

TRINITY COLLEGE

A Mismatched Dubai

A Glamorous Globalizing City vs. A Contentious
Local Identity

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ABSTRACT

Dubai has been globalizing for a long time. While it was the center of trade for commodities such as gold and pearls, and had an important foreign community of Indian and Iranian merchants before 1970, Dubai remained a small town in the middle of the desert. It is only with the discovery of oil in the late 1960s that financial prowess increased exponentially, and Dubai's could fully pursue its dream of becoming a global city, a city of merchants, and trade. Ahmed Kanna identifies Dubai as a perfect example of "the city as corporation". Dubai is the Al-Maktoum royal family's business project, which has put a tremendous emphasis on the physical transformation of the city in order to brand it as a city of luxury, tourism, wealth, tax-free, diversity, innovation, and prosperity. It represents a 'dream land' in the globalized world we live in today. However, the rapid physical and demographical change of Dubai, where today more than 80 percent of its population is foreign, leaves many tensions unresolved between the global and local aspects of the city in the social, economic and political spheres. This thesis examines how Dubai is rapidly becoming a global city with a hybrid identity that reflects the tension and inequality resulting from the complex interactions between the ambitious build-up of Dubai's urban environment, its conservative traditions and institutions, and its new social order.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of cities like New York, London, Paris and Hong Kong into main global urban centers took centuries of continuous political development, social and economic growth. However, technological innovations and growing global interconnectivity of the past decades have not only allowed the emergence of new global economic centers, but also accelerated the formation of urban centers. Dubai is an unprecedented case of this rapid urbanization. Learning about its origins is crucial to understand the path that Dubai has taken in the last fifteen years, which has transformed what was a small town in the middle of the desert into a ‘global’ city (See Appendix A and B). Dubai was not an agrarian economy but a vibrant center of trade throughout the past centuries. It reached an earlier peak at the beginning of the twentieth century when Sheik Maktoum bin Hasher Al-Maktoum removed many trade barriers and the five percent tax on trade (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success” 68). Not only was a free port born, but Dubai’s strategic cross-road location between Asia and Europe allowed it to become the main port of the Trucial Coast, the Gulf coast. Thus, Dubai became an intermediary for the world trade.

Although Dubai has been a port mainly focused in re-exporting goods, such as gold, the growth of the pearling production and trade took Dubai to another level. While it attracted an important amount of merchants to the Emirate due to the high profitable trading activities, it gave jobs to most local inhabitants. Pearl diving became the main source of income for obtaining indispensable foreign consumer goods such as rice, coffee and textiles (Al-Sayegh 89). By World War I, Dubai had the lowest unemployment rates in the Trucial Coast due to the pearling activities, which encouraged a significant inflow of immigrants to the state, primarily from

Indian and Persian origin. These foreign merchants not only became successful in trading, but also contributed to the development of the banking system, in which Muslims could not engage due to religious belief. This economic boom set the stage for Dubai's subsequent development until today.

It is with the discovery of oil in the United Arab Emirates in the 1970s, and the subsequent influx of immigrants from both the East and the West, that Dubai sets itself onto a path of exponential growth and transformation into a global city. The massive amounts of profits from oil exports opened the horizon for Dubai's leaders to design a new city. The commitment of the royal family to this project since 1970 has made Dubai a distinct case of growth in the world economy. Politically, Dubai has remained a tribal autocracy with the Al-Maktoum family at its head since 1833. Sheikh Muhammad has been the main instigator of the transformation of Dubai. His peculiar approach is most clearly expressed by the title of Ahmed Kanna's book *Dubai, The City as Corporation*. In fact, Sheikh Mohammad does not refer to himself as the leader, but the CEO of Dubai. Dubai's success resides on the fact that the government acts as an entrepreneur. Unlike its counterparts in most developing countries, the government does not follow a planned and rigid project for growth. Dubai's government takes advantage of profitable opportunities as they arise (Krane 138). It hardly raises any taxes on its population, and in addition, subsidizes education and health care for all its citizens. The government obtains most of its profits from government owned, and professionally managed business such as Emirates Airlines, aluminum plants and constructions companies like Emaar among many others.

A program focused on economic diversification has led the road towards development. Sheikh Mohammad put a tremendous emphasis in the urban transformation of Dubai as a city that would match the wealth and rapid expansion of the Emirate. In his eyes, Dubai had to

become a global city in order to succeed. In the same way Sheikh Muhammad was considered the CEO and Dubai his corporation, the city had to become the image of 'Brand Dubai'. Massive and revolutionary projects by main architects flourished in the city. The completion speed of construction projects and the scale of hotels, free zones and malls were unprecedented. The city was continuously changing in not only terms of its built environment, but also the diversity of its social composition. Both high-qualified Western and Southeast Asian workers were coming in significant amounts to live in Dubai and support the Emirate's megaproject with their skills and hard work. The fast growing cities of the Gulf "now represent a distinctive model of urban modernity and socio-spatial dynamics that differs both from the classical colonial city and from other 'Arab cities', and can be differentiated from other postcolonial cities in Africa, Asia or elsewhere in the global South" (Mohammad and Sidaway 608). The example of Dubai is fascinating in many ways and has drawn great attention from scholars in a wide variety of academic fields ranging from architecture, sociology, economy or anthropology to environmental studies.

Nevertheless, there is a central question that must be answered in the case of Dubai: has the royal family succeeded in transforming Dubai into a global city? Saskia Sassen has been among the most prominent scholars on the phenomenon of 'global cities'. She mentions the following distinguishing elements of a global city: foreign direct investment and trade, immigrant communities, cultural links, and criminal networks (Sassen). Dubai has been a main trading port, home of more than 1 million foreign immigrants, an attraction for art companies and celebrities, and a hidden 'paradise' for smuggling and prostitution. Thus, if we follow her assumptions, Dubai has succeeded to do so in the short period of time of 15 years. However,

globalization has come with an important cost to it. There is a significant lag between the social and urban transformations of Dubai into a global city.

“Contemporary globalization has produced a global circumstance in which civilizations, regions, nation-states, nations within or cutting across states, and indigenous peoples, are increasingly constrained to construct their own histories and identities – or, at least, reappropriate selectively their own tradition (Robertson and Khondker 28).

Foreign population’s growth reaching 80 percent of Dubai’s total inhabitants has raised many tensions with the native Emirati population, who have become a minority. The locals’ defensive reactions along with the government’s protective policies present an important obstacle in Dubai’s goal of becoming a global city, which remains local at its heart.

