured the title of the tallest building the region, while in 2010, the inauguration of Burj Khalifa saw it surpass this regional record, achieving the global record of tallest building in the world. Domestically, architectural advancements have communicated that these states are catapulting themselves into a Western-style idea of “modernity.” Internationally, their increasingly iconic buildings

⁴⁵ IMF, “Labor Market Reforms to Boost Employment and Productivity in the GCC” (Report, The International Monetary Fund, 13 November 2013); Sahar Hussain, “Economic Diversification for a Sustainable and Resilient GCC,” Gulf Economic Update, Issue 5 (Report, The World Bank, December 2019).

⁴⁶ Rosie Bsheer, *Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Günel, *Spaceship*; Menoret, *Joyriding*; Reisz, *Showpiece City*.

⁴⁷ Chap. 4 provides a more comprehensive discussion of how urban environments and infrastructures in the Gulf were forged in the conflict between these two political currents.

and high-tech urban environments have helped pitch the Gulf's growing cities and economies onto the global stage, signalling their investment potential and their intention to position themselves as players within the community of powerful states.

What sets museum architecture apart from the earlier uses of architecture as a political and economic instrument is their sheer complexity and the name recognition of their architects. As Sheikh Saud's abandonment of the regionally famous architect Rasim Badran for the world-renowned I. M. Pei indicates, name recognition has become central to the state-building efforts of these cultural complexes. These starchitects, largely trained in the highly aestheticised architectural tradition of stylistic postmodernism, have brought a level of formal complexity and experimentation to their designs such that what they are celebrated for, aside from their aesthetic accomplishments, is their elaborate forms and volumes. Complex design and engineering have thus rapidly become fields in which new structures, and the states that commission them, compete. Although complexity is a far more challenging characteristic to quantify than height,⁴⁸ the building of Dubai's Museum of the Future, is being hailed by many as one of 'the most complex construction projects ever attempted.'⁴⁹ Due to their complexity these cultural institutions, though replete with symbolism, are also acutely technological, and thus their highly sophisticated and intricate designs have a correlate in the engineering process itself.

Computerised design and engineering have long been pillars of architectural practice. A mechanism through which to conjure and toy with design, models are often used in the tendering process and to secure funding. Mainstreamed in the 1980s, Computer Aided Design (CAD) corralled computers into building design, replacing many of the analogue features of the design process including drawing and

⁴⁸ This is not to say that complexity has superseded height as a benchmark of "modernity," and a prefiguration of the future. Height as dimension is unconventional for cultural institutions. However, the competitive pursuit of height remains a preoccupation among those commissioning cultural infrastructures in the Gulf, coexisting and overlapping with other aesthetic expectations and preferences. Snøhetta, the Norwegian firm behind the design for the recently opened Ithra: King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture related to journalist Matthew Teller how ARAMCO demanded that the building at the centre of their geological design, previously low, be elongated. The tower, like an upright pebble pinned precariously in place by the two buildings between which it is sandwiched, now looms over the entire complex. However, despite its imposing profile, this tower is merely part of the broader symbolic universe of the building, the structure of which mythologises oil as the lifeblood of the Saudi state, celebrating its, and by association ARAMCO's, relationship to knowledge and material improvement.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Bains, "Museum of the Future: The Building Designed by an Algorithm," *BBC*, 29 October 2019.

documentation. Architectural scholars Achim Menges and Sean Ahlquist are careful to distinguish this revolution in engineering and architectural practice - a turn to computerisation - from the revolution that would follow in the 2000s with the introduction of computational methods and systems, primary among them building information modelling or BIM.⁵⁰ They explain this difference as turning on the manner of managing and generating information. Whereas computerised methods ‘simply compile[s] or associate[s] given values or sets of values,’ computational methods ‘deduce[s] results from values or sets of values.’⁵¹

The concept of BIM, and its software, have existed since the 1970s, yet architects and engineers have been relatively slow to adopt them. What differentiates BIM from CAD is that, in addition to the three dimensions of width, height, and depth, the BIM process and its compatible software allow for the input of other parameters such as cost, materials, and time, hence the name parametric modelling. Unlike CAD, which produces 2D drawings that are subsequently executed on site, BIM spans the entirety of the building process from concept to occupation, enabling different stakeholders to work collaboratively, and often simultaneously, on a single shared digital 3D model, while details of how to build are extrapolated from the model on the basis of the parameters set. Ownership of the model is handed over during the different phases of the build, from architects and engineers to the contractors and subsequently to the owners. Harnessing the computational power of sophisticated computer software is seen as the inevitable product of the turn toward postmodern architectural styles such as blob architecture and its cousins. To create such unique and free-flowing forms with smooth undulating surfaces,⁵² architecture and engineering repurposed aeronautical and automotive software which had been developed with such shapes in mind. Digital Project, the software that Frank Gehry’s software company, Gehry Technologies, created for use on the Bilbao Guggenheim and his other projects, is based on CATIA V5, a design software developed by the French software corporation Dassault Systèmes SE, which began its life as Dassault Aviation.

⁵⁰ Achim Menges and Sean Ahlquist, eds. *Computational Design Thinking* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011); See also Mario Carpo, *The Second Digital Turn: Design beyond Intelligence* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2017); Nicole Gardner, “New Divisions of Digital Labour in Architecture,” *Feminist Review* 123, no. 1 (2019): 106–125.

⁵¹ Menges and Ahlquist, *Computational Design Thinking*, 10.

⁵² The technical term used to describe such shapes is “curvilinear.”

Technological evangelists within architecture and engineering have been quick to hail the radical potential of BIM and BIM compatible software. In lockstep with communitarian approaches to the internet, which diagnose its possibilities for creating truly collaborative, non-individualised work using open-source materials, in its left-wing variant, celebratory receptions of BIM stress its potential to dissolve the narcissistic ideal of the artist,⁵³ which underpins the producer-consumer relation and architecture's fraught labour model.⁵⁴ The apolitical version of the argument, by contrast, points to BIM's potential in ironing out kinks in advance of the construction process, increasing safety and cost-efficiency throughout the build. By incorporating and storing health and safety and other vital information in a single digital archive, emphasis on which has become increasingly pronounced across much of Europe and America in the wake of disasters such as the Grenfell Fire, BIM is also hailed as a saviour technology - those working in the construction sector are encouraged to refer to the system by the hyperbolic and inescapably modernist terms of "the truth" or "the golden thread."

To realise its dizzyingly elaborate design, and in keeping with imaginaries of the Gulf as a laboratory, Buro Happold, a major British engineering firm incubated in the Gulf,⁵⁵ piloted their use of BIM on the Louvre Abu Dhabi project, for which they were awarded a partial engineering contract. Adopting BIM thus shifted the process away from a linear delivery of the museum buildings, integrating the practice of modelling and abstraction at every stage.⁵⁶ Writing in a special issue on BIM technologies for engineering magazine *the Structural Engineer*, Andy Pottinger, one of the lead Buro Happold engineers on the Louvre build, explains how central the 3D model was to their process: "[i]n recent times we have noticed that the 3D model has become so engrained in our minds that walking around on site as the building takes

⁵³ Carlo Ratti, *Open Source Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015).

⁵⁴ Peggy Deamer, "Introduction" in *The Architect as Worker: Immaterial Labor, the Creative Class, and the Politics of Design*, ed. Peggy Deamer (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), xxvii-xxxvi; Franco Bifo Berardi, "Dynamic of the General Intellect" in *The Architect as Worker*, ed. Deamer (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 3-12.

⁵⁵ The company's first foreign office opened in Saudi Arabia in 1983. They have now also opened offices in Dubai and Abu Dhabi as well as in China, India, the United States, and elsewhere.

⁵⁶ Attempting to counter the digital whiteness of architectural modelling software, Nonscandinavia is a project developed by an independent group of students from the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University, that has created a series of non-white figures for architects and engineers to use in their digital models.

shape is assisted by the way we navigated the model!'.⁵⁷ The firm have since been contracted to engineer other cultural venues in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as well as the Museum of the Future project in the neighbouring emirate of Dubai. To achieve the distinctive torus shape of the Museum of the Future, Tobias Bauly, the principal Buro Happold engineer on the project, describes the rapid up-skilling of his team who had to learn 'BIM fully, and radically change how they work day-to-day'.⁵⁸ A purpose-built algorithm was also developed to design the diagrid - a steel framework to which the metal cladding of the building was attached. As a side note, even at the level of software these structures are shot through with competition. A journalist invited on a guided press tour of the National Museum of Qatar thinks it noteworthy that the building, which opened in 2019, is the 'largest BIM project in the world in terms of project scope and degree of detailing'.⁵⁹

Despite much of the triumphalist noise surrounding BIM and computational design, critiques are already coming out of the woodwork from within architecture itself. Deploying a feminist lens to understand the impact of computational ways of working and technological competencies to architecture, Nicole Gardner⁶⁰ argues that:

'the technocreative imaginaries that locate the potential for disruption and agency in the capacity of technological systems problematically overshadow the ways the socio-organisational contexts of the profession, which are already complexly structured by hierarchies and power dynamics, forcefully shape and influence... how technologies are used'

Building on critiques of architecture's exploitative labour model, and the voluntaristic approach to acquiring computational design skills, she argues that the adoption of computational approaches within architecture and engineering is compounding the profession's gendered hierarchies.⁶¹ Although BIM may have entailed a paradigm-shift

⁵⁷ Andy Pottinger, "BIM on the Louvre Abu Dhabi," *The Structural Engineer*, 91, no. 11 (2013): 73.

⁵⁸ Bains, "Museum of the Future."

⁵⁹ Beth Broome, "National Museum of Qatar by Ateliers Jean Nouvel," *Architectural Record*, 29 April 2019.

⁶⁰ Gardner, "Divisions," 123.

⁶¹ Aside from deepening the already substantial divide that care work introduces into the architectural

in terms of types of work and its operational logics, enthusiastic receptions thereof from both an academic and an on-the-ground, industry perspective overstate its agentive and transformative capacities. Maintaining this promethean vision requires deracinating BIM, and indeed technology writ large, from the messy socio-economic realm from which it emerges and in which it intervenes, reversing the relationship between technology as fundamentally beholden to human endeavour to a situation where humans merely become the vectors of technology's inexorable forward march.⁶²

Legal scholar, Frank Pasquale, terms this process of naturalising technology by placing it in an autonomous realm beyond the social world and critique 'black-boxing'. As Ruha Benjamin explains, 'black-box' is intended in its *double entendre*, as both a device that continuously records information and a 'mysterious object.'⁶³ To this she adds another meaning, black as in racialised blackness, to highlight the quotidian racism that is embedded in technological development, and that works to normalise racialised inequities and white supremacy through its claims to autonomy and thus to race neutrality. Manuel Castells persuasively argues that '[t]he dilemma of technological determinism is probably a false problem, since technology is society, and society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools.'⁶⁴ To put a critical gloss on Haraway's claim that we have always been cyborgs: if technology is and has always been an extension of the human, then it is also indelibly marked by the profoundly hierarchical effects of social technologies like race that govern human relations. Understanding the political logics of the pivot toward BIM and its related software on the construction sites of these new museums in the Arab Gulf states thus requires reading against the grain of the triumphalism that has accompanied its adoption by situating the analysis squarely in the entangled space of political economics and social relations.

workplace, the move to BIM taps into the construction of both logical thinking, and its derived forms in mathematics, science, and technology, as well as grand (as opposed to domestic) design, as inherently masculine traits. See Gardner, "New Divisions."

⁶² In *Race After Technology*, Benjamin, 40-41, quotes the British libertarian journalist and member of the House of Lords Matt Ridley, who offers quite an astonishing example of the techno-mystic determinist viewpoint: '[i]ncreasingly, technology is developing the kind of autonomy that hitherto characterized biological entities ... The implications of this new way of seeing technology – as an autonomous, evolving entity that continues to progress whoever is in charge – are startling. People are pawns in a process. We ride rather than drive the innovation wave. Technology will find its inventors, rather than vice versa.'

⁶³ Benjamin, *Race After Technology*.

⁶⁴ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 5.

Over the last fifteen years, the GCC states have been steadily liberalised through the introduction of substantial pieces of legislation to reform their business environments. Among the changes made are the introduction of competition and bankruptcy laws in Bahrain, a competition regime in Saudi Arabia, and laws governing the onshore foreign ownership of businesses and property in the UAE. A recent World Bank report on the GCC states celebrates the steps towards economic liberalisation and the creation of a hospitable environment for foreign business as substantial strides.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, these organisations strike a word of caution about overstating these transformations, as the Gulf states continue to be plagued by stagnant productivity rates and a consequent heavy reliance on migrant and internationally outsourced labour (see Figure 3.1).⁶⁶ While one might question the World Bank and IMF’s prescriptions for the precise shape of the requisite structural adjustment, it nevertheless provides a useful context for thinking through the objective of using this suite of high-tech museum designs as part of the programme for economic diversification and regeneration.

Beyond debunking the futuristic sci-fi utopias to which optimistic automation theorists are in thrall, Aaron Benanav has provided a critique of the economic rationale that underpins the theory of automation and of which the techno-creative imaginaries specific to architecture and engineering are part and parcel.⁶⁷ Silicon Valley vanguardists believe that only technology contains the solutions to the knot of global problems such as climate change, poverty, and racism, often underwritten by a deep investment in liberal values, and libertarian notions of freedom and the need for government regulation not to intrude on the work of big tech.⁶⁸ Accelerationist arguments from the left, rooted in the Marxist idea of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and post-scarcity, advocate for a left-reclamation of technological innovation on the basis of its ability to turbocharge production. Under conditions of

⁶⁵ These extend to experiments in the merger between technology and urbanism, often called the smart city, of which there are now several examples in the Gulf: NEOM and the Line in Saudi Arabia, and Masdar in UAE primary among them. For discussions of these projects see Günel, *Spaceship*, and Séamus Malekafzali, “Neom - The Line to Oblivion,” *Séamus Malekafzali* (blog), 14 January 2021.

⁶⁶ IMF, “Labor Market Reforms”; IMF, “Economic Prospects and Policy Challenges for the GCC Countries” (Report, The International Monetary Fund, 10 December 2020); Hussain, “Diversification for a Sustainable and Resilient GCC.”

⁶⁷ Aaron Benanav, *Automation and the Future of Work* (London: Verso, 2020); and “Technology Is Unlikely to Create Prosperity,” *Boston Review*, 20 May 2021.

⁶⁸ For a discussion of the political persuasions of Silicon Valley see Benjamin, *Rave After Technology*.

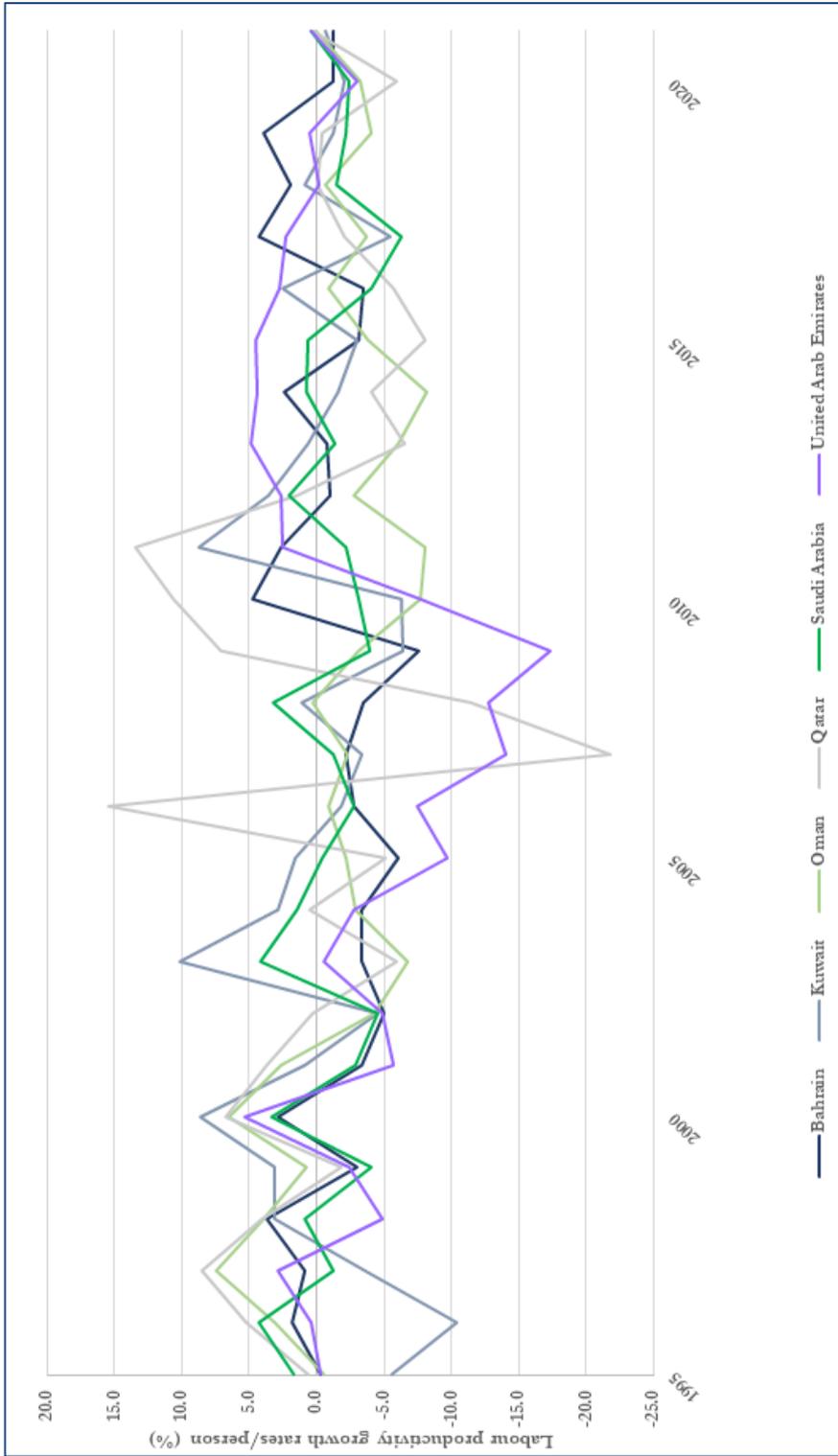


Figure 3.5 Labour productivity growth rates in the GCC, 1995-2021
 (Source: The Conference Board, Total Economy Database, April 2021 Edition)

abundance and minimal work, seemingly socialist provisions such as Universal Basic Income would become essential.⁶⁹ Yet, as sceptics have been quick to point out, Universal Basic Income is also part of the roadmap to the future offered by libertarian automation theorists and practitioners, largely because of its capacities to break worker power and further attenuate unions.

Benanav takes to task the optimistic claims around automation and technological development on the basis of the substantial evidence that there is a very long distance yet to travel before we are anywhere near achieving full automation, particularly in the service sector, into which those automated out of jobs in other professions have been pushed. Relatedly, but more central to Benanav's overall argument, is his upending of the assumed relationship between technology and increased productivity, and thus its role in expanding the 'reserve army of labour.' On the basis of an analysis of the economic data of late-capitalist, ostensibly post-industrial states, he claims that considered through the equation domestic output over employment (the total number of workers), productivity has in fact been falling since the digital revolution despite technology's promise of boosting productivity. In their hopeful desire to believe in an automated future as a panacea, automation theorists have tried to explain away the 'productivity paradox.' Focusing on global increases in manufacturing and exports, they fail to attend to its relative decline since the 1970s due to a cocktail of industrial overcapacity, profit driven research and development, and the proliferation of 'underemployment' (i.e., high employment levels in precarious and unproductive work).

For Benanav this wilful blindness impedes an acknowledgement that social problems are simply too intractable to be outsourced entirely to even the most sophisticated technologies in the pipeline; rather they need collective social solutions that enlist labour augmentation technologies. Moreover, overstating the ruptural impact of automated technologies on work, obscures the fact that though the nature of work might have changed, neither are we moving to a post-work future, nor toward an abolition of labour-based exploitation; not only do the basic mechanisms for

⁶⁹ See for example Aaron Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2019); Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work* (London: Verso, 2015).

exploiting labour persist, they have in fact been deepened by technology in ways that cannot eventually be automated away as left-wing accelerationists would have it.

To return to the point of departure for this discussion, namely the positioning of this suite of museums as a cornerstone of the Gulf states' imaginaries of a post-oil sustainable future: when considered in the context of Benanav's arguments against the backdrop of already stagnant productivity growth rates, looking to what I term 'archi-technical fixes' to solve the economic predicaments of the Gulf states, will only deepen critical and long-standing problems around productivity in the Gulf. The rapid up-skilling that Buro Happold's Tobias Bauly describes as necessary for the Museum of the Future will place a bridging of the current racialised divide between public and private sectors even further out of reach. This would require a slow and incremental investment in the local workforce *as a whole* (i.e., abandoning the highly racialised immigration and employment regime and naturalising much of the workforce)⁷⁰ and a drive to reduce income inequality, not a strategy driven by the outsourcing of technical work to foreign companies that have a vested commercial interest in developing software and skills that allow them to effectively dominate the global market in architecture and engineering. Making technical architecture central to the diversification effort will therefore further entrench the current racial segregation of the labour market with its associated challenges of sluggish productivity. Beyond reinscribing the existing political-economic system, architectural and engineering technologies also affect the shape and political logics of the transnational construction sector as a whole.

During a complex build, the process typically involves the architect and engineers collaborating closely on the initial BIM model, developing what is referred to as tender information (i.e., the level of detail and information required for the contractor to price a design and guarantee that it is deliverable). Once a contract has been awarded, the contractor's engineering team will take over ownership of the BIM model and undertake due diligence and any necessary remodelling with help from the external engineers. Toby Clark, a senior engineer at ARUP⁷¹ who has worked on projects in the Gulf, suggested that the process of transferring ownership of the BIM

⁷⁰ See Wells, "Construction."

⁷¹ Much like Buro Happold, ARUP have been heavily involved in construction projects in the Gulf, with offices in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

model from the often Western-based architecture and engineering firms to the contractors operating on the ground could be a slightly clumsy process due to the lower levels of BIM literacy among the construction companies' management teams. Clark gestures toward the foreign outsourcing of the majority of the pre-tender design and engineering to Western firms, a point which he later confirmed in our discussion, indicating that even where companies have local offices, as do both ARUP and Buro Happold, the majority of the work is undertaken from their Western offices.

The link between the move towards digital and computational ways of working and its foreign outsourcing is well established. Even though this does enable some workers to undertake forms of labour market arbitrage, undercutting local workers while exploiting the relative difference between wages and living costs, at the structural level, the effect of deterritorialisation has been to weaken labour across the board. Bargaining power and the scope for political association are both reduced, while multiplying the corporate opportunities for value capture and exploitation by way of geographically diffuse recruitment.⁷² Still more pertinent to this discussion is the tendency of digitisation and computer-driven outsourcing to allow for workers to be kept at a remove from 'core business processes, hindering flow from the core to the periphery thus perpetuating rather than erasing skill and capability disparities.'⁷³ Architecture has already seen an increase in the outsourcing of tasks such as drafting, rendering and model-making to 'distant countries,'⁷⁴ while the work deemed more important, namely the conceptual "creative" work continues to be located in the core.

A great deal of research, much of it within critical legal studies and socio-technical studies, has shown how technical and legal infrastructures work to naturalise racialised and gendered discourses within the labour market that are necessary to the continuous remaking of the structure of late capitalism.⁷⁵ Purportedly dispassionate

⁷² Mark Graham, Isis Hjorth, and Vili Lehdonvirta, "Digital Labour and Development: Impacts of Global Digital Labour Platforms and the Gig Economy on Worker Livelihoods," *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research* 23, no. 2 (2017): 135–62; Harvey, *Spaces*; Erik Swyngedouw, "Excluding the Other: The Contested Production of a New "Gestalt of Scale" and the Politics of Marginalisation," in *Society, Place, Economy: States of the Art in Economic Geography*, eds. Roger Lee, and Jane Willis (London: Arnold, 1997), 167-176.

⁷³ Graham et al., "Digital Labour and Development," 151; see also Carlo Pietrobelli and Roberta Rabbellotti, "Global Value Chains Meet Innovation Systems: Are There Learning Opportunities for Developing Countries?," *World Development* 39, no. 7 (2011): 1261–69.

⁷⁴ Deamer, "Introduction," xxviii.

⁷⁵ Often referred to as hard and soft infrastructures. See Hannah Appel, *The Licit life of Capitalism: US*

notions such as skill level and competencies facilitate the argument that the market is merely following its natural laws of economisation and efficiency, awarding contracts based on the differential distribution of skills in the global economy. However, these supposedly neutral ideas in fact operate as proxies for both racialised and gendered biases, and the continued association of masculinity and whiteness with techno-creativity and managerial competence.⁷⁶ Thus while the majority of the building contracts on the Louvre Abu Dhabi were awarded to companies headquartered in the Gulf, almost all the engineering and design contracts were awarded to Western specialist companies. The contract for engineering, manufacturing, and assembling the 7,850 unique steel and aluminium stars that comprise the building's intricate dome was awarded to the Austrian steel and glass specialists, Waagner Biro, who have also been behind the the (re-)design of other notable cultural venues including the Great Court at the British Museum and the Sydney Opera House.⁷⁷ Waagner Biro subcontracted the German company, elumatec AG, who specialise in what is termed “intelligent machinery” for manufacturing steel and aluminium. With a partner company in the UAE, elumatec installed two SBZ 151 Flexium+ intelligent profile machining centres - the industry term for this type of manufacturing machinery - in Abu Dhabi. The machines are controlled using the eluCAD software. Data files with instructions for these machines were developed in elumatec's German office and subsequently provided to the local partners, with occasional factory visits from the German elumatec team.

Moving to more complex architecture, and the concomitant increased role for computational design and automated manufacturing in the construction process, thus facilitates the uneven distribution of contracts in the international realm, with “skilled” contracts, and especially skilled design contracts, awarded disproportionately to

Oil in Equatorial Guinea (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); Cowen, *Deadly*; Khalili, *Sinews*; Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and *Carbon*. For an early theorisation of the relationship between violence and the shift from political rationality to technical rationality see Frankfurt School texts such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1995 [1944]); Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 1947).

⁷⁶ See Appel, *Licit*.

⁷⁷ Waagner Biro declared bankruptcy in 2018, citing non-payment by their clients for the Louvre Abu Dhabi as one of the reasons for their insolvency. While under administration several of their subsidiaries were liquidated. See Catherine Hickley, “Austrian Company Behind Louvre Abu Dhabi Dome is Insolvent after Non-Payment,” *The Art Newspaper*, 23 November 2018 [Online].

Western companies. The arrival of machines has not, however, eliminated labour from the construction site. Rather, the two continue to coexist with construction workers undertaking the fiddly and often risky tasks that cannot be automated, as well as operating the heavy machinery. Toby Clark, the engineer at ARUP, also suggested that there were extremely gifted young employees on the engineering teams of the local contractors operating in the Gulf. Like most of the on-site workforce, these engineers were almost invariably from the Indian subcontinent. He described how, despite their advanced skills, the deeply hierarchical, deferential workplace culture meant the engineers employed by local contractors were excluded from decision-making, with on-site managers, usually also from South Asia, treating workers badly across the board.

The tiered allocation of contracts and responsibility according to geography also confirms the suggestion that outsourcing strengthens core-periphery dynamics, with secondary engineering conducted in-country and primary design and engineering done elsewhere. Moreover, the existence of highly skilled engineers from South Asia working in the Gulf indicates that it is not purely a deficit of “skill” that prevents contracts being awarded to companies in the Global South but also the racialised black-boxing of architectural technologies, biases that prop up white supremacist ideas about the West as the crucible of the visionary intellect. Such a division of labour also perpetuates the false binary between thinking and physical work, where only those undertaking the latter are construed as workers.⁷⁸

In architecture, technology has turbocharged this chimerical divide in as much as the ability to design relatively complicated buildings entirely independently of architect has further necessitated the need for the discipline to root itself principally in aesthetics and design, underpinned by the idea of an architect in its purest form as an “artist.” It is this idea that licences the discipline’s exploitative labour model in its Western capitals, with architects, particularly junior architects, encouraged to accept long hours, poor pay, and the caprice of their senior colleagues for the privilege of working in such a rarefied, vocational profession.⁷⁹ There is perhaps no better indication of the precarious yet wilful identification of architecture with the figure of

⁷⁸ For critiques of this divide see autonomist theory.

⁷⁹ Deamer, ed. *Architect as Worker*, Gardner, “New Divisions.”

the artist, and its disavowal of the worker, than in their actively sidestepping the exploitation of construction workers in the Gulf. Peggy Deamer, a practising architect and Professor Emerita of Yale's School of Architecture, recalls a campaign called 'Who Builds Your Architecture?' Launched by two architects working in conjunction with HRW, the campaign focused on the abuse of construction workers in the Gulf.⁸⁰ Per Deamer, the campaign could not convince a single architect working on projects in the region to sign a petition pressing their clients for better construction protocols, to take part in talks on the issue, or to intercede on behalf of construction workers in any other way.⁸¹ Ironically, this was done by Gulf Labor Artists' Coalition, a group comprising *bona fide* artists instead.⁸² The next and final section of this chapter therefore focuses on this campaign and the ways that the raced spatial dynamics of the Gulf's highly international construction sector and art world create scope for acts of resistance and solidarity while simultaneously enabling the narrative arcs that militate against challenges to the Gulf's highly exploitative immigration regime.

3.3 NEEDING SPACE

The growth of the Gulf as a core site of the global construction industry and of architectural innovation has spurred the self-fulfilling neoliberal imaginary of the Gulf as a space of turbocharged development and unconstrained possibility. When describing his request that the Museum of Islamic Art be built on a man-made island, rather than the plot of land on the corniche earmarked by the Qatar Investment Authority, I. M. Pei gestures somewhat coyly towards this sense of the limitless possibility: 'I asked if it might not be possible to create my own site. This was very selfish of me of course, but I knew that in Qatar it is not too complicated to create landfill.'⁸³ Although he attempts to strike a self-effacing note, it is not himself that Pei effaces, but rather the abundance of migrant construction workers engaged on the

⁸⁰ The campaign was also involved in Gulf Labor.

⁸¹ Deamer, "Introduction," xxix–xxx.

⁸² The irony of this is not lost on Deamer. She writes imploringly, '[h]ow could artists, with less professional security, more easily identify with indentured workers than did architects? How ironic that if architects thought they were outside the work/labor discourse because what they did was art or design instead of "work" per se, that artists themselves didn't abdicate the social responsibility that accompanies the self-identification as a laborer.' See Deamer, "Introduction," xxx.

⁸³ Jodidio, *Museum of Islamic Art*, 43.

project. It is the biopolitical super-exploitation of their labour, and not innovations in technology and machinery, that make feats such as this major intervention into the landscape ‘not too complicated.’

Millions of construction workers, the majority of whom come from the countries on the eastern side of the Indian Ocean - Pakistan, India, Bangladesh as well as the Philippines - currently reside and work in the Gulf. The workers engaged in construction on Saadiyat Island earn an average of USD300 to USD320 a month.⁸⁴ Although many workers make their way to the Gulf illegally, most arrive through the *kafala* system, a work permit scheme through which labour is imported to the GCC states. Under the system, which has its roots in the system of sponsorship and labour bondage instituted by the British colonial administrators of Bahrain,⁸⁵ the legal right to work within a certain territory is provided to the worker via a citizen-sponsor. Under the system, exit visas must be granted to workers by their employers, and workers are prohibited from changing employers until the term of their sponsorship expires or written consent is given. For a fee, citizen-sponsors are supposed to guarantee that the workers under their sponsorship meet the terms stipulated by their work permits. These fees are supposed to be paid by the employer on behalf of their employee. In practice, however, fees are imposed on workers themselves, usually via recruitment companies operating in the feeder countries. Recruitment fees range from approximately USD1200 to USD3000. To afford these fees, migrant workers overwhelmingly contract loans from banks, migrant associations, or informal lenders in the community. Accounting for the variations in interest rates, this debt burden is paid off over an average of two to four years.⁸⁶ Given the meagre salaries paid to workers and the high risk of injury in the workplace, the *kafala* system often leads to *de facto* forms of debt bondage.⁸⁷ Workers are also particularly vulnerable to exploitation under the system as it involves the wholesale outsourcing of the

⁸⁴ Gulf Labor, “Observations and Recommendations,” in *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor*, ed. Andrew Ross (New York: O/R Books, 2015), 168. This income data was collected by Gulf Labor during two separate fieldwork trips to the UAE in 2014.

⁸⁵ AlShehabi, “Policing Labour”; Gardner, *Strangers*; Onley, *Arabian Frontier*.

⁸⁶ Paula Chakravartty and Dhillon Natasha, “Gulf Dreams for Justice: Migrant Workers and New Political Futures,” in *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor*, ed. Andrew Ross (New York: O/R Books, 2015), 48.