The assimilation of the foreign community’s exponential growth in Dubai, which has reached the 80 percent of the total population in 15 years, has been one of the greatest challenges for the Emirate. Three different groups can be easily identified in Dubai’s society: Western expatriates, Southeast Asian workers and local Emiratis. They remain separate entities within a whole. This division primarily originates from social, ethnic and traditional reasons. There are important cultural and religious differences among them that prevent social interactions and integration from taking place. The urban environment has also contributed to the separation among groups. While Westerners and locals may live in common downtown or suburban areas, poor Southeast Asian immigrants are completely excluded from the city. Even though the latter account for the largest percentage of the population, they live on camps an hour away from the urban core, which they built with their own hands. Yet, their status, abundance and relation to the

city determine the structure of Dubai's social life to a great extent (Mohammad and Sidaway 620). Although Dubai has become a global city, its society remains disharmonious delaying the formation of a common global identity that completes the urban transformation.

The rapid physical and demographical change of Dubai has left many tensions unresolved in the social, economic and political spheres. This thesis examines how Dubai is rapidly becoming a global city with a hybrid identity, which reflects the tension and inequality resulting from the complex interactions between the rapid build-up of Dubai's urban environment, its conservative tradition, and institutions, and its new social stratification. It is imperative to look at Dubai's case from a macro level, urban project and foreign migration, in order to understand the effects at the micro level, on society and identity.

II. BUILDING THE URBAN STRUCTURE OF A GLOBAL CITY

The image of New York, London or Tokyo is automatically related with the concept of global cities. The built environment of a global city is highly physical and symbolically important. High-rises, financial districts, malls, hotels and monuments of large glamorous scales are part of the infrastructure of a global city. Until 1990, Dubai was a small port city in the Gulf. It had a strong foundation as a trading and shipping port, and was a cross-road location between Asia and Europe that the Al-Maktoum family exploited to an unknown scale over the past two decades, in order to put Dubai on the map of global cities. This study examines the multiple dimensions of the physical transformation of Dubai and its main social consequences in growing inequality and a lagged shift in identity. Dubai was and still is run as a corporation, and the transformation of its physical environment became the core of 'Brand Dubai', a global city.

Dubai: A new brand of Global City

It is rare to read an article or a book about Dubai without finding a reference of Dubai as "a global city", "a city-corporation", "Dubai Inc." or "Brand Dubai". It is crucial to understand that after the British Independence in 1971 and the accumulation of oil revenues, the royal family had envisioned a greater development project for the city as a whole. Large corporations such as the construction company Emaar, Dubai Holdings, Emirates Airlines, the Investment Corporation of Dubai (ICD) or the retail development company, Dubai World, were funded by the royal family and important merchants with the goal of exerting a strong influence on not only the economic, but also the public and social spheres of the city. Dubai was becoming a corporation in itself with King Muhammad Al-Maktoum as its CEO. His determination,

enthusiasm, sophisticated vision and unlimited budget have been important factors in the success of Dubai as a “business project”. In 1990, the oil supply was expected to last for only 30 more years, thus, Dubai needed a new solution for its economic future (Lee and Jain 235). Sheikh Al-Maktoum unleashed the process of economic diversification through tourism, real estate, education and free commercial zones, which converged onto the massive build-up of infrastructure. The city had to change completely for the Emirate’s future and has since undergone a dramatic physical transformation.

As any business project would be incomplete without a marketing strategy, Dubai built its own brand to achieve full diversification; “Dubai’s bottom-up approach in the world market may be found in its ability to create an ideal location for a variety of individuals” (Lee and Jane 240). Whether you look for a sunny vacation spot, luxury, shopping, a job, a business opportunity, prostitution or even smuggling, you can find it in Dubai. These luxuries make it a “fantasy land” for all. It targets investors and tourists alike promoting the city’s unique features or simply creating them. Dubai’s well-rounded multifaceted brand is a unique model of successful global reach. Abdul Khaled Abdulla in his essay “Dubai: The Journey of an Arab City from Localism to Cosmopolitanism”, notes that: “there is no difference in the age of globalization between commodity, the state, merchandising, the city, cultures, and services. All are equivalent” (qtd. in Kanna, “Dubai, the City as Corporation” 137). He identifies the concept of ‘the city as a brand’; a natural phenomenon that does not diminish the dignity and status of states. According to data only, it has extensively benefited the state, in this case Dubai. The 13 percent annual GDP growth since 2000, even greater than the Indian and Chinese rates, can attest for it (Jane and Lee 245). 20 ago, people had hardly heard about Dubai, now it is among the most desirable cities to visit.

Dubai has become a “sensational city”. Janet Speake uses this term for cities that strive for uniqueness and differentiation in the urban environment in a globalized, homogenizing world. It is “their dramatic urban form, vibrancy and newness, and that therefore excite curiosity which triggers the desire to ‘see it’ and/or ‘be there’” (Speake 4). Cities like New York, London, Paris or Shanghai are part of the list of sensational cities because of their distinctiveness. Whether it is for the Empire State Building, the Big Ben, the Eiffel Tower or the Oriental Pearl TV Tower, everyone recognizes these landmarks, and thus their cities. The sensationalization of cities is part of their marketing strategy. Their branding strategies can be credited for their position on the global map. Dubai’s skyline was hardly distinguishable from that of other capitals of the Gulf States two decades ago. Now, Dubai has not only the Palm Jumeraih, or the Burj Al-Arab, but also the World Islands, as unique features of Dubai that differentiates it from any other city in both the region and the world. Dubai’s business project has put a tremendous emphasis on changing the built environment in order to have both a unique brand and a sensational global city.

Starchitects and glamorous projects

The primary strategy to achieve the goal of transforming Dubai into a global city has been the transformation of its physical sphere. The Al-Maktoum family, and particularly Sheikh Muhammad, have recognized the importance of authenticity in this task. Syed Ali identifies “the seemingly never-ending construction” of Dubai as an essential part of its brand (Ali 33). It keeps people’s imagination alive, and there is a continuous excitement about what Dubai is capable of bringing to the world. It is part of Dubai’s entrepreneurialism.

Starchitecture has been a crucial element in the achievement of a unique urban transformation, essentially, a unique brand name for Dubai. In the article “the UAE’s Space Race,

Sheikhs and Starchitects Envision the Future”, Ahmed Kanna and Arang Keshavarzian explain this strategy as positioning “the Gulf cities as laboratories for the starchitect’s aesthetic experimentation” (Kanna and Keshavarzian 35). There is no other region in the world that has put such an emphasis on starchitecture for their development, which offers exceptional experimental opportunities to these professionals. Not only Sheikh Muhammad’s forward looking vision, but also the relaxed legal framework and the almost unlimited resources allows starchitects and real estate developers to build unimaginable projects in other cities in the world. Even Donald Trump emphasized this point stating that: “New York is at huge disadvantage to Dubai. If this project (Palm Jebel Ali) were ever proposed for New York, or would be a ten-year review process at the end of which you’d receive a ‘No’ vote by the community board for being too high, too dramatic, too beautiful or whatever” (Krane 157). Dubai is a synonym of innovation in all spheres, but particularly in urbanism. Green building projects, the Dubai’s Signature Towers (dancing towers), rotating towers that produce energy with their movement, the Opera House (built to look like a waterfall), the tallest building, a World archipelago, or wheel shape towers are among these iconic projects designed by starchitects such as Zaha Hadid, Koolhaas or Wright among others (Nasr 29). “Dubai looks at itself not as a series of skylines, but as a series of *brandsapes*, where buildings are not objects, but rather advertisements and destinations”, thus, it is crucial to analyze the projects that made Dubai the global city it is today (Lee and Jane 242).