⁸⁷ AlShehabi et al., eds. *Transit States*; Buckley et al., “Migrant Work”; Buckley, “Bachelor”; Chakravartty and Dhillon, “Gulf Dreams”; Gardner, *Strangers*; HRW, “Island”; Longva, *Walls*.

immigration regime and its policing to the citizenry of the GCC states, making migrant workers beholden to the whimsy of their employers. This total dependency is only deepened by the systemic bias towards employer-citizens within the courts, meaning workers are loathe to seek legal redress for abuses faced in the workplace or for unlawful termination.⁸⁸

Additional pieces of legislation have been introduced across all the GCC states that operate alongside and intersect with the *kafala* system, in part as a response to pressure brought to bear on Gulf states due to the visibility of high profile construction projects such as this suite of museums.⁸⁹ In 2004, the UAE enacted a summertime ban on working on construction sites between the hours of 12:30 and 15:00, which a 2018 report by Jill Wells for the ILO suggests is ‘seemingly enforced.’⁹⁰ All six countries have also introduced an electronic wage protection system intended to guard against non-payment of wages. Current labour law also proscribes recruitment fees, but the practice remains widespread for a clutch of reasons, in particular its legality in feeder countries such as India and Pakistan, and the lack of bilateral agreements on the matter.

In 2020 Qatar abolished the *kafala* system and, while figures suggest that over 200,000 workers have since moved jobs, there are also reports that super-exploitation remains rife.⁹¹ There are, however, currently no indications that any of the other GCC states intend to do away with the *kafala* system⁹² for the primary reason that it is the cornerstone of the political bargain struck by the state with its citizenry.⁹³ In allowing citizens to leverage their sponsorship capacities as a market resource, the state ensures

⁸⁸ See Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf, “Contract Labour and Debt Bondage in the Arab Gulf states. Policies and Practices within the *Kafala* System” in *Bonded Labour: Global and Comparative Perspectives (18th – 21st Century)*, eds. Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf et al. (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), 163-189; Longva, *Walls*, see especially, 84-93; Wells, “Construction.”

⁸⁹ Sarah Leah Whitson, “Foreword,” in *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor*, ed. Andrew Ross (New York: O/R Books, 2015), 7-10.

⁹⁰ Wells, “Construction,” 9.

⁹¹ See Pete Pattison’s reporting in *the Guardian*.

⁹² Wells, “Construction.”

⁹³ Chapter Four in Longva, *Walls*, 77-111, begins to flesh out this idea but falls short of analysing the relationship between the system and non-productive rent extraction. See most of the essays in *Transit States*, eds. Alshehabi et al., for an analysis of the *kafala* system as income generation; in “A Politics of Non-Recognition? Biopolitics of Arab Gulf Worker Protests in the Year of Uprisings,” *Interface* 4, no. 1 (2012): 146–64, Ahmed Kanna also suggests that sponsorship should be understood principally as a biopolitical technique, continually enacting the sovereignty of the state and its body politic vis-à-vis its migrant population. Kanna’s argument has some commonalities with the forms of biopolitical debility that Jasbir K. Puar describes in the *The Right to Maim* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

a substantial revenue stream for its citizens. Tethering work and citizenship in this manner yields a political structure that Anh Nga Longva famously defined as ‘ethnocracy’ but which might more clearly be understood as a particular arrangement of racial capitalism in which, as the last section alluded to, racialisations define your position within the state along a series of oppositions: citizen/migrant; employer/employee; sponsor/sponsored; high skilled/low skilled; propertied/renter.⁹⁴ This racialised ‘double exclusion’ is the basic social relation in the Gulf. On one side, a precariat of cheap, infinitely replaceable foreign labourers drawn largely from poorer countries on the Eastern periphery of the Indian Ocean, and a white-collar workforce, largely referred to as expats unlike their blue-collar counterparts, both excluded from citizenship. On the other, a rich and small citizenry who have not, historically, participated in the private labour market.⁹⁵ It is also this highly racialised and spatialised arrangement of the labour market that has enabled ‘the Gulf’s ascension as a core zone within the global economy,’⁹⁶ facilitating the imaginary Pei invokes.

White-collar workers like Pei are not alone in having imbibed these narratives of possibility. Despite their systematic oppression being central to construction booms in the Gulf, and consequently to the durability of this imaginary, migrant labourers and domestic workers continue to appropriate and adapt these narratives to determine their actions and adjudicate the range of options open to them.⁹⁷ Motivated by the guarantee of work and the hope of enrichment, workers from the main feeder countries continue to migrate to the Gulf countries chasing what Paula Chakravartty and Nitasha Dhillon term “Gulf Dreams.”⁹⁸ Among those who have returned from the Gulf, the most common sentiment is not a sense of grievance at the exploitation suffered but one of ‘pride at having worked overseas and delivered enhanced opportunities for their

⁹⁴ Longva suggests that the three identitarian distinctions around which the Kuwaiti politics of exclusion was formulated were Kuwaiti/non-Kuwaiti, Arab/non-Arab, and Muslim/non-Muslim. As this thesis shows, although Longva laid some of the theoretical foundations for thinking through the centrality of exclusion, employment, and citizenship to the political economy of the Arab Gulf states, this set of binaries cannot capture the complicated racialisations produced symbiotically with the international labour market, nor the racialised overtures efforts to economically diversify away from oil involve. See Longva, *Walls*, 45.

⁹⁵ Chakravartty and Dhillon, “Gulf Dreams,” 40.

⁹⁶ Hanieh, *Capitalism and Class*, 54.

⁹⁷ Kanna, *Corporation*, 18.

⁹⁸ Chakravartty and Dhillon, “Gulf Dreams,” 47.

children and, in some cases, their communities as a whole.⁹⁹ To ameliorate the lives of their families and communities, these workers nevertheless shoulder substantial risks.

Several organisations and groups have been working concertedly to puncture the bloated imaginary that motivates both white- and blue-collar migrant workers, and which the Arab Gulf states are eager to maintain. In exposing the exploitative labour relations that underpin this imaginary, and levelling its political and moral burden at the Western organisations that benefit from this system, these groups have been attempting to secure improvements to workers' rights and protections in the Gulf. One such group is the coalition of artists, academics and activists, Gulf Labor Artists' Coalition (hereafter Gulf Labor). The only death that has been officially confirmed during the construction of the museums that comprise the Saadiyat Cultural District was a consequence of Gulf Labor's investigations. Although the 28-year-old worker from Pakistan was killed on 8th June 2015, AFM only confirmed that a worker had died on the construction site of the Louvre Abu Dhabi after Gulf Labor revealed the death.¹⁰⁰

The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (GAD) has been the focus of Gulf Labor's organising. When I visited the Saadiyat Cultural District in April 2019 only the foundations of the stalled GAD had been laid, though in May of that year it was announced that construction on the museum would resume. The influential Lebanese "Post-War" artist, Walid Raad, had, however, been made aware of the GAD approximately a decade prior to my visit, when the project was still incipient. He had been contacted by Thomas Krens, the controversial director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, to ask if Raad would propose a design for the institution's new Abu Dhabi outpost. Although Raad did come up with some ideas, his enthusiasm for the project quickly ebbed.

The germ of Gulf Labor was thus a panel discussion about the project that Raad organised for the Lebanese contemporary art institution Askhal Alwan's annual conference in Beirut. Raad conceived the panel, which took place in April 2010, as a platform to kickstart a discussion about the status and function of a UAE franchise of this major institution, and its effects on the regional art scene and its practitioners.

⁹⁹ Chakravartty and Dhillon, "Gulf Dreams," 50.

¹⁰⁰ In a 2009 report, HRW suggest there is a severe problem of deaths on construction sites being systematically under-reported.

Andrew Ross, an academic at New York University (NYU), was invited because of his involvement with the campaign, NYU Coalition for Fair Labour. Using NYU's internal communities of conscience, coupled with the moral burden carried by the NYU brand, the campaign pressured the parent institution by shining a light on the egregious exploitation of the migrant workers contracted to build the NYU Abu Dhabi campus.

Because of Raad's contact with Krens, the initial organisers knew that the Guggenheim was to have a regional focus on modern and contemporary art from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. The original panel included many artists from the region whose works would have logically formed part of the collection that the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi was hoping to build. They therefore determined to use a similar tactic to NYU Coalition for Fair Labour. By assembling a community of conscience, they sought to stymie the organisation's early attempts to build a collection of modern and contemporary works by artists from the region. The group's first public action was to publish an online petition calling on artists to boycott the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi until the foundation secured 'contractual guarantees that will protect the rights of workers employed in the construction and maintenance of its new branch museum in Abu Dhabi.'¹⁰¹

Over time, the group boiled down to a central, albeit informal, organising committee who determined strategy and tactics, and attended negotiations with the Guggenheim. As they comprised many artists, Gulf Labor were clear from the outset that any direct actions they took had to be beautiful. This central organising committee and its offshoots were responsible for multiple spectacular actions. The Frank Lloyd Wright designed Guggenheim building on New York's Fifth Avenue offered the perfect stage for direct actions that were intended to be at once politically and visually arresting. On several occasions, the group flung leaflets into the building's cavernous inner atrium. During these actions, visitors to the museum amassed along the parapet of the spiral ramp gallery that coils uninterrupted around the central rotunda from ground floor to skylight to witness these interruptions. Negotiations between Gulf Labor and the Guggenheim, on the other hand, took place in the Foundation's headquarters in downtown New York. Gulf Labor sent a delegation from the core group to each meeting. On the museum side, meetings were attended by several of its

¹⁰¹ At the time of writing the petition had 2515 signatories.

senior staff including, among others, its director, Richard Armstrong,¹⁰² senior curator, Nancy Spector, and curators Suzanne Cotter and Reem Fadda, both of whom had been specially appointed to the Abu Dhabi project. A PR team was also present and representatives from the Abu Dhabi Tourism Development & Investment Company (TDIC) (now the Department of Culture and Tourism) were skyped in.

In September 2010, the TDIC published its Employment Practices Policy for all of its projects on Saadiyat followed by the publication of a TDIC/Guggenheim Joint Statement of Shared Values. Despite such promising early signs – the ‘solid provisions’¹⁰³ of these documents as well as the privately expressed sympathies of the Guggenheim staff with the group’s objectives – these meetings were largely intractable, yielding minimal results. The only idea for which the Guggenheim exhibited any enthusiasm was Gulf Labor’s proposal that the artists in the group pool together some artwork to be sold, the profits of which could be used to write off the recruitment debt of all workers on the project. With an estimated USD5 - 10 million the total debt for all workers on the Saadiyat Island could be cleared, a small figure relative to the fees paid to the Guggenheim for its franchise (USD115 million) and the gross costs of building the institution. The plan collapsed when the Guggenheim refused Gulf Labor’s suggestion that the foundation should amass these funds itself by selling off some of its stock. A new suite of demands was subsequently sent to the management of the Guggenheim, an elaboration of the original demands that the Guggenheim take responsibility for the construction workers on the project and ensure the appointment of an external monitor. They demanded that a bonus and debt settlement fund be created to give each Guggenheim Abu Dhabi worker an additional USD2000, a figure calculated to write off all the recruitment debt they had incurred. They also demanded that all workers contracted to the project be paid a living wage. Their final demand concerned the right to collective bargaining. Unionisation among migrant workers is currently illegal in all the Gulf states and the regimes have consistently attempted to

¹⁰² Armstrong took over as director after Krens resigned in 2008, following a confrontation with the board over his drive to export the institution overseas. I was told by an interlocutor that the institution had been forced to pay back some of the excessive amounts of TDIC money Krens had spent.

¹⁰³ Andrew Ross, “Leveraging the Brand: A History of Gulf Labor,” in *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor*, ed. Andrew Ross (New York: O/R Books, 2015), 17.

engineer a quietist and biddable workforce.¹⁰⁴ Yet, despite these efforts and the popular view of workers in the Gulf as submissive in their subjugation, strikes and other forms of political organising among workers are frequent occurrences with a long history in both oil and construction industries.¹⁰⁵

Among the construction workers employed by companies working on Saadiyat Island in the UAE there have been several strikes. In May 2013, 7000 employees of Arabtec, the main contractor for the Louvre Abu Dhabi, went on strike. Aabar Investments PSJ, which owns a controlling share in Arabtec,¹⁰⁶ was bought in 2008 by the SWF International Petroleum Investment Company (IPIC). In 2017 IPIC merged with Mubadala Development Company to form Mubadala Investment Company, the company that is behind the redevelopment of Saadiyat Island, in conjunction with the TDIC. Al-Reyami workers, some of whom were employed on the construction site of NYUAD also on Saadiyat Island, struck in June 2013. In Saadiyat Accommodation Village (SAV), the labour camp in which workers engaged on construction sites located on Saadiyat are contractually obliged to live, there have also been smaller strikes and fracas. Given the illegality of collective bargaining and the withdrawal of labour, workers involved in wildcat strikes, particularly those perceived as ringleaders, are arrested and imprisoned. While in prison they are often subjected to sustained physical abuse before being summarily and systematically deported without any outstanding wages.¹⁰⁷ Gulf Labor's final demand was therefore that the Guggenheim extract concessions from the TDIC such that workers on the project be guaranteed the right to collective association and the discussion of grievances.¹⁰⁸

Despite the magnitude of the Saadiyat Island building projects, the TDIC adopted a traditional procurement approach to deliver the buildings, appointing different companies to undertake the different elements and phases of the

¹⁰⁴ After the first Gulf War, restive Arab workers were deported *en masse* on the pretext of sympathies with Saddam Hussein, and replaced with South Asian workers, who were cheaper and viewed as more biddable. Due to problems with the payment of wages and exploitation, construction workers regularly abscond. Illegality is therefore the structural product of the *kafala* system, rendering workers more precarious and therefore more exploitable.

¹⁰⁵ For more detail on the history of strike action by manual labourers in the Arab Gulf states see among others Buckley, "Locating"; and Vitalis, *Kingdom*.

¹⁰⁶ In early 2015 it was reported by *The National*, an Emirati English language newspaper, that Aabar Properties had increased its shareholding in Arabtec to 37.27 percent.

¹⁰⁷ Guy Mannes-Abbott, "The Emergent Wave of Artworld Activism," in *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor*, ed. Andrew Ross (New York: O/R Books, 2015), 86-99; and Ross, "Leveraging the Brand."

¹⁰⁸ Gulf Labor, "Recommendations"; Ross, "Leveraging."

construction process rather than appointing a single firm to oversee the entire construction process. Andy Pottinger, one of the main engineers at Buro Happold working on the Louvre Abu Dhabi, makes the somewhat barbed comment in his article in *the Structural Engineer*, that ‘the procurement approach did not facilitate/permit the fully integrated Design & Construction Team ethos that we enjoy on so many of our projects.’¹⁰⁹ Indeed, although construction work on the Guggenheim stalled for many years, a panoply of companies were involved in the engineering and construction of the Louvre Abu Dhabi in addition to the three different constituencies - the TDIC, Atelier Jean Nouvel, and AFM - that had to be satisfied with the works. The contract for piling - creating a foundation for the building by inserting steel piles deep into the ground - was awarded to Bauer International FZE, a Gulf subsidiary of the German company Bauer Aktiengesellschaft, while the aforementioned steel and glass specialist Waagner Biro, constructed the dome. A consortium of contractors and subcontractors were appointed to complete the main phase of construction. As mentioned above, the most prominent among these is Arabtec. Additional contractors include San José, BK Gulf, Al Reyami, Al Futtain Carillion, Robodh, Al Jaber, and Oger Abu Dhabi. Many of these contractors will themselves have subcontracted parts of the work to meet the numerical requirements of the workforce. There were also four engineering companies working on the project including the British headquartered companies Buro Happold and ARUP, whose global growth has been achieved to a significant degree through their early expansion into the Gulf construction market in the 1980s.

In an important intervention into political philosophy, Charles W. Mills attempts to theorise ignorance - ‘active, dynamic... not at all confined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated at the highest levels of the land, indeed presenting itself unblushingly as knowledge’¹¹⁰ - as the collective social epistemology of whiteness and white supremacy.¹¹¹ White ignorance can be distinguished from other forms of non-

¹⁰⁹ Pottinger, “BIM,” 76.

¹¹⁰ Charles W. Mills, “White Ignorance,” in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, eds. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 13.

¹¹¹ Epistemic asymmetry is also foundational to Mills’ argument. While people that have been racialised must have an intimate knowledge of the operations and normative demands of whiteness, the reverse is not true. He quotes James Baldwin: ‘I have spent most of my life, after all, watching white people and outwitting them, so that I might survive,’ and Du Bois’ notion of the ‘vast veil.’ Part of this epistemic machinery also rests on creating tiers of credibility that discredit certain witnesses and their testimonies *a priori*. Per Mills, this is tantamount to performing a lobotomy on the social memory such that there are no histories of racism to forget.

knowing as the particular form of non-knowing concerning issues related to race and racism. Thus, while explicit racism may motivate this form of non-knowing, the concept of white ignorance extends far beyond discrete intentional instances of racism to capture the entire architecture of white thought and its myriad machineries in the putatively “post-racial” order.¹¹² These mnemonic machineries work by systematically subtracting the structuring racist histories of white supremacy, colonialism, and slavery from the present.¹¹³

Structuring the design and construction of these built infrastructures in chains of contracting and subcontracting, in conjunction with a highly dispersed and racialised labour market, creates a dizzying and, at first glance, seemingly impenetrable tessellation of jurisdictions and responsibility. Although they have enshrined provisions such as the illegality of recruitment fees in law, the ensuing jurisdictional ambiguity releases Gulf states from having to enforce its statutes as debt is often incurred in the feeder countries. More significantly for the arguments of this chapter, franchise or consultancy arrangements where a brand, or knowledge and personnel, are exported elsewhere likewise involve acts of spatial dislocation. Anna Tsing has termed nation-state making projects involving foreign franchises, ‘franchise cronyism.’¹¹⁴ The arrangement denotes the total quietism that authoritarian capitalist states extract from companies in exchange for contracts to develop natural resources, exploring how these scale-making projects interlock with both regional and global scales of contemporary capitalism. In the context of Western cultural actors, this relationship can be reformatted to include the franchise relationships and other partnerships established to enable them to benefit indirectly from the extraction of natural resources by siphoning off the states’ oil revenues. The Guggenheim accrued substantial profits from its contract with the TDIC, revenues which it is believed among other things funded the 2017 relocation of its offices to a new space in the former US Steel Building in Lower Manhattan. These capital flows have thus shored up its institutional power and reinforced its central position within the global cultural landscape.

¹¹² See also Meera Sabaratnam, “Is IR Theory White? Racialised Subject-Positioning in Three Canonical Texts,” *Millennium* 49, no. 1 (2020): 3-31.

¹¹³ In *Intimacies*, Lowe, 2, calls this liberalism’s “economy of affirmation and forgetting.”

¹¹⁴ Tsing, *Friction*, 77.

Despite these financial intimacies, the de-territorialisation of the institutions that franchising and consultancy relationships entail, what we might think of as a process of trans-nationalisation, introduces a convenient distance between the Western parent institution or head office and its projects elsewhere. While practices of subcontracting provide one layer of the institutional machinery of ignorance, franchise relationships operate as another, attempting to keep the realities of the construction site at arm's length from the liberal institutions and states they benefit. As if to underscore the distance that institutions and governments are keen to place between themselves and those in the Gulf, despite being part of a bilateral agreement between the governments of France and Abu Dhabi, AFM, now operating under France Muséums, was constituted in 2007 as a private entity,¹¹⁵ with the Louvre as its primary shareholder. This governance structure supplies a helpful level of space between the French Government, which manages the Louvre through the Ministry of Culture, and the revenues which accrue to it through the activities of France Muséums, of which it is the beneficial owner. France Muséums' website describes the virtue of this public-private partnership as allowing the entity 'to support all kinds of projects, whoever their initiators may be.'

Nevertheless, Gulf Labor, affiliated groups such as the ILO and HRW, as well as individual researchers and journalists, have assiduously documented how exploitation in the Gulf is intimately intertwined with the racially inflected supply of construction workers. As a consequence, none of the parent institutions and/or Western partners can claim ignorance of the exploitative political-economic arrangements through which these projects are realised, and their fees paid. Notwithstanding the major obstacles to such research including the deportation and subsequent ban on re-entry of three of its members, Gulf Labor's demands were the product of multiple fieldwork visits to the UAE and feeder countries. Their findings directly contradicted those of PwC and Mott MacDonald, the appointed monitors whose independence has been called into question given the lucrative contracts they hold elsewhere in the Emirates. To manage these revelations, these Western companies

¹¹⁵ AFM was listed on the French company register on 23 August 2007. In April 2021, a new private entity was registered at the same address as AFM under the name France Muséums Développement.

and institutions make recourse to their purported powerlessness vis-à-vis their clients, and the jurisdictional and cultural differences of the Arab Gulf states.

In exposing the contradictions inherent in liberal cultural capitalism, at once notionally egalitarian yet expansionist and ordered vertically around racialised and gendered hierarchies, Gulf Labor and other groups have threatened the epistemology of ignorance through which white supremacy and its political and economic asymmetries are reproduced. Following Mills, anger and hostility are the psychic effects of attempting to puncture this ‘closed circuit of epistemic authority.’¹¹⁶ It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that members of Gulf Labor describe senior management at the Guggenheim as becoming increasingly irate at being confronted with the political and economic realities of the construction workers engaged on the project, and the group’s exhortation that the Guggenheim take proper responsibility for these workers by mounting a public challenge to the immigration regime. In so doing, Gulf Labor made the self-interest that underpins these franchise and consultancy relationships more apparent, bringing into harsh relief the fundamental choice at the heart of racial capitalism - that between social justice, and capitalist expansion and capital accumulation.

In an elaboration of Mills, Gloria Wekker applies his epistemology of whiteness to the Netherlands, arguing that the particular valence it assumes in the Dutch context is that of ‘innocence.’¹¹⁷ Among the trademarks of white innocence that Wekker identifies, two are particularly salient to this discussion. First, the Christian connotations of innocence as a form of moral purity, and second, the implication, deeply sedimented in Christian homiletics, of innocence as diminutive, meek and mild. Wekker also infuses her notion of white innocence with Paul Gilroy’s idea of the pervasive atmosphere of postcolonial melancholia that engulfs Europe.¹¹⁸ Possessing the features that the humoral theory of medicine ascribes to melancholy¹¹⁹ such as malaise and listlessness, this social epistemology accepts the racist histories of empire and slavery but sees their legacies as unfortunate yet insurmountable social realities.

¹¹⁶ Mills, “White Ignorance,” 34.

¹¹⁷ Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

¹¹⁸ Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

¹¹⁹ The term melancholy derives from the Greek, *melaina chole*, meaning black bile.

After Gulf Labor tore holes in the outer layer of this cloak of ignorance, the parent and/or affiliated Western institutions moved to a discourse of jurisdictional ambiguity and political powerlessness. Gulf Labor published a book in 2015, a compilation of articles discussing their actions and a presentation of the research that informed their strategy. In the book, Ross describes how, based on the rationalisations offered by the Guggenheim for their inability to grant the group's demands, Gulf Labor perceived that 'the museum's capacity to take decisive action was heavily constrained by the terms under which the franchising and licensing of the Guggenheim identity was contracted to TDIC. As with NYUAD, the purchase of the use of the brand name also entailed tight UAE control over all aspects of the delivery of the buildings and their infrastructure.'¹²⁰ In a manner that largely mirrors the reasoning offered by the architects appointed to design the cultural institutions in the Gulf, the space generated in the transnationalisation of the institution enabled it to strenuously and continuously claim an inability to intercede on behalf of construction workers. Invoking their small, innocent stature as compared to their sovereign employers, the Guggenheim were able to create a narrative structure to legitimise their continued involvement. Such a defence of innocence does not simply rely on questions of size and powerlessness. It also relies on racialisations of the Gulf states as hotbeds of authoritarianism and illiberality, fundamentally different and beyond the influence of the liberal Western institutions they pay.

Western companies working in the construction sector that operate in the Gulf usually undertake assessments of political risk including of the reputational kind. Often countries will be grouped according to the level of risk they are perceived to pose, and thus the level of approval that is needed prior to bidding for work. To mitigate the possible reputational fall out of being associated with the systemic abuse of migrant construction workers in the Gulf, many firms will only take on work in the region perceived to have some intrinsic social value. Steeped in liberal notions of the autonomous value of the arts and high culture as peerless vehicles of human understanding and connection, museums and cultural institutions perfectly fulfil this brief. As this system for assessing risk illustrates, the boundary-making endeavour by which Western institutions intentionally and laboriously disarticulate their capital

¹²⁰ Ross, "Leveraging," 17.

accumulation from political and social responsibility is deeply enmeshed with the imaginary of white moral rectitude and innocence.

Such narratives have a rich provenance in Western encounters in the Middle East.¹²¹ They thus fortify the characterisations of virtue that shield institutions and cultural workers from the cultural metropolises from their complicity in the racialised exploitation through which cultural capitalism is made, placing the fault squarely at the feet of the Gulf states.¹²² Predictably, the significant number of women employees in these cultural institutions is used as an indicator of the role of these institutions as conduits of much-needed - and lacking - liberal values. By making recourse to their powerlessness at an institutional level within a framework of the attitude-changing potential of the cultural infrastructure they are helping to create, less senior personnel can also manage the dissonance between their individual sympathies with the principles that groups like Gulf Labor have sought to achieve, and the institutional intransigence of their joint employers. The paradox, of course, is that for the account of the profound integrity of culture and its transformative potential to be tenable, the institutional actors charged with bringing culture to the Gulf are by extension in charge of its communicative power, thus suggesting that they do in fact wield significant influence. Yet, as Ruha Benjamin so incisively put it, 'racism is, let us not forget, a means to reconcile contradictions.'¹²³

The specific context of the art world offers an additional kind of infrastructural solution to the various epistemic contradictions at the core of whiteness. On some level the spectacular, public profile of these institutions does provide a highly visible platform to spotlight the complicity of ostensibly liberal organisations in the racialised exploitation of the Gulf's construction workers.¹²⁴ Were it not for the transnational structure of the art world, the artists involved in Gulf Labor would equally be unlikely to possess the same degree of freedom to use their artworks and backgrounds as political leverage. And yet the art market and the formally freelance mode of artistic

¹²¹ Makdisi, *Romantic*; Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004); Said, *Orientalism*.

¹²² Appel, *Licit*.

¹²³ Benjamin, *Race After Technology*, 36.

¹²⁴ In leveraging their backgrounds, artists from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia involved in Gulf Labor also pose an implicit challenge to the political capital that would accrue to the Emirates from the regionalist framing of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi.

production undermine this challenge, limiting the range of political actions available to the group to a boycott and reputational damage, and posing significant challenges to active coordination between groups such as Gulf Labor and the construction workers they take action in solidarity with. Meanwhile, the institution can continue to acquire works by artists involved in the group on the secondary market. Arresting architectural environments do provide a stage for the coalition of actors to freely articulate their dissent. Yet, dissent on this stage is a double-edged sword. While a political point is made, the liberal impulse around freedom of expression is also satisfied, and the spectacle and architectural beauty of the museum as a built environment somewhat defangs the protest staged within it, assimilating these acts as part of the scene's artistic performance.

3.4 CONCLUSION

In the Introduction to this thesis, I suggested that an approach to art rooted in the theory of racial capitalism would mean attempting to thread the needle between a focus on the political *in* art and the politics *of* art¹²⁵ i.e., between the ideational and the material. More specifically, I suggested that it would attempt to bridge the studies that examine culture as a site for the promulgation of, or resistance to, racial constructs on the one hand, and culture as subject to capitalism's reorganisation of society and social relations on the other. Zooming in on the infrastructural basis of high culture, especially architecture, is a way to overcome this divide, as it is very clearly both symbolic and tangible. Cultural institutions in the Gulf seem particularly well suited to such an endeavour, in as much as their architecture has either only recently been finished or is still being built. Yet, as was mentioned in the introduction, due to liberalisation of the funding environment for culture in the cultural metropolises, to sustain their appeal in a crowded marketplace, cultural institutions must be in a near-constant state of renewal. Equally, a very significant proportion of cultural infrastructures such as biennials and art fairs are temporary. Art fairs, in particular, are assembled and deconstructed in a matter of weeks.

¹²⁵ See Toukan, "Art."

At the level of theory, the discussion offered in this chapter can therefore be taken as an attempt at working with the insights from different disciplines and fields – labour studies, and architectural and automation theory – to begin elaborating a new way of engaging with high culture that takes account of how the gamut of their infrastructures are shaped by the racialised asymmetries of the global design and construction market. The critical literature on architecture and labour has long-since established the centrality of racial categorisations to both the discipline of architecture and the global construction sector. As I hope this chapter has shown, bringing these fields to bear on high cultural architectures, can help illuminate the colonial dimensions of the high cultural field's global political economy. Beyond an observation of the ways that high cultural architectures co-opt and market particular racial identities, often in tandem with gentrification, these currently remain under-researched and under-theorised.

Equally, as has been observed, the field of Gulf studies is in the grip of a spatial turn.¹²⁶ This chapter forms a couplet with the next, which expands the architectural remit of the foregoing discussion to urban space more broadly. Together they should both be read as a making an empirical contribution to this spatial turn. Having shown how racial constructions are threaded through its hierarchies of labour, marking some subjects and geographies out for hard labour and others for thinking labour, this chapter makes plain that it is imperative that this turn adequately accounts for race. To the extent that it takes seriously urban space as a site of capitalisation – i.e., capital investments that yield long-term capital flows – the spatial turn in Gulf studies is also manifestly about the future. Such an orientation sensitises one to how these capital flows might over time either deepen or alter the uneven saturation of power and capital within particular markets such as the art market, and within the capitalist system as a whole.

Unevenness is at its core colonial, concentrating assets, capital, and expertise in certain geographies at the expense of others. This chapter has shown how architectural interventions forcefully participate in the colonisation of the future while also complicating the standard East/West cartography of colonial relations. While these architectures materially shore up the dominance of the cultural metropolises, their

¹²⁶ MacLean, "Spatial."

relative financial precarity after liberalisation has also made them more dependent upon Gulf capital and largesse. In the context of this uneven interdependence,¹²⁷ the Gulf's own colonial relations are not simply legitimated, they are deepened, guaranteeing that these regional metropolises will continue to extract and exploit hard labour from their Eastern peripheries.

¹²⁷ Wearing, *Anglo-Arabia*.

[Chapter Four]

A READY-MADE VILLAGE WITHIN A VILLAGE¹

On a day toward the end of my eight weeks of fieldwork in the UAE, I got into my car to drive to Abu Dhabi from the Dubai suburb where I had been staying with friends. I had yet to visit the Louvre Abu Dhabi and, as I had arranged several interviews in Abu Dhabi for that afternoon, I decided to tack on a long visit to the museum in the morning. Abu Dhabi is the southernmost emirate in the federation. The fastest and most direct route from Dubai is to hurtle south down the E11, a thick asphalt artery that hugs the coastline all the way from Abu Dhabi's border with Saudi Arabia at al-Ghuwaifat in the south-west to Ras al-Khaimah in the north. When I set off in my tin can - a Nissan Sunny, which I was told repeatedly was a model only driven by working-class South Asians - the Emirates were being buffeted by one of their few annual rain storms and the road was relatively empty - a rarity given the nearly non-existent public transport system and the Gulf's 'cult of the car.'² The highway was slick with precipitation which the turning car tyres and powerful winds whipped into misty plumes, obscuring the suburban sprawl that lines this road from the centre of Dubai almost all the way to the industrial zones of Jebel Ali.

An artefact of the Emirates' nation building exercise, the E11 was built in segments over several decades starting in the late 1960s. In 1990, reflecting the structure of the power sharing agreement in which the federation is anchored (and its distribution of power), the portion of the road that runs through Dubai was christened Sheikh Zayed Road in honour of the president of the federation and emir of Abu Dhabi, while the section that crosses the Abu Dhabi - Dubai border was named

¹ The title is taken from Deepak Unnikrishnan's darkly fantastical, satirical novel, *Temporary People* (New York: Restless Books, 2017), 70. In this vignette, a story within a story, the former labourer Ba becomes chief of a village in an unnamed Francophone country, after leading a revolt against the village's current ruler. Following a vicious yet clinical cull of those loyal to his predecessor, Ba wants his takeover to be preserved for posterity. He orders his 'soldiers to create, then manage, a readymade village within a village... Ba gives his project a name: Le Musée.'

² Menoret, *Joyriding*, 98.

Maktoum bin Rashid road, after its then prime minister and emir of Dubai. The official names of the northern sections of the road articulate the subordinate position of the northern emirates. Its central tranche stitches together Sharjah, Ajman, and Umm al-Quwain under the names al-Wahda Street (unity) and al-Itihad Street (the union). Colloquially, bits of the northern strip of road continue to be referred to as King Faisal Road due to donations from the Saudi King to develop the Trucial States in the 1960s and 1970s.³

The road's history, and indeed that of urban development in the Gulf as a whole, sit at the confluence of the political histories of imperialism, Arab nationalism, suburbanisation, and modernist urban planning.⁴ The laying of the northern section of the road was a product of rulers of the Trucial and other Gulf states negotiating the geopolitical wrangling between British interests institutionalised in the protectorate on one side, and the Arab nationalist movement and its institutions on the other.⁵ Meanwhile, its trajectory out of Dubai enabled the suburbanisation of the city, spurring urban migration away from the historic cosmopolitan hub of mercantile activities on Dubai Creek into the newly built villas connected to one another, and to the recently constructed electrical grid and sewage systems, by this central spine.