In 1990, the Dubai Tourism Promotion Board was founded along with its ‘Destination Dubai Initiative’, early projects destined to shape the branding strategy of Dubai. However, it was in 1993 when the Al-Maktoum family became involved in the project of building a landmark for Dubai (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success” 121). A city is nothing

without a landmark, and Dubai could not allow itself to miss one in its goal of becoming a renowned global city. The Burj Al Arab tower was built to host the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, which was unique for not only having a two-dimensional wave design and being the tallest hotel in the world, but breaking the hotel star standard of luxury becoming the first and only hotel in the world with seven stars (See Appendix C). Tom Wright, its architect greatly pleased the Sheikh's desires. As Jim Krane writes in his book, *City of Gold: Dubai and the Dream of Capitalism*, the "Burj Al Arab did exactly what Sheikh Mohammed wanted. It became an instantly recognizable icon. Dubai's skyline was famous" (Krane 115). Moreover, its interior is as surprising as its exterior since it is covered with 22-carat gold leafs and has 24000 meters of marble decorations inspired by the stories of "1001 Nights" (Lee and Jain 242). It is crucial to point out that the construction of this hotel was so costly that the royal family did not expect to obtain profit for more than a hundred years even if it was running at full capacity in its 202 suits, and taking into account that the room price vary from \$1000 to \$15000 per night. (Krane 113) Nevertheless, it did not only fulfill the goal of building a landmark for Dubai, but also set up a development model for the city that was just starting to grow. The strategies of mystification would be pursued from that time on.

The next iconic project developed in Dubai was the Palm Jumeirah, designed by Bin Suleyman, in 1997 (See Appendix D). Seeing an increase of half a million foreign visitors in Dubai since 1985, in this project, Sheikh Mohammad found the solution for expanding the hotel industry in the already limited coastline available. Robert Lee, the project's investment director clearly stated the essence of Dubayyans' mentality about the physical transformation of their city. If they tell you "don't do it", that's great. It is an opportunity for us. That tells us there are going to be barriers to entry for that market. If we can crack into it, we're going to have leadership

position. That goes to the core of Dubai. We're always encouraged to do what's seemingly not possible" (Krane 153). With this project, Dubai gained 48 miles of new shoreline, of which 38 miles were beach. Nothing had ever been built like the Palm Jumeirah, and its distinctiveness was created on what Heiko Schmid defines as an 'economy of fascination'. The constant production of new symbolism in a city is indispensable for attracting investors and tourists alike. "Semiotic aspects are implemented with economic intentions as powerful marketing and attention strategies, as seen in the slogan and wordplay from Nakheel (the Palm): 'The Palm puts Dubai on the Map- The World puts the Map on Dubai'" (Schmid 358). The success of this continuous symbolic stimulation can be proved by the price increase of the 2000 Palm's mansions from \$1.3 million in 2001 to \$9.5 million in 2008 (Krane 155). Yet again, two more Palms are expected to be built in Dubai. Palm Jebel Ali that will double its predecessor's size and Palm Deira that is supposed to be the size of Manhattan (Krane 157). Sheikh Muhammad and real-estate developers' imagination is never-ending, and keeps the rest of the world fascinated about Dubai. This is the outcome of Brand Dubai; this is how it has become a global city.

Yet, not all the urban projects in Dubai were targeted towards tourism. In fact, the creation of free trade zones has become one of the most lucrative in the process of diversification. Sheikh Rashid bin Said Al-Maktoum, father of Sheikh Muhammad, knew that tourism meant profit instability, while bringing business meant a long term revenue multiplier in all areas of the economy, including services. The idea of free trade zones came about after the federal Commercial Companies Law of 1984, which required at least 51 percent of total ownership to belong to UAE citizens (Krane 125). The concept of kafala and its *kafil*, meaning local sponsorship and sponsor, were born and intended to regulate all types of foreign investment in

any of the UAE states. Jebel Ali Free Zone Authority was the first one and represented a great alternative for investors in countries like Iran or Lebanon, which were suffering from a conflict with Iraq and a civil war respectively. This area was transformed into a leading free port and manufacturing district with unprecedented growth. From an initial number of 300 companies, the zone reached the figure of 2000 coming from every region in the world, employing 40,000 people and generating more than \$6 billion in investments by 2002 (Davidson, "Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success" 115-116). The rapid and relevant success of this project just encouraged "Dubai's CEO" to dream further and envision a greater development in the route to diversification and growth. By 1999, an Internet City and a Media City were built in Dubai under the overarching structure of the free trade zones.

The underlying basis for the success of Brand Dubai is that its "bottom-up approach in the world market may be found in its ability to create an ideal location for a variety of individuals" (Lee and Jain 240). They do not replicate what others have done, but bring innovative solutions to their customers. In this case, the exemption of the five percent corporate taxes for up to 50 years, the possibility of 100 per cent foreign ownership and full repatriation of profits and capital, created a dream land for multinational companies. Since then, Dubai has been considered an ideal place for their headquarter offices in the Middle East. While the Internet City hosted companies like Microsoft, Dell or Canon, Dubai Media City was home for Al-Jazeera, CNN, BBC or Reuters. By 2007, both had an average of 800 companies with more than 10,000 employees each (Davidson, "Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success" 117). Both Sheikh Rashid and Mohammad Al-Maktoum were men of vision and goals, and a remarkable obsession with speed. It is imperative to point out that both cities, free trade zones, were built in just a year. They wanted to see Dubai becoming a global city in the next 10 years and they did. "Dubai

gained decades' worth of foreign investment in a year, simply by bundling offices with clever incentives" (Davidson, "Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success" 130). The starchitects involved in these projects knew it and work incessantly to design what the Sheikhs had envisioned. From a few office buildings by an artificial lake, the Internet and Media City were formed by two dozen buildings including two copies of the Chrysler building in New York (Davidson, "Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success" 132). Both leaders and architects were bringing the dream of a global city alive.

This successful road became a pattern for growth and diversification not only for Dubai but other Gulf countries as well. After 2000, free zone projects spread to almost every economic sector. Projects like the Dubai Silicon Oasis, Dubai Airport Free Zone, Dubai Flower City, Dubai Festival City, Dubai Healthcare City with a Harvard Medical School, Dubai Knowledge Village with partnership of international universities, and Dubai International Financial Center and Exchange are among the most significant (Davidson, "Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success" 118). This insuperable infrastructure combined with Festivals and world-known sporting events have become the most attractive alternative for companies and tourists alike. The Desert Rock Festival, the Dubai International Film Festivals, Dubai Shopping Festival, the Dubai Desert Golf tournament, the Dubai Rugby Sevens, and the Dubai Open Tennis tournament not only contribute to the promotions of this areas but their success is encouraging ideas for new free zones such as the Sports City and Golf City as well (Davidson, "Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success" 128). They want to be a world-class city by attracting the best companies and organizations in each field.