As I neared Abu Dhabi, the clouds began clearing and the hot sun dissipated the condensation heavy in the air and on the road, leaving only the wind and a light ochre smog. Through the smog I could see the fourteen-carriage highway snaking out ahead of me dotted with vehicles conveying passengers and goods from other parts of the federation. Saadiyat Island lies just north of Abu Dhabi City's central island to which it is connected by Sheikh Khalifa Bridge. To get to its Cultural District from Dubai one therefore peels off the Dubai - Abu Dhabi Highway at the E10 exit in the direction of the Shahama - Saadiyat Highway (E12). This road traverses empty islands, mangrove forests and wetlands on Jazeerat Fahid and Jubail Island, before becoming a bridge that crosses onto Saadiyat Island. Here the road approaching the Louvre is named Jacques Chirac Street after the French President who signed the deal. Parts of Saadiyat Island between the road and the seafront have already been developed into large complexes

³ MacLean, "Spatial," 226.

⁴ Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Khalili, *Sinews*; MacLean, "Spatial"; Farah al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

⁵ MacLean, "Spatial."

including a beach club, hotels, and real estate by the state-owned property development and investment company Aldar Properties, in collaboration with the Department of Culture and Tourism (formerly the TDIC), both of which are chaired by Muhammad Khalifa al-Mubarak.⁶ Substantial swathes of the island nonetheless remain completely empty. Apart from Manarat Al Saadiyat, the first cultural venue to open on the island in 2008, and the Louvre Abu Dhabi, the rest of the mooted district is made up of either empty plots or very slowly developing building sites concealed behind high screens. Driving between the two, the area does not feel like the cultural district it claims to be, just a tangle of roads and potential museums invested with the prospective spatial imaginary of this idea.

Saadiyat Island's Cultural District resembles several other new cultural developments in the Emirates. In neighbouring Dubai, there is Alserkal Avenue, a cultural complex in the former industrial area of Al Quoz, and Al Jaddaf, an area being developed on Dubai Creek where the Jameel Arts Centre (JAC) is located. Al Jaddaf is particularly redolent of Saadiyat Island. Like Saadiyat Island, with the exception of visitors to the JAC and the Versace Hotel next door, Al Jaddaf is largely deserted. The chronologies of these areas, where cultural institutions have preceded property developments, and the intimate relationship between the leadership of the DCT and Aldar Group, both indicate that cultural infrastructure is in fact central to the speculative investment strategy behind the diversification agenda in the Gulf. These institutions are a centrepiece of the lifestyle imaginary in which these pieces of real estate are embedded.

Taking inspiration from the wave of scholarship that examines how urban planning and renewal operate through raced appropriations, exclusions, and displacements, this chapter scrutinises cultural urban policy and practice in the Gulf cities for its racial politics. Ida Danewid describes the city as possessed of a 'broader pattern of racialised inclusion and exclusion'⁷ while, on the basis of this patterning across disparate geographies, Laura Pulido argues that racism must be understood as a

⁶ Mubarak was Aldar Group's CEO prior to being appointed its chairman. He is also chairman of Miral Asset Management, which is developing the nearby Yas Island. His brother, Khaldoun Khalifa al-Mubarak is CEO of the state investment company, Mubadala. As discussed in chap. 1, Mubadala was founded with the funds from the Offset Programme.

⁷ Danewid, "The Fire," 296.

‘socio-spatial relation,’ existing in a co-constitutive relationship with urban space.⁸ This chapter contends that to brand Gulf cities as “cultural cities” requires a form of ‘cultural urbanism,’ to adapt Henri Lefebvre’s term for the system of producing knowledge about the urban landscape. Reading the productive operations of the cultural urbanist imagination on the Gulf’s urban landscape brings into view the racial dimensions of designating space and cities as “cultural.” Within the context of the Arab Gulf states, it also elucidates the racial horizons of the capitalist futures such designations attempt to realise. This chapter therefore builds on and broadens the arguments of the previous chapter, contextualising its analysis of the relationship between race and cultural architecture in an assessment of the specific racialised dynamics that underpin the strategic indexing of Gulf cities to culture and the cultural city imaginary. These chapters are therefore loadbearing walls in the overall theoretical architecture of this thesis, which attempts to bridge the material/ideational divide in the study of the high culture industry by making recourse to the theory of racial capitalism. Both chapters reconstruct the very material processes through which its infrastructures are erected in urban space, showing how racial ideas are inextricable from these processes and their asymmetrical circuits of labour and capital.

The first of the chapter’s four sections sets the stage for the three others. Here I explore the powerful diptych of structural racism and urban planning in the Gulf’s twentieth century history to show how urban development in both its Western company oil towns and historic urban areas foreshadowed the racially inflected functional segregation of space into cultural and heritage districts. In the second, I look at the programmes to concentrate cultural institutions and infrastructures into districts in new urban areas, contending that these imported imaginaries of urban capitalist development are underpinned by a systematic attempt to manage difference. The third section situates an analysis of the new heritage areas in the racialised dynamics of suburbanisation and displacement. In the fourth and final section, I bring together an incipient theme across the three previous sections, probing how racialised processes of subject formation are inscribed in and through the calibration of culturally inflected urban planning to the liberalisation of the legislative environment

⁸ Laura Pulido, “Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, no. 1 (2000): 12.

governing property ownership and residency rights. Before proceeding to the substantive analysis of this chapter, it is worth restating that this chapter understands the relationship between race, class, and space not simply in terms of the ways that the spatial imagination and organisation of space communicates certain ideas about race, but how the persistence of those ideas in space represents part of a racial *dispositif* that continually naturalises a certain ratio of power and distribution of resources through its productive operations on the built environments and its subjects. Power is understood as telegraphed through the built environment, and the calculated, rationalising practices of its ordering as processes that racialise certain subjects as legitimate consumers of commodified urban space and its infrastructures, while racialising other bodies as illegitimate or aberrant consumers, warranting violent control.⁹

4.1 SEGREGATED URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE 20th CENTURY

In an early scene in *Cities of Salt*, the first instalment of the epic trilogy by Saudi novelist Abdulrahman Munif,¹⁰ the protagonist describes the sudden unexpected return of American oil men to the sleepy oasis of Wadi al-Uyoun, months after an earlier oil prospecting mission in an unnamed country in the Persian Gulf:

‘As soon as the camp was erected, the men paced off the area, put up wire fencing and short white pickets, scattered some strange substance around the tents, and sprayed the earth with water that had a penetrating smell. Then they opened up their crates and unloaded large pieces of black iron, and before long a sound like rolling thunder surged out of this machine, frightening men, animals and birds... As soon as the animals began to bark and bray at sunset, the machine started to roar again, frightening everyone, only this time the sound was accompanied by a blinding light. Within moments scores of small but brilliant suns began to blaze, filling the whole area with a light that no one could believe or stand’

⁹ Adrienne R Brown and Valerie Smith, eds., *Race and Real Estate*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Nelida Fuccaro, ed., *Violence*; Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Abdulrahman Munif, *Cities of Salt*, trans. Paul Theroux (New York: Vintage, 1989), 68–69.

Before the terms on which Gulf states had granted concessions to Western oil companies to develop their oil fields were renegotiated (and their oil rents rocketed), much of the early electrified Western-style urban infrastructures in the Gulf had been developed by Western oil companies to accommodate their expatriate employees. Though often far from the existing urban areas in the Gulf and imperialist in their imperatives, the oil towns that sprung up in the first half of the twentieth century prefigured the urban and social changes that rulers of the Arab Gulf states and the Arab nationalist bureaucrats they empowered would administer to their historic cities and capitals.¹¹ Camps established in Kuwait by the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), a subsidiary of the British Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC, later Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, and then British Petroleum), and in Saudi Arabia by a joint venture of the two oil giants, the Standard Oil Company of California and the Texas Fuel Company (renamed ARAMCO), developed quickly into large oil towns. The urban space of these camps was highly stratified along racial lines into what Robert Vitalis calls a ‘Jim Crow system’¹² of segregated living space and amenities.

In the early twentieth century oil towns of Ahmadi (Kuwait) and Dhahran (Saudi Arabia), dwellings were hierarchically segregated according to racial origins, with white Western employees consistently housed in superior accommodation. Even in the smattering of dwellings that comprised the very first encampment at Dhahran in the 1930s, Western employees were accommodated in shacks made of corrugated steel while all non-white employees were housed in shacks called *barasti*. The latter dwellings were extremely rudimentary, thatched out of palm fronds and without floors. While the dwellings of the European employees were rapidly upgraded, built out of imported materials, and fitted with sanitation infrastructure and electricity, despite minor upgrades, the quality of accommodation for the non-white employees remained poor. Living arrangements in the camp were also stratified hierarchically at the level of the nuclear family - only American and European employees were permitted to bring their wives and children to the camp, thus prescribing the primacy of Western intimacy and

¹¹ Reem Alissa, “The Oil Town of Ahmadi since 1946: From Colonial Town to Nostalgic City,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013): 41–58; al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*.

¹² Vitalis, *Kingdom*, xviii.

kinship structures. Despite some desultory efforts on behalf of ARAMCO staff to claim the apartheid system that ordered the built environment of the camp was in fact rooted in professional skill level, the company's own employees acknowledged that many of the South Asian engineers they contracted were middle class, educated men habituated to far superior living conditions than those provided to them at the ARAMCO camp.¹³

Using skill level as a euphemism for race closely resembled the urban planning and architecture at Ahmadi where the KOC installed a regime of total segregation. Housing was designed and distributed according to three skill levels - senior, junior, or unskilled. Former workers and inhabitants of the town recalled how, irrespective of the actual skill level possessed by workers, all European and American staff were categorised as senior and all South Asian as junior.¹⁴ As was the case at Dhahran, where the Arab workforce were predominantly drawn from the nomadic Bedouin peoples of the Arabian desert attracted to the camp due to the proletarianising promise of wage-work, Arab workers at Ahmadi were universally classed as "labour." KOC security enforced the segregation of space, policing the perimeter of the part of town where "senior" white staff were housed, while the part of town for "labour" was colloquially referred to as 'Arab City.'¹⁵ With the swell in employees from India and Pakistan, Arab workers were rapidly displaced from company-provided housing in Ahmadi, relocating to informal slums on the margins of the town.

Segregationist design such as this was standard industry practice, replicated at oil concessions in both Latin America and Africa.¹⁶ This racial ordering of the workforce derived directly from the arsenal of imperial governance techniques in which racial differentiations were threaded through the labour market to ensure the sustainability of cheap labour and to militate against the potential of coordinated struggle across the workforce.¹⁷ Mark Crinson, one of the first architectural historians

¹³ Vitalis, *Kingdom*, 56–61.

¹⁴ Alissa, "Ahmadi," 47.

¹⁵ Alissa, "Ahmadi."

¹⁶ See for example, Appel, *Licit*.

¹⁷ The continued use of the word "coolie," a racial slur that originated in the British Empire, by Western ARAMCO employees evidences the continuity of the racist architecture that underpinned colonial capitalism. As a variety of scholars have shown, in the nineteenth century Asian "coolie" labour, often working under conditions of debt bondage, was seen as an expedient solution to the mounting political and economic challenges posed to the system of slave labour used by the British on plantations in

to comprehensively address the deeply interlaced histories of modern architecture and empire,¹⁸ looked specifically at the Iranian city Abadan, which was established by APOC and was the first major oil town in the Middle East, as an example of how urban planning and architecture reinforced the racial underpinnings of imperial rule.¹⁹ At Abadan, he argues the refinery functioned as a kind of *cordon sanitaire*, separating the grid of ‘prim suburban’²⁰ bungalows in Braim, where the European oilmen lived, from Abadan town where non-European labourers employed at the refinery lived in company-provided housing tiered according to employment status. Contract labourers, who made up the majority of the population of Abadan, lived in shanty towns such as Kaghazabad that bloomed along the fringes of the municipality. In keeping with techniques of imperial rule, British administrators are also known to have fanned the tensions between the Shi’a members of the communist Tudeh party, and the Sunni Arab community, fracturing the workforce in a targeted effort to undermine collective bargaining potential.²¹

James Mollison Wilson was appointed by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) to undertake the urban design of Abadan, and by APOC’s jointly owned subsidiary, the KOC, to design Ahmadi. Wilson, who would only in 1944 be named the company architect, had gained much of his architectural experience in the British Empire. Before his appointment at Abadan, Wilson had worked from 1913-1916 as an assistant for Sir Edwin Lutyens, the key architectural figure involved in the urban design of British New Delhi. Wilson subsequently directed the Public Works Department in Baghdad.²² However, whereas these former engagements had been for the British Imperial Government, in both Iran and Kuwait, Wilson’s clients were a

their West Indian territories. Agricultural engineers on the al-Haradh project, a failed Bedouin resettlement scheme launched by the Saudi Arabian Government in the 1960s, also referred to the Bedouin working on the project as “coolies.” This racial slur manifested itself in the pay scale, with local Bedouin earning a small portion of what their Arab counterparts from elsewhere in the Middle East were paid, and a tiny fraction of what the Europeans earned. See Menoret, *Joyriding*, 85-86.

¹⁸ Crinson, *Modern Architecture*.

¹⁹ See the chapter “Oil and Architecture” in Crinson, *Modern Architecture*, for his discussion of Abadan, 52-71.

²⁰ Crinson, *Modern Architecture* 54.

²¹ Rasmus Christian Elling, “War of Clubs: Struggle for Space in Abadan and the 1946 Oil Strike,” in *Violence and the City in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Nelida Fuccaro (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 189–210.

²² Alissa, “Ahmadi?”; Crinson, *Modern Architecture*.

private company, albeit one in which the British Government was the majority shareholder.

These oil towns were thus early examples of the enclave economy model that developed as nominally or newly independent countries granted contracts to foreign companies to extract natural resources, establishing a pattern of jurisdictional outsourcing that would metastasise with the exponential growth of multinational capitalism. Unlike *de jure* forms of colonial rule, which entailed responsibilities for the governance of colonial subjects, in an approach comparable to the Guggenheim's approach described in the previous chapter, the companies in charge of these enclave economies would repeatedly avoid taking responsibility for the living conditions of those they employed, especially local contract workers, by claiming responsibility for them lay with local governments.²³

Domestic criticism of foreign oil companies operating in the Middle East began to mount in the late 1950s and 1960s, surfing the rip tide of Arab nationalism that followed the Suez Crisis in 1956. To counter these political sentiments and stymie criticisms of their racially segregated operations, each of which increased the possibility of strike action, Western oil companies increasingly tried to assume a more benevolent, welfarist guise. In a propaganda effort intended to disseminate an image of the developmental uplift the company was providing to both its host country and employees, ARAMCO began publishing a magazine, *ARAMCO World*,²⁴ in 1949 which was shortly accompanied by an Arabic language version entitled *qafilat al-zayt* (Oil Caravan). Using imagery redolent of the paternalistic visuals disseminated by the foreign aid sector, the magazine was filled with generic photographs of white employees engaged in teaching or the provision of healthcare to brown-skinned locals.²⁵

²³ Crinson, *Modern Architecture*; Vitalis, *Kingdom*.

²⁴ *ARAMCO World* continued to be published after the company was nationalised in 1981. In keeping with the paternalistic PR agenda of the company's American managers, the magazine is a source of company PR in the Anglophone world, regularly publishing articles on Islamic, and modern and contemporary Middle Eastern, art- and adjacent markets. Published in Houston, Texas, *ARAMCO World* describes its mission as an effort to 'increase cross-cultural understanding' (see chap. 2 for a discussion of the burden of representation). The same people in charge of the publication of *ARAMCO World* were also responsible for the creation of Ithra: The King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture, which opened in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia in 2017.

²⁵ Vitalis, *Kingdom*, 123–25. Vitalis also documents how, in the 1950s, the company mounted an extensive poster campaign. City walls across Saudi Arabia, the rest of the Middle East, South Asia, and even

In Kuwait, the KOC used similar means to burnish their reputation. In the 1950s it began to circulate *the Kuwaiti*, a magazine published with an English and Arabic version each brimming with images suggesting the positive contribution the firm had made to developing the country and its concerted efforts to indigenise the workforce by training Kuwaitis for more senior positions within the company and beyond.²⁶ Domestic pressure applied to these foreign companies thus engendered a slow reshuffling of the structures of racism that patterned the urban landscape and political responsibility, affording more rights and affluence to the sedentary parts of the local population vis-à-vis other groups. The rip tide of Arab nationalism did not, however, simply affect the urban environment in the oil cities. Indeed, it was felt equally acutely in the Gulf's older urban areas. Against the global geopolitical drama of the Cold War, and the political excitement that Gamal Abdul Nasser's charismatic leadership pulsed through its Middle Eastern theatre, in the Gulf, the British, Arab nationalists, and committed capitalist rulers all vied for popular support through infrastructural investments in the built environments.

As was discussed in the last chapter, among the Arab Gulf states, it was Kuwait that was first out of the starting blocks in implementing a modernist²⁷ overhaul of their capital city with the help of a coterie of Western officials and consultants. At the core of the plans submitted in November 1951 by the British urban planning company Minoprio was the idea of decentralisation and the "new town." These principles were in vogue in Britain, having been trailblazed at the dawn of the twentieth century by the campaigner and social reformer Ebenezer Howard in his concept of the 'Garden City,' and had since been replicated throughout parts of Europe and the colonised world.²⁸ The skeleton structure for urban development in Kuwait, and a central pillar of the plan Minoprio submitted to Abdullah al-Salim Al Sabah, was provided by a system of concentric ring roads radiating out from Old Kuwait City. These ring roads were

Italy were papered with these "Foto Stories," which portrayed the company's generosity and the "modernity" they imparted.

²⁶ Alissa, "Ahmadi," 50–51.

²⁷ I use modernist here to refer to architectural and urban modernism and its drive to rationalise the built environment.

²⁸ They also held a particular appeal for the rulers of Kuwait due to the impediment that the narrow and winding pathways of Kuwait Old Town posed to the motorcar. See al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, 100–101. For a discussion of how, under conditions of abundant and heavily subsidised oil, the car rapidly became a central feature of Gulf subjectivities in both their hegemonic and subversive formulations see Menoret, *Joyriding*.

intended to constrict the continued expansion of the more ramshackle historic urban core, and offered a seemingly natural hierarchy to the suburban quarters they delineated. To redevelop the urban core and encourage migration into the suburbs, the state undertook a vast land acquisition scheme that began in 1954, purchasing land at artificially inflated prices and offering vendors a new plot of land in suburbia with the option of an interest-free government loan or a government-built house for those with limited incomes.²⁹ Drawing inspiration from British and American suburbs, the government mandated that all structures built in the new gridded districts that encircled the city centre be built as single-family detached villas,³⁰ thus inscribing the dominance of the self-contained and normative nuclear family into the landscape. In the city centre, price inflation rendered projects with a commercial purpose effectively non-viable, and even more so those with any kind of social or welfarist agenda.

Many Kuwaitis that would later be naturalised as citizens felt strong sympathies with Arab nationalism, including many bureaucrats that Kuwait would send to assist with the development of other Arab Gulf states. Domestically, Arab nationalist feeling was particularly pronounced among the Kuwaiti working class who were heavily represented in the opposition. Initially, changes to the urban environment were a boon for Arab nationalist political activities which, in the 1950s, were primarily organised through urban social clubs. *Sharq*, the historic district on the waterfront of Kuwait became a focus of this political public sphere, of which the Shuwaikh Secondary School was an epicentre. The school, a boarding school for Kuwaiti and foreign students with an international academic staff, hosted many rallies, speeches, and demonstrations in its large stadium. However, urban redesign quickly revealed the French ghost in its machine. In 1956, security services violently raided a rally held in support of Nasser's calls for a general strike in solidarity with his nationalisation of the Suez Canal. The Al Sabah subsequently clamped down on all opposition activities, realising Haussmann's original ambition of devising a style of urban environment favourable to policing. That said, urban redevelopment ended up being a pyrrhic

²⁹ Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*.

³⁰ Villas were an almost exact inversion of indigenous architecture's spatial organisation: houses largely faced inwards, organised around a central courtyard, in which multiple generations and families lived. The villa, by contrast, extruded outdoor space, with balconies and grassy areas framing indoor spaces. See al-Nakib, 2016, *Kuwait Transformed*; al-Ragam, "Kuwaiti Architectural Modernity"; Menoret, *Joyriding*.

victory for the Al Sabah, tainting investments aimed at generating support for their rule among citizens with an awareness of the surveillance and policing to which the body politic became increasingly subject after these interventions.³¹

As Farah al-Nakib has demonstrated, the mode of suburbanisation in Kuwait City was underwritten by a classed logic of racial ordering and differentiation.³² Much like other ruling families in the Gulf hostile to the aims of Arab nationalism,³³ the Al Sabah sought to reconcile anti-British imperialism with their steadfast capitalism, and the emergence of pronounced class differentials, by casting Arab nationalism as a foreign import. Arab migrant workers from other parts of the region were characterised as bent on corrupting local communities with this malevolent external ideology. Capitalising on this portrayal, the Al Sabah persisted with their campaign to fracture domestic coalitions between locals and Arab migrants by passing a restrictive citizenship law in 1959, which an amendment passed in 1960 further restricted. Land was purchased by the state and redistributed exclusively among the citizenry, creating the suburbs as ‘socially homogenous enclaves that differentiated between sectors of the population by background,’³⁴ although al-Nakib cautions that the extent to which the state intentionally imprinted the urban landscape with racial divisions is hard to ascertain. The phases of the land acquisition and relocation scheme roughly corresponded to affluence levels, with the most expensive and desirable properties along the seafront or those owned by people with connections to the royal family purchased first, thus guaranteeing their relocation to prime locations in the inner suburbs situated in close proximity to the perimeter of the city centre.

Notwithstanding these differentials, the new districts were reserved exclusively for the Kuwaiti citizenry. In restricting land acquisition rights to citizens, the Al Sabah grounded its tiered spatial structure in a foundational, binary exclusion.³⁵ The

³¹ For this history see al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, 163-168.

³² Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, 135.

³³ MacLean, “Spatial.”

³⁴ Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, 134.

³⁵ Across the Arab Gulf states, after independence, land became a core mechanism for the distribution of capital, and class constitution. Land has largely been treated as part of the sovereign prerogative, to be distributed among citizens and, in rare, instances non-citizens on the basis of sovereign munificence. Acquisition rights have historically been either *de jure* or *de facto* restricted to citizens or GCC nationals. As indicated, this articulation of citizenship and land creates the juridical substrate of segregation, while their disarticulation, which will be explored at greater length towards the end of the chapter, contributes to the complex interlacing of race, class, and precarity in the Gulf.

increasingly sedentarising Bedouin communities were by contrast settled in the more peripheral suburban districts, while the immigrant workforce, prohibited from owning property were housed either with their employers if domestic workers and/or in camps beyond the fifth ring road. The sharp contrast between the inhabitants of either side of the fifth ring road had a homogenising effect on those living within the area it cordoned off, who were increasingly referred to as *badar* meaning sedentary urbanites.³⁶ Proscriptions on renting in the districts within the first four ring roads, and laws prohibiting the foreign ownership of land, combined with the familial orientation of suburban villas to instigate a pattern of urban development common to metropolises across the world, with significant suburban flight and racialised groups settling in either run-down homes or neglected social housing in the inner city.³⁷

While he had grievances with the British, having had two British advisors foisted on him after the death of his brother Ahmad Jabir Al Sabah, Abdullah al-Salim Al Sabah nevertheless took heavy-handed, decisive action against urban Arab-nationalist movements in Kuwait. Other rulers were forced to be more circumspect in their approach, in large part due to the nuanced reception that these ideas had received among the different strata of society. Many influential merchant families, notably the Kanoo in Bahrain and the al-Ghurair and al-Futtaim families in Dubai, and the al-Owais in Sharjah, nurtured nationalist feeling. These sentiments were traceable to the obstacles that Western companies, particularly oil companies, erected to frustrate the participation of local businesses in domestic industry, except as adjuncts to British enterprise.³⁸ Mercenary objectives did, however, temper their support for Arab nationalism. Although anti-colonial language provided an opportunity to undermine British businesses seen as threatening to the burgeoning local capitalist class, many businesses continued lucrative dealings with other Western firms.³⁹ Despite the desire to crush Arab nationalism domestically, outside their borders, the Al Sabah and rulers of the other Arab Gulf states had to gingerly negotiate these commercial complexities

³⁶ Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, 134.

³⁷ See for example Brown and Smith, *Real Estate*; Harris, *Little*.

³⁸ A member of the Kanoo family describes how, in the 1940s, the Bahraini Petroleum Company (BAPCO) built a jetty at Sitra for their exclusive use. To unload onto the mainland, boats arriving from the direction of Sitra had to decant their cargo onto *dhows* and barges, and sail around the coastline to Manama's natural harbour. See Khalili, *Sinews*, 155.

³⁹ For example, Kuwait Oil Tanker Company, founded in 1957, refused to do business with the British firm Gray MacKenzie, but was contracted by BP to ship its oil exports. See Khalili, *Sinews*, 150.

and the relatively widespread popular support that Arab nationalism commanded. Matthew MacLean's detailed history of the asphalted road that connects the UAE's northern emirates to the powerful southern ones provides a richly illustrative example of the way these competing interests, each constellated as a different version of "foreign" influence vis-à-vis jingoistic ideas of the "national" space, shaped the urban landscape.⁴⁰

In 1963, the Kuwaiti development office opened in Deira, Dubai, with the intention of building hospitals, schools and, crucially, the road from Dubai to Ras al-Khaimah. Through this entity, which had close links to the British Bank of the Middle East (BBME) and the Kuwait Investment Bank (KIB), both of which were headquartered in London,⁴¹ Kuwait sought to formalise its role as the key funder of infrastructural projects in the Gulf states and a regional bulwark against the socialist implications of Arab nationalism. It was notably a Kuwaiti loan of GBP400,000 underwritten by the BBME that had financed Halcrow's dredging of Dubai Creek for Sheikh Rashid. For their part, the British government's reticence in providing direct funding forced the British imperial officials in the Trucial States to reluctantly accept increased Kuwaiti aid despite their fears about the Arab nationalist bureaucrats who rode on its coattails.

Sheikh Saqr Al Qasimi of Sharjah, however, recognised that relying on financial diplomacy from either the British or the Kuwaitis allowed them to increase their grip on the Trucial States. He therefore refused loans from the BBME to develop the emirate's harbour in 1961.⁴² It was his struggle to secure alternative sources of financing for the harbour under his own steam that motivated him to invite an Arab League delegation to the Trucial States, hoping that a development office under their auspices would prise loose the British and Kuwaiti chokehold on development. The Arab League accepted Saqr's invitation, with a delegation visiting the Trucial States in

⁴⁰ Despite their anti-colonial underpinnings, Arab nationalist movements in the Gulf were far from immune to jingoism. Both Shi'a communities, and those from the Eastern edge of the Indian Ocean, fell foul of its delimitation of the Gulf states and wider Middle East as solely "Arab" territories. Interestingly, however, the structure of British imperial power in the Arab Gulf states was configured eastward, particularly towards India, rather than westward toward the Levant and North Africa. See Fuccaro, *Histories*; Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*; Maclean, "Spatial."

⁴¹ Bazoobandi, *Gulf Sovereign Wealth Funds*.

⁴² MacLean, "Spatial"; Reisz, *Showpiece City*. Much of the BBME financing was made possible by recycling Kuwaiti deposits back into capital investments in the other Arab Gulf states.

1964 to discuss the plans for a development office as a counterweight to British and Kuwaiti influence. MacLean recounts how diplomatic correspondences from 1965 show that when the British political resident in Bahrain, William Luce, and the political agent in Dubai, Glencairn Balfour-Paul, caught wind of the mooted visit, they pleaded with the British Foreign Office to invest in projects with ‘immediate visible popular impact’⁴³ or licence the use of force against the dissident rulers of the northern Emirates.

At a meeting held in March 1965, the British managed to pass a motion with the Trucial States Council that all development aid had to go through the Trucial States Development Office (TSDO), which the British had recently founded. At the meeting, Saqr agreed to the proposal but announced that the Arab League had committed to provide the Trucial States GBP1.5 million in development funds. His one condition for agreeing to the motion was that the British must have no further involvement in the TSDO. Particularly concerning to the British was the fact that, despite their strong anti-Nasserism, membership of the Arab League precluded friendly leaders such as King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and Sheikh Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain from rebuffing the Arab League’s advances. Only behind closed doors did these rulers quietly forward British interests, while Kuwait equivocated throughout. In the end, the British determined their only way to undo Arab League inroads into the Trucial States was to back a coup against Sheikh Saqr by his brother Muhammad Al Qasimi, which took place in 1965. A British RAF plane deported Saqr to exile in Bahrain from where he would eventually move to Cairo, and a ban was placed on the further involvement of the Arab League in the emirates.

After this fracas, the Ras al-Khaimah - Dubai road became politically urgent, viewed by the British as a way to pacify ensuing political tensions. When the road was eventually built, British money funded part of it, and the rest was funded by donations from King Faisal and Sheikh Zayed, who had since deposed his brother, Sheikh Shakhboub, in a bloodless coup in 1966. Neither leader agreed to route the funds through the British instrument of the TSDO. The Dubai - Ras al-Khaimah road exemplifies how the built environments of the historic urban areas and the infrastructures connecting them were the product of Gulf rulers attempts to thread

⁴³ Quoted in MacLean, “Spatial,” 183.

the needle between political dependency on either the British or on Arab nationalists from elsewhere in the Middle East. Of the road, MacLean writes that ‘portrayed at the time of its completion as an example of Arab brotherhood succeeding where British imperialism had failed, [the road] was in fact the outcome of the exclusion of Arab nationalist political and economic power from the Gulf.’

In a different yet related vein, Pascal Menoret’s book *Joyriding in Riyadh* offers a fascinating exploration of how Riyadh’s roads and highways were reclaimed by working-class Saudis through the prevalent youth culture of joyriding, transforming an artefact of Archimedean power projection into a plebian public sphere and site of resistance. The system of roads was contrived by the famed Greek modernist town planner Yannis Dioxadis, on behalf of King Faisal. Dioxadis’ firm was linked to several key institutions of global capitalism such as the World Bank, Harvard University, and the Ford Foundation. Menoret charts the history of how Dioxadis’ firm advised the government on their “Bedouin development policy,” ‘a euphemism devised in 1975 by the Saudi interior ministry to refer to measures aimed at controlling the rural populations and turning them into productive and subservient citizens.’⁴⁴ Rapid urbanisation was an inadvertent consequence of the consistently anti-tribal policies promulgated by the state to discipline the rural population. As people migrated into the city, sprawling shanty towns cropped up throughout Riyadh while towns and villages were abandoned.⁴⁵ To deal with the moral panic stirred by these slums, King Faisal spearheaded a displacement policy, demolishing inner city shanty towns and relocating their inhabitants - the Gulf states’ internal other - to newly built planned low-income housing complexes. Despite urging that the new districts detailed in the master plan should have diverse occupancy, Dioxadis’ firm located these complexes outside the city proper.⁴⁶

The Gulf’s twentieth century urban history thus discloses an urban environment of racial segregation rooted in a spatial imagination which has sought to discipline anti-colonial threats of independence/nationalisation, and subsequently Arab nationalism, through the functional ordering of space, infrastructural development, and racially

⁴⁴ Menoret, *Joyriding*, 76.

⁴⁵ Menoret notes how this large-scale migration, described in much of the Saudi sociological literature as *tarayyuf al-mudun* (the ruralisation of the cities), articulated a mounting queasiness over rural migrations and the Bedouin populations. See *Joyriding*, 86.

⁴⁶ Menoret, *Joyriding*, 98–99.

stratified access to land and accommodation. Though straining against the continued jockeying of both the British and the Americans to maintain a powerful foothold in the region, capitalist rulers and Arab nationalist bureaucrats of the newly independent Gulf states alike parcelled up land by citizenship and function in ways redolent of the racially motivated ordering of urban space found in British and American oil towns. These oil towns also established normative benchmarks of urban development and technology which rulers on the make sought to emulate when subsidising the development and suburbanisation of the Gulf's urban areas. Infused with both anti-Arab nationalist xenophobia and nativist ideas of Arab exclusivity, infrastructure and the built environment became a nation-building tool through which the geopolitical boundaries of the Arab Gulf states were redrawn, while consolidating their economic trajectories as profoundly capitalist.

Mirroring sociological shifts that occurred in Western metropolises, in the wake of the centrifugal migration of newly minted citizens to the suburbs, older urban centres, which would only later be reappraised as important repositories of local history and culture, and thus designated heritage sites, became residential areas for the labouring poor. These communities overwhelmingly comprised bachelor migrant labourers who, precluded from the securities afforded by property ownership due to their foreign nationalities and exploitatively scant incomes, took up residence in the dilapidated, derelict, and slowly vanishing historic buildings that were scattered throughout the city centres. It was not only the migrant poor that moved into these areas, however. The rural population, who were treated by both imperial Western oil ventures and the state as of secondary or even tertiary importance, also moved into these areas, compelled to migrate due to a combination of discriminatory land policies and meteorological challenges. In what remains of this chapter, I will explore how the underlying logics instigated by these interventions have translated into the drives to organise the emerging cultural sphere via the dual practices of zoning and preservation, before drawing these two threads together in the final section, where I discuss the relationship between race, real-estate, and post-oil futures.