What Robert Thurer, the director of Harvard Medical School in Dubai, had to say about this transformation was that: "this is by far the biggest thing we've ever done. No place in the

world is doing anything like it” (Krane 133). Schmid would argue that “festivalization, theming, and hyper-reality are the catchwords of a fast-paced development which is increasingly reducing everyday ‘reality’ and replacing it with a ‘culture of simulation’” (Schmid 347). Dubai is going through a rapid physical change. Continuous symbolism flourishes from the massive innovation in the city, which should be understood as a marketing strategy for keeping both tourists and investors stimulated and interested in coming to Dubai. Brand Dubai has proven to be successful in the past decade. The city has gone through a “Disneyfication” process as Sharon Zukin defined in her book *The Culture of Cities*. However, it is in her last book *The Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (2010) where she questions the authenticity of urban renewal projects in particular in New York. Yet, it is applicable to Dubai. She argues that urban distinctiveness has been used by economic elites to stimulate the real estate market and other economic sectors, which have forced the gentrification of many local residents and the elimination of local characters in the urban environment.

In fact, the real estate market responded to the massive incoming migrant workers that accompanied the increasing business activity in Dubai. Sheikh Muhammad understood that people would not stay in Dubai if they did not have appropriate residential options available. In 2002, he announced the implementation of Dubai Property Law, which granted for the first time the possibility to foreigners to own real estate in designated areas of Dubai (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success” 131). This guaranteed a real estate boom. Palm Jumeirah and Deira were already sold before their completion and many other projects were under way. The World, a 300 island archipelago forming the world map, has been a revolutionary project crossing the limits of architecture and design once again, which Dubai’s leaders and Nakheel property developers have accustomed the public to as part of Dubai’s marketing strategy of

fascination (See Appendix E). In 2008, projects such as the Old Town and Business Bay aimed to increase the residential living areas through the construction of buildings with a more “traditional” architecture with a canal system simulating a Venice-type city (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success” 133). In addition, many residential towers were constructed along the creek.

Yet, the most important of them was Burj Dubai, later renamed as Burj Khalifa, which is the world tallest building with a height of 830 meters (See Appendix F). His main architect Adrian Smith defined it as a “1950s sci-fi depiction of a Mars rocket, a glossy creation with a needle tip and a cluster of booster engines as its base” (Krane 161). However, this building was unique for much more than its height; its revolutionary construction techniques drew great attention. The tower was able to swing in slow motion ten feet from one side to another to accommodate the impact of high winds at such altitude. While these features fascinates architects and constructors, the unique experience of being able to watch the sunset at the bottom of the building and then ride the elevator to the top floor and being able to watch it again amazes residents and visitors alike (Krane 164). Dubai knows how to make people dream and remain interested in it. Dubai has gotten it right. It keeps the entire world talking about the city.

Nevertheless, the increase in residential space could not work without an efficient change in infrastructure. While constant improvements have been made to Dubai’s International Airport, its port and highways, the solution to the tripling of the city’s population with the consequent issues of traffic has been the subterranean metro, with the most advanced mass transit system yet known (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success” 108). It is not surprising that the terms related to the majority of Dubai’s projects are most, greatest, tallest, revolutionary or unique. And it could not be less when talking about malls, in a city where money “floats around”. Many

malls such as the Reef mall, Dubai mall or the Ibn Batuta mall have been built since 1990, offering a world travelling shopping experience, but none has surpassed the impact of the Mall of the Emirates (See Appendix G). It is a:

“sprawling maze of marble and glass, it covers size and a half million square feet...Mall goes mingle in posh restaurants and a labyrinth of high-end boutiques amid jaw-dropping attractions like an indoor ski slope contained in a shiny tube that just futuristically off the building into the sky” (Nasr 28).

Dubai made a smart decision in branding itself as “the place to shop” since it presents a unique alternative in the region where high quality international goods could only be found at a much higher price due to taxes imposed by their counterparts. The Dubai Shopping Festival and the Dubai Summer Surprises have had a tremendous success in attracting tourists to Dubai, reaching figures of 1.6 million visitors in the first year (Ali 22-23). Dubai has become one of the most important shopping centers in the world, and particularly in the Middle East.

Whether it is for shopping, tourism or business, people are attracted to Dubai because it brings unique options to whatever your desires are. It is known all over the world because it has excelled in most of the sectors a city could. Dubai has put its name on the world map as it desired, and it has done so through a complete transformation of its built environment. Dubai might be a “land of superlatives” as Vali Nasr defines it in his book *Forces of Fortune*. In less than 15 years, it has the tallest building and hotel, the biggest mall, airport, and theme park; the largest man-made archipelago and harbor; an air-conditioned beach and the most efficient subway in the world. “The emirate seeks to set world standards for luxury and consumerism, to be the first in everything, especially the kinds of things the West appreciates” (Nasr 28).

Through innovation and exploitation of opportunities that would allow Dubai to have a comparative advantage in the world, it has transformed its city and the way people see the globalized world we live in. Dubai has built a city for the world. The success of the architectural strategy with an overproduction of iconic structures has been argued with statements like the following, “buildings feel so much like logos that there is something strangely unsubstantial about them” (Ali 39). Nevertheless, in this case, the end justifies the means. No one could argue that Dubai has not become a global city, for many the ‘dreamed city’, an improved version of Las Vegas, a Disneyland for adults.

This type of urban transformation has provided Dubai with great benefits. It has not only caused a tremendous economic boost by building the projects themselves, but it has provided spaces for activities such as tourism, shopping, and corporate business to take place. These are now main contributors to Dubai’s GDP. On the other hand, the exponential and fast growth of the city has provoked many displacement issues, further separating national and foreign inhabitants and imposing important obstacles in social integration.

Demographics of a globalizing city

Cultural diversity is a relevant indicator of the ‘globality’ of a city. Dubai has a long history of being a hub of trade, particularly for gold and pearling during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of twentieth century. Dubai has tremendously benefited from the great influx of Persian, Lebanese, Indian, and particularly Iranian communities since it became a free port city. These generations of merchants “who did business in the city then helped Dubai not only to grow its economy, but develop a deep appreciation for free trade along with the necessary tolerance for diversity it requires” (Nasr 33). These roots have eased the way for the achievement of the

Maktoum family's dream of making Dubai a true global city. Economic diversification would not have been possible without the tremendous influx of expatriates from the different regions in the world. The labor needs of the 13 percent annual GDP growth of the past decade could not be met by the less than half a million locals. In fact, Dubai's population has been listed among the fastest growing per year in the world, with a foreign community that exceeds 80 percent of the total population of Dubai (Lee and Jain 236). This unique data makes Dubai a peculiar and interesting case to study. Its rapid change and growth had major impacts on the local identity, Dubai's global image and the present reality of the city.