4.2 DISTRICTS OF DIFFERENCE

The contemporary urbanist imagination is no stranger to culture. In the United States there are over 100 cultural districts, while Europe is replete with so-called “cultural cities.”⁴⁷ The historical context for many of these initiatives and designations has been the backdrop of de-industrialisation and urbanisation, two of the most generic sociological shifts that ensued after the dollar was floated in 1973.⁴⁸ Culture has been seen by municipalities and urban planners operating in these contexts as an instrument of economic regeneration and uplift.⁴⁹ Often allied to economic benefits such as tax advantages for cultural enterprises or the additional allocation of funds from central government, these designations seek to streamline and focus cultural policies, and ameliorate local economies, by reprogramming them towards tourism and hospitality. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully explore the critiques of the precise culturally inflected variant of post-Bretton Woods modernist urbanism operating in mature capitalist economies. Suffice it to say, the major dimensions of the critique pivot on the ways that such initiatives, rather than delivering uplift to immiserated residents of a given city or neighbourhood, have set in motion dynamics of gentrification that have seen the targets of this social engineering economically and symbolically excluded from public space.⁵⁰

Discussing the creation of the Saadiyat Cultural District on Saadiyat Island, Brigitte Dumortier stresses that Abu Dhabi’s political-economic context and urban landscape are very different from those that have provoked cultural approaches to urban redevelopment in the United States and Western Europe.⁵¹ Unlike those contexts, or indeed other urban contexts in the Gulf, where the cultural economy has been grafted onto the preexisting urban landscape, she argues that the Saadiyat Cultural

⁴⁷ Brigitte Dumortier, “The Cultural Imperative: Saadiyat Cultural District in Abu Dhabi between Public Policy and Architectural Gesture,” in *Under Construction: Logics of Urbanism in the Gulf Region*, eds. Steffan Wippel et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 211–30.

⁴⁸ Harvey, *Spaces*; Massey, *World City*; Sassen, *Global City*.

⁴⁹ Crinson, ed. *Urban Memory*.

⁵⁰ Embedded in these everyday and capillary exclusions is an often fetishistic aesthetic performance. By dint of operating on the urban scale and its localities, these initiatives appropriate and market characteristic features of the communities that live there, such as the industrial architecture of their historic industries, or the “cultural difference” of the often non-white communities that have settled in inner cities.

⁵¹ Dumortier, “Imperative.”

District is being created *ex nihilo* on a previously uninhabited island.⁵² In the last section of this chapter, I explored how transformations to the Gulf's urban landscapes induced sociological shifts and exclusions that share significant features with those experienced in cities of the de-industrialising West due to the historical connections between these parts of the world. Rather than stressing differences, and in keeping with the overarching argument of this thesis, I would like to begin this discussion of cultural zoning policies by emphasising the deeply enmeshed economic and political context out of which both these initiatives, and the wider long-term economic strategies of which they are a part, emerge.

As described in the previous chapter, the idea of creating a cultural district on Saadiyat Island took wing following a conversation between the Guggenheim's director, Thomas Krens, and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Zayed in 2005. At that point the body for managing culture and heritage was the newly formed Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH). Sheikh Khalifa also created the Tourism Development & Investment Company (TDIC) in 2006 to manage the assets of the ADACH. The ADACH merged with the Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority (ADHA) and the cultural arm of the TDIC in 2012 to form the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority (ADTCA), later renamed the Abu Dhabi Department of Tourism and Culture.⁵³ In 2005, the Guggenheim Foundation signed an agreement with the ADACH to consult on the creation of this district. Per Negar Azimi, who worked as a research assistant on Krens' memoir project, 'Guggenheim curators would staff the museum, and Krens would be the master planner of Saadiyat's cultural district.'⁵⁴ Indeed, Krens is credited with having first mooted the idea of creating a cultural zone. He is also credited with having introduced Nouvel to the Abu Dhabi organs of state at around the same time, prior to the negotiation of a deal with the French Government and the Louvre, when the 'classic museum' idea was still embryonic.⁵⁵

Thomas Krens is a divisive figure in the art world. Bullish and buccaneering, Krens was appointed as a consultant to the Guggenheim in 1986 shortly after

⁵² Dumortier, "Imperative," 173.

⁵³ This series of status promotions signals the mounting perception of cultural policies and assets as an important political and economic instrument.

⁵⁴ Azimi, "Art War," 19.

⁵⁵ Bruno Maquart, "The Louvre Abu Dhabi: Utopia as Reality," in *Under Construction: Logics of Urbanism in the Gulf Region*, ed. Steffan Wippel et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 195.

graduating from Yale with an MBA and was made director of the Foundation two years later. During his tenure as director, Krens pioneered the institution's expansionist corporate strategy, using his business background and acumen to augment the organisations' revenue streams and improve its financial position given its comparatively small endowment relative to other museums in the United States.⁵⁶ Prior to the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, the Guggenheim outpost with the largest footprint was Bilbao, a cavernous 'modern cathedral'⁵⁷ for art, also designed by Frank Gehry, which opened while Krens was director.⁵⁸ Smaller franchises had also opened in Berlin, Las Vegas and Venice.⁵⁹ Several other major venues were ventured but not realised despite discussions having advanced quite significantly - in the case of both Salzburg and Rio de Janeiro, architects for each building had been selected.⁶⁰

In a filmed interview with the editor of *the Art Newspaper*, Anna Somers Cocks, Krens suggested that he did not perceive these unrealised projects as failures or wasted attempts, instead describing his sustained project of franchising the Guggenheim 'as a *discursive process*...it sensitises the region to a cluster of opportunities... developing a critical mass of potential and excitement.'⁶¹ This elaborate and strangely persuasive logic was likely designed to deflect attention from his having led the institution up the garden path on multiple occasions, wasting critical resources in the process. Nevertheless, Krens' reasoning inadvertently captures something fundamental about how culturally inflected urban planning taps into *preexisting* discourses about culture and space that are deeply imperialist.

As already described, in the cities of Western Europe and America, where this merger between cultural, urban, and economic policy originated, such zoning policies have been a response to the economic stagnation and decline that followed rapid

⁵⁶ Azimi, "Art War."

⁵⁷ Graeme Evans, "Hard-branding the Cultural City—from Prado to Prada," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 2 (2003): 433.

⁵⁸ Due the strong Basque secessionist movement, with its roots in the Partisan anti-Franco resistance, parachuting the Guggenheim into Bilbao was seen as an assault on its identity - a bomb was planted at the opening ceremony in 1997, injuring a security guard. See Evans, "Hard-branding."

⁵⁹ It should be noted that Venice predated Krens, while the Las Vegas project is now defunct.

⁶⁰ Krens stepped down from his post as director of the Guggenheim Foundation in 2008 to focus his attentions entirely on the Saadiyat Cultural District, a project of such complexity that he felt it demanded his full attention and the creation of a special organ within the Guggenheim institutional machinery.

⁶¹ The Art Newspaper, *Thomas Krens on the Guggenheim's Unrealised Projects in Salzburg, Rio and Venice; Interview Part 3*, YouTube, 2008.

deindustrialisation. The industry colloquialism ‘the Bilbao effect,’ captures how Bilbao was the European test-case for this cultural form of urban renewal. The city was emblematic of the sociological and economic predicament facing many European cities. Previously a major exporter of iron, steel, and ships, with one of the most active ports in Western Europe, Bilbao’s industries collapsed in the 1970s. The municipality sought to harness the marketing power of iconic architecture and the Guggenheim’s global branding to reinvigorate its economy, orienting it towards culture and tourism. The Gulf states, by contrast, are seeking to resolve the dual problems of low productivity and long-term economic instability that are the structural products of their overwhelming dependence on migrant labour, and their reliance on a handful of key industries including but not limited to oil and petrochemicals (see section 3.3). Jean-François Charnier, the former Scientific Director of AFM described to me how,⁶² having decided the necessity of a development vision,⁶³ Abu Dhabi was quite taken with the cultural approach to development pursued by Bilbao in collaboration with the Guggenheim.

Nonetheless, that the precise structure of the cultural solutions offered to these different economic histories and circumstances should so closely resemble one another – what Hanieh calls their ‘marked discursive resemblance’⁶⁴ – is an effect of the prodigious involvement of foreign consultants such as Krens in devising these strategies. The welter of Western consultants working on these museum projects insist that they have been specifically informed by and formulated for the Gulf’s urban environments. Nonetheless, the decision to establish cultural institutions that replicate extant models,⁶⁵ to concentrate these ‘cultural assets,’⁶⁶ as Krens describes them, into a single cultural zone, and to assign these zones the label of a ‘hub’ or ‘district,’ indicates how, rather than the highly localised context, they take the broader global trend of cultural zoning and labelling as their original points of reference.

Abu Dhabi is not the only Gulf state to have adopted the cultural district as an organising principle for its cultural infrastructures - Kuwait, Dubai, Sharjah, and Saudi Arabia have all adopted policies of concentrating cultural institutions in specific areas.

⁶² Jean-François Charnier, interview with author.

⁶³ What would become the *Vision 2030* document.

⁶⁴ Hanieh, *Money*, 207.

⁶⁵ Saadiyat Island was purportedly modelled on Berlin’s Kulturhaus Insel (Museum Island).

⁶⁶ Azimi, “Art War.”

That the Kuwait National Cultural District (KNCD) has determined to apply the framework of a district, with its associated policy directives and incentives, to its cultural infrastructures is particularly illustrative. The KNCD is composed of what it refers to as three ‘cultural clusters’ – the western shores, the eastern shores and the edge of the city centre. These clusters are, however, geographically non-contiguous. The eastern shore cluster is in fact quite far away from the other two clusters although it does sit in close proximity to the Tariq Rajab Museum, a private museum and the only museum in Kuwait to have remained consistently open before and after the Iraqi invasion. As a consequence, this was the museum to which diplomats and other dignitaries were taken on official visits to Kuwait before the new suite of museums opened. Following the zoning of culture in the city, older museums within the parameters of these new cultural districts that had been subject to prolonged closures have now been retrofitted to its new cultural district framework. This post-hoc, slightly clumsy attempt to functionally organise the cultural components of Kuwait City’s urban landscape into a district comparable to those announced, and only partially implemented by Abu Dhabi, indicates the power of both these developmental blueprints, and of regional competition,⁶⁷ in corralling the urban imagination of Gulf rulers and their consultants.⁶⁸

Discussing the market oriented economic planning that these states have all undertaken - a crystallisation of their diversification agendas - Hanieh cautions that the foreign origins of policies do not mean that they have been imposed.⁶⁹ Rather, these plans have found receptive audiences among Gulf rulers, aligning with their ambitions to solidify their power and further develop the capitalist class.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁷ Jean-François Charnier, former Scientific Director of AFM responsible for overseeing the museological side of the creation of the LAD, and current Cultural & Heritage Director of Al Ula, likewise told me that Saudi Arabia were rushing to create a cultural infrastructure due to an awareness that they were ‘very late’ to the party, relative their regional neighbours.

⁶⁸ Barker Langham and Brunswick, both headquartered in the UK, are two of the consultancies most deeply involved in the creation of the Gulf’s new cultural infrastructure. While Brunswick merely has a cultural arm, Barker Langham *only* work with culture, establishing themselves through their work in the Gulf. Its founders suggest that they use their ‘UAE experience of heritage project development in places as diverse as Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom.’ See Barker and Langham, “Spectacle,” 86.

⁶⁹ Hanieh, *Money*.

⁷⁰ Drawing on Kanna, Hanieh argues that neoliberal norms and practices are transposed with the collaboration of Gulf institutions and actors, undergoing a process of creative adaptation. Gulf specific instantiations of neoliberalism are thus both recognisably neoliberal yet configured to, and shaping, the specific local neoliberal environment. See Kanna, *City*; Hanieh, *Money*.

adoption of cultural zoning policies should be thought of comparably. That several Gulf states have plumped for these policies may be a consequence of the fact that they have been suggested by the cultural consultants whose imaginations are structured by the policies and practices of cultural zoning rooted in the Western context of late-capitalist deindustrialisation. However, these policies have been met with enthusiasm by the bodies responsible for expanding and maintaining the cultural infrastructures in the Gulf. As the non-contiguous geography of the KNCD indicates, the planned approach to cultural infrastructure is to a significant degree a discursive project. In labelling these different parts of the city a district, Kuwait and the other Gulf states that now boast “cultural districts” are able to position themselves in the cosmopolitan company of major cultural districts and projects the world over. Actors from the Gulf are heavily represented in the highly cosmopolitan membership of the Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN) - the Kuwait National Cultural District, Sharjah Museums Authority, Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism, Alserkal Avenue in Dubai, and MiSK City in Saudi Arabia are all among its partners, sitting beside districts and organisations from the United Kingdom, mainland Europe, China, and the Antipodes.

GCDN was founded in 2013, the progeny of AEA Consulting, a British firm specialising in cultural consultancy and strategy. According to their website, the organisation is motivated by its commitments to ‘improve the quality of urban life through the contribution of the arts, culture and creative industries,’ while their mandate is to ‘foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing among those responsible for creative and cultural districts, quarters and clusters in widely diverse contexts.’ Since 2015, it has organised seven conferences, what it calls “convenings,” to which all its members are invited – its 2018 convening was held in Dubai. The very existence of such an organisation and its origins in the private sector industry of cultural consultancy is symptomatic of the coalescence of planned approaches to the urban landscape and culture. Its mandate, however, guarantees that the evolution and articulation of emerging cultural infrastructures in diverse locations will be further homogenised and standardised, ensuring that new or redeveloped cultural institutions and infrastructures emulate and adapt preexisting Western derived models and techniques. These logics, i.e., those underpinning the spread of cultural zoning policies to the Gulf and elsewhere, conform to the basic structure of imperialism. Norms and

practices are spread with the effect of eliminating alternative arrangements of culture in urban space thereby slowly limiting even the imaginative possibilities for alternatives. To the extent that racial capitalism can be understood in part as a social structure that produces and organises difference, there is nevertheless another less evident, though no less damaging, way that cultural zoning policies racialise.

Taking a more general view of planned approaches to the urban environment, Lefebvre argued that the impulse to rationalise and order public space, as expressed in the forms of systematised suburbanisation, functional segregation, and zoning, creates fragmentation and distance between urban multitudes.⁷¹ Such hyper-rationalist modernist approaches were, he maintained, antithetical to the utopian promise of the urban as a space of the spontaneous – sometimes confrontational, sometimes serendipitous, but wholly unavoidable – encounter with difference. Although they cannot eliminate such encounters entirely, modernist urban thought was therefore ‘violently anti-urban...[o]ne could call it a de-urbanizing and de-urbanized urbanization to emphasize the paradox.’⁷² The functional separation of urban space devoted to culture from other parts of the urban landscape represents a specific compounded variant of the de-urbanising urbanisation described by Lefebvre.

At its core, culture, and the experience thereof, represents an experience of difference. Much like the aesthetic horizons of cultural institutions limited the impact of the political performances of Gulf Labor, naturalising them by assimilating them into the art world’s aesthetic performance and horizon of expectation, so cultural zoning policies assist with the management of difference entailed by the modernist urban imagination. Unruly and quotidian *encounters* with difference that a less managed urban space affords are supplanted with regulated and organised *displays* of difference within the safe confines of cultural districts. In these locations, although strange and uncanny experiences may provoke thought, they do not disturb the prevailing order as they are anticipated by the functional designation of space and the structure of expectation such a designation imposes. Indeed, to be in a cultural district is almost invariably to have sought out an engagement with difference.⁷³

⁷¹ Lefebvre, *Cities*.

⁷² Lefebvre, *Cities*, 78.

⁷³ Chap. 5 will further elaborate this argument, exploring the political effects of the particular attention given to postcolonial curatorial practices and artworks by cultural institutions in the Gulf.

Thus far, this chapter has shown how cultural zoning policies, derived from Western contexts and often applied to sites on the outskirts of Gulf cities, are the counterpart to the attempt to homogenise and commodify the Gulf through museum architecture. Such zoning policies are also an extension of the state-driven suburbanisation described in the previous section of this chapter. As aforementioned, the corollary to suburbanisation was the abandonment of city centres. The next section will turn to a discussion of the racial dynamics at play in the assimilation of these historic city centres into the Gulf's urban cultural infrastructures as "heritage."

4.3 NEWLY PRESERVED

The Western town planners hired by rulers in the Gulf to conceptualise the original functional segregation of urban space and, in particular, the dispersion of the residential parts of the city to its suburban environs via major road infrastructures, envisioned that these interventions would allow for the restoration and preservation of the historic districts. With the ordered expansion of the city, the historic centres would be transformed from bustling residential quarters to pristine landmarks and tourist attractions. Menoret describes how the guiding philosophy behind Dioxiadis' master plans for Riyadh, dubbed Dynapolis, was 'linear growth' to militate against the 'future strangulation of the existing centre.'⁷⁴ According to Menoret,⁷⁵ Dioxiadis had planned that:

[t]he Musmak fort, several palaces and whole areas would be protected and landscaped to serve as a reminder of the rich architectural tradition of central Najd, and as a model for the design of the public spaces and residential housing. The central spine was roughly oriented in the direction of Dir'iyya, Al Sa'uds first capital in the eighteenth century, which in 1818 had been bombed by the Egyptians on behalf of the Sublime Porte'

⁷⁴ Menoret, *Joyriding*, 96.

⁷⁵ Menoret, *Joyriding*, 96.

Dioxadis' hope that his plans would enable the conservation of places he perceived as repositories of local history and culture is a pure expression of the hegemonic Western approach to heritage, what Laurajane Smith calls its 'authorised discourse.'⁷⁶ This formulation of heritage is deeply positivist, emphasising its material basis and suggesting that such tangible sites of material culture have inherent and immutable historical and cultural value that render their preservation a moral and political imperative.⁷⁷ This dominant discourse concerning heritage was powerfully reinforced in 1972 by the ratification of the United Nations Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage, which mandated an international legal framework for the designation of World Heritage Sites that would then fall under the administrative purview of UNESCO, headquartered in Paris.⁷⁸ Such an approach, with its assembled ideas, techniques and institutions did not, however, find much purchase among the Gulf ruling elites during the first phase of urban development. In this period the state was much more preoccupied with communicating its power through novel architecture and infrastructures,⁷⁹ thus allocating meagre funds to those bodies tasked with managing historic districts and buildings.⁸⁰ As a consequence, in the main, these historic areas were neglected by the state after they had been vacated by their former residents.

Many of these historic quarters have now been absorbed into the cultural infrastructures in the Gulf cities. A cluster of old residential buildings were reclaimed by the Sharjah Museums Authority (SMA) and Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF) in Al Mureijah, known to be the Bangladeshi part of Sharjah City; in Qatar, the downtown area of Msheireb, where the old city was located, consists of several quarters including

⁷⁶ Smith, *Uses*, 4.

⁷⁷ Smith, *Uses*; Byrne, "Unfeeling."

⁷⁸ Since the early 2000s, the Arab Gulf states have all nominated numerous heritage sites to be inscribed on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites.

⁷⁹ Bsheer, *Archive Wars*; Matthew MacLean, "Suburbanization, National Space and Place, and the Geography of Heritage in the UAE," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 7, no. 2 (2017): 157–78; Djamel Boussa, "A Future to the Past: The Case of Fareej Al-Bastakia in Dubai, UAE," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 36 (2006): 125–38.

⁸⁰ Based on meticulous archival research in Chapter Four of *Archive Wars*, Bsheer documents how, although the Saudi state commissioned a conservation expert to come up with solutions for the preservation of the Governance Palace District within the old city walls, with the exception of Masmak Fort, recommendations to preserve the district were not heeded until the 1990s (see especially 145–162).

a heritage district with a cluster of museums in traditional buildings;⁸¹ smaller heritage projects can be found in Abu Dhabi City, in particular the restoration of Qasr al-Hosn, which has been restored and renovated and now hosts a permanent exhibition on the history of the Emirate. Dubai also has its own heritage district recently renamed from al-Bastakiyya to al-Fahidi, although it continues to be referred to by its original name in the local idiom.⁸² The quarter contains an assortment of shops selling local handicrafts, cultural centres, small art galleries and cafes. It also hosts the annual Sikka Art Fair, a cultural festival showcasing cultural production by local artists and invigilated by students from Sheikh Zayed University. The preservation of al-Bastakiyya, and its redevelopment as a site of culture and heritage, captures the racial implications of the intersection between urban redevelopment, and the arrival of heritage and conservation discourse to the Gulf.

Al-Bastakiyya is the only remaining part of Old Dubai that has survived into the present, a small part of the historic area of Bur Dubai situated on Dubai Creek. Dwellings were constructed in al-Bastakiyya between 1890 and 1950, largely by Iranian merchants who fled the cities of Lengeh and Bastak due a combination of religious persecution and tax incentives offered by the emir of Dubai, who made Dubai port a free zone following the imposition of taxes by the Qajar king. Constructed from coral and mud, the buildings almost invariably comprised at least one *barjil*, the distinctive wind towers designed to cool the buildings by funnelling breeze down into the rooms. In the 1950s, residents of al-Bastakiyya began to vacate their homes following the redevelopment of Dubai Creek, relocating to the new suburbs to its south that could be accessed with a motorcar and were fitted with all the mod cons.

Todd Reisz has described the dredging of Dubai Creek and the demolition of many of the older dwellings located in this part of town in microscopic historical detail. With the assistance of British officials in London, the British Engineering firm

⁸¹ The Aga Khan Foundation has been the steward of much of the architectural development and innovation in the Arab Gulf states. Not only have they been enlisted to organise architectural competitions, but they have their own award for architecture that serves places with a significant Muslim presence - the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. SAF's new buildings were shortlisted for this award, as were the heritage museums in Msheireb, Doha. Videos on each, made by the Aga Khan Foundation for the prize, can be viewed on YouTube.

⁸² This is not an exhaustive list of all the historic houses and heritage districts in the Arab Gulf states. All the states and emirates named sport other heritage buildings and villages, while comparable restoration initiatives have been undertaken in Kuwait and Oman.

Sir William Halcrow & Partners was invited in 1954 to undertake a survey of the Dubai Creek sponsored by the British Government. Despite the deficit of historical, demographic, and topographical data, and the protean nature of the currents flowing in and out of the creek, Halcrow ‘confidently calculated the price of a predictable and compliant harbor.’⁸³ To make their case, the creek was portrayed by the firm as aged and creaking, lacking the requisite infrastructure for a high-functioning modern harbour. On the basis of their survey, Halcrow were commissioned to dredge the creek to allow larger boats with deeper hulls into it and to line its banks with concrete. Halcrow’s engineering and redevelopment of the creek, Reisz argues, deprived the residents of Old Dubai of this community asset. Deeply embedded in the social structure of Old Dubai, the creek had previously been a place to fish and relax as well as interact with the merchant trade centred around it, and its expansion catalysed the move of citizen-residents to the new suburban parts of town.

Dubai Creek continued to be a dense thicket of mercantile activities for the first few years after it was dredged. Many of Old Dubai’s buildings were quickly inhabited by migrants involved in merchant trade who joined the thriving cosmopolitan communities from the eastern edges of the Indian Ocean that had long since settled in the area.⁸⁴ However, the increase in consumption and trade, piqued by the oil boom of the 1970s, saw the volume of cargo rapidly outstrip the capacity of Dubai Creek. Activities were therefore relocated first to the nearby Port Rashid, opened in 1972, and subsequently, piecemeal to Jebel Ali Port in the southern outskirts of the city. This reorientation of the centre of maritime trade away from the creek precipitated an exodus of more affluent expatriates from the area. Rather than allow the owners of the now abandoned buildings to develop the areas of Old Dubai, which many were keen to do, much of the land and buildings were purchased by the ruling Al Maktoum family.⁸⁵

While the state equivocated over the future of the area, the buildings were allowed to lapse into a state of dereliction and disrepair. In the 1960s and 1970s, the licenced shipping agent, Gray MacKenzie, employed many South Asian migrant workers as stevedores to process goods arriving at Customs House on the creek. The

⁸³ Reisz, *Shonpiece City*, 80.

⁸⁴ Reisz, *Shonpiece City*.

⁸⁵ Boussa, “A Future.”

construction and engineering company Costain likewise employed migrant workers to build the nearby Port Rashid, and these workers were subsequently employed to process cargo at the new port. During the period of uncertainty concerning the buildings of the old city, this migrant workforce moved into them, attracted by the proximity to their work and cheap rents. By 1975, all that remained of al-Bastakiyya were seventy-five wind-tower houses. Another twenty-two houses were demolished in the early 1980s to clear space for Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum's new Diwan complex, thus further attenuating the stock of traditional buildings left in the area.⁸⁶ Admitting a small portion of Shindagha designated a heritage village, the nearby areas of Deira and Shindagha were completely demolished in the early 1990s after the issuance of a royal decree. A similar demolition order was issued for the remaining buildings in al-Bastakiyya in 1989. The reason this scheduled demolition did not occur was an intervention by the British Prince of Wales.

Prince Charles was due to visit the emirate in that year. A few years earlier the British architect, Rayner Otter, had settled in al-Bastakiyya and had restored his home using traditional methods. Conscious of the demolition order and aware of Prince Charles' preoccupation with conservation and heritage, he managed to contact the royal prior to his official visit to the UAE in 1989. When Prince Charles arrived in Dubai, he duly asked to visit the area, with Otter offering his services as a guide. After his visit, the future British king encouraged Sheikh Rashid to protect the area and its demolition was cancelled. Shortly thereafter, in 1994, Dubai municipality charged the consultancy firm Llewellyn-Davies, with administering the al-Bastakiyya conservation project. In preparation for this conservation project, the emir purchased all the remaining properties in the area from their owners, and it was proposed that the houses be lent to the foreign consultants who had been commissioned to restore the area.⁸⁷

There was some - albeit slight - precedent for this conservation agenda.⁸⁸ In 1978, al-Fahidi Fort, which sits on the periphery of al-Bastakiyya, opened as the new

⁸⁶ Boussa, "A Future."

⁸⁷ Boussa, "A Future."

⁸⁸ It is worth bearing in mind that, though an import, the conservation agenda is not unitary. During the tour, my guide seemed somewhat frustrated with the commercial motives underpinning the conservation of al-Bastakiyya. He expressed his disdain for a development of mock Bastak buildings that had been built next to al-Bastakiyya. This tallies with what Bsheer describes as divergent motives of those behind Riyadh's Governance Palace District, see chap. 3, fn. 3.



Figure 4.1 Dhows with fishing cages on Dubai Creek
Photo credit: Dubai As It Used To Be



Figure 4.2 Bastak-style architecture in old Dubai, 1970s
Photo credit: Dubai As It Used To Be

Dubai National Museum, the building having been thoroughly restored. New Zealander Yvonne Chetwin, the wife of David Chetwin, who was Costain's contract manager for the development of the dry docks infrastructure at Port Rashid,⁸⁹ is credited with conceptualising the museum, having undertaken the collecting and curation of many of its first objects on a shoestring budget.⁹⁰ Cecilia Green, whose husband Byron Green worked for Oilfields Supply Company managing the handling of oil exports through Port Rashid, collaborated with Chetwin on the fort.⁹¹ Bayt al-Wakil, the old customs office on the creek, was also partially restored by the Dubai municipality in the 1990s, having been neglected after Gray MacKenzie traded up their offices for new buildings on reclaimed land in Deira in 1964. Purpose built for Gray MacKenzie in 1935, the building was peculiar in its size, adapting traditional coral and mud building methods to bear a larger load and allow more living space. The restoration initiated by the state was only completed after local businessman, Ahmed al-Rafi, took responsibility for it. He converted the building into a restaurant that continues to trade today.

Braiding commercial colonial enterprises with the gendered politics of domesticity and immigration, these two projects reveal the capillary mode by which conservation and heritage discourses slowly seeped into the Gulf. Vanity projects of businessmen in buildings that had been distended to meet the more expansive needs of its Western staff, or the hobbies of the wives of Western commercial agents overseeing projects in the Gulf whose spousal residency visas precluded them from working, these projects anticipated the incorporation of heritage policies into the remit of the state. In addition to the Iranian connection, that cultural projects were often initiated by women may partly account for their slow uptake by the emirs of Dubai, who only responded to these calls in a more comprehensive fashion after prompts by the British Crown Prince. As Silvia Federici argues, women's hobbies and domestic

⁸⁹ Western company contracted to redevelop the urban environment often documented the old cities as part of their surveys. A company video produced by Costain, which can be found on YouTube, evidences the self-justifying and self-aggrandising way that Western companies contracted to develop the Gulf viewed their work, perceiving themselves as hauling these states out of the dark ages and into modernity.

⁹⁰ Cecilia Osborne, *The Gulf States and Oman* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1977).

⁹¹ Dubai municipality awarded the British design company Event a contract to further develop the Dubai National Museum in the 1990s. Joy Ashworth, a founding member of the company, was appointed to project manage this expansion, and recalls that when she arrived in Dubai in 1993, the municipality had already built an enormous subterranean suite of exhibition rooms.

pursuits as housewives were constructed as frivolous to sustain certain divisions of labour, and thus safeguard capitalist social reproduction.⁹²

Despite the initiative launched in 1994, conservation in al-Bastakiyya did not begin in earnest until 2005. In 2012, the area was designated a 'Cultural Area' by the Historic Buildings Department of the Dubai Municipality. As aforementioned, along with this designation, the area was also renamed al-Fahidi. Its former name was derived from the Bastak style of architecture - the very reason for its protection and restoration - which in turn takes its name from the city of Bastak in modern day Iran.⁹³ The official explanation for this name change was that the sobriquet al-Fahidi would knit the area more closely to the nearby fort of the same name that houses the Dubai National Museum.⁹⁴ However as many of my interlocutors told me, consensus opinion among Dubai residents is that the renaming was a symbolic act intended to purge the UAE of any vestiges of its historical connection with Iran.

In the historical overview of the relationship between modernist town planning and race in the cities of the Gulf provided at the beginning of this chapter, I detailed how the dynamics of suburbanisation, functional segregation and zoning have a correlate in the sociology of the historic parts of the city. What we might think of as a Gulf variant of urban flight (i.e., flight to the suburbs), which largely took place following the provision of political and financial incentives from the state, altered the demographics of these parts of town. Areas such as al-Bastakiyya were transformed from residential areas largely inhabited by the sedentary indigenous populations of the Arabian Peninsula to areas inhabited by the cities' working poor, mainly migrant labourers both from South Asia who arrived under the *kafala* system, described in detail in Chapter Three, and recently sedentarised Bedouin. In addition to the cheap rents charged by the owners due to the decaying structures and anachronistic and creaking infrastructure, and their proximity to workplaces on the creek, al-Bastakiyya held a particular appeal for workers from the Indian subcontinent due to the prior settlement of South Asian merchants involved in the *dhow*-based trade in the adjacent Bur Dubai.

⁹² Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 1998).

⁹³ Slightly inland from the Persian Gulf coast, the city of Bastak is almost exactly due north from Abu Dhabi City, and is not far from the major port city Bandar Abbas and the strategically significant Strait of Hormuz.

⁹⁴ Boussa, "A Future."

Marilyn Wouters, a Dutch woman who lived in Dubai between 1988 and 2003, filmed a walk through Bur Dubai, Shindagha and al-Bastakiyya in 1988. Her video shows the crumbling state of much of al-Bastakiyya. In the footage, one sees how some buildings have collapsed entirely as the foundations have given way. As her camera drifts lazily across the neighbourhood, many intact buildings also come into view, with her camera homing in on the wind towers (*barjil*) and the birds roosting within. Despite the dilapidation, it is nevertheless clear from the footage that the quarter is inhabited. One shot shows two children standing in an alley, looking with tentative curiosity into the camera, while another shows men crouched over, studiously mending the distinctive *qarqour* fishing cages common in the Gulf. That the area should have remained inhabited despite its neglect is unsurprising given that one of the main reasons for the settlement of migrant labourers in the area - the work available processing cargo at Port Rashid - did not conclude until the mid 2000s, despite Sheikh Rashid deciding in the 1980s that Port Rashid should be decommissioned in favour of Jebel Ali.

Having rapidly transformed Port Rashid into a container terminal to accommodate the container ships that now made up the bulk of its traffic, the Port was nevertheless hamstrung by its topographical unsuitability for this enterprise - its seabed too shallow and the currents in the Gulf Littoral too protean to receive large and deep container ships without major, capital intensive interventions into the landscape.⁹⁵ Though vast, Jebel Ali was afflicted by the same topographical challenges and had to be continuously reworked to make it suitable as Dubai's single container terminal. During this drawn-out liminal period, Port Rashid continued to function as a container port, receiving the overspill from Jebel Ali. The implementation of the conservation agenda therefore entailed clearing the low-skilled migrant workers who continued to reside in the dilapidated parts of the Gulf cities such as al-Bastakiyya from their homes, separating them from the vital South Asian community hubs and support networks around the creek that nourished forms of attachment and belonging beyond the purely economic.

The timings of these conservation interventions are not without significance. Only long after they had been abandoned, left to communities viewed as disposable in

⁹⁵ Khalili, *Sinews*.

favour of more desirable newer homes and amenities, and only at the behest of the future British monarch, did these buildings come to be viewed as valuable artefacts of heritage. The application of conservation discourse and techniques to these historical sites attempts to suspend them in a particular moment in history, inserting them into the linear chronology of an acceptable Arabised past, for which they become evidence, and allowing their absorption into the teleology of capitalist development and consumption.⁹⁶ As such, they are consistent with broader political dynamics in the Gulf where the elliptical temporalities of religious or indigenous time are supplanted with the linear temporalities of capitalist time.⁹⁷ Notwithstanding my desire to avoid communicating any notion of an authentic historic area, when I visited al-Bastakiyya as part of a guided tour organised as part of the Sikka Art Fair, dubbed the ‘Tolerance Tour,’ I was struck by the immaculate, sanitised condition of the conservation area. Gone are the sand banks and detritus that one sees shored up against the walls of the buildings in both Wouters’ video and old photographs, while those in charge of the conservation have opportunistically converted areas where buildings had collapsed into squares. During my visit to the Sikka Art Fair, these played host to gustatory pop-ups and a stage for concerts.

As the attempt to change the name of Al Bastakiyya indicates, the act of temporal stabilisation entailed by heritage designations is also part of a process of historical purging. The constitutive historical complexity and interlinkages across the Persian Gulf and wider Indian Ocean are eradicated and the UAE’s history retrofitted with a national container and the chimera of ethnic homogeneity. To restate the point more bluntly, this state-led amnesia, rooted in the Western positivist discourse of heritage, is what Achille Mbembe calls ‘an act of ‘chronophagy’.’⁹⁸ That is, it is an example of the constitutive practice by which the state founds itself through the constant act of swallowing threatening pasts. Mbembe thus conceptualises state-led archival practices as technologies for regulating the relationship between the past and the present, acting as a gateway between the living and the dead, and arguing that its

⁹⁶ To rephrase less theoretically, only when these heritage sites could be repurposed as part of a marketing effort was there any political will to invest in them.

⁹⁷ For a discussion of how secular capitalist time overwhelms religious temporalities at the Holy Cities in Saudi Arabia see Chapter Five of Bsheer, *Archive Wars*, 165-207.

⁹⁸ Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and its Limits,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, eds. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2002), 23.

‘power as an “instituting imaginary” largely originates in this trade with death.’⁹⁹ Mbembe is writing with specific reference to the deceased and their documents, theorising the archive and its architecture as an attempt to systematise these traces, interring them in archives, which he understands as a kind of bureaucratic mausoleum, such that they are ‘formally prohibited from stirring up disorder in the present.’¹⁰⁰ This form of death might, however, be reinterpreted more broadly to entail the demise of particular socio-technical constellations. Examined in this light, the process of internalising objects and built environments into the archives of the ‘national heritage’ entails an attempt to shift these historical and cultural materialities from the domain of the present and the living, across the styx, and into the realm of the dead. As the case of al-Bastakiyya shows, this transfiguration nonetheless requires an act of displacement, consigning heritage sites to their prescribed past by forcibly expelling the living.

Alongside its migrant labouring workforce, the Bedouin have also represented the Gulf States’ internal other. Across the region the Bedouin have had a complex relationship with the state, having been treated in turns antagonistically and instrumentally. They have been targeted by pieces of anti-tribal legislation including the revocation or denial of citizenship, the abolition of tribal territories and the nationalisation of grazing lands. They have also been assimilated into the state at strategic moments, to serve in the army as mercenaries, or to enlarge support for the ruling families in the face of dissent.¹⁰¹ Bedouin ways of life were also imperilled by severe droughts in the central region of the Arabian Peninsula, largely in Saudi Arabia, that ravaged their livestock throughout the 1960s.¹⁰² As a consequence, many Bedouins migrated into the cities as economic and political migrants, leaving behind towns and

⁹⁹ Mbembe, “Archive and its Limits,” 22.

¹⁰⁰ Mbembe, “Archive and its Limits,” 22.

¹⁰¹ In Kuwait citizenship laws created the stateless nomadic peoples referred to as *bidoun*, for *bidoun jinsiyya*, an Arabic term that translates to “without nationality.” Until the late 1980s when their privileges were largely revoked, many *bidoun* formed the rank and file of the military and the police, offering service in exchange for access to benefits otherwise denied to them. See al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*; Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Longva, *Walls*. For discussions of the Bedouin in Saudi Arabia see Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Menoret, *Joyriding*, and in Qatar see Allen James Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

¹⁰² Menoret, *Joyriding*, 82.



Figure 4.3 Entrance to Sikka Art Fair, al-Bastakiya, Photo by author



Figure 4.4 Still from “1988 Bur Dubai; Bastakiya & Shindagha”, Marilyn Wouters

encampments to take up residence in the abandoned buildings of the historic centres or erecting slums within the confines of the city walls. These more subtle forms of displacement, rooted in the inexorable logics of urbanisation and proletarianisation, have created openings for the requisitioning of the material traces of Bedouin life into the state as heritage.

The now empty old city of Al Ula is a part of the Saudi Arabian conservation area of Al Ula in the northwest, which includes the Nabatean City of al-Hijr, the country's first UNESCO World Heritage site.¹⁰³ Al Ula old city's dilapidated buildings and winding roads have been repackaged as part of the area's tourist offering. In its PR material, the old city is described as having been populated up until recently, only abandoned by its inhabitants in the twentieth century in favour of the nearby new city of Al Ula. Describing these displacements with the language of abandonment naturalises the political and juridical violence that impelled the urbanisation and sedentarisation of the Bedouin, and which was catalysed by the programme of property acquisition that the Saudi state began in the area in the 1970s.¹⁰⁴ This is not to say, however, that this violence has been completely sublimated by bureaucratic and technical machineries. A metal fence was erected around the Al Ula site in 1982 and was continually expanded, cutting it off from the local community entirely until 2008. Under Saudi Arabia's Law of Antiquities, Museums and Architectural Heritage, archaeological discoveries licence the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Heritage (SCTH)¹⁰⁵ to seize any land in which discoveries are made. Local residents therefore report that, despite being legally obliged to do so, they do not notify the SCTH of finds on their land for fear their land will be requisitioned.¹⁰⁶ Violations of the legislation are punishable by fines of up to SAR300,000 (~GBP57,000) and prison sentences of up to three years.¹⁰⁷ Although not a cultural development project, the violence enacted by the state at the nearby NEOM smart city development is a brutal

¹⁰³ The area has been known as *mada'in salih* since the nineteenth century. The Quran describes how the Thamud people, who 'used to hew out dwellings from the mountains' (Surat al-Hijr 81-4), were punished for their refusal to heed the Prophet Salih's call to worship God. Due to this association, and despite the investment by the state, much of the local community dislike the site, with reports that the tombs have been defaced with graffiti. See Alrawaibah, "Archeological."

¹⁰⁴ Alrawaibah, "Archaeological."

¹⁰⁵ Previously the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities until the name was changed by a Council of Ministers resolution in 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Alrawaibah, "Archaeological."

¹⁰⁷ See Saudi Arabia's Law of Antiques, Museums and Urban Heritage.

manifestation of the violence and exclusion that underlies the superficially ordinary and peaceable sedentarisation of the Bedouin, and the requisitioning of their culture by the state. To make way for NEOM,¹⁰⁸ which is located on the Red Sea near the border with Jordan, approximately 20,000 of the indigenous Huwaitat people will have to be forcibly cleared from the land they have inhabited for centuries. Security services have already killed a Huwaitat man who brought international attention to these violent evictions by posting videos online.¹⁰⁹

Consistent with the arguments made in the previous section about the functional segregation of space entailing the management of the encounter with difference, the state's requisitioning of built environments as its heritage, or indeed for the purposes of other developments, has displaced the Bedouin, both directly and indirectly, from their historical homes and into cities, and has driven parts of the disproportionately migrant labouring poor out of the city to shanty towns and encampments at the city limit and beyond. Their new dwellings, as well as other social practices such as the persistence of the name al-Bastakiyya in the vernacular, represent the remains of the plural histories that animated heritage sites before their designation as such. These urban remains do not simply, as Mbembe discusses, disclose different pasts contained within the present. They reveal its occluded presents. The social forms that have been reintroduced into these heritage sites by contrast are only those consonant with the dominant historical present now ascribed to these areas - hotels, small art galleries and shops selling tourist tat, many run by Western expats, and all oriented around the tourist capital that derives from its heritage designation and the confected past it summons. A latent theme buried in the coalescence of tourism with heritage and culture, as described here, is that of economic diversification and the post-oil future. In the final part of this chapter, I will therefore draw together the discussion of its previous pages to explore how the intersection between cultural urbanism and the liberalisation of the property market discloses the racial imaginary of the Arab Gulf states' post-oil development vision.

¹⁰⁸ NEOM is a portmanteau, composed of neo, from the Greek for new, and *mustaqbal*, the Arabic for future.

¹⁰⁹ Séamus Malekafzali, "Neom - The Line to Oblivion," *Séamus Malekafzali* (blog), 14 January 2021.

4.4 THE PEOPLE OF HAPPINESS ISLAND

In 2008 the Emirate of Abu Dhabi published its *Vision 2030* document. Mandated by Crown Prince Muhammad bin Zayed, it was the joint purview of the General Secretariat of the Executive Council, the Abu Dhabi Council for Economic Development, and the Department of Planning and Economy. The key policy agendas it sketched out were informed by several earlier documents including the Abu Dhabi Urban Structure Framework Plan (USFP), a document published in September 2007 by the Urban Planning Council (UPC) which Emiri Decree Number 23 had created earlier that year.¹¹⁰ The intimate relationship between these two documents, one the overarching developmental blueprint for the emirate, the other an organising imaginary for its capital, demonstrates how intertwined urban planning and the urban environment are with the Gulf states' desired trajectory of economic development and diversification, and the consolidation of political power.

Both documents were devised by organs of Abu Dhabi's government working hand in glove with major Western firms and consultants. The American consultancy firm Booz Allen Hamilton¹¹¹ were the main company commissioned to work on the Vision 2030 document.¹¹² Boston Consulting Group and ARUP Engineering each undertook two separate reviews to inform the USFP. Two extensive workshops were attended by 'a technical team of urban specialists and production people; a distinguished group of urban experts from academia, private practice and government from seven countries,' in addition to local representatives from the academy and government. The proposals from these workshops were all assimilated and synthesised into the urban growth model the USFP outlines. Alongside the stated objective of guarding against what the USFP characterises as the loss of 'the unique Abu Dhabi

¹¹⁰ Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, "Urban Structure Framework Plan" (Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, September 2007).

¹¹¹ The company's specialist areas include information technology, defence, and security. Their employment roster includes a very substantial number of ex-intelligence while its vice president and former head of defense programs, J. Michael McConnell, briefly served as United States Director of National Intelligence under the George W. Bush administration (2007-2009).

¹¹² Economic Vision Taskforce, "The Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030" (Report, The General Secretariat of the Executive Council, Department of Planning & Economy & Abu Dhabi Council for Economic Development, November 2008).

civic identity,¹¹³ the ‘components of the traditional Emirati family lifestyle’¹¹⁴ and preserving its ‘critical natural environment,’¹¹⁵ its long-term ambition was the strategic incorporation of the predominantly underdeveloped islands adjacent to Abu Dhabi, including Saadiyat Island, into its urban environment. By incorporating these islands, the USFP could lean on the island geography of Abu Dhabi City to render the functional division of space more acute. Although much of the development mooted by these plans is yet to be realised - many of the ideas slated have in fact been jettisoned entirely - they nevertheless constitute imaginative realities. These realities offer insights into how the cultural agenda is ensconced in a broader imaginary about the consumption of space, and about the consumers thereof that it attempts to prefigure and designate legitimate.

The two detailed general sections of the USFP - *Section 4.0: Urban Structure Framework Plans* and *Section 5.0: Overall Patterns* - include maps of the city in which the landscape is divided and coded by intended use and then further subdivided by density with different gradations of colour, creating a highly elaborate mosaic. These plans appear to place a heavy premium on certain functions for land, namely residential use, leisure, and tourism, including dedicated maps for the distribution of retail and hotels. This earmarking of land use dovetails with the plans detailed in the press releases issued by the Guggenheim shortly after the original agreement between the organisation and the ADACH was signed. As per a press release issued by the organisation on 8 July 2006: ‘Saadiyat Island will be developed in three phases with total completion scheduled for 2018. The masterplan envisages six highly individual districts and includes twenty-nine hotels, including an iconic seven-star property, three marinas with combined berths for around 1,000 boats, museums and cultural centers, two golf courses, civic and leisure facilities, sea-view apartments and elite villas.’¹¹⁶

As described in the introduction to this chapter, aside from the Louvre Abu Dhabi and Manarat Al Saadiyat, the only developments to have been completed on Saadiyat Island thus far are major residential complexes as well as the luxury resort Saadiyat Island Beach Club. Throughout, the USFP pays lip service to the idea of

¹¹³ Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, “Urban Structure Framework Plan,” 32.

¹¹⁴ Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, “Urban Structure Framework Plan,” 32.

¹¹⁵ Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, “Urban Structure Framework Plan,” 7.

¹¹⁶ Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2006.

sustainable development and to the imperatives to protect the natural environment, emphasising the need to reduce the heavy dependence on congestion prone arterial motorways and dispersing traffic by constructing crossroads to form a grid.¹¹⁷ Yet, the plan highlights the necessity that Saadiyat Island be directly connected to the Airport and to the upmarket Leisure and Recreation area surrounding Rafa Beach. To do so entailed the construction of a major highway - the E12 (Shahama - Saadiyat Highway). The highway cuts across an area of wetlands that the plan designates a 'city buffer area' as part of its 'green gradient buffer scheme' which was ostensibly meant to protect wildlife in the National Parks from the pollution emitted by Abu Dhabi City. Jointly developed by the Aldar Group and the Tourism Development & Investment Company, contracts for the road were awarded in 2006, prior to the publication of the USFP, and it opened in early October 2009. The chronology of this highway indicates the order of priorities compelling the development of Abu Dhabi City, with environmental sustainability dwarfed by the preoccupation with tourism. It also gives an insight into the trajectories of urban planning and developmental which, though they appear to be rigorously conceived, comprehensive, and teleological, are in fact partial, contradictory, and retroactive.

The proposals outlined in these plans must also be read in the context of the liberalisation of the Gulf's property market. Prior to the 2000s, there was very little legislation concerning real estate and land ownership in the UAE. Federal law dictated that land fell under the sovereign prerogative of each of emirates' ruler, although the commonly held belief was that federal law proscribed the foreign ownership of real estate and land. Dubai was the first emirate in the federation to take active steps to allow for the foreign ownership of property. In May 2002, Dubai's current ruler, Sheikh Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, announced that foreigners would be permitted to purchase properties in designated areas being developed by government-owned investment companies. These relatively ambiguous early liberalisations were codified and passed into law in 2006, allowing non-UAE nationals to acquire freehold ownership rights without time restrictions, as well as leasehold and usufruct rights up

¹¹⁷ The Abu Dhabi Environment Agency's managing director is Razan al-Mubarak, sister of Khaldoun al-Mubarak, CEO of Mubadala, and Muhammad al-Mubarak, chairman of the DCT. She was previously the international representative of Mubadala, one of the main investors in Aldar Properties PJSC, and the investment fund behind the cultural institutions in Saadiyat Cultural District.

to ninety-nine years in development plots identified by the legislation.¹¹⁸ Al Jaddaf, and Al Quoz Industrial Areas Two and Three, are among those areas in which expatriates have been permitted to purchase property, with the former the location of the new cultural venue the Jameel Arts Centre,¹¹⁹ and the latter two areas adjacent to the major gallery and cultural district Alserkal Avenue.

Abu Dhabi, historically less mercantilist due to its vast oil reserves and therefore more conservative concerning the sale of land, has nevertheless also liberalised its property market. In 2005 a law was passed that granted non-UAE or GCC nationals the right to buy leaseholds with a maximum term of 99 years, although they were denied the right to purchase land. In April 2019, the law was amended to allow non-GCC expatriates the right to purchase freehold properties in Abu Dhabi, including land rights, across nine designated investment zones. Saadiyat Island is one of these zones and is singled out by Tamm, Abu Dhabi's digital portal for accessing government services, as the most popular choice for foreigners, along with Reem Island and Al Raha Beach. The Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism, Muhammad al-Mubarak, is also chairman of Aldar Properties PJSC, which is developing Saadiyat Island, and Miral Asset Management, which is developing the nearby Yas Island; Miral's website describes him as the 'leading curator of experiences in Abu Dhabi.'

Given this overlapping management¹²⁰ and the liberalisation of the legislative environment for the property market, one interlocutor emphasised that I should understand Saadiyat Cultural District and other cultural districts first and foremost as real estate projects. I found myself persuaded by this argument, particularly after attending an architecture tour as part of the Art Dubai programming, which culminated with guests being taken to the showroom of a major development (see figure 4.5). Per the 2020 annual results presentation published on their website, since

¹¹⁸ Regulation No. (3) of 2006 Determining Areas for Ownership by Non-UAE Nationals of Real Property in Dubai has been amended on multiple occasions to expand the areas in which expatriates can buy properties.

¹¹⁹ The architect Rem Koolhaas developed a now abandoned plan for the waterfront in Dubai. Koolhaas is famous for his idea of the generic city, a place for "global nomads" emptied of specificity. See Omar AlShehabi, "Rootless Hubs: Migration, Urban Commodification and the Right to the City in the GCC" in *Transit States: Labour, Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, eds. Adam Hanieh, Abdulhadi Khalaf and Omar AlShehabi (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 101–131.

¹²⁰ Miral's CEO, Muhammad Abdalla Al Zaabi, was previously Director of Strategic Investments at Aldar Properties.

2016 Aldar have started - and in many cases completed - work on 767 plots across three separate developments on Saadiyat Island alone. The liberalisation of the property market also has important implications for residency permits, with the state granting residency visas on the basis of land titles held, thus allowing the affluent to sidestep the employment requirements of the work-permit scheme.

Reading across these soft and hard infrastructures, imagined (plans), material (built), and virtual (legal), it is clear that culture and cultural policy are perceived as a central plank of the economic diversification agenda, as the Gulf states attempt to fashion themselves as tourist playgrounds. Cultural institutions form a part of the broader leisure and lifestyle offering which those who either visit or take up permanent residence in the Gulf cities can avail themselves of.¹²¹ Hence Saadiyat Cultural District's proximity to the low density "eco-village" housing developments, and the emphasis on clustering hotels on Saadiyat Island, as well as the imperative for it to be linked directly



Figure 4.5 Development showroom to which Art Dubai guests were taken as part of the 'Architecture Tour', Photo by author

¹²¹ See Christine Skwiot, *The Purposes of Paradise* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) for a discussion the social, political, and economic effects of the attempts to fashion Hawai'i and Cuba into pleasure grounds for American tourists. Skwiot plays particular attention to the imaginative worlds of these efforts.

to the airport.¹²² Cultural institutions, as already discussed, also form part of the state's raiment of power.

In the USFP Saadiyat Cultural District is identified as one of the emirate's 'iconic precincts,' and is configured in relation to the other 'iconic precincts.'¹²³ Connected via a series of boulevards, these 'special capital places'¹²⁴ represent the urban coordinates of the state's domestic performance of power, allowing for parades and state celebrations. The other iconic precincts are the Corniche, which links to the iconic areas of Lulu Island, the Palace District, and across to Saadiyat. These areas are connected to the Grand Mosque District and the Capital District, now known as Zayed City, via two main arteries. The Grand Mosque District currently spans the Grand Mosque itself, the Ministry of Defence, and the military monument, with *wabat al-karama*, sandwiched between them, while the Capital District, which remains under construction, is to be the new seat of Abu Dhabi's government.

The economic horizons and ensuing stability that these cultural plans, and the states behind them, attempt to engineer, depend upon the production of certain subjects, interpellating them into the Gulf by way of the cultural city idea. The dual impulses of these plans as described above do not however prefigure a unitary subject. Rather this complex imaginary produces diverse subjects with varied and sometimes incompatible subject positions. In one of her more recent additions to the Gulf studies literature, Neha Vora, in collaboration with Natalie Koch, offers the clearest statement of her intellectual agenda.¹²⁵ She beseeches scholars and activists not to perpetuate the landscapes of orientalism within the academy by using reified concepts such as ethnocracy and the *kafala* system as the primary optic through which to analyse the political and economic structures of the Arab Gulf states. Instead she asks that scholars attempt to think through belonging and the making of the state in a more holistic fashion, starting from the precept of inclusion and the ways in which those living in the Gulf that are legally excluded from the state nevertheless mould and contribute to its trajectories.

¹²² Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, "Urban Structure Framework Plan."

¹²³ Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, "Urban Structure Framework Plan," 11.

¹²⁴ Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, "Urban Structure Framework Plan," 77.

¹²⁵ Neha Vora and Natalie Koch, "Everyday Inclusions: Rethinking Ethnocracy, Kafala, and Belonging in the Arabian Peninsula," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 15, no. 3 (2015): 540–52.

I do not disagree that the diverse communities of non-nationals that inhabit the Gulf possess complex attachments to the region which cannot merely be explained through: i) the ineluctable pull of the often false promise of economic improvement; ii) the capitalist bureaucracies that profit from the *kafala* scheme; and iii) the systems of oppression and exploitation that impede the most vulnerable of workers from returning home once they arrive in the Gulf. Nevertheless, it is the work permit scheme in conjunction with *jus sanguinis* citizenship laws that have historically subtended the extent to which a sense of belonging can ever translate into legal recognition and material security.¹²⁶ Whatever their attachments - which as Vora notes are extremely important for the reproduction of the Arab Gulf states - this foundational exclusion consigns such forms of belonging to contingency and precarity, extracting pliancy from those subjected to it as they remain fundamentally beholden to the caprice of the state and its citizens.¹²⁷

Emphasising how Arab Gulf states are forged out of structures of exploitation does not have to entail, as Vora suggests, an orientalist exceptionalisation of the Gulf as a space of primordial illiberality, or the elision of the excesses of belonging they produce, in pursuit of political impact or theoretical neatness. Firstly, if understood as a visa-trading scheme, the complex, contradictory, and bureaucratic form of exclusion perpetuated by the immigration regime emerges as a regionally specific feature of the *global* capitalist system. Secondly, if historicised properly these forms of illiberality must be appraised as the long-term and ongoing product of the implication of Western liberal regimes in the region through colonialism and empire, complicities which liberal states strenuously and laboriously attempt to sidestep. Indeed, it is from such a vantage point that the contributions to the formation of the state by some of those with ephemeral forms of belonging, whose attachments rooted in pleasure and profit Vora foregrounds,¹²⁸ can in part be understood. The mirage and/or experience of the Gulf as a pleasure ground has everything to do with the deep-rooted provenance of frontier dreams in liberalism itself and its imaginings of the anarchic jungle beyond the order

¹²⁶ For an overview of the evolution of citizenship in Kuwait from *jus soli* (right of birthplace) to *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) see Chapter Three of Longva, *Walls*, 43-75.

¹²⁷ Buckley, "Locating Neoliberalism"; and "Bachelor" Builders"; Buckley et al., "Migrant Work"; Dito, "Kafala"; Gardner, *Strangers*; Wells, "Construction."

¹²⁸ Vora, *Impossible Citizens*; Vora and Koch, "Everyday Inclusions."

and rights instituted and distributed in liberal democracies.¹²⁹ Indeed, although liberal states have created governance structures to distance themselves from frontierist ventures, their profits have founded and lubricated liberal regimes.

Invoking the depoliticising language of inclusion to deal with these complex attachments, as Vora does, arguably absolves these states of their structural reliance on racialised super-exploitation and exclusion. Perhaps a way to reframe Vora's emphasis on the contribution made by non-citizens and retain her concern with the productive operations of power, is to think *pace* Michel Foucault about freedom and the subjectifying effects of its uneven distribution. Per Brenna Bhandar,¹³⁰ the tautological nub of dispossession and freedom under colonial conditions inheres in its property regimes, both past and present: 'in order to be a proper political subject' she writes, 'one had to own property, and in order to own property, one had to be in possession of certain qualities in the requisite degrees, such as whiteness and maleness, which determined whether one could own property.' In the Gulf, the ability to acquire land, as described above, is a key mechanism through which freedoms and security are distributed beyond the citizenry. Tethering long-term residency rights to land acquisition enables Arab Gulf states to maintain the putative ethnic homogeneity instituted through restrictive citizenship laws, while assimilating non-citizens into the future horizons.

As discussed in Chapter Three, establishing citizenship not simply as a juridical category, but as a market resource, has historically been the fulcrum of the racial capitalism that generates the class system in the Gulf. Although the extent of enrichment among the citizenry is somewhat contingent upon the state, it has overwhelmingly yielded a rich citizenry with symbolic claims to ethnic homogeneity.¹³¹ This has not, however, impeded the creation of wealthy diasporas from other parts of the Middle East, who were displaced to the Gulf from places like Palestine and Iran, and many of whom had preexisting sources of wealth that aided their resettlement.

¹²⁹ Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, "On the Multiple Frontiers of Extraction: Excavating Contemporary Capitalism," *Cultural Studies* 31, no. 2–3 (2017): 185–204; Tsing, *Friction Lovenhaupt Tsing*; Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Penguin UK, 2008 [1893]).

¹³⁰ Brenna Bhandar, "Plasticity and Post-Colonial Recognition: "Owning, Knowing and Being," *Law and Critique* 22, no. 3 (2011): 229.

¹³¹ Saudi Arabia is the major exception to this due to its substantial citizenry and particularly complex relations with the Bedouin, as discussed in the previous section.

There are also substantial middle and upper-middle-class diasporas from elsewhere - from the West but also, crucially, from the Indian subcontinent - who have been attracted to the Gulf as a nodal point of regional commerce, and other financial and leisure opportunities. While the amendments to land law do not confer the full gamut of entitlements and privileges afforded to the capitalist classes internal to the citizenry, they nevertheless guarantee their security and long-term presence, thereby complicating the structural composition of racial capitalism in the Arab Gulf states. Given that the bulk of labourers in the Gulf now come primarily from South and South-East Asian countries - India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and the Philippines primary among them - this poses a *prima facie* problem for analyses of race and racism conceptualised as hierarchies overwhelmingly organised on the basis of the predicates of skin colour and place of origin.

In an oft-quoted and much-debated line from the seminal work *Policing the Crisis*, Stuart Hall formulated a way out of the impasse between the tradition of black radicalism which posits race as a political ontology and the leftist Marxist tradition for whom, 'however sympathetic to anti-racist struggle' as Nikhil Pal Singh writes, 'it remains difficult... to resist the political and theoretical reiteration of race's secondariness.'¹³² Hall characterised 'race as the modality in which class is lived, the medium in which class relations are experienced.'¹³³ This modulation of race with class directs us towards the ways in which racism and racial hierarchies imprint and organise classes internally and externally, naturalising ontological differences and the uneven distribution of surpluses and capital. It allows us to explore both the uneven distribution of suffering within and across racial assemblages showing how these kaleidoscopic formations change in different contexts and geographies, and how classes (and tastes) themselves have been racialised, accreting cultural associations that represent the discernible coordinates of what Meera Sabaratnam calls 'racialised subject-positioning.'¹³⁴

Subject positioning connotes the two mechanisms of articulation and interpellation. The former describes the process of conjoining attributes and subjects

¹³² Nikhil Pal Singh, "A Note on Race and the Left," *Social Text Online* 31 (2015).

¹³³ Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 [1978]), 386.

¹³⁴ Sabaratnam, "IR Theory White," 4.

to create durable structures of meaning that make the world legible and authorise certain distributions of power and capital, while the latter refers to the manner by which subjects are hailed to reproduce these discursive constructs through identification. Drawing on critical race theory Sabaratnam astutely observes ‘that ‘the West’ is on any plausible reading a racialised category indexed to ‘Whiteness.’¹³⁵ By the same token, whiteness is a predicate of both the Enlightenment and liberalism, with their - albeit historically inaccurate - contemporary investment with notions of technological and cultural sophistication, democracy, meritocracy and, finally, cosmopolitanism and freedom of movement. It is not coincidental that the plots of land where wealthy non-Nationals are licenced to acquire property are positioned adjacent to cultural and heritage districts - beacons of liberalism - that, as the previous two sections have shown, were forged in the crucible of normative Western ideas about heritage and culture. This positioning demonstrates the Arab Gulf states’ concerted attempt to interpellate non-nationals of the capitalist class into this racialised subject position, parlaying this interpellation into economic stability in a post-oil future.¹³⁶ Particularly where those subjects have brown skin and/or are not from nation-states raced as white, this represents a complex instantiation of Hall’s much debated aphorism, where class modulates, and in this case moderates, the expression and experience of the racialised forms of exclusion to which they are subject as neither citizens nor people with white skin.¹³⁷

The cosmopolitan subjects of culture that the Arab Gulf states are attempting to prefigure and assimilate into their long-term future can be counterpoised with Gulf nationals, whose stronger identification with the nation permits plural interpellations, both as citizens of the nation and as cosmopolitan subjects of the cultural city and/or state. More importantly, however, this subject-position can be contrasted with those that are formally excluded from it, namely, the labourers that have neither rights nor security on the basis of citizenship or capital. In the last section I discussed how the application of heritage discourse to the urban environment had partly entailed the

¹³⁵ Sabaratnam, “IR Theory White,” 8.

¹³⁶ Both Kanna, “Non-Recognition?” and Vora, *Impossible Citizens*, point to the ways in which middle-class and upper-middle-class South Asians strenuously try to distance themselves from working-class South Asians.

¹³⁷ Many of those most involved in creating these new cultural infrastructures are part of these expansive diaspora communities.

relocation of the working poor to the outskirts of Gulf cities, detaching them from the communities which anchored their precarious forms of belonging. Since being cleared out of the city centres, bachelor labouring communities in the UAE have been subject to aggressive campaigns by state police and private security contractors to keep them out of affluent areas and have largely been housed in labour camps of which there are thousands across the Gulf.¹³⁸ Often run by labour recruitment firms or contractors, they are located on the peripheries of the city – Andrew Ross describes such labour camps in the UAE as ‘a cruel archipelago... that encircles Abu Dhabi and Dubai.’¹³⁹ Even discounting the substantial delays to travel time caused by the often intractable traffic on roads, these informal camps are very far from both construction sites and city centres. The accommodation is cramped and regularly violates health and fire safety laws, leading to the deaths of workers in numerous fires in these camps.¹⁴⁰

The Saadiyat Accommodation Village (SAV) was built by the state to house the workers engaged to build the various major construction projects on the island. Built in conjunction with ZonesCorp, an Abu Dhabi government-owned company that specialises in the construction of industrial zones, its opening was a response to the increased scrutiny that the Gulf’s high-profile construction projects have brought to the labour camps. Per the Employment Practices Policy of the Saadiyat Island development, subcontractors are obligated to house workers employed on projects on the island in this accommodation, although many do not as a consequence of the high fees charged to subcontractors to house their workers here.¹⁴¹ Although the living conditions in this facility are superior to those in the informal camps, its residents have

¹³⁸ See Buckley, “Bachelor” Builders,” 142. The degree of policing does vary somewhat from state to state. Moreover, as the discourse concerning the rights and infringements of these workers has increased, they have been selectively incorporated into affluent “public” spaces, even in those places where policing has been most aggressive such as the UAE. For example, it was noticeable that JAC lists the names of all the construction workers involved in building the centre on a wall in its central atrium. One interlocutor also described to me what a coup it was for Qatar’s government to manage to take and circulate photographs of South Asians at the opening of the Qatar National Museum in 2019, while another described how the pristine manicured parks in Doha are spaces shared by migrant labourers and more wealthy denizens.

¹³⁹ Ross, “Leveraging,” 26. Although labour camps in the UAE are too numerous and too informal to count systematically, major camps in the UAE include Al Mafraq Workers City and the camps in the industrial district of Mussaffah.

¹⁴⁰ In 2008, public health authorities in Dubai found that over 40 percent of the accommodation in its labour camps failed to meet the emirate’s health and fire safety standards. See HRW 2009 report, “Island of Happiness.”

¹⁴¹ Ross, “Leveraging.”

expressed a desire to reside elsewhere due to the heavy securitisation and policing, as well as poor quality and unfamiliar food, to which they are subjected while living in the compound.

Located in the secluded southwest corner of Saadiyat Island, away from the cultural infrastructure, beach club and other pieces of real estate which snake their way along the northern shorefront of the Gulf, the perimeter of the facility is fenced, and entry and egress are controlled by guards stationed at checkpoints. Workers living there have to wait for hours to be allowed out, thus effectively cordoning them off from informal community infrastructures, lifelines that sustain tenuous forms of belonging and make bearable the arduous and exploitative working conditions to which migrant workers are subject.¹⁴² When contrasted with the twin processes of liberalising the property market and building cultural infrastructures, the concentration of migrant workers into labour camps takes on distinctly racialising characteristics. Through urban planning and policy, privileged foreigners are interpellated into the state as cosmopolitan and cultured - predicates of white subject positioning. Meanwhile, the spatial management of migrant workers and their freedoms demonstrates the concerted effort of the state to assign this class of migrant worker the opposite racialised subject position: immobility, provincialism, and disposability. Despite the absolute indispensability of migrant labourers to the Arab Gulf states, these spatial forms of control work to stymie the activities that can - and do - engender forms of attachment and subject formation beyond the economic, and symbolically excise these workers from the post-oil future that racialised cultural urbanism seeks to “curate.”¹⁴³

4.5 CONCLUSION

As has been argued throughout this thesis, to scrutinise the relationship between racism, colonialism, and capitalism in the transnational field of the arts and high culture, requires reading its ideational and material dimensions as inseparable. In keeping with that commitment, in the last chapter I showed how high culture in the Arab Gulf states cannot be read exclusive of its architecture, and the raced social

¹⁴² Chakravartty and Dhillon, “Gulf Dreams.”

¹⁴³ As Muhammad al-Mubarak’s work is described on the Miral Company website.

relations that these designs and their technologies enshrine. In this chapter I have expanded the analysis of the last to consider the mutually constitutive relationship between structures for fine art and heritage buildings, urban policy, and the warp and weft of urban space in the Gulf states. From the history of racialised urbanism in the Gulf cities, to zoning practices and the sudden reappraisal of previously neglected older areas as heritage, and lastly to their coalescence in the property market, each section of this chapter has scoped out the implications of what I termed ‘cultural urbanism’ for difference.