Tourism data clearly reveals the reality of Dubai becoming a global city. Not only did Dubai receive 6 million visitors coming mostly from Asia and other Arab states, but the tourist sector has shown an average of 17 percent annual growth in the past year (Lee and Jain 236). While Dubai attracted foreigners through trade during the first half of the twentieth century, it never received tourists in the past. "Dubai basically had to create tourism from scratch as there is little to 'naturally' attract tourists in terms of culture and history, aside from a small fort dating back to the late 1700s, which today is the site of the Dubai Museum" (Ali 21). However, it is through that push of physical transformation in the past 15 years that Dubai has built those iconic and unique places that the rest of the world wants to see. According to Speake, positive outcomes of creating a sensational city "are seen as the consequences of successful commodification of a particular urban environment. Such outcomes occur when a city sells itself convincingly and successfully as an exciting location" (Speake 9). Not only does data prove this statement, but Dubai's branding strategy of targeting luxury tourism also creates a vicious circle of wealth coming into the city. Dubai is a city with very few public spaces, which means that money is essential to be part of the city, to belong to it. "In this model, luxury is a privilege of class and

status, and what makes this opulence even more luxurious is the fact that it is unavailable to the masses” (Ascensao in Lee and Jain 238). It is that feeling of exclusivity, distinctiveness and uniqueness that is built into and about the city that cannot be found in the rest of the world; it is that feeling that pleases the visitors and makes them want to come back.

On the other hand, the diversity of Dubai is measured by its population rather than by its tourists, and the close to 90 percent of foreigners forming the population proves it. The same way tourists came with the physical transformation of the city, so did these foreign workers and their families. First, low-skilled workers mainly from Southeast Asia, but also from other Arab countries, came to work in the construction sites. Dubayyans did not lift the city that was a mere port town three decades ago; these migrant workers did and still do today. When free zone areas such as Jebel Ali, Internet or Media City were built and filled by foreign companies, a major influx of Western corporate professionals and businessmen from countries such as Russia or the United States came to Dubai. As Persian merchants were a main component in the city economic growth in the past century, this new influx of world citizens has allowed Dubai to become a true global city in economic and demographic terms. Dubai’s strategy has focused on “build it and they will come”, which has proved successful up to 2008 with the financial crisis.

Nevertheless, the tripling of the population and the assimilation of 202 nationalities in Dubai’s social and political framework has been problematic. Dubai has been built up on the notion that “it promises to provide everyone with a chance to participate in consumer well-being, to enact a consumer citizenship that reaffirms the free market ideal of egalitarianism of opportunities” (Kanna, “Dubai, The City as Corporation” 185). Yet, the issues of exclusion imposed by the nature of the urban, political, and economic structure are significant. Tensions arise from all groups in society. Low-skilled migrant workers have become the majority of the

population, yet they live in secluded areas outside the city and cannot access most of its services due to the unfeasibility of facing the high cost of urban life with their minimal wages. While most Western expatriates are participants of the “consumer citizenship” of Dubai, they are not accepted by the local Dubayyan population.

In addition, social and cultural values are still very different. Both types of expatriates feel excluded from any form of political participation, as well as the rights to citizenship and free speech. In contrast, locals are a minority and feel that the values and identity of the true Dubayyan are being eroded by the globalization of the city, which has brought prostitution, gambling and drinking among other illegitimate activities. Syed Ali in his book *Dubai, Gilded Cage* has defined Brand Dubai as a combination of: “the seemingly never-ending construction, the extravagant consumerist excess, the prostitutes and the degraded conditions of the construction workers, maids, cleaners and others of the working class. These are all the things that have helped to catapult Dubai into global fame and infamy” (Ali 33). These are the things that have triggered the tensions among its population.

Nonetheless, we still considered Dubai to be a global city. In fact, most of the global cities suffer from the unintended consequences of economic development and globalization. Dubai’s demographical division and the diversity of its population are so extreme that has imposed deeper questions about the city’s future and its identity. Is a city with a disrupted identity a true global city? Christopher Davidson in his book *Dubai, the Vulnerability of Success* affirms that “Dubai cannot be considered a cosmopolitan city” (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success” 192). It has rebuilt and rebranded itself through its physical structure to become a global city. However, this change has not been followed by a parallel transformation of its identity. There is a social and cultural lag with the formation of a global city. The

disconnection between the global and local elements of Dubai is clear by the lack of interaction of its diverse population in the transformed urban environment. Yet, there are many barriers to a defined identity for Dubai and its inhabitants.

III. GLOBAL DUBAI'S LOCAL INEQUALITY

Legal and structural frameworks have been identified as barriers for a unified Dubayyan identity. Globalization has imposed important pressures for reorganization of economic and social components in the Gulf State, causing significant inequality. Many of these elements, particularly in the social arena, have been left out in the Al-Maktoum project creating continuous tensions between the local and global realms. Inequality has become one of the most important unintended consequences of this rapid and uncontrolled globalization process in Dubai. The impossibility of obtaining citizenship best exemplifies the inequality of the foreign population, which trickles down to all aspects of their daily lives. Issues like the differentiation between foreign populations by economic status, and the conditions of low-skilled immigrants are issues that must be discussed in order to understand Dubai since these have had an extraordinary impact in the formation of a global city.

Three types of foreigners

Whether it has been the origin, the issues of local identity, the economic needs or the royal family's policies, Dubai's foreign population is divided in three main groups that are completely separated, and rejected, from the local community. Globalization meant the need for foreign labor force. In fact, locals see expatriates as "the price we need to pay for this development (Hari). However, not all were accepted on the same criteria. Significant privileges were given to the incoming Western technocrat elite. But while middle class skilled Arabs received some privileges, the low-skilled South Asian immigrants were at the other end of the spectrum. In fact, although the average UAE citizen has middle to upper class income, a large

fraction of the population lives under unreasonably exploitative conditions since the bottom of the society accounts for its larger proportion (Kanna, “Dubai, The City as Corporation” 63). They all have a particular position in society, in which they are trapped.

Taking into consideration that not all foreigners were treated equally at their arrival at the emirate, Westerners or highly skilled non-Westerners were at the greatest advantage from the situation. They had the skills that most of Dubai’s locals lacked. Their academic and professional experience in the corporate, technological or financial fields made them the greatest asset to Dubai’s project of globalization, in particular for rapid globalization. Dubai could not rely on their locals but on these expatriates to achieve its goals. But, why would they come to a small city in the middle of a desert? Dubai assured greater salaries, better housing and education for children, and zero tax collection from expatriates among other advantages. Moreover, the companies compromised on arranging the visas for their entire families and in many cases, paid for the travel to Dubai. They were given high-paying jobs, salaries, benefits and property that expatriates could not reject (Kanna, “Dubai, The City as Corporation” 63). These are winners in the services producer system that helps define the global cities (Sassen).