This chapter also sets the stage for the discussion in the next chapter, where I will examine the birth defects of postcolonial theory in the light of capitalism’s restless social relations. Those studies that consider the intersection between race and space in the Gulf have tended to do so from the perspective of the conventional geographies of postcolonial theory, looking at the racial segregation imposed by Western oil companies on their oil towns. Reading cultural urbanism in the Gulf through the aperture of racial capitalism, this chapter has updated their analysis for the postcolonial, post-oil nationalisation era. Although I have drawn attention to how earlier segregationist rationalisations of the built environment reverberate through cultural urbanism, and while these cultural urbanist interventions are still shaped by Western imaginaries, nativist policies that prioritise *khaliji* identity have altered the relationship of urban space to difference. The chapter has therefore homed in on the implications of cultural urbanism for the Gulf’s current internal Other – its migrant labouring diasporas and, in a more ambivalent way, its Bedouin communities. I have excavated how the liberalisation of the property market as a part of the wider patterning of urban space discloses a racial logic, with wealth and high culture indexed to whiteness. Affluent non-white diaspora communities from beyond the Gulf are therefore interpellated into the Gulf’s post-oil imaginaries as subjects of culture. By contrast, through cultural urbanism, poor workers, largely from the Indian subcontinent, are displaced to the city limit, marked as not profitable, and therefore excluded from the horizon these states are attempting to prefigure.

If, as Winegar suggests, the kernel of the autonomous theory of art is a belief that art and cultural production are the purest manifestation of what it is to be human, then the spatial practices described in this chapter symbolically downgrade the

humanity of those placed at the margins of the urban environment, far from the new cultural and heritage districts they have inhabited as residents and workers. Cultural urbanist interventions into urban space can thus be read as an attempt to dictate what Vincent Brown, in reference to slavery, calls ‘the terms and conditions of social existence’¹⁴⁴ for both those they welcome and, more importantly, those they do not. However, Brown suggests that overbearingly violent attempts to manage the terms of social existence saturate the varied, often quiet, ways people continue to live in excess of such modes of control with resistance. Without wanting to overstate or romanticise the power and agency of migrant labourers in the Gulf, the precarious living and informal communities they continuously eke out might be considered such acts, and ones that point toward entirely different definitions of humanity than those suggested by high culture.

¹⁴⁴ Vincent Brown, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (2009): 1244.

[Chapter Five]

DECOLONIAL AESTHESIS IN QUESTION

'The heavier the burden of the concrete, the more likely it is to be bypassed by theory'

- Michel-Rolph Trouillot

Hoor Al Qasimi moved to London in the late 1990s to study at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL. She was awarded her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2002 by UCL, and subsequently a Diploma in Painting from the Royal Academy of Arts in 2005, and an MA in curating from the Royal College of Art in 2008.¹ Only nine years before Hoor was awarded her first qualification, her father, Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, ruler of the emirate of Sharjah, established the Sharjah Biennial, holding its inaugural festival in 1993. A decade after this exhibition, and one year after her graduation from the Slade, Hoor was appointed chief curator of the Biennial for its 2003 edition. She credits her experience while attending Documenta 11, held in Kassel in 2002, and curated by the Nigerian super-curator Okwui Enwezor, with inspiring her to transform the Sharjah Biennial from the traditional national pavilion model to a thematic exhibition concentrated on the intersections between postcolonialism and culture. Documenta described Enwezor's show as 'the first truly global, postcolonial Documenta exhibition.'

Since 2003 Hoor has stewarded the Sharjah Biennial as its director. In 2009, the Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF), of which Hoor is president and director, was created by Emiri Decree and charged with expanding the work of the organisation beyond the biennial. Now SAF boasts collaborations with an illustrious roster of contemporary art organisations, and hosts an architecture triennial, as well as a multitude of other

¹ Several other influential cultural actors from the various ruling families have been educated at institutions in the cultural metropolises. Although Sheikha Mayassa Al Thani completed her undergraduate degree at Duke University in Political Science and Literature, during an unfinished degree in Public Policy and Administration at Columbia University in 2008, she audited courses in Art History. Sheikha Hoor's now deceased twin brother studied fashion and architecture at Central Saint Martins, while her cousin Sultan Sooud al-Qassemi, founder of the Barjaeel Art Foundation, studied at the American University in Paris in the late 1990s.

one-off exhibitions. Under her leadership, the foundation has grown in prestige and global recognition, winning plaudits from the great and the good of the contemporary art world as an incubator of modern and contemporary art produced within what Enwezor has termed the ‘postcolonial constellation.’² That is, of art produced in the shattered landscapes of hybridity and creolisation augured by globalisation after imperialism; art that uses cultural production to interrogate colonialism, and recover the histories, cultural practices and subjectivities to which colonialism has laid waste. Originally a part of Sharjah’s Department of Culture and Information, in recognition of its international stature and critical acclaim, the foundation became an autonomous government body in 2015, gaining parity with its parent organisation.³

Walter Dignolo, among the most renowned and celebrated theorists of decoloniality, attended Sharjah Biennial 11 in 2013, which was entitled *Re:emerge, Towards a New Cultural Cartography*. Writing in the Middle Eastern contemporary art magazine, *Ibraaz*, Dignolo claims to have had his interest in this edition piqued by the silhouette of decoloniality that he discerned in its curator Yuko Hasegawa’s statement of intent.⁴ He hoped that the decolonial idiom which Hasegawa had used to describe her ambitions for the biennial would translate into a curatorial gesture that was meaningfully oriented away from the orthodoxies and conventions of Western art. On arriving in Sharjah in March 2013, Dignolo chronicles finding an exhibition that realised these hopes. Indeed, in his effusive assessment of the exhibition’s achievements, he intimates that not only had his hopes for the project been met, they had been exceeded. He goes on to boldly claim that ‘the epistemic and cultural privilege of European modernity is over, as is the politico-economic privilege.’⁵

This new-found epistemic and economic multipolarity has collapsed the hitherto stable organisation of the West as centre and the rest as periphery. In this context, Dignolo writes: ‘we can read Sharjah Biennial 11 entering into a dispute with ‘Western’ hegemony in the sphere of culture, knowledge, aesthetics and, above all, sensibility.’⁶

² Enwezor, “Postcolonial.”

³ Reem Shadid, the Deputy Director of SAF until last year, told me in an interview that, despite the name, the organisation is not, in fact, a foundation but a government entity.

⁴ Walter Dignolo, “Re:emerging, Decentering and Delinking: Shifting the Geographies of Sensing, Believing and Knowing,” *Ibraaz* 005 (2013a): 1-15.

⁵ Dignolo, “Re:emerging.”

⁶ Dignolo, “Re:emerging,” 10.

He goes on to draw comparisons between this instalment of the biennial and the Bandung Conference of 1955 in its ability to make possible new futures. The demographic breakdown of exhibiting artists indicated the institution's sustained attempt to cultivate south-south relations; out of the nearly 100 exhibiting artists, only approximately 20 percent were from Europe. Yet, for Mignolo, the event held the promise of more than a geographical reorientation away from the West - it tendered the possibility of stepping out of the long shadow cast by the imperial hegemony of Western art practice into lucid new or recovered epistemic and sensory terrain.

Mignolo published a follow up article in *Ibraaḩ* concerning the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) in Doha, which has been explored in significant depth in other parts of this thesis. Mignolo compares Qatar Museums Authority's annual USD1 billion budget at the time he wrote the article in 2013, to alternative state expenditures, both potential (e.g, tackling poverty) and actual (e.g, annual US defence spending). By way of these straw man comparisons, he contends that the 'political sovereignty of capital' has afforded Qatar and, by extension, other resource rich postcolonies, the ability to challenge the dominant narrative of Western superiority.⁷ With their extraordinary market capacity these states and private actors can build spectacular museums in which to house the collections of art object they have been able to acquire on the market. Through these museums, some postcolonial contexts can begin to interleave the arc of global history with the glorious histories of other civilisations and cultures. Like the Sharjah Biennial, Mignolo understands MIA as an epistemic intervention, interpreting it as part of the trajectory of de-westernisation, one of five tendencies that Mignolo identifies the end of formal colonialism as having set in motion, enacting a new cultural geography away from the 'mono-cultural cartography of European modernity.'⁸

Mignolo's interpretation of the contribution made by these cultural institutions must be read in the context of both his wider intellectual agenda of decoloniality, and the particular theoretical elaboration thereof into which he was putting most of his intellectual efforts at the time, namely *decolonial aestheSis*.⁹ An article published in *Social Text* in November 2013 outlines the theoretical lens which led him to make these

⁷ Mignolo, "Enacting."

⁸ Mignolo, "Re:emerging"; See also Mignolo, "Enacting"; Walter Mignolo and Michael Vazquez, "Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings," *Social Text Online* (2013).

⁹ The "S" is capitalised in order to ensure that it is clearly differentiated from the tradition of aesthetics.

grandiose pronouncements about how cultural institutions in the Gulf were decoupling from the hegemonies of Western aesthetic doxa. *Decolonial aestheSis* positions itself in direct opposition to aesthetics, the Enlightenment concept through which beauty and the sublime were separated out from reason, and rationalised as a discrete realm of sense perception. Its ambition is therefore to decolonise the senses, rehabilitating or discovering ways of perceiving and sensing beyond the rational order of thought; to, as Mignolo and Michael Vazquez write, unveil the wound inflicted by colonialism and move ‘towards the healing, the recognition, the dignity of those aesthetic practices that have been written out of the canon of modern aestheTics.’ Despite these laudable ambitions, their application to national and institutional contexts of which the cornerstone is a highly precarious, securitised, and racialised workforce, drawn from the Gulf’s peripheries around the Indian Ocean, is disquieting.

This chapter is the final layer of my thesis as it concerns the Arab Gulf states, shifting the attention from market and built environment to cultural output. It addresses a problematic that haunted earlier chapters of this thesis – namely, in a formally postcolonial world, with its changed global ratios of power and accumulation, how should we conceptualise colonialism and colonial relations? The chapter’s organising tension is the paradox that cultural institutions in the Arab Gulf states assume or are assigned the role of incubators of postcolonial and decolonial cultural production, enabling the kind of critical appraisals such Mignolo’s, while racialised super-exploitation and dispossession remain the cornerstones of their economies. Put differently, it is prompted by the seeming tension between investigations of historic subalternity - of subjects and epistemologies - and the specific conditions of subalternity found in the Gulf that are the product of the global system of racial capitalism.

Rooted in this paradox, in this chapter I use the breadth of black radical thought to ask whether Gulf cultural institutions centring a curatorial gesture that has Western aesthetic hegemony in its crosshairs is actually yielding an emancipation from the tyrannies of colonialism. In so doing, the chapter offers a contribution to materialist critiques of postcolonial theory from the vantage point of the contemporary art scene in the Gulf. While there is a long tradition of materialist critiques of postcolonial theory within the academy, its derivations in other fields, such as the art world, have

received substantially less critical attention. Irrespective of these critiques, as has been observed, the archive of postcolonial theory remains generous and capacious, and thus full of tensions and ambivalences.¹⁰ Rather than jettisoning postcolonial theory, this chapter therefore heeds Rahul Rao's call to 'recover reparative readings'¹¹ between Marxism and postcolonialism. It attempts to elucidate how black radical thought – as both theory and method - can sharpen the insights of both traditions, stressing i) the need for assessments of decolonising interventions to be grounded in a material analysis that roots itself in the specificities of present dynamics of colonialism; and ii) how the current colonial and capitalist structure of rule in the Gulf might force us to stretch Marxist categories such as hegemony.

I begin with a discussion of Mignolo's concept of *decolonial aestheSis* and his application of these ideas to cultural institutions in the Gulf. I unpack his arguments, counterpoising them with Christina Sharpe's concept of 'the wake,' to suggest that the work of black radical thinkers provides a conceptual machinery that allows scholars to better grasp the political effects of postcolonial and decolonial cultural production being central to cultural institutions in the Gulf. Building on this theoretical exposition, I reconstruct the history of pearl diving and slavery summoned by black Cuban artist Carlos Martiel's performance at the Sharjah Biennial 14, drawing out the structural legacies of pearl diving for histories of super-exploitation and dispossession in the contemporary Gulf. Based on this reconstruction, I argue that fine art's current preoccupation with criticality intersects with the limits on political expression in the Gulf to render artworks useful political tools for mediating the relationship between the region's past, present, and thus also future, of colonialism and super-exploitation.

As I stress throughout, the vulnerability of artists to co-optation is a product of their increasing dependence on unaccountable sources of financing due to the ever more liberalised funding model for the arts across the cultural metropolises. Indeed, the co-optation of their work is consistent with the broader patterns of dispossession, displacement, and assimilation that define the social world under speculative racial capitalism, and circumscribe the available range of actions and calculations.¹²

¹⁰ Rao, "Reparative"; Rahul Rao "Postcolonialism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, eds. Michael Freeden and Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 271-289; Salem, *Afterlives*

¹¹ Rao, "Reparative."

¹² Brown, "Social Death."

Nonetheless, due to these logics – the logics of the wake – I argue that postcolonial and decolonial aesthetic practices paradoxically become a terrain on which consent for the Gulf states is accumulated, enabling the continued inscription of durable imperial structures and the futures of exploitation they prefigure – in a word, of colonialism.

The analysis I proceed to offer in this chapter should not be mistaken for a rejection of the presence of diverse representations in the art world - they are long overdue. Indeed, my preoccupation with the political effects of this belated incorporation stem from my deep and continued commitment to the arts and cultural production. My exploration of the ways that the political-economic logics of the present reality corrupt creative practices produced under a political, and more specifically a postcolonial or decolonial sign, is therefore offered in the hope that vigilance might contribute to the ongoing process of redeeming spaces for creative practice. In this I take my cue from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, via Stuart Hall, who called on scholars and activists to ‘accept in all their radical novelty, the transformations of the world we live in, neither to ignore them nor to distort them in order to make them compatible with outdated schemas... Start from that full insertion in the present - its struggles, its challenges, its dangers - to interrogate the past and to search within it for the genealogy of the present situation.’¹³

5.1 DECOLONIAL AESTHESIS IN INDIAN OCEAN WAKES

Coloniality, in Mignolo’s theoretical schema, describes the underlying logic of colonialism. It is the order of reason that has licenced historical colonialisms, and that convenes the dominant self-authored history of Western “modernity” as an endogenous phenomenon originating in the sixteenth century Renaissance.¹⁴ Decoloniality is conceived as the shadow term to “liberal modernity” and its murky underbelly coloniality, as the first step to its undoing is to theorise its logics (i.e., how it buries or undermines subaltern knowledge) and thereby understand its power. The current historical conjuncture - of postcolonial nations and globalising capitalism - has, according to Mignolo, generated a series of responses to the demand of nationalism,

¹³ Laclau and Mouffe quoted in Hall, *Hard Road*, 14.

¹⁴ Mignolo, *Local*; and *Darker*; Mignolo and Vazquez, “Decolonial AestheSis.”

and the homogenising force of neoliberal capitalism, that he maintains will ‘shape global futures for many decades to come.’¹⁵ He identifies five trajectories each of which are constellated differently relative to capitalism and nationalism: rewesternisation, the reorientation of the Left, dewesternisation, decoloniality, and spirituality.

It is the third and fourth trajectories that concern this discussion, as it is under these that Mignolo files the Sharjah Biennial and the Museum of Islamic Art. Dewesternisation poses an epistemic challenge to the relationship between knowledge and epidermal hierarchies that is the legacy of the Western Enlightenment, where whiteness and authoritative knowledge are coextensive. Dewesternisation does not, however, challenge the capitalist foundations of Western epistemology, only its ‘structure of enunciation.’¹⁶ Decoloniality, by contrast, emerges out of the decolonisation experiences of the Third World, and their will to non-alignment with either of the actually existing, political-economic systems of capitalism and communism. Claiming the Bandung Conference in 1955 as its crucible, decoloniality for Mignolo therefore connotes the process of expanding the space that exists in the interstices of these two systems. In this sense, Mignolo suggests decoloniality is distinct from postcolonialism. Though both are predicated on the shared history of colonialism, postcolonialism originates in the British Indian experience and its logics were vividly captured by Edward Said and the later generation of subaltern scholars that took British India and the Middle East as their reference point. Narrowly construed, decoloniality therefore builds on the postcolonial intervention into the academy, broadening the ambit of postcolonialism by introducing more subaltern epistemologies, histories, and subjects into its scope. Broadly construed, however, Mignolo argues that decoloniality connotes the decolonisation of the breadth of human existence, entailing what Linda T. Smith describes as the ‘long term processes involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological divesting of colonial power.’¹⁷

As described in the introduction to this chapter, *decolonial aestheSis* is the decolonial process that specifically targets sense perception and the arts. The regime of beauty instituted by aesthetics enshrined the supremacy of sight and vision,

¹⁵ Mignolo, *Darker*, 21.

¹⁶ Mignolo, *Darker*, 46.

¹⁷ Linda T. Smith quoted in Mignolo, *Darker*, 52.

associating this sense with the perspicacity and Archimedean vantage point of the objective subject of European “modernity.”¹⁸ Mignolo therefore maintains that forms of what he terms ‘place- and/or world-sensing’ that rely on the other senses - sound, touch, smell - are essential to divesting sense perception and ways of knowing of the epistemological hierarchies that this sensorial ratio enshrines.¹⁹ Discussing the courtyard as the key motif for the exhibition in an interview with *Whitewall Magazine*, Hasegawa said that it anchored the exhibition’s attempt to engage with place, conceived specifically as ‘a place of memory.’²⁰ Mignolo therefore interprets the Sharjah Biennial 11 as a decolonial intervention due to the particular emphasis it places on the courtyard as a repository of alternative forms of knowing and memory, appealing to senses other than sight to summon subaltern ontologies, temporalities and cosmologies. The problem with Mignolo’s arguments, in both the abstract and in their applied form, is that despite attempting to place decoloniality on different footing, he reproduces many of the theoretical hallmarks - and defects - of postcolonial theory.

Materialist critiques have dogged postcolonialism since its emergence in literature departments at American universities in the late 1970s. The central charge Marxist critics level at postcolonialism is that it is beset by an elective – if disavowed - affinity with globalising capitalism. Postcolonialism repudiates the systematic foundations of capitalism, as well as collective subjectivities such as the “Third World,”²¹ stressing the essentialising and exclusionary potential of both. Coming a close second is the charge of ahistoricism, which extends to the tendency to obscure the tradition’s origins in the 1980s cauldron of the Washington consensus.²² The affinity with neoliberal capitalism is thus diagnosed as the birthmark of these buried historical origins. Ahistoricism and an emphasis on singularity are suggested, paradoxically, to lead postcolonial theory into elevating its primal scene – the imperial encounter between East and West – into a metaphysics.²³ Indeed, despite the premium

¹⁸ See chap. 2, fn. 35.

¹⁹ Mignolo and Vazquez, “AestheSis.”

²⁰ Quoted in Mignolo, “Re:emerging,” 7.

²¹ For the origins of the term “Third World” see chap. 1, fn. 144.

²² Arif Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,” *Critical Inquiry*, 20, no. 2 (1994): 328-356.

²³ Aijaz Ahmad, “The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality,” *Race & Class* 36, no. 3 (1995): 1-20; Lazarus, “Doesn’t Say”; Benita Parry, “Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique,” (London: Routledge, 2004).

much postcolonial thought places on creolisation and hybridity, hyphenations are always grafted onto an original subject position on one side of the East/West binary. Postcolonial theory also stands accused of abstracting the condition of formerly colonised states into this generalised global condition of fragmentation and hybridity – what Arif Dirlik calls its ‘aura.’²⁴

Considered from the perspective of these critiques, one can see how Mignolo’s theoretical schema is part of the same tradition. Much in the way postcolonialism romanticises hybridity, without attending to the economic conditions that produce hybrid subjects, Mignolo romanticises place and locality as sanctuaries of subaltern sensing and knowledge existing in the interstices of postcolonial capitalism (effectively an internal outside) but does not attend to the ways in which they are structured by its logics. By fetishising Sharjah Biennial 11’s engagement with locality as a decolonial metaphor, without examining the material basis of this structure of feeling, Mignolo also reproduces the cleavage between the epistemic and the material.²⁵ As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, the basic move that allows capitalism to sustain the profound contradictions with which it is riven is to cultivate a fundamental separation between these two realms. This separation is, as I have also just described, foundational to orthodox postcolonial theory.

Perhaps most redolent of postcolonialism, however, is Mignolo’s Manichaeic and ahistorical vision of the world – divided in the dualities of pre- and postcolonial. His theory emphasises the existence of continuities from before colonialism and slavery that can be recuperated and used to widen the ontological and epistemic fissures that Western colonialism and neo-imperial capitalist hegemony necessarily leave open. In this arrangement, decoloniality ends up being configured implicitly as an attempt to salvage precolonial worlds, and *decolonial aestheSis* as an aesthetic and epistemic counterweight to the epistemological terrain defined by Western imperialism. There is, however, an expansive and deeply productive literature that investigates the

²⁴ Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura.”

²⁵ On postcolonialism see Ahmad, “Literary Postcoloniality”; Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura”; Lazarus, “Doesn’t Say”; Parry, “Postcolonial Studies.” On the ideational/material divide and the reproduction of capitalism see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. & trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971); Hall, *The Hard Road*. Both Gramsci and Hall, whom Gramsci influenced heavily, suggest that in its tortured debates around the analytical or normative primacy of one realm over the other, social theory has fallen prey to this mystification.

profound ways in which slavery and colonialism do not leave an outside free from their contaminating and corrupting effects. Rather, this historically sensitive body of work traces the contradictions, ambivalences, and complicities that mark both the subjects of these systems and their descendants, as well as anti-colonial projects themselves, exploring how this terrain has shaped their capacities to live, and to remake the social world.²⁶

Due to the inextricable relationship between the merchant ship and the transatlantic slave trade, Christina Sharpe's recent book *In the Wake* uses the motif of "the wake" to limn a powerful elegy to black being.²⁷ In her usage, the wake is polysemic, referring to the afterlives of slavery in the wake of the slave ship, but also to the wake as a mournful remembrance of the dead and, finally, the state of being awake to these afterlives, to do what she terms 'wake work.' The centrality of mourning to Sharpe's work, and her insistence on the specificity of the blackness founded in the hold of the slave ship, make it imperative that one use the concept with the requisite sensitivity and care. Sharpe does, however, express her hope that the praxis of wake work is sufficiently generous and capacious to be able to 'travel and do work'²⁸ that she herself could not have anticipated. In deploying the wake as a guiding motif, I do not wish to suggest that the histories of empire and slavery in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans are in anyway reducible to one another - in its scale and brutality, the slave trade across the Atlantic far outstripped that in the Indian Ocean. Yet, though in ways vastly different from North America out of which this paradigm issues, the whorling

²⁶ See for example, Brown, "Social"; Hazel V. Carby, *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (London: Verso, 2019); Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger* (London: Penguin, 2017); Lowe, *Intimacies*; Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2019); Salem, *Afterlives*. On Bandung see Naoko Shimazu, "Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 225–52. The triumphalist comparison offered by Mignolo with Bandung might in fact be generative if Bandung, and the leading political lights of anticolonialism in this period, are properly appraised. As Shimazu has shown, at the time of Bandung, Sukarno was grappling with substantial separatist movements of both Christian and Muslim persuasion. Bandung was the epicentre of Islamist separatism. Holding the conference in the city therefore licenced the deployment of substantial police and military forces in the region, stamping it with the central authority of Sukarno's state. Likewise, Deb Cowen and Neil Smith maintain that the paradox of decolonisation is that, though it released colonies from the grip of the European imperial powers, it also paved the way for postcolonial autocracy and US global hegemony through the market: 'imperial geoeconomics evolved hand in hand with the postcolonial.' See Deborah Cowen and Neil Smith, "After Geopolitics? From the Geopolitical Social to Geoeconomics," *Antipode* 41, no. 1 (2009): 22-48.

²⁷ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

²⁸ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 22.

political waters generated by the imperial ships, pearling *dhows*, and East African slaving vessels plying the Indian Ocean have also formed the Arab Gulf states.

For the purposes of this chapter, it is Sharpe's elaboration of the specific temporality conjured by the wake that is most illuminating. While the theoretical commitments of this thesis differ from Sharpe's in as much as, working in the afro-pessimist tradition,²⁹ she contends that the wake is atemporal, and thus blackness an irredeemable, insurmountable political ontology,³⁰ its temporality is also, Sharpe suggests, recursively lapsarian: slavery is a series of ongoing ruptures, and we continue to live in their unfolding. Unlike Mignolo, Sharpe therefore insists that the damage that slavery - and, we might add, that empire - inflicted cannot be overcome through the retrieval of the worlds that have continued to exist in their interstices, for such worlds do not exist.

Applying these insights to Mignolo's claims around the imperative to decolonise sense perception - and his view that the Sharjah Biennial fulfils this imperative - it would seem to me that the context of decolonial recuperation is of utmost importance. It is not enough to simply salvage the multiplicity of histories, and sensorially plural and spatially rooted ways of knowing. If recuperation is to have decolonising purchase on the present, then the disinterred subaltern ways of sensing must be situated in an examination of the context of their display - as I have done in the previous chapters of this thesis - and thus the degree to which their display makes alterity more or less possible. Contained in Sharpe's temporality of the wake is also a radical proposition for praxis - a demand that investigations start from a position of immanence. Wakefulness on my reading therefore finds common cause with the works cited above that emphasise the historical need to stay with the complexities, ambivalences, and intimacies of the wake's ongoing effects. Adopting a wakeful posture means being hyper-vigilant to how vestiges of slavery and colonialism's devastating racialised violence resurface. It means tracing how these afterlives translate into new

²⁹ Specifically, its theory of change and racial ontology.

³⁰ Afro-pessimist-inflected works such as Saidiya Hartman's, *Lose Your Mother* and Frank B. Wilderson's, *Red, White & Black* are imprinted with Patterson's theorisation of slavery as "social death" or natal alienation. For some responses to this political ontology from within North American Black Studies see Brown, "Social Death"; and Spillers, "Afro-pessimism and its Others." Brown submits that, in afro-pessimist thinking, social death moves 'beyond a general description of slavery as a condition' to become 'an experience of the self.' See "Social," 1237.

institutionalised forms of violence and oppression that, though formally different, remain dependent upon a racialised bookkeeping that metes out differential access to life and humanity, even - and perhaps especially - in postcolonial contexts such as the Arab Gulf states.³¹ It also means paying attention to how fields and institutions are circumscribed by power and capital.

Mignolo assesses *decolonial aestheSis* in the Gulf as representing a breach with the Western Enlightenment's regulative ideals of beauty, writing the aesthetic practices and modes of being obscured by these ideals back into the historical and aesthetic archive. Against his reading, in what remains of this chapter I will read the decolonial and postcolonial emphasis of cultural institutions in the Gulf as produced in and by the complex, often ambivalent, political maelstroms of colonialism and slavery's Indian Ocean wakes. Such a reading is acutely necessary, and perhaps particularly generative in the Gulf, given that it is a complex and contradictory instantiation of the postcolony, with a deep history of slavery that exceeds the history of empire, and an abundance of hydrocarbon deposits that have rendered it an important node in the racial capitalist world system.

5.2 TASTING TEARS OF HISTORY

On the morning of 9th March 2019, I was among the attendees of the Sharjah Biennial 14's opening week who crammed into a small room in Bait Obaid Al Shamsi, one of the SAF's venues. In the room a man was partially suspended upside down from the ceiling. His feet and hands were trussed in ropes, pulled tight such that his arms were contorted up and away from his torso and his legs elevated above the rest of his body, while his face and chest were pressed uncomfortably against the glass floor. The

³¹ Historians of slavery in the Indian Ocean have emphasised the challenges of thinking through slavery outside the transatlantic paradigm and the historical and theoretical work it has generated. The operating logics of the slave trade in the Indian Ocean have been argued to be different in significant ways from the Atlantic slave trade. Attention is drawn to the trade being less violent and less explicitly racist than its transatlantic counterpart. Additionally, manumitted slaves generally integrated into local communities and, in Arabia, those originally descended from East African slaves tend to identify as Arab rather than as part of the African diaspora (see Hopper, *Slaves of one Master*). Despite such differences, the forced migration of slaves across the African continent, from the landlocked centre to the coastal region, was the scene of the most violent part of the slave trade, with one historian estimating that for every slave that reached the coast between eight to ten others died (see Mathew, *Margins*). Thus, as Mathew cautions, Indian Ocean slavery, despite being somewhat less violent than that in the Atlantic, cannot be thought outside of the devastating brutality of its primal scene.

cramped quarters restricted the number of spectators that could cross the threshold into the room, so attendees clustered around the doors at each end, craning their necks to see in. As the audience jostled and strained, waiters wound their way through our midst serving us syrupy nests of baklava on ornamental gold platters. Rather than toothpicks, each sweet was skewered with a gold pin crested with a pearl, tokens that we were told we could keep.

Sabor a Lágrimas was one half of a couplet of durational performances by the black Cuban artist Carlos Martiel. The other performance, *Eslabón*, staged later that day, saw Martiel curl in foetal pose for two hours at the centre of an austere structure built from *qarqour* fishing cages. In the guidebook that we were all given, these commissions were described as furthering the research trajectory on the ‘African diaspora, systems of value, and cultural histories,’ which underpins Martiel’s work, by turning his attention to ‘scholarship and archival records documenting the nineteenth and early twentieth century slave trade and related industries that link East Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East.’³² Both performances recalled the arduous labour involved in the production of the major commodities exported by the Gulf states before oil. Martiel’s choice of location for his performance gestured toward the historic role of date cultivation to the Gulf’s economies. The small space into which spectators piled was the *madbasa*, a former date press, where dates would be pounded by foot until they were transformed into dark and treacly molasses. Aided by the bluish hue cast into the room by the thick glass floor, added such that guests could walk across the ribbed ground of the press without discomfort, *Sabor a Lágrimas* summoned the underwater labour of pearl divers. During his gruelling 45-minute performance, Martiel carried the traditional tools used by divers, his limbs bound with ropes similar to those used aboard pearling *dhows*. Though recently banned by the UAE due to their environmental impact, the *qarqour* fishing cages that Martiel lashed together to create the menacing setting for his second performance have historically been one of the main contraptions of the local fishing industry.

³² Sharjah Art Foundation, *Leaving the Echo Chamber: Sharjah Biennial 14* (Sharjah Art Foundation, 2019), 168.

Martiel's performative representations of the complex history of commerce and slavery in the Indian Ocean transcended the reductive essentialisms of conventional



Figure 5.1 Sabor a Lágrimas (the Taste of Tears)

Photo credit: Carlos Martiel

historiography. In his detailed history of slavery on the Arabian peninsula, Matthew Hopper shows how in the nineteenth century traditional forms of slavery in the Gulf, usually the enslavement of women as concubines or household workers, were superseded by an expanded trade of disproportionately male slaves for use in pearl-diving and date-farming.³³ Due to the important role that the abolition of the slave trade played in British imperial strategy in the Indian Ocean, mainstream histories have tended to accept the portrait painted by the British, characterising slavery and concubinage as core features of the elite class in Muslim societies. However, increased demand for commodities such as pearls in Western markets was driven by imperial expansion and the globalisation of capitalism. This stimulated qualitative and

³³ Matthew Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

quantitative shifts in the slave trade, connections that are elided by orientalist ahistoricism with regard to Islamic slavery.³⁴ In not taking seriously earlier forms of commodity production and trade, such histories also give succour to orientalist narratives that crudely view the discovery of oil as a revolutionary watershed, lumping all history in the Arabian Peninsula prior to that discovery into the historical void of a rudimentary “pre-modernity.”³⁵

Each of Martiel’s two arresting performances can therefore be understood as conveying a sophisticated form of embodied critique, staging these crucial critical revisions to the history of slavery and imperialism in the Gulf. By showcasing the early industries through which the Gulf began to be integrated into the commodity circuits of globalising capitalism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and viscerally representing both the backbreaking work that slaves engaged in these industries were forced to undertake and the intractable relations in which they were ensnared, Martiel challenges ideological reductions concerning abolition, empire, oil, and modernity in one fell swoop. His total silence throughout both performances, while we stood and watched, also evoked the marked silences of African slave diasporas in the historical archives of the Indian Ocean, who thus remain subject to layers of mediation and abstraction that frustrate attempts at accessing the lived realities of their existence.³⁶ In punctuating the uncomfortable experience of watching a bound and contorted man hang from the ceiling with the pleasurable experience of eating a sticky sweet, *Sabor a Lágrimas* also enlisted sensorially plural ways of knowing to show the complicities and moral ambiguities inherent both in the trade in luxury goods manufactured in the nineteenth century Gulf, and in the contemporary art world. And yet, the histories of labour that Martiel depicts are part of a much longer history that can be traced out from pearling vessels right up to the contemporary *kafala* system.

In the Indian Ocean, as elsewhere, the history of abolition and slavery was not a clear-cut history of before and after. Rather, as Johan Mathew emphasises, the history of abolition was one of the slow and uneven translation of illicit forms of coerced

³⁴ Bishara, *Debt*; Gwyn Campbell, ed. *Abolition and its Aftermath in the Indian Ocean, Africa and* (London: Routledge, 2005); Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Mathew, *Margins*.

³⁵ Hopper, *Slaves of one Master*.