As it was mentioned previously, even the new construction of residential areas was designed to model Western homes. Driving a nice car, having a villa and a maid, and access to luxurious resorts, beaches and restaurants could not be afforded in their home countries with the same job. While men come with a high-paying job, most of their wives are ‘trailing spouses’, who often give up their career when coming to Dubai and spend their time hanging out with other expatriates’ wives or in trips shopping or going to their home countries for vacations with their children (Ali 112). Expatriates enjoyed living in Dubai because they could have even more benefits than living at home “without having to bother with the tiresome aspects of life in most

foreign countries (adjusting to local customs and worrying about the hygiene issues, etc.)” (Kanna, “Dubai, the City as Corporation” 187). Dubai built their ‘best home’ in the emirate, it was a dreamed land. According to Johann Hari in his article “The Dark Side of Dubai”, expatriates stay in Dubai for what they call ‘the lifestyle’; "Here, you go out every night. You'd never do that back home. You see people all the time. It's great. You have lots of free time. You have maids and staff so you don't have to do all that stuff. You party!" (Hari) Dubai became a Disneyland for adults.

Nonetheless, this deal could not be perfect. There was a price to pay for those advantages. Dubai could not give everything without asking for something in return. All expatriates, including the Westerners with greater privileges, can enjoy all the services offered by the city as long as they do not engage in political activity or claim against state decisions or regulations. The royal family needed to assure their supremacy, especially when the local community was reduced to less than 20 percent of the total population. The lack of influence of changing their status in the country feeds into their political vulnerability creating a vicious circle. Laws are made mostly for locals even though they are the minority. Foreigners are unequal because they are considered as transient. “Essentially, the state has struck an implicit bargain with its professional expatriates - do as you please, within the reason, while you build up our economy. You may be *in* Dubai, but you cannot be *of* Dubai” (Ali 111). Most of wealthy foreigners are content with the royal family and what the state of Dubai has offered them; however, the fact that foreigners cannot participate in political life and adapt legal and administrative restrictions to their status slows down the social transition from a local to a global city.

Many Western expatriates complain about the strictness of the laws in regards to alcohol consumption, public demonstration of affection, car accidents or financial debt, which are causes

of imprisonment. For instance, Daniel Andrews, a Canadian expatriate had to resign his job due to a tumor. The employer informed the bank as soon as he quit, his accounts were immediately frozen, and the couple was banned from leaving the country. Because he and his wife Karen could not cover the debt with their savings, he was sent six months to prison at a trial in Arabic, which he could not understand. He was powerless. Now, his wife lives in her Range Rover in a hotel parking waiting for him to get out of prison (Hari). There has been little development in the official administration to accommodate these expatriates beyond granting them their 'dream life', which sometimes do turn into nightmares due to that legal and cultural disconnection between locals and foreigners.

The situation of Arab and Iranian expatriates is very interesting. They have been coming to Dubai for over a century. The Iranian merchant community, the most numerous, has been a great promoter of the 'Arabness' of Dubai building residential neighborhoods like Fareej Al-Bastakia, home of the famous 25 remaining wind-towers, squares and sikkas (cohesive houses) of the 'Old Dubai' (Boussa 130). It is worth noting that what tourists relate with local in the building structure of Dubai is actually of Iranian origin. These immigrants not only speak the same language, but also look like nationals by both the color of their skin and national custom. However, in reality, they are not; they were treated as just expatriates. There is a "main ethnic divide in the UAE, the between Emiratis who consider themselves "pure" Arabs (sometimes called *bedu* or "Bedouin") and those who are of Iranian descent ('*ajam* or '*ayam*')" (Kanna, "Dubai, The City as Corporation" 119). Before the oil boom they were all a part of the same community, but with the increasing influx of immigration after the 1970s, rulers' emphasized 'locality' and 'Arabness' and started favoring ethnically Arab inhabitants through laws and

regulations. Some Arabs received citizenship in the 1970s, and their sons and daughters were even married to nationals.

However, the situation for Arabs who have come after, even if it has been through family ties in Dubai, has been standardized with the same difficulties to obtain citizenship or even a standard three year visa, which is tied to an employment position. “At the end of the day, no matter how close they may be with nationals, expatriates are still just expatriates” in the Dubai of the last decades (Ali 146). Who is local in Dubai was firmly defined, and foreign Arabs were left out of the equation. Arab expatriate community in Dubai lacks established funds or formal organizations to cope with their situation but heavily relies on solidarity from fellow Arabs (Khalaf and Alkobaisi 290). Being of the Middle East is not equal of being of the Gulf, and particularly, of Dubai.

Nevertheless, neither the Western or Arab expatriates are the majority in Dubai. It is the Southeast Asian immigrants, and their situation in the Gulf, that is a main issue and concern. Since the local population was small and unskilled for construction labor, and had lucrative but unproductive opportunities in the public sector, Dubai had to look for cheap labor in other regions of the world. Building up a global city in a decade needed massive influx of workers into the city ranging from unskilled to managers and engineers for construction projects. Inequality on a macro level comes from the international movement of labor as profit is generated from the exploitation of foreign workers (Khalaf and Alkobaisi 273). There is a relationship between dominator and subordinated in Dubai, which first starts with the visa process and the kafala system.

Unlike their fellow North Americans and Europeans expatriates, Southeast Asian immigrants cannot enter the UAE without a visa (Vora 385). They find jobs and sign contracts in their home countries through freelancers agreeing to certain conditions such as the annual repayment of their visa sponsorship. However, many of them suffer from the illegal practice of “contract switching” through which employers avoid the payment of wages agreed upon as well as health insurance, visa and work permits fees that they are enforced to cover (Kanna, “Dubai, The City as Corporation” 63). They are treated as a commodity and thus, disposable. They ‘belong’ to their employers, which Dubai’s laws protect. “Once in Dubai, they are trapped, legally obligated to work for their employers in spite of any underhand activity on the employer’s part, and financially beholden to agents back home who own their debt” (Ali 86). Moreover, taking into account that employers hold their passports to avoid the interruption of their contract until visa expiration, there is no legal minimum wage and that it is illegal for them to organize trade unions or protests against their situation. These immigrants are trapped in the worse side of the unequal Dubai.