³⁶ Spivak, *Other Worlds*; Rao, “Recovering.”

labour into licit forms of coerced labour.³⁷ This was in large part a consequence of the Indian Ocean being one of the main theatres of imperial contestation due to its centrality in stitching together British territories and providing a trading route for goods produced in British India. Desperate to maintain control over the Gulf waters, and conscious of the centrality of slavery to the industries on which local potentates allied to British interests depended, the British were reluctant to abolish the practice slavery on *terra firma*. Thus, despite abolishing the slave trade through a series of treaties signed with local rulers, the first of which was negotiated with the Sultan of Muscat and Zanzibar in 1822, the British overlooked the continuation of a substantial illegal traffic in slaves, while the slave trade in women and children was adapted so as to be transacted through non-market exchanges of marriage and adoption. During this time, the British also became the primary agents and beneficiaries of the movement of debt-bonded Indian “coolie” labour, and many freed slaves were subsequently offered work through the coolie system. Instead of creating a free market of labour as claimed it would, post-abolition, legal sleights of hand in fact allowed slavery to hide in plain sight. Imperial officials and merchants contrived together ‘to frame enslaved bodies out of the market, while facilitating a traffic in bonded labor,’³⁸ enabling the systems of capital accumulation that depended on this labour to continue unabated.³⁹

Given the astronomical expansion of the pearling industry in the nineteenth century, the primary site in which these multiple overlapping forms of coerced labour coexisted was on pearling *dhows*. Almost all the workers on these ships were indentured. Crew would be at sea for the duration of the pearl diving season, which ran for five months from April through to September. Capitalising on this seasonal flux, captains of pearling vessels therefore issued formally free divers with credit to sustain their families for the duration of the season, locking them into cycles of obligation that ensured they continued returning to the diving boats year after year. Outside the season, these indentured workers often worked as sailors in the Indian Ocean shipping industry. Even the slaves that worked beside these indentured yet nominally free workers were not spared obligation through debt. Hopper recounts how documents

³⁷ Mathew, *Margins*.

³⁸ Mathew, *Margins*, 56.

³⁹ See Khan, “Indebted,” 93-96, for a discussion of how the abolition of slavery led to the legal definition of debt bondage and attached labour as lawful, and the construction of the Indian indentured labouring subject as “free.”

in the pearl trading archives reveal the widespread practice of owners recording the cost of purchasing slave divers or haulers in the debt ledgers of that slave.⁴⁰ A senior naval officer in the British navy estimated in 1929 that approximately twenty thousand divers working aboard pearling *dhows* in the Gulf were slaves, about a fifth of the total number of divers.⁴¹ This gives an indication both as to the continued abundance of slavery in the industry, despite the slave trade having been abolished a century earlier, as well as the sheer scale of the pearling industry which would at this point have already been in decline, as the Japanese had patented the technique for culturing pearls in 1916.

Due to its propitious location in the pearling waters of the Gulf Littoral, during the nineteenth century Bahrain became one of the most important emporiums along the Indian Ocean trading route, and a strategic node in what James Onley has designated Britain's 'informal empire.'⁴² Although Bahrain had been under British protection since 1820, its ruler having voluntarily acceded to the Great Peace Treaty which was imposed on his neighbours in the Trucial States, Britain only assumed a more active role in the administration of Bahrain toward the end of the nineteenth century. A series of Exclusive Agreements granted the British extraterritorial jurisdiction over the Bahraini archipelago and other Arabian territories on the Persian Gulf. According to the terms of these agreements, the British were responsible for the adjudication of all cases involving foreigners while the jurisdiction of the Bahraini ruler was limited to cases involving only locals. Cases involving both a foreigner and a local were to be tried in a joint British and Bahraini Court.⁴³

Having taken over administration of these territories, the seasonal flow of crews of indentured and slave labour aboard the pearling *dhows* plying the Gulf meant that the British had responsibility for a very high volume of foreign workers. To alleviate themselves of this administrative burden, the British decided to outsource the management of foreign workers on the pearling vessels to individuals. In December 1928, the British political agent stationed in Bahrain announced that ship captains were now legally responsible for all the foreign pearl divers working on their ships. Numbers, names and valid travel permits were to be provided by the captain to British customs

⁴⁰ Hopper, *Slaves of one Master*.

⁴¹ Hopper, *Slaves of one Master*.

⁴² Onley, "Informal Empire."

⁴³ Onley, "Informal."

officials and he was to pay the British a repatriation deposit which would be returned when the workers permanently left Bahraini waters.⁴⁴ From Bahrain the system was exported to Kuwait, where it was codified into law, and then spread to other parts of the region where it remains largely intact and unchanged.

Much more could be said about this history. This is not, however, the primary objective of this chapter, particularly as there are numerous works that have already offered thorough critical revisions of the standard historiography of empire, slavery, and abolition, and the *kafala* sponsorship system used to import labour into the Gulf.⁴⁵ I provide this brief potted history instead to illustrate the intimate relationship between these institutions. As other chapters have shown, the *kafala* system is a cornerstone of racial capitalism in the Gulf and its foundational exclusion. Premised on the exploitation of labour extracted from the eastern peripheries of the Indian Ocean, the system allows citizens to leverage their citizenship as a market resource to sponsor workers, yielding racialised access to subject formation and belonging in addition to nativist forms of state formation. Keen to emphasise the colonial foundations of the *kafala* sponsorship system against those that trace its lineage back to the legal use of sureties to Islam, Omar AlShehabi maintains that it would be ‘fundamentally erroneous’⁴⁶ to locate its origins in the obligated relations of debt and servitude aboard pearling vessels. He argues that, as the sponsorship system simply guarantees the legal right to work in foreign territories, it could theoretically exist without indebtedness.

Nonetheless, these structures of obligation are in practice so endemic as to be inextricable from the system (see Chapter Three). Moreover, it was the pearl diving industry which, as has been shown, was profoundly enmeshed with slavery and debt bondage, that brought a very high volume of workers into British administered territories, prompting the introduction of the sponsorship system. Not only did the Imperial Government of Bahrain turn a blind eye to slavery aboard these ships, during the nineteenth century they expanded systems of coercing labour through debt, while the expansion of both these labour practices were stimulated by demand for goods

⁴⁴ AlShehabi, “Policing.”

⁴⁵ AlShehabi, “Policing”; Bishara, *Debt*; Campbell, *Abolition*; Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*; Gardner, *Strangers*; Mathew, *Margin*; Onley, “Informal.”

⁴⁶ AlShehabi, “Policing,” 296.

such as pearls in Western markets. Fahad Bishara has also shown how these deep-rooted linkages of economic obligation further sutured different parts of the Indian Ocean, reinforcing the long-standing patterns of migration from the countries on its eastern shores to those on its western.⁴⁷ The *kafala* system can therefore be understood as an afterlife of the histories of empire and indentured, corvée and slave labour that coalesced aboard pearling *dhows*. Not only does the segregation through which the system operates echo the racial differentiations of the labour market that allowed European empires to be forged and sustained over disparate geographies, its very origins can be traced in the rippling wakes of the pearling *dhows*.

As can be seen from the history detailed here, there is much that Martiel's works, and others like them, gloss over. This is indubitably due to the increasingly heavy constraints on critiques of extant power relations. Despite these restrictions, Reem Shadid, the former Deputy Director of the Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF), emphasised that labour was one of the most enduring preoccupations of participating artists in the Sharjah Biennial.⁴⁸ Shadid also suggested that, given many of the artists commissioned by the SAF come from places where censorship is commonplace, the need to negotiate limits on critiques of extant power relations tended not to be particularly off-putting for participating artists. As censorship in the Gulf tends to be relatively crude and simple, she said works exhibited by the SAF engaged contentious topics subtly, using symbolism to gesture towards, and critique, local forms of dispossession and exploitation. Martiel, for example, performed his second work, *Eslabón*, in an edifice perched on the rooftop of the Bait Obaid Al Shamsi complex, which doubled up as an installation. The structure was oriented in such a way as to draw the view and noises of the port and sea into its *mise-en-scène*, thus signalling, however obliquely, the racialised and super-exploited labour involved in much current industry in the Gulf.

⁴⁷ Bishara, *Debt*.

⁴⁸ Exploring this intersection, Melanie Sindelar has argued that subtle artistic representations of workers create what she calls 'appreciatory visibilities.' Works with such visibilities remain palatable to bourgeois audiences and avoid censors, while still fostering recognition of the workforce based on appreciation rather than pity. See Melanie Sindelar, "When Workers Toil Unseen, Artists Intervene: On the In/visibility of Labor in the Arabian Gulf States," *Visual Anthropology* 32, no. 3-4 (2019): 265-286.

Adding another wrinkle of complexity to the web in which artists are ensnared is the fact that the burden of speaking in a political language is itself imposed by the contemporary art world's Western-derived rubric for judging value. Since what David Joselit terms the 'critical turn,' penetrating political critique has supplanted quality – a combination of creativity and skill – as the most important determinant of artistic merit.⁴⁹ In his glowing endorsement of the aesthetic critique tendered by Sharjah Biennial 11, Mignolo does not stray from this subjective schema for separating good art from bad, the wheat from the chaff.⁵⁰ On the basis of prolonged fieldwork with artists residing in the Gulf, Elizabeth Derderian contends that such demands are exclusionary, placing local artists in a double-bind.⁵¹ Either they produce political artwork legible to an international art elite in the hope of breaking through to international audiences, jeopardising their safety and security in the process, or they negotiate the increasingly onerous restrictions on freedom of speech by utilising the creative strategies Derderian calls 'conspicuous omission' (i.e., critique by way of conspicuous absences discernible only to audiences with shared frames of references) or 'circumscribing audiences' (i.e., creating safe spaces for trusted friends and colleagues that remain entirely off-grid). This pair of strategies and the alternative of completely avoiding politics do not put artists in danger. However, due to the demands of international art milieus, Derderian suggests that, in all likelihood, they foreclose the possibility of critical acclaim on the international stage, and even, to some extent, on the local.

An adjacent claim might be made about artists from elsewhere. While in the Gulf, foreign artists such as Martiel are freer to utilise oblique aesthetic strategies of critique than those resident in the region, but their careers remain equally structured by the hegemonic demand of criticality and counter-hegemonic representation. For artists like Martiel that meet this demand with a focus on anti-colonial themes, the double-bind is pulled particularly tight: either remain on the fringes of the art world or accept funding from mainstream institutions rooted in histories of colonialism and racial capitalism. The extremely competitive and highly liberalised environment of the

⁴⁹ Joselit, "Allegory," 3.

⁵⁰ Mignolo, "Re:emerging."

⁵¹ Elizabeth Derderian, "Margins of Freedom: Censorship, Critique, and Contemporary Art in the UAE" (Lecture, Yale MacMillan Centre, YouTube, 2021).

cultural metropolises makes the cultural sector in the Gulf an appealing prospect for artists. Here, although critique remains of overweening importance, comparatively bounteous resources are traded for more pronounced circumscriptions on artistic expression.

One of the key forms of symbolism that participating artists in the Sharjah Biennial use to circumvent these restrictions, while fulfilling this requirement of criticality and critique, is historical allusion. Martiel's work, and several other works I saw at *Leaving the Echo Chamber*, utilised this mode of critique by implication. Through excavations and representations of the entangled histories of the slave trade and commerce in the Indian Ocean, they alluded to current structures of subalternity in the Gulf. Allusion through history is, in some ways, a surreptitious act of resistance, refusing to shy away from the contentious topic of labour entirely. Nevertheless, artworks are also agents of historical narration. This mode of critique requires that works separate the histories of imperialism and slavery they depict out from the Gulf's contemporary racialised structure of accumulation.

As Michel Trouillot so elegantly demonstrates, how we relate to the past is an effect of the writing of history.⁵² The objective of power is to make history and the past coterminous with one another, thus detaching the past from the present moment, and making the workings of power invisible. And yet, as he writes 'the past does not exist independently from the present. Indeed, the past is only past because there is a present, just as I can point to something over there only because I am here. But nothing is inherently over there or here. In that sense, the past has no content. The past—or more accurately, pastness—is a position. Thus, in no way can we identify the past as past.'⁵³ Such a relational understanding of past and present is fundamental to the concept of wake work, as it is the historical construction of pasts *as past* that enables the repressed violence of empire and slavery to continue to structure the present. Due to the inability to be explicit about the relationship between the histories depicted and the present moment, Martiel's work ends up sliding into a form of 'historical abstraction.' By which I mean that his works, and others in the same vein, are aesthetic investigations of historical events that must elide the relational quality of the past that

⁵² Trouillot, *Silencing*.

⁵³ Trouillot, *Silencing*, 15.

Trouillot describes, as well as the distinct role history has as the technology for plotting that relation.

Artists are, of course, aware of the double-bind that faces them, and the ways they are drawn into forms of complicity with powerful actors. One of my interlocutors, the artist Doris Bittar, spoke candidly of her sense of complicity in the creation of what she called the UAE's 'national fiction.' Like Martiel's performance, her site-specific work, exhibited at an earlier edition of the Sharjah Biennial, explored the cosmopolitan trading and labour histories nested in pearl diving. Her experience of the reception of her work, which was purchased by the Bank of Sharjah to hang in one of their foyers, gave her a sense that the state was in fact very keen to promote these histories of diversity so long as one remained silent on the unequal access to security and belonging that are the legacies of this history, recalling 'I was silent too and that's why I say I was complicit even though my research was to honour the diversity - it's not all equal and I didn't say that.'⁵⁴ As Bittar indicates, the mode of excavation and retrieval inflects works differently, establishing an epistemological structure for relating to the themes they investigate. The necessarily tentative, sideways approach that they must take obfuscates the structures of subalternity, framing present systems of racialised super-exploitation out of the past systems they depict. In so doing, these aesthetic interventions are made available to the state for co-optation.

As this section should have made clear, in the context of the steady liberalisation of high culture, the critical turn is a political minefield for artists. These challenges reveal the power of the wake - the troubling reality of articulating postcolonial and decolonial aesthetics within a set of racialised global capitalist relations is that they condemn even profoundly anticolonial interventions to complicity and ambiguity. Thus, a black artist from the Global South whose work has always focused on embodied representations of the intersectional and mobile dynamics of racialisation and subjection, as well as transnational solidarity, at once excavates the overlapping historical strands of these structures while simultaneously being conscripted into enabling their persistence into the present.⁵⁵ Perhaps more troubling, however, is that theorists of postcolonialism and decoloniality like Mignolo have willingly enlisted in

⁵⁴ Doris Bittar, interview with author.

⁵⁵ For an in-depth discussion of Martiel's work see Marelys Valencia, "Carlos Martiel and the Transnational Politics of the Black Body," *Parse* 10, Spring (2020).

this project. When considered in the context of the racialised labour model on which the Arab Gulf states are built, this willingness reveals the limits of an account of decolonisation that views it, first and foremost, as an epistemic process. It would also seem to confirm the materialist contention that, by neglecting the material, reifying its primal scene, and celebrating the non-Western, strong postcolonial theory inadvertently becomes the handmaiden of capitalism.

I have stressed throughout this thesis that the politics of the emergent cultural sector in the Gulf cannot be read independently of the political economy of the wider art world. It is therefore worth emphasising that the dynamics described here do not merely ensnare artists working in the Gulf. Due to the liberalisation of the sector, described at length in the first two chapters, across the transnational locations of the art world, the burden of criticality forces artists that seek recognition and professional advancement to make their work vulnerable to assimilation by the global threads of racial capital stitched into its every seam – private capital in the cultural metropolises and unaccountable states in postcolonies such as the Gulf.

These dynamics of assimilation have a temporal correlate in the capitalist future, which I will now discuss. Incorporating this section's discussion of the relationship between *decolonial aestheSis* and history, the next section will also probe what the temporal logics of the Gulf's cultural sector reveal about the hegemonic workings of political power in the Gulf, and thus the limits of a conception of hegemony modelled on early twentieth century Western nation-states.

5.3 HEGEMONY PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

While in the Emirates on my fieldwork during the cultural season which spans March through to April, I also attended the annual Abu Dhabi Culture Summit. The 3rd annual Culture Summit was held at the Manarat Al Saadiyat in Abu Dhabi between 8th and 11th April 2019. Organised by the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism (DCT), the annual summit is something of a who's who of the art world; assembled together at the third edition were the heads of many major global institutions from Singapore to London to Mali. When we arrived at the summit, a friend quipped 'welcome to the Davos of culture.' Although tongue in cheek, this was perhaps the most apt description I heard of the event. Much like Davos, during the Culture

Summit, the international elites of culture descend on the same place annually to “solve” what its organisers have determined to be the most urgent questions facing the sector between silver service meals and stays at luxury hotels. Indeed, the entrepreneurial focus on digital technologies, and the snappy, high-tech panel discussions, contrived to make the event feel less like a conference and more like a series of glorified sales pitches.⁵⁶



Figure 5.2 Auditorium at the Culture Summit 2019, Photo by author

Each day was organised into morning and afternoon sessions. In the morning, attendees would gather in the round to listen to four panel discussions, each of which lasted approximately forty minutes, with each new panel introduced by the conference’s master of ceremonies, Muhammad al-Utaiba, who founded the Abu Dhabi based media group Syndication Bureau. After lavish table service lunches held in the restaurant and garden of Manarat Al Saadiyat, guests were then asked to go to one of the four breakout sessions, one for each of the four streams covered by the panel

⁵⁶ In his welcoming address, Muhammad al-Mubarak hailed his guests as the “avengers of culture,” referencing the astronomically successful Marvel superhero movie franchise.

discussions we had listened to that morning, with the aim of coming up with concrete proposals that would receive backing from the summit's organisers-cum-patrons. On the second day of the conference, I took part in a workshop entitled *How can Museums Activate the Past in our Present?* The workshop explored how museums should deal with history: the future of their historical displays and the histories they should tell. The workshop was facilitated by Wanda Nanibush, Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, and Alexandra Munroe, Chief Curator of Asian Art at the Guggenheim and Interim Director of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi project. Perhaps inevitably, the discussion focused on the problems of object-based institutions, their colonial legacies and inheritances, and the tension between the competing imperatives of conservation and restitution.

More interesting than the conversation itself, which rehashed the familiar and seemingly intractable debates of museology after the end of formal empire, was the insight it offered into the motivations of some of the attendees. As the clock wound down on the workshop, Alexandra Munroe began to insist that participants produce some concrete proposals to give our DCT hosts for them to realise. Many of the participants demurred, appearing sceptical of the notion of quick-fix technological solutions. In the end, Munroe concluded that she would propose her group's suggestion of an app that would give visitors to museums contextualising information for the objects on display. Numerous participants in the workshop objected to this idea, pointing out that there were endless such apps already in existence and that, as the process of building a beta version of the app to pilot could be very modest, it was premature for the app to receive a massive injection of cash.

As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, describing the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Mignolo proposes that the 'political sovereignty of capital'⁵⁷ in resource rich postcolonies such as Qatar - and by extension the UAE - has enabled them to establish collections that narrate what he terms 'dewesternising histories.' The evolution of this workshop illustrates the tensions and ambivalences inherent in this turn. The dewesternising history to which Mignolo is referring when describing the MIA is the history of Islamic cultures. Petrodollars have facilitated the Gulf's acquisition of objects and the building of architectural regalia through which to narrate

⁵⁷ Mignolo, "Enacting."

the magnificent achievements of Islamic societies. Nevertheless, as the last section also showed, capital and power operate on the relationship between past and present, and on history as the technology for plotting that relationship. As Mignolo acknowledges, the turn toward more capacious histories does not, in and of itself, pose a challenge to systems of power and capital accumulation providing that the relational quality between past, present, and future, can be buried.

Whereas the previous section examined the complexities and ambivalences of the SAF's turn toward *decolonial aestheSis* through the prism of the idea of historical abstraction, this vignette testifies instead to how history and more specifically more expansive histories have become a marketable commodity. Those seeking to draw in capital from resource rich postcolonial states exerting their 'political sovereignty,' such as the Gulf, can deploy the turn toward more plural, "decolonising" histories to secure access to funding. This is not to discredit all the participants in the workshop and summit, as many of their contributions were interesting and reflective. However, the stated ambition of the summit organisers is to convert Abu Dhabi into a global cultural hub. Via the summit they have been able to bring many of the industry's heavy hitters to the emirate annually to mine their intellectual and political insights. The more mercenary among the guests correctly discerned the financial opportunities of formulating curatorial conversations, such as the very vexed conversation around art, history, and colonialism, into proposals for funding. The consonance between calls to recoup historical plurality, and the colonial experience of the Gulf as a resource rich postcolony, has surely not gone unnoticed, rendering such alternative histories particularly marketable.

In this context, historical multiplicity in the name of "decolonisation" acquires an economic valence; in keeping with the development goals of economic diversification, it might be considered an investment in historical diversification. Much as economic diversification is undertaken in pursuit of the future sustainability of the Arab Gulf states as a node of the existing global capitalist order, it might be argued that the proliferation of historical narration as a political and aesthetic strategy, within the context of a liberalised art market, facilitates the narrowing of the present moment. As described in Chapter One, sponsorship arrangements have become increasingly necessary due to the liberalisation of the funding environment for the arts. This is an

alliance of convenience: invariably beneficial to the sponsors themselves, sponsorship arrangements offer firms and states responsible for integrating ever more sites into the global capitalist system opportunities to burnish their image. Diversity in the past tense is invested in, distracting from the ways that the global system of racial capitalism draws more spaces into its scope, adapting and entrenching racialised and gendered political-economic hierarchies, while furthering the alienation of subjects from the structures of globalisation and domination. Just as diversification is prospective, setting its sights on a future that it attempts to bring into being, the temporality of historical diversification has a corollary in the future, contributing to the foreclosure of histories that might yet be written by sustaining and deepening the homogenisation of the present; in sum, by contributing to the colonisation of the future.

Although critical studies of the Gulf have begun to turn the tide, discussions of the structure and power of Gulf states in much of the academic literature have remained the province of an orientalism long-since jettisoned in the study of other parts of the Middle East. Scholars have tended to train their eyes on oil and authoritarianism alone, impervious to other crucial nation and state-building practices. Perhaps unsurprisingly the most ubiquitous theoretical construct deployed to undertake analyses of the Gulf is therefore rentier theory, which braids these two concerns together to posit the absence of democracy in the Gulf as a by-product of its overweening dependence on oil rents. Oil rents are understood to configure the state's relationship to society as primarily distributive, and classes as vertically segmented and radiating outward from the state.⁵⁸ Beblawi and Luciani write '[d]emocracy is not a problem for allocation states,'⁵⁹ gesturing toward the underlying normative assumption that democracy and dispute are the inevitable outcome, and exclusive property, of liberalism.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Crystal, *Oil*; Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, *The Rentier State* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1987); Hossein Mahdavy, "The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran" in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, ed. Michael Cook (Abingdon: Routledge, 1970), 428–67. For a more recent version of this argument see Steffen Hertog, "Segmented Clientelism: The Political Economy of Saudi Economic Reform Efforts," in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*, eds. Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (London: Hurst, 2005), 111–143.

⁵⁹ Beblawi and Luciani, *Rentier*.

⁶⁰ In "Spatial," MacLean notes that within a few years of the publication of Beblawi and Luciani's influential work, other scholarship emerged that chronicled efforts to build a national culture through archaeology, archives, and fostering folklore, strategies rentier theory would assume to be unnecessary.

What these investments in culture, and the cultivation of counter-hegemonic artistic content invested with the Gulf's local histories of merchant trade and colonialism, make abundantly clear, is that attempts to gerrymander the future are underpinned by logics far more complex than allocative authoritarianism. Moreover, as the conclusion to this thesis will examine in greater depth, racial capitalism does not only operate on new sites of the art world in the Gulf, but also on the cultural metropolises in ways that link them together. In both locations, capitalism assimilates the democratic principle of critique and dispute, consigning aesthetic critique to complicity and ambivalence. That these interdependent systems of capital accumulation co-opt and absorb critique across locations poses a significant challenge to the orientalist reductions that suggest liberal states are fundamentally different from the authoritarian Arab Gulf states, a point made all the more poignant by the fact that economic liberalisation in the Gulf appears to be entrenching and not threatening authoritarianism. That said, in the Gulf and the Western cultural metropolises assimilation is configured differently relative to the question of democracy.

In the late democracies of the liberal West, political critique and its postcolonial variant entered into the mainstream institutional field of fine art and high culture, in large part, as a consequence of their displacement from other channels of political participation and subject formation. These channels have been steadily eroded since the neoliberal transformation, while the cultural sector itself has equally been encircled and assimilated by capital. At the cultural institutions in the Gulf, these logics undergo at least a partial inversion. Despite artworks having to make recourse to forms of implication and allusion if addressing the Gulf context, these institutions provide a circumscribed space in which quite radical political conversations and representations can be staged. A version of political engagement is thereby offered in the absence of suffrage, and in the context of repressive security machineries, strict slander laws,⁶¹ and anti-strike legislation that bans or places very heavy restrictions on unionisation and collective bargaining, particularly for migrant workers.⁶²

⁶¹ Except Saudi Arabia, which is guided by Shari'a, all the GCC states have strict slander laws, though enforcement varies from state to state. Defamation is classed as a criminal, rather than civil, offence, and the burden of proof is merely evidencing that the reputation of the defamed has been hurt.

⁶² None of the Arab Gulf states have ratified the International Labour Organisation's two key conventions on collective association and bargaining between workers. See Adam Hanieh, "Migrant

Across my conversations with art world professionals employed at major cultural institutions, a term I encountered often was the ‘threshold problem’ - the term used to designate the challenge of widening audiences beyond already initiated publics. Cultural consumption in the Gulf remains a relatively novel pastime, and the industry comparatively nascent. In the case of the SAF, both Sharjah and institution are far less well-known than their more powerful cousins in the federation, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Most of the footfall that the institution receives is therefore self-selecting: visitors attend due to a prior awareness of the institution’s work and history. The cultural institutions clustered in Saadiyat Cultural District are by comparison understood by the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism as tourist destinations (see Chapter Four). Another interlocutor who had worked at a variety of cultural organisations in both Dubai and Abu Dhabi described how Saif Said Ghubash, former undersecretary of the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism and current director of the Abu Dhabi Executive Office,⁶³ attended a meeting with the Louvre Abu Dhabi staff in 2019 to insist that they boost their visitor figures, as only ten percent of tourists to the UAE were visiting the Louvre Abu Dhabi. The entire cultural calendar of the Gulf itself is also calibrated to the global art calendar. Flagship exhibitions and art fairs are scheduled in March and November such that cultural professionals and audiences travelling to events further east such as Art Basel: Hong Kong can avail themselves of a long layover in the UAE to visit these shows.

Given this positioning relative to the transnational space of the art world, cultural institutions in the Gulf, as elsewhere, are therefore partially abstracted from the specificities of the domestic political context. They are configured as much, if not more, in relation to this mobile art audience, as in relation to the local audiences. The threshold “problem” therefore doubles up as a shield, enabling political critiques to be staged behind the safe confines of the institution walls. The critical turn of mainstream cultural institutions in the West to aesthetic critiques of capitalism, imperialism, and

Rights in the Gulf: Charting the Way Forward” in *Transit States*, eds. Abdulhadi Khalaf et al., (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 223-233. A variety of studies have illustrated the intensity of these restrictions across a range of contexts. See, among others, Hanieh et al., eds. *Transit States*; Buckley, “Locating Neoliberalism”; Buckley et al., “Migrant”; Damir-Geilsdorf, “Contract”; HRW, “Island of Happiness”; Khalili, *Sinews*; Vitalis, *Kingdom*; Wells, “Construction.”

⁶³ The Executive Office is the organ of government responsible for supporting the Executive Council, the highest office in the emirate of Abu Dhabi.

structural racism, described in the previous section, has also led to a growing conversance of international cultural milieus with this subject matter. Within cultural institutions these discourses thus form part of their international audiences' horizon of expectation. Accrued over time, these expectations attenuate the subversive potential of political critiques staged at cultural institutions in the Gulf.

The buffer afforded by the circumscribed space of the exhibition does not, however, mean that everything is permissible within the walls of the cultural institution. Doris Bittar, a participating artist in the Sharjah Biennial 9 whose sense of complicity I recounted earlier in this chapter, was also a core member of Gulf Labor. Both Bittar and Gregory Sholette, another founding member of Gulf Labor, related to me how, for a while, the Sharjah Biennial had provided a local context in which the core activists involved in the group - a coalition of artists and academics - could meet.⁶⁴ In 2015, three members of Gulf Labor were deported from the UAE while on a research trip and banned from ever returning.⁶⁵ The group were not targeting Sharjah but rather institutions on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi. As Chapter Three related, their objectives were to highlight how Western cultural institutions are complicit in the violent exploitation of workers that underpins capital accumulation in the Gulf, and to amplify the construction workers demands for improved conditions made during recurrent strikes. Nevertheless, due to the federated structure of the state, since this ban was imposed, the Sharjah Biennial is no longer a place where the members of the group come together.

SAF is not, however, merely enmeshed in these coercive interventions by proxy. In 2011 Jack Persekian, the Palestinian curator initially appointed as director of the SAF, was summarily fired by the emir over a public installation by the Algerian artist Mustapha Benfodil. Simultaneous with Persekian's firing, Benfodil's work was removed from the Sharjah Biennial 10's exhibition, while that of another artist, Rosalind Nashashibi, was removed, adapted, and reinstalled. This domino of events led to substantial criticism of the institution, and a pledge, signed by approximately 1500 art world practitioners, committing themselves to boycotting the SAF, and all other cultural enterprises in the Gulf, if the decision to fire Persekian was not subject to due

⁶⁴ Doris Bittar, interview with author; Gregory Sholette, interview with author.

⁶⁵ Andrew Ross, one of those detained and deported, also described to me how a private detective had been hired to investigate him.

process and proper mediation. The foundation ‘dismissed the petition as the work of outside agitators’⁶⁶ and Persekian was not reinstated.

Although the state claimed that Benfodil’s piece was removed due to public outcry from conservative elements of society, Benfodil suggested it was the echoes of the uprisings that had recently erupted across parts of the Middle East which contributed to this repressive move.⁶⁷ While both Oman and Saudi Arabia witnessed small protests, Bahrain was only Gulf state to experience widespread popular demonstrations against the regime. At the behest of the ruling Al Khalifa family, two days before the opening of the biennial, the GCC agreed to deploy the Peninsula Shield Forces to Bahrain to crush the uprising, with the UAE sending 500 police officers. During the opening week of the Sharjah Biennial, a small group of guests, including the artist Ibrahim Quraishi, handed out pieces of paper with the names of protestors killed in Bahrain. Quraishi was immediately picked up by Sharjah’s security services and was interrogated for five hours prior to his release.

Setting aside the orientalist preoccupation with censorship and cultural production in the Gulf, which more often than not pivots on a facile engagement with the question of “the nude,” censorship has become increasingly onerous and restrictive, ironically for the Western institutions which claim to be bringing liberal ideas to the Gulf. Despite these repressive moves, which have extended to artists,⁶⁸ many practitioners, including members of Gulf Labor, have continued to participate in the biennial and work of the SAF more broadly, and have likewise participated in exhibitions organised by the Guggenheim in conjunction with the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi project. This oscillating field of tacit consent and occasional violent coercion to which Gulf Labor, and other artists and cultural practitioners involved in the work of cultural institutions in the Gulf, are subject is indicative of the logics through which critique is staged and absorbed.

⁶⁶ Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, “Sharjah Biennial 10: Plot for a Biennial,” *Bidoun* (2011).

⁶⁷ See Toukan, “Art” for more detail. The work consisted of a multitude of headless mannequins wearing t-shirts with political slogans, installed in a public square next to SAF’s buildings. It was accompanied by an audio track of uproarious chanting like that heard in the urban epicentres of the 2011 Arab uprisings.

⁶⁸ Ashok Sukumaran, an artist who had previously exhibited at the Sharjah Biennial, was one of the three members of Gulf Labor banned from ever returning to the UAE.

The distinction between consent and coercion forms the basis of Antonio Gramsci's description of hegemony, a form of rule premised on the consent of the majority to being governed in the partial interests of the ruling minority, secured through moral reforms. This arrangement of power has been deemed to be an inappropriate analytical concept for the postcolony, given that the coercive apparatus on which colonial rule depended stunted the development of the bourgeois institutions through which consent was secured. Reading Gramsci with Frantz Fanon, Sara Salem pushes back against this common view, insisting that the Marxist concept of hegemony can and should be stretched to the postcolony.⁶⁹

Fanon unflinchingly depicts how, in the postcolony, rule is fundamentally intertwined with the imperial structure of the world economy. Colonialism creates relationships of racialised dependency, with newly independent elites immediately dependent upon the imperial elites of global capitalism following the end of formal empire.⁷⁰ In this context, I would posit that political projects can adapt hegemonic tactics, perhaps even achieve hegemony, without bourgeois society, by securing consent for the state at the international level of these imperial elites. The Gulf's ruling class represent a version of Fanon's idea of the (inter-)dependent bourgeois class, utilising the dialectic of coercion and consent to supplement their power domestically with consent secured at the level of the colonial international. As the last chapter showed, elite and middle-class immigration to the Gulf also facilitates the internalisation of this international layer of consent into the domestic context.