Their working and living conditions are not much better for construction laborers. These immigrants work an average of 11 hours per day and six and half-day weeks under dangerous conditions causing more than 700 deaths and 19 suicides annually (Ali 83). A Human Rights Watch study found that these figures are underestimated reaching the rate of 972 in the year of 2005 among the Indian construction workers only (Hari). They work during summers and winters alike with temperatures reaching 50 degrees Celsius. Sometimes, they are even accommodated illegally by their companies on the construction sites. “But what is even worse is that some containers that measure 18 sq. meters do not have air-conditioners. The toilets are dirty; bunk beds are also cheek by jowl and workers can barely manoeuvre in the containers” (Kanna,

“Dubai, The City as Corporation” 74). Although these are unique and random cases, others, in similar conditions in Abu Dhabi, decide to live in houses without access to a kitchen in order to save money (Mohammad and Sidaway 614). However, the cost of eating outside and decent quality food exceeds their budgets causing detrimental effects on their health.

Workers are responsible of their own accommodation. Because their wages are limited, they tend to live in slum areas and camps outside the city such as Sonapur. It “is a rubble-strewn patchwork of miles and miles of identical concrete buildings. Some 300,000 men live piled up here, in a place whose name in Hindi means ‘City of Gold’”(Hari). The reality of that promised “City of Gold” is very different. Because they come to Dubai with the intention of making money to maintain their families at home, they have the necessity of cutting the cost of their living expenses. Splitting rooms and sharing beds are among the most common, together with declining access to a television, air conditioning or a kitchen. The situation worsens in terms of health since not only is the drinkable water delivered not properly desalinated, but the camps are also “riven with the smell of sewage and sweat” as Hari points out (“The Dark Side of Dubai”). These camps are not pleasant places to live in. In fact, the situation has worsened since the crisis. Electricity has been cut out in many of them, salaries are delayed by months and employers have even left the country with their passports. These workers are living a very different experience than to what was guaranteed back in their home countries.

The overcrowding with an average of six to ten people per room, and the questionable health and hygiene conditions of these areas leads workers to spend their leisure time in the limited real public spaces of Dubai such as parks, mosques and beaches. Because of the great congregation of immigrants in these areas and the lack of accessibility to the city’s consumerist culture, they have created numerous organizations for leisure, and funds for other purposes. For

example, there are numerous movie theaters playing the latest Bollywood movies and Jordanian, Goan and Sudanese clubs organize social events. Pakistani immigrants have even put together a fund to meet the costs of transporting a body to the home country for burial (Khalaf and Alkobaisi 289). These are social initiatives that ease the difficult and unequal conditions of unskilled workers in Dubai.

They are left outside the society of consumerism not only through their wages and working conditions but also through their inability to bring their family to the UAE as higher skilled and Western expatriates are allowed to do. “For the great majority of married low-income migrants, having a wife and children in the host society is considered a liability, not an asset” (Khalaf and Alkobaisi 293). In fact their annual wage ranging from 400 to 1500 Dh minus the expensive living expenditures of Dubai do not reach the 4000 Dh minimum monthly wage to apply for family expatriation.

It is crucial to point out that inequality is present in daily life as well in the form of racism. Unskilled construction workers do not interact with Westerners or locals due to their inaccessibility to the consumer culture; middle class Indians suffer from the racial tensions between them and the local Dubayyan society. Immigrants denounce racist behaviors coming not from whites but locals in particular. Whether they are engineers or doctors, they classified them as servants automatically. “The experience of New Dubai is a mixture of contentment with its promise of consumer well-being and anxiety over exclusion from the full potential of neoliberal citizenship” (Kanna, “Dubai, the City as Corporation” 190). Inequality is not a matter of pure citizenship. Actually, most low skilled immigrants will not forgo their citizenship for and Emirati

passport since the benefits are mostly related to economic terms and they see their situation as temporary in Dubai (Vora 382). They only wish to improve their conditions during the stay in the Gulf State. Racism comes as a result of the gap between the physical and social transformation of the city. Social customs and values are harder to change due to the generational gaps in a city that was made a modern global city in a decade. The increase to almost 90 percent rate of foreigners in the city has originated a negative reaction from the local community, in forms such as racism. However, it is a matter of time for Dubayyans to become globalized and assimilate the racial composition of their society.

Although the majority of the incoming migrant population is of the male gender, maids and prostitutes have a significant role in the planned global city. While construction workers built the infrastructure of Dubai, maids and prostitutes contribute to the ‘enhancement’ of its inhabitants’ lives. In 2006, there were 450,000 maids, a 10 percent of the total UAE population (Ali 95). Although many may have good relations with their employers and get the benefits of living in a upper-middle class home, they are still subject to work an average of 100 hours per week, late payment, and mental or sexual abuse in the worse cases. Hari noted that:

“Everyone, it seems, has a maid. It is an open secret that once you hire a maid, you have absolute power over her. You take her passport – everyone does; you decide when to pay her, and when – if ever – she can take a break; and you decide who she talks to. She speaks no Arabic. She cannot escape” (Hari).

As clearly mentioned in this quote, maids are ‘prisoners’ to their house lords, just as construction workers are to their employers.

On the other hand, prostitutes provide an illicit service for tourists and businessmen alike. Some women come by themselves with the intention of becoming prostitutes because they find it prestigious and a source of freedom and autonomy when they are coming from countries such as Iran or other more conservative countries (Ali 104). However, the majority of the more than 10,000 sex slaves in Dubai are victims of human trafficking. In fact, the UAE has been placed on the top positions on the Human Rights Watch List ranking for its failure to prevent human trafficking for the last years (Ali 99). Prostitutes are considered as a mere commodity in Dubai, as another variable of the global city equation where you can find whatever your needs and desires are. Inequalities have come with the movement towards globalization. The rapid changes and the peculiar composition of society have created a push-pull relation in the legal and economic framework that has failed to accommodate a smoother and fairer transition. Yet, both the local and expatriate elite, the ones who are active in economic life in the city, have obtained great and unprecedented benefits in a rapidly developing city in the world. Dubai has created the best and the worst city at the same time depending on your country of origin and class status.

Inequality as a hallmark of global Dubai

One of the most important facts to mention about Dubai is that it has been a land of merchants, and immigrants for a couple of centuries. The presence of these foreign communities has always raised discrepancies among the local population. After the post-oil era when the ratio between locals and foreigners was becoming more unbalanced, the local elite took the leading role in determining the future of their state against the foreign threat.

“Spatial representations in post-oil Dubai are symptomatic of social conflicts. They signify the ascendancy of ruling bargain and its various entailments - the dependent notion of citizenship and the absolute otherness of certain classes of foreigner, for example. The spaces that migrants are seen to inhabit are taken to be reflections of a moral and aesthetic decay requiring state intervention” (Kanna, “Dubai, The City as Corporation” 68).

Dubai is a city that has been modeled to Sheikh Rashid and Muhammad’s desires. Its design has meant to create a home for those selected under the protection of the system. High-skilled Westerners and non-Westerners were a variable in the equation; unskilled immigrants were not and thus reside in slum areas outside Dubai.