Cultural institutions play an important role in this process, participating in creating the conditions of moral reform upon which the production of hegemony depends. As the second section of this chapter illustrated, they provide degrees of unspoken consent for aesthetic critique within a fluctuating matrix of that which can be said explicitly and that which can only be implied. Put differently, just as in the liberal West, hyper-capitalist states assimilate aesthetic critiques of capitalism and imperialism, the inscription of postcolonial and decolonial aesthetic practice in the Gulf becomes one of the terrains on which consent for the racialised ruling bargain

⁶⁹ Salem, *Afterlives*.

⁷⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990 [1961]).

described in the previous two chapters is accumulated, while the coercive apparatus of the state inhibits those critiques deemed too challenging.

Speaking of his motivations for taking the job of designing the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, in an interview with *Foreign Policy*, Frank Gehry said ‘what I bought into, when we talked to the sheikhs and the deciders, was that this was going to be a museum for a *globalized* art culture.’⁷¹ Paradoxically then, postcolonial and decolonial artistic interventions are assimilated in such a way as to end up at least partially arming the very colonial structures they challenge, fortifying the liberal logics through which the ruling classes and cultural capitalists continue to accumulate capital, both ephemeral and material. The critical operation of this accumulation of consent which, as already discussed, Mignolo reproduces, depends on cordoning theory - whether crystallised academically or aesthetically - off from the material realm and thus from political praxis. It should therefore come as no surprise that where decolonial moves are explicitly political, and engage political rather than aesthetic exclusions, as Gulf Labor did, they provoke a coercive reaction from the state.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This is the only chapter in this thesis that has focused on artistic practices themselves. Taking the postcolonial and decolonial orientations of cultural institutions in the Gulf as its point of departure, the chapter has excavated one of the core concerns of this thesis – the relationship of the postcolonial to the anticolonial and decolonisation. It has argued that, seen from the perspective of actually existing, racial capitalism, postcolonial and decolonial aesthetic practices in the Gulf represent a particularly pernicious form of the moral reforms through which hegemony in the postcolony is sought. Such reforms intervene in and co-opt, often for the financial gain of cultural capitalists, the very terrain on which is posed the challenge to systems of racialised global accumulation that benefit states and institutions in both the Gulf and cultural metropolises in the West.

⁷¹ Ben Pauker, “Epiphanies from Frank Gehry,” *Foreign Policy*, 24 June 2013, emphasis mine. In the same interview, Gehry also suggests his preferred political system would be a benevolent dictatorship. With a tasteful dictator, he thinks urban space could be less chaotic and more beautiful – and Gehry would get more commissions to make it so.

As a concluding point, I want to return to the idea of the wake. Empire and slavery made instrumental use of racial differences, creating, and adapting racialised hierarchies so as to exploit different pools of labour across far-flung places. In the process of decolonisation, newly independent states challenged these hierarchies, asserting their equity through the claim to self-rule within the nominally equal system of nation-states. Flickering, relentless movement is, however, characteristic of the wake, hence Sharpe's call that scholars position themselves within its immanence. Both slavery and empire spearheaded the emergence of a truly global racial capitalist system. Indifferent to the nominal equality of independent nation-states within the postcolonial international system, since the opening of the sluice gates to speculative capital at a global scale, its market forces have produced profound hierarchies between former colonies and raced groups that are continually shifting and reordering. Hierarchies and racialisations within postcolonies and between raced groups may be challenging to talk about, more so when part of a discussion about anti-colonial discourses. And yet, as the pages of this thesis have demonstrated, in the new multipolar landscapes of global capitalism, the Gulf is at once a postcolony and a centre of capitalism, albeit one dependent upon other centres, extracting subaltern labour from other postcolonial contexts on its peripheries.

The curatorial orientations of cultural infrastructures in the Gulf towards more capacious histories - one that is either less Western-centric (as in the case of the Louvre Abu Dhabi) or one that is trained on south-south relations (as in the case of the Sharjah Art Foundation) - risk smoothing over the hierarchical relations between postcolonial contexts, unintentionally reifying the condition of the postcolony to suggest a commensurability between different postcolonies simply by virtue of their colonial experience. Postcolonial and decolonial curation in the Gulf therefore bears the marks of the rip tide of racial capitalism. Continuously dislocating and deracinating subjects and histories, racial capitalism frustrates easy delineations such as coloniser/colonised, precolonial/postcolonial, colonial/decolonial/anticolonial, and confounds attempts to instate a truly postcolonial order. This is not to suggest that the artists and cultural practitioners that participate in these cultural events are naïve about the Gulf or the possibilities of their practices. Quite the contrary, in my discussions with artists that have participated in the Sharjah Biennial I sensed a deep and sober

awareness of their limits. The analysis of the complexity, ambivalences, and dangers I offer in this chapter is therefore offered with artists, in the spirit of vigilance and a recognition of the profound challenges that the current global political-economic conjuncture poses to cultural production.

To strike a final, more optimistic note, my analysis is also offered in the hope it may contribute in a modest way to the effort to find a way through the theoretical thicket engendered by changing distributions of power and capital within the international system. Both the European Marxist tradition and postcolonial theory are haunted by the geographies of their primal scenes. By contrast, Black Marxism, which takes racial capitalism as its object of inquiry, was conceived against both the geographic and conceptual orthodoxy of European Marxism. Light on its feet, the theory is therefore neither uncompromising in its concepts nor wedded to particular territories. In both this chapter and this thesis, I have therefore tried to show how postcolonialism might rid itself of its civilisational shadow by embracing the limber insights of this theory of capitalism. If it were to abandon the map of the European imperial encounter, postcolonial theory could concentrate on calibrating concepts of empire to the current historical conjuncture, in its full discursively mediated materialism. For, as this thesis has also evidenced, concepts of empire remain as integral as ever to the anticolonial project of making sense of persistent colonial relations the world over.

[Conclusion]

A TERRIFIC BOOMERANG EFFECT

'the dreamer of the dream'
- Toni Morrison

This thesis opened with the UAE's colonisation of the Soqatra Archipelago, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At first glance, its relevance to a thesis about high culture may have appeared obscure. Yet, as I drew out, the archipelago's designation as a World Heritage Site of so-called "intangible" heritage, and the echoes of European colonialism in the UAE's recent actions on the collection of islands, are the canaries in the cultural coal mine. They alert us to the divisions between the material and the ideational, and between colonialism and postcolonialism, warning of how these artificial divisions profoundly affect the Arab Gulf states' high cultural infrastructures. To bring their effects into view, I have argued, requires reading these infrastructures through the prism of racial capitalism. Such an account of capitalism threads the needle between materialism and discourse, emphasising historical specificity, and geographic and temporal interconnection, over calcified divisions.

Racial capitalism is therefore indispensable to political sociological analyses of the transnational field of high culture and its infrastructures, bridging studies of museum colonialism, and studies of capitalism and contemporary art. Assessing the expanding cultural infrastructures in the Arab Gulf states through its lens, I have shown how they emerge out of the material dynamics of the global art market, and how, in turn, the inscription of a local site of the art market is nested in the profoundly material dynamics of other markets - financial markets, labour markets, and property markets. I have also shown how racial ideas lubricate these transnational markets, resolving contradictions at every turn. In tracing the ways high culture is embedded in hierarchical material circuits and concretised in urban space, I have demonstrated that colonialism in the high cultural sector far exceeds colonial plunder lining the cases of museums in the cultural metropolises to form the basis of Western museology.

My reading is prompted by these empirical realities of the art world as a colonial – and therefore inherently transnational and interconnected – field. It is also, however, prompted by a normative desire to destabilise accounts that exceptionalise the Gulf and lionise the West. Together, these prompts suggest that we should not understand these dynamics as radiating unidirectionally out from the cultural metropolises. Rather, we should understand that the creation of cultural infrastructures in the Gulf will inevitably be shaping market dynamics, built environments, and discourses in the cultural metropolises – a motion that Aimé Césaire pithily describes as the ‘boomerang.’¹

Written in 1950, his *Discourse on Colonialism* offers a penetrating indictment of the West and its colonial history. In effervescent, angry prose he prosecutes the argument that, seen from the colonies, Nazism could only be understood as the inevitable consequence of colonialism’s inherently racist order. It was the violent offspring of the ‘terrific boomerang effect’ by which the techniques of colonial rule and its racist bookkeeping return to the metropole, having been trialled in their imperial laboratories. Césaire’s understanding of colonialism – further elaborated, whether unacknowledged or coincidentally, by both Hannah Arendt² and Michel Foucault³ – prevents the binaries of core/periphery becoming hypostasised, theorising colonialism as a truly global affliction.⁴ As Nasser Abourahme writes, colonialism was neither ‘a ‘constitutive outside’ or subtending foil of liberal-metropolitan power’⁵ but a technology that eventually and inexorably corrupts the core. Many studies have turned their attention to the more visible and explicitly material aspects of this return, focusing on the interrelated processes of policing, urban policy and development, and the provision of housing.⁶ Though perhaps less obvious than the processes that have already garnered substantial attention, the art world is nevertheless also a site in which this colonial return manifests. Indeed, many of the core arguments of this thesis are

¹ Césaire, *Discourse*.

² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007[1951]).

³ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey (London: Penguin, 2004 [1997]).

⁴ In the final chapter of *Wretched*, Fanon, 200-250, also offers an analysis of the corrupting toll of colonialism on the psychology of the colonisers.

⁵ Abourahme, “Monsters,” 107.

⁶ Danewid, “Fire”; Conor Woodman, “The Imperial Boomerang: How Colonial Methods of Repression Migrate Back to the Metropolis” (Verso Blog, 2020); Joe Turner, “Internal Colonisation: The Intimate Circulations of Empire, Race and Liberal Government,” *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 4 (2018): 765–90.

reflected in and – crucially – structurally connected to dynamics that have been unfolding within the cultural metropolises, to which its milieus have attempted to turn a blind eye.

Beyond vague orientalist notions of copious oil wealth, the only detail about the political economics of cultural institutions in the Gulf that is relatively commonly known among Western high cultural milieus, is the revelation made by Alexandre Kazerouni of the connection between Saadiyat Cultural District and the offset programme.⁷ The programme is so-called because of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan's policy of offsetting arms purchases by reserving funds for social investment. As described, these funds formed the basis of Mubadala, the Sovereign Wealth Fund which has overseen the creation of the suite of Western franchise or consultancy-based museums on Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island. Given there is an intimate connection between the military-industrial complex and cultural institutions in the liberal West, the particular interest in this connection in the Gulf is arguably evidence of the persistence of a profound orientalism in appraisals of these states.

Recent activism has nevertheless increased scrutiny of what is termed the 'militarisation of culture' in the art world's historic geographies. In 2019, the Whitney's vice chairman, Warren B. Kanders, was forced to resign due to the campaigning that followed revelations that his company, Safariland LLC (formerly Armor Holdings), had manufactured the teargas canisters used against migrants along the US-Mexico border.⁸ Kanders' company has also reaped the rewards of the numerous American-led wars in the Middle East. Annual company filings with the United States Securities and Exchange Commission in 2004, show a 740 percent increase in Armor Holdings' profits between 2003 and 2004, with the report making specific reference to sales to the United States military following the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

In the United Kingdom, the campaign Boycott Zabludowicz (BDZ)⁹ has highlighted how the Zabludowicz Collection is involved in the ongoing occupation and art-washing of Palestine. The collection, which champions early career artists, is

⁷ Kazerouni, *Mirrors*.

⁸ There is documentary evidence of tear gas canisters bearing the Defense Technology/Federal Laboratories logo having been deployed against protesters in Bahrain, Yemen, Egypt, and Tunisia during the wave of uprisings that coursed through the Middle East in 2011.

⁹ Kate Brown, "25 Artists have 'Deauthorised' their works in the Zabludowicz Collection because of its ties to the Israeli Military," *Artnet*, 27 July 2021.

funded with the personal fortune of the British-Israeli billionaire Poju Zabludowicz. His wealth derives from the sale of the Israeli defence contractor Soltam, founded by Zabludowicz's father, to Israeli arms-manufacturing juggernaut Elbit Systems in 2010. Soltam produces artillery for the IDF, and Poju parlayed the returns of the arms firm's sale into a property empire and his art trust.¹⁰ In addition to amassing a major collection of contemporary art, the Zabludowicz Collection has donated to a welter of cultural institutions in London: the Camden Arts Centre, the ICA, Goldsmiths, the Tate, and Whitechapel Gallery, to name but a few.

In 2019, Novalpina Capital Group S.à.r.l. (NCG) supported a management buyout of NSO Group through a labyrinthine corporate structure of holding companies and investment funds registered in Luxembourg.¹¹ Although the company was founded by Stephen Peel, at the time of the buyout, all his equity in NCG was held by his wife, Yana Peel, then CEO of the Serpentine Gallery in London.¹² NSO Group's highest revenue-generating technology is Pegasus, spyware which gives intelligence operatives the ability to hack encrypted software and hijack phones, harvesting data from that device and those in its vicinity. In July 2021, NSO Group became infamous after a consortium of media outlets, research units, and NGOs began reporting on the extent of surveillance operations conducted using Pegasus. These leaks reveal that numbers targeted by the spyware include those belonging to activists, politicians, journalists, academics, lawyers, and other persons of interest to NSO's government clients.¹³ Over 10,000 numbers from the leaked cache relate to people connected to the UAE, making it the most extensive government-directed Pegasus surveillance operation uncovered besides those undertaken by the Moroccan and Mexican governments.¹⁴ In her resignation statement Peel decried what she described as the 'bullying and intimidation' she was subject to, claiming campaigns focused on

¹⁰ Zabludowicz is also the founder and former chairman of the pro-Israeli lobby group, BICOM (Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre).

¹¹ For detailed diagrams showing the evolution of NSO Group and Novalpina Capital's corporate structure see *Operating from the Shadows: Inside NSO Group's Corporate Structure*, a report compiled by Amnesty International, SOMO (the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations) and Privacy International (2021).

¹² Novalpina Capital Group S.à.r.l Luxembourg Business Register (LBR) filing, L170177260, 28 August 2017.

¹³ Even the number of French President, Emmanuel Macron, appears in the leaked cache.

¹⁴ All six GCC states feature prominently in the locations where operators of the spyware were identified. See Mehul Srivastava and Robert Smith, "Israel's NSO: The Business of Spying on your iPhone," *The Financial Times*, 14 May 2019.

sources of wealth risked an ‘erosion of private support’ for the ‘treasures of the art community.’¹⁵

The entanglement of war and surveillance in the Middle East with capital and cultural institutions in the West provides ample evidence of the intimate connection between these two geographies. Yet, perhaps more important for the overall arguments of this thesis, is how the militarisation of high culture bolsters its basic claim of the transformative effect that rampant liberalisation is having on the sector’s social relations. Chapter One described at length how these qualitative and quantitative shifts catalysed the search for new markets by actors in the cultural metropolises, whose overtures were met with enthusiastic receptions in the Gulf states. Liberalisation has also, however, made cultural institutions and artists in the West increasingly dependent upon unaccountable private capital. It is this overhaul of high cultural financing that has created openings for arms dealers – metonyms for the presence of corporate entities in the sector more broadly – to burnish their reputations through sponsorship arrangements. Considering these structural connections, it should come as no surprise that the activist networks challenging the militarisation of culture in the art world’s historic capitals are part of the polymorphous hydra-like formation of groups forged in the crucible of Gulf Labor. Militarisation is also but the sharp end of this boomerang.

In the central two chapters of this thesis, three and four, I looked at how the Gulf’s emergent cultural infrastructures - as both architectures and forms of urban planning - sit at the inflexion point of the cultural urbanist imagination, race, and empire. Because the thesis has been preoccupied with illustrating the profoundly material underpinnings of cultural institutions in the Gulf, and their implications for the ostensibly liberal actors benefitting from their creation and popularisation, these chapters were cornerstones in its argument. Due to the imperial structure of global development, the racialised commodification of space and the spatial exclusions of raced populations that I detailed in these chapters, derive in large part from strategies of cultural redevelopment devised in the metropolises. Nevertheless, asymmetries in the direction of travel between the West and the Gulf should not be overstated.

¹⁵ Naomi Rea, “Serpentine Galleries Director Yana Peel Resigns, Blaming “Toxic” Allegations About Her Links to a Cyberweapons Company,” *Artnet*, 18 June 2019.

Since decolonisation, freeports and other special economic zones have been eagerly embraced in those parts of the world seeking to establish themselves as critical nodes in the capitalist system, the Gulf states primary among them. Creating highly favourable conditions for business, free from the usual customs and tariffs applied to imports and exports, has been a way for non-Western states to contend with the imperialist hierarchies of global capitalism. Such special economic zones have allowed these states to compete with the corporate and commercial benefits of being headquartered in capitalism's original command centres, or of being incorporated in long-standing secrecy jurisdictions such as Switzerland and Luxembourg.

Throughout this thesis I have illustrated how the emergent cultural sector in the Gulf is shaped by the hierarchical yet overlapping global systems of financial governance. Since the 2000s, the bumper crop of freeports and other special economic zones that have sprung up in the Gulf, and wider Middle East and East Asia, has afforded these postcolonial economies a competitive edge. Chapter Two described how, after the European Union clamped down on the trade in cultural contraband conducted in European freeports, illegal trade and the more diffuse practice of offshoring of cultural treasures in freeports, moved eastwards. This departure of capital has, predictably, steered the course of the boomerang, stimulating the renewed implementation of freeport policies, and corresponding spatial practices, in the cultural metropolises. Thus, as part of the March 2021 budget, the British Chancellor and ardent advocate of freeports for art and other luxury asset classes, Rishi Sunak, announced that eight new freeports were to open in the United Kingdom.

America has also witnessed the arrival of the art freeport. In 2018, a freeport facility named Arcis, meaning stronghold or citadel in Latin, opened in New York.¹⁶ As if to confirm the intimate connection between race, space, capital, and culture, elaborated across these pages from the vantage point of the Gulf, the facility was located at 122 W 176th Street. The street runs perpendicular to Malcolm X Blvd in Harlem, the name of which indicates the centrality of Harlem to the history and culture of America's black communities. It is the neighbourhood of the famed Harlem Renaissance, as well as a key site of the violent policing of America's black and brown

¹⁶ Arcis was not the only freeport facility in the US specialising in art storage. In 2015, the art logistics specialist Fritz Dietl opened the Delaware Freeport in the sleepy town of Newark, Delaware, which remains open, and where it is reported that many Qatari cultural treasures have been stored.

communities, which Elaine B. Sharpe calls ‘post-industrial policing.’¹⁷ Since they began, these programmes of raced cleansing have been causally associated with the gentrification¹⁸ of Harlem by the creative class, processes of which Arcis is the logical conclusion.¹⁹

Interestingly, although the art press was awash with feverish predictions about the inevitable success of the venture,²⁰ in September 2020 its directors announced that the freeport would be closing.²¹ Despite its closure, Arcis remains a particularly edifying example of how the high culture industry’s material and spatial dynamics are swept along by the imperial boomerang, shaping the urban landscapes that are the cauldron of its colonial return. In the Gulf’s cities, heritage developments have displaced its raced working-class populations, while new cultural developments in the industrial sprawl that surrounds the urban core have provided a *cordon sanitaire* between the city centres and the labour camps that line the urban extremities. Following a similar pattern, in Harlem, a neighbourhood and sanctuary for America’s black communities has been transformed into a place for New York’s creative classes to live, and for its uber-wealthy to store art in scientifically optimal conditions, while its redlined, neglected, and policed black communities are displaced over the natural perimeter of the Harlem River.²² This formal symmetry is indicative of the mutual structure of racialised cultural urbanism from which they issue, commodifying and concretising race in the built environment.

Tracing the swoop of the boomerang also has a correlate in our theories of how power operate under the postcolonial conditions of global capitalism, which is among the central theoretical contributions of this thesis. Approaching the question from the

¹⁷ Quoted in Olúfemi O. Táíwò, “Climate Apartheid Is the Coming Police Violence Crisis,” *Dissent Magazine*, 12 August 2020.

¹⁸ In a talk at the Simpson Center Robin D. G. Kelley called gentrification a form of settler colonialism. Robin D. G. Kelley, “What Is Racial Capitalism and Why Does It Matter?”, Lecture, The University of Washington, 2017.

¹⁹ Sofia Kwon, “Broken Windows Policing and Gentrification Not Only Harmed the Black Community, but also Strengthened Columbia’s Reputation,” *Columbia Spectator*, 5 October 2020.

²⁰ Ursula Sommer, “Demand for New York’s First Freeport Facility Steps Up,” *The Art Newspaper*, 2 January 2020.

²¹ Talia Berniker, “Behind Closed Doors: A Look at Freeports,” 3 November 2020.

²² As Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law* (New York: Liveright, 2017) has shown, the ghettoisation of America’s communities of colour was not merely the *de facto* result of income inequalities and individual racisms. Instead, it was the result of direct interventions by policymakers who enshrined America’s structural racism in the urban environment through policies of segregation, zoning, and redlining.

geographic and historical specificity of the Gulf's cultural institutional landscape, the final chapter of this thesis interrogated the veritable crescendo of critique and political radicalism in the art world. While cultural institutions in the Gulf have cultivated and been assigned an identity as incubators of postcolonial theory, as I indicated, the necessity of such a selling point is a consequence of the wider shift of aesthetic value from 'quality to criticality.'²³ This shift, Brian Holmes suggests, 'directly reflects the crisis of the representative democracies,'²⁴ that followed the end of Bretton Woods.

In the maelstrom of this unfettering, market forces have reshaped the logics and spaces of political subject formation in the West's late-capitalist democracies. Democratic enfranchisement and political participation have been reduced to a parlous state that has commonalities with the anaemic formal political participation that European and American colonisers bestowed upon their colonies and, thus, upon many of the postcolonial states they left behind after national liberation.²⁵ The agonistic currents displaced by these assaults on Western democratic institutions have not, however, simply dissipated. Rather, they have shifted from the institutional channels of political participation and organising, into other parts of the amorphous and fractured public sphere such as cultural institutions. The problem with the displacement of political participation and critique into mainstream cultural spaces is that, as this thesis has explored in depth, cultural institutions have also been subordinated to economic forces and logics.

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello argue that the assimilation of the creative spirit of 1968, which articulated what they term the 'artistic critique' of capitalism, was crucial to the system's ability to overcome the challenges posed by this febrile political moment.²⁶ Since then, capitalism has continued to secure itself against the artistic critique by aligning itself with the principles championed by artistic critiques thereof - autonomy, flexibility, and creativity. Both governments and the capitalist class have invested in spaces and people, such as artists and cultural institutions, indexed to this

²³ Joselit, "Allegory," 3.

²⁴ Holmes, "Poker."

²⁵ This process has variously been termed "non-sovereignty," "democracy without a demos," and "post-democracy." See Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (London: Polity, 2004); Peter Mair, "Ruling the Void? The Hollowing of Western Democracy," *New Left Review* 42, Nov/Dec (2006): 25-51; Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000); and *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018); Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

²⁶ Boltanski and Chiapello, *Spirit of Capitalism*.

measure of human flourishing. These biopolitical processes are more subtle and affective than the treatment of art objects as speculative investments or of the cultural sector as an opportunity to burnish the image of big capital. Set against the backdrop of fragmenting organs of political representation, these subtle processes are nevertheless indicative of the pincer like encroachment on political critique by capital: politics is dislocated from many of its traditional institutions, while the cultural spaces to which it is displaced are corrupted.

In my final chapter I addressed how some theorists and curators, notably Okwui Enwezor and Walter D. Mignolo, have welcomed the arrival of radical politics to the art world. Working within the tradition of postcolonial theory, these scholars have drawn a connection between the disorganisation and fragmentation engendered by the deterritorialisation of capital, and the ability to limn postcolonial or decolonial scripts.²⁷ Enwezor and Mignolo are, of course, right to discern a formal symmetry between these fractured political landscapes, and the aleatory and non-aligned enunciation called for by poststructural variants of postcolonialism and decoloniality. Yet, in drawing a hopeful line between the two, they are not sufficiently mindful of the historical context of this fracture. Nor do they take sufficient account of the dialectics of crisis, displacement, and assimilation through which capitalism has routinely secured itself against challenges, instantiating forms of imperialism after colonialism. My concluding pages have highlighted these theoretical limitations, proposing that the presence of radical discourses in the West's cultural institutions is, to a large degree, symptomatic of systematic disenfranchisement in other spaces, itself a product of the process by which the political-economic conditions of former colonies are imported into former metropolises.

The concluding thoughts I have offered here are like the preliminary study for a painting, roughly sketching the possible composition of future research – to comprehensively analyse the return journey of the boomerang, much more work is necessary. As a final point I would, however, add that thinking from the “South” in this way is not necessarily about provincialising conceptual models developed in and for Western contexts, as postcolonial theory has sought to do. Instead, taking account of the unfolding processes by which colonial logics are continually repatriated to the

²⁷ Enwezor, “Postcolonial”; Mignolo, “Re:emerging”; and Mignolo and Vasquez, “AestheSis.”

metropole, ensures the ongoing revision of political theories *tout court*, destabilising their sovereignty by emphasising the change that is inherent in the circulation of technologies of power and governance.²⁸

As was demonstrated, in the Gulf, the germination of postcolonial aesthetic production created scope for the conscription of cultural institutions into the processes of establishing a transnational form of hegemony at the level of the colonial international. Building on these arguments, the processes described here should give us theoretical pause. Without wanting to overstate my claim, these dynamics do appear to indicate that the workings of hegemonic power in the liberal West are changing, stretched by their intercourse with new centres of capitalism. As democratic institutions are watered down, and the conditions of material wellbeing attacked, the mechanisms of securing consent for the racialised ruling bargain have demanded new terrains. This is leading not only to the use of culture as a biopolitical technique, but to the repurposing of radical politics as biopolitical management. Much like in the Gulf, cultural institutions have come to provide a space in which radical, anticolonial politics can be staged and consumed as curiosities, while colonialism and racial capitalism trundle on, changed but unabated.

²⁸ Nasser Abourahme and Omar Jabary-Salamanca. "Thinking against the Sovereignty of the Concept: A Conversation with Timothy Mitchell." *City* 20, no. 5 (2016): 737–54.

[Appendix I]

INTERVIEWS AND INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS*

**To protect the privacy of my sources, the list of interviewees and interlocutors has been removed from the digital version of my PhD thesis.*

[Appendix II]

EVENTS, EXHIBITIONS, AND INSTITUTIONS

1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Somerset House, 2019

A Century in Flux: Highlights from the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, 2019

Al Manar International Tolerance Convention, World Trade Centre, Dubai, 2019

Ala Younis: Plan for Feminist Greater Baghdad, Delfina Foundation in partnership with Jameel Arts Centre (Dubai), London, 2018

Alserkal March Late, 2019

Architectural Tour of Dubai by Richard Wagner, Dubai, 2019

Art Dubai 2019, Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai, 2019

Artists and the Cultural Foundation: The Early Years, the Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, 2019

Behjat Sadr: Dusted Waters, the Mosaic Rooms, London, 2018

Conversations on Practice: Farah Al Qasimi with Shumon Basar, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, 2019

Conversations on Practice: Ranjit Kandalgaonkar with Nora Razvan, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, 2019

Crude Symposium, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, 2019

Crude, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, 2019

Culture Summit 2019, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi

Fabric(ated) Fractures, Concrete, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, 2019

Frieze Art Fair, London, 2018

Global Art Forum 13: "School is a Factory?," Art Dubai, Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai, 2019

Hesam Rahmanian: Don't worry, spiders, i keep house, casually, Isabelle van den Eynde Gallery, Alserkal Avenue, 2019

I am British Petroleum: King of Exploitation, King of Injustice, P21 Gallery, London, 2019

Jameel Art Prize 5, the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 2018

Jameel Gallery of the Islamic Middle East, the Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Kader Attia: The Museum of Emotion, the Hayward Gallery, London, 2019

Kamrooz Aram: Arabesque, Green Art Gallery, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, 2019

Louvre Abu Dhabi, Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi

Lunchtime Lecture: Jameel Prize 5 with Mehdi Moutashar and Younes Rahmoun, the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 2018

Manifesting the Unseen, Guest Projects, London, 2018

March Meeting 2019, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah

May You Live in Interesting Times, Venice Biennale Main Exhibition, Venice, 2019

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: The Space Between the Eyelid and the Eyeball, Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, 2019

Museums in Arabia 2019, Conference organised with support from the British Council, King's College, London, 2019

Nujoom Alghanem: Passage, National Pavilion of the United Arab Emirates, Venice Biennale, 2019

Opening weekend of the Albukhary Galleries of the Islamic World, the British Museum, London, 2018

Rana Begum: Perception and Reflection, the Third Line Gallery, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, 2019

Proud Expressions, Wahat al-Karama, Abu Dhabi, 2019

Qasr al-Hosn and the House of Artisans, Abu Dhabi

Reflections, Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa, the British Museum, London, 2021

Sharjah Biennial 14: Leaving the Echo Chamber, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, 2019

Sharjah Heritage Days, Sharjah, 2019

Shilpa Gupta and Zarina; Altered Inheritances: Home is a Foreign Place, Ishara Art Foundation, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, 2019

Shubbak, London, 2019

Sikka Art Fair, Dubai, March, 2019

Sophia al-Maria: Beast Type Song, Tate Britain, London, 2020

Syria, Then and Now, the Brooklyn Museum, New York, 2019

Tashkeel, Dubai

Tashweeh: Material Noise, Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah, 2019

Tolerance Tour, al-Bastakiyya and Shindagha, Sikka Art Fair, Dubai, 2019

Townhall Meeting organised by Decolonize This Place, Chinatown Art Brigade and W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy), Cooper Union, New York, 2019

Zabrah al-Ghamdi: After Illusion, National Pavilion of Saudi Arabia, Venice Biennale, 2019

Zimoun: A Series of Immersive Sound Sculptures, the Art Gallery at NYUAD, Abu Dhabi, 2019

ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

- ABSA – Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts (UK)
- ADA - Arriyadh Development Authority (Saudi Arabia)
- ADHA – Abu Dhabi Heritage Authority
- ADIA – Abu Dhabi Investment Authority
- ADMICAL – Association pour le développement du mécénat industriel et commercial (Association for the Development of Industrial and Commercial Sponsorship, France)
- ADTCA – Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority
- AFALULA – Agence France-Al Ula (France/Saudi Arabia)
- AFM – Agence France-Muséums (France/Abu Dhabi)
- APOC – Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, then British Petroleum)
- ARAMCO – Arabian-American Oil Company (Saudi Arabia)
- barjil* – wind towers, an architectural feature common to the Gulf brought by Iranian diaspora communities; called *badgir* in Persian
- BBME – British Bank of the Middle East
- BIM – Building Information Modelling
- CAD – Computer Assisted Design
- CRT – Critical Race Theory
- DAI – Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyya (Kuwait)
- DCT – Department of Culture and Tourism (Abu Dhabi)
- dhow* – a generic term for ships in used in the Indian Ocean. Traditionally *dhow*s were sailing boats but have since been motorised
- EIC – East India Company
- GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council
- GCDN – Global Cultural Districts Network (UK)
- HBJ – Hamad bin Jasim, former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister (Qatar)
- HNWI – High-Net-Worth Individual
- ICDP – Integrated Conservation and Development Programme (Yemen)
- ICIJ – The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists
- IOR – India Office Records
- IPIC – International Petroleum Investment Company (Abu Dhabi)
- JAC – Jameel Arts Centre
- kafala* – sponsorship system for importing workers into the Arab Gulf states
- al-khalij* – the Gulf
- khaliji* – from or related to the Gulf
- KIB – Kuwait Investment Board
- KNCD – Kuwait National Cultural District
- KOC – Kuwait Oil Company
- LAD – Louvre Abu Dhabi

LBR – Luxembourg Business Records

majlis – a gathering, formal or informal; can also refer to the space itself; derived from the word council

MBR – Muhammad bin Rashid, Emir of Dubai

MBS – Muhammad bin Salman, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia

MBZ – Muhammad bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi

MIA – Museum of Islamic Art (Qatar)

MFAH – Museum of Fine Arts Houston (USA)

NACF – National Art Collections Fund, now simply the Art Fund (UK)

NCCAH – National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage (Qatar)

NCG – Novalpina Capital Group (UK)

NEA – National Endowment for the Arts (USA)

OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (France)

primary market – trade in new works, usually sold by gallerists, hence the significance of gallery representation to artists

preemptive purchase – the right reserved by some states for their national museums to raise the capital to buy an object defined as a ‘national treasure’ upon application for an export licence; also applies upon sale at auction in France

QIA – Qatar Investment Authority

QMA/QM – Qatar Museums (Authority)

qarqour – fishing cages used in the Persian Gulf

RCU – Royal Commission of Al Ula (Saudi Arabia)

running – the practice of taking an object on consignment from one dealer to try to flog it to another dealer or auction house, above the original asking price, to net the difference

SAF – Sharjah Art Foundation

SAMA – Saudi Arabia Monetary Authority

SAV – Saadiyat Accommodation Village

SCTH – Saudi Commission for Tourism and Heritage

secondary market - trade in works already in circulation (i.e., works previously sold that are returning to the market)

SMA – Sharjah Museums Authority

STC – Southern Transitional Council (Yemen)

TDIC – Tourism Development & Investment Company (Abu Dhabi)

TSDO – Trucial States Development Office

UAE – United Arab Emirates

UHNWI – Ultra-High-Net-Worth Individual

UNCTAD – United Nations Conference of Trade and Development (Switzerland)

UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme (Kenya)

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (France)

UPC – Urban Planning Council (Abu Dhabi)

USFP – Urban Structure Framework Plan (Abu Dhabi)
ZNM – Zayed National Museum (Abu Dhabi)

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