The physical structure represents that first social divide with local, low-skilled and Western communities living in segregated areas in the city. It is the political structure that shows the rest. The unobtainable citizenship for foreigners has been a policy to safeguard not only the nature of the Emiratis as a local population, but most importantly the supremacy of the royal family. Those who are not citizens have no political rights. There is not a democratic but a tribal autocratic system in place, which has been working so far. The royal family makes sure that those who may have a voice in political life, the Westerners due to their economic status in Dubai, are more than satisfied with what the city has to offer. The social and economic benefits of Dubai exceed any others’ in the world. These expatriates know it and accept their restricted role in political and legal life as the price they pay for these unique advantages. The global Dubai has been designed from sources of inequality among its society. Dubai is a planned city, it is a city for those who the royal family decides to include in it. This has accentuated the lag between the formation of the urban structure of a global city and the cultural identity that emerges from it.

IV. LOCAL IDENTITY IN GLOBAL DUBAI

Every global city from New York to Shanghai has a high rate of cultural diversity among the qualifications of their global identity. In most of the cities that have received massive immigration at the beginning of the last century, immigrants share with locals political, economic and social rights and end up forming part of the local community such as in London or New York City. The issue with Dubai (and Shanghai to a certain extent as well), is that the framework allowing the fusion between what is global and what is local in the city is disrupted. Moreover, the fast pace and the excessive share of foreign population in relation to the local inhabitants has slowed down and blocked more precisely the process of assimilation for that global identity to fully occur. The rapid physical transformation of the city has brought many benefits to Dubai but has imposed questions beyond the economic results. The issues of identity clearly demonstrate that ‘it is not gold all that glitters in Dubai’. Yet, most of the Gulf States are following Dubai’s path for economic growth. Could they still be considered as Emirati cities? Are they truly global cities? What is the real identity of these cities and their people? These are questions to be further analyzed in a city like Dubai, an extreme and interesting case.

A hybrid identity in the making

Mixture is one of the closest synonyms to the term hybrid, and it is an appropriate word to define Dubai’s identity. It has been shaped by a mixture of more than 202 different nationalities besides Emirati and accounts for almost 90 percent of the total population. Western skilled corporate workers and their families, Southeast Asian construction and low-skilled workers, other Arab expatriates, and wealthy elites from countries such as Russia have joined the

local community. “Today in the twenty 21st century the totality of the UAE’s population represents one of the most racially, ethnically, religiously, and socially mixed to be found anywhere” (Heard-Bey 360). Before the 1990’s, the majority of immigrants in Dubai were from other countries of either the Middle East region or Muslim roots. Whether they came from different parts of the world, people shared religious, linguistic or cultural values that held a common Dubayyan identity. Nowadays, this is unattainable. The differences between locals and foreigners have dramatically sharpened in terms of attire and rights.

The Al-Maktoum royal family, together with other important merchant families of Dubai, has highly contributed to this disruption through the push for economic and urban progress, in which identity and social issues were forgotten. Still, their project for citizenship was meant to be parallel to the entrepreneurial and global approach taken for the change of the physical image of the new global city. Rulers throughout the Gulf have used the economic progress from the construction boom to reinforce their authority on determining both space and identity (Kanna and Keshavarzian 35). While in the urban context the attitude was ‘build it and they will come’, in the social realm there was an underlying belief of “when they come, they will be”.

The concept of flexible or hybrid citizenship was born. In his book *Dubai, The City as Corporation* Ahmed Kanna has stated that the meaning of being a ‘flexible citizens’ is of “seeing oneself as a sort of creative artist of identity, extracting useful and (allegedly) progressive aspects of ascriptive identity, and reframing them through neoliberal values of entrepreneurialism, individualism, and cultural flexibility” (Kanna, “Dubai, The City as Corporation” 151). It was the business vision towards every element in the city that was meant to penetrate its new inhabitants, considering themselves part of that global structure beyond their own cultural differences. Actually, the biggest companies led by members of the Al-Maktoum

family such as Emaar, Nakheel or Tecom are the first to promote this type of 'hybridity' in the city. The rate of women, Emirati locals, ethnically mixed and expatriates are disproportionate in the rest of the companies established in Dubai (Kanna, "Dubai, The City as Corporation" 151). The push for diversity comes from the state itself, so as to set an example.

Nonetheless, in a city where everything takes place through the royal family's projects, a plan for the formation of a renewed identity that would accompany and respond to the dramatic physical change of the city never took place. The increase of cultural diversity contented the leaders in their goal of forming a brand for Dubai, the global city of the twenty first century. Art and culture has not been the core of any of the construction and development projects in Dubai, while cities like Abu Dhabi host the Guggenheim and the Louvre museum in the Middle East. Syed Ali emphasizes the lack of 'real culture' in the Gulf city. "Dubai's public culture is a kind of lowest common denominator of global, generic forms, and its generic nature, as it appeals to no one in particular, can then appeal to all. It is when looking at Dubai as a whole that people mean there is no culture, that it is plastic" (Ali 66). The terms plastic and generic are crucial in understanding the contemporary identity of Dubai. It is plastic because as everything in Dubai, it is superficial. It was made out of the air -from ideas of its CEO-, but not based on people's needs.

The physical, and somewhat cultural, transformation of Dubai was not a natural but a planned process. It was based on the capitalist values of consumption and entrepreneurship, in which meaningful interactions between individuals are analyzed in economic terms. On one hand, Emirati's culture is conservative and private, and its Western counterpart is mostly public. The little interaction between both only created a hybrid generic culture, which could fit all. Actually, one of the most active starchitects in the physical transformation of Dubai, Rem Koolhaas, was the father of the theory of 'generic cities', a response to the crisis of the contemporary city.

Koolhaas' design of Dubai Waterfront City "consisted of repeating, modular units linked directly to an airport and whose inhabitants are rootless global nomads" (Kanna and Keshavarzian 35). Cities are becoming experiences that people consume instead of places where people settle and shape to make them their home and community. They do not take the time to make an impact on it, but to get the benefits of its assets. This concept is highly supported by Saskia Sassen, who argues that there is an "overbearing sameness" of the city due to both the generic urban sprawl and the lack of interactions between their inhabitants ("The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo"). The changes in identity are a reflection of those in the urban environment.

Dubai might be a global city with a hybrid identity but it is the lack of interaction between its inhabitants that do not make it a cosmopolitan city. The government sells that image as part of the well-known Brand Dubai. Billboards with pictures of Dubai national and foreign families interacting with each other are all over the city and vacation brochures. However, in reality, "most ethnic groups prefer to remain distinct, each with their own social networks, clubs, and community centers. As such, 'Dubai Society' continues to feel somewhat disharmonious (Davidson, "Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success" 192). The traditional conservative Muslim legal framework of the Emirate state is outdated in a city in which the native population is a significant minority. The 3 year visa restriction prevents foreigners from considering Dubai their final destination, and thus, they do not preoccupy or take the time to have a relevant impact on Dubai's culture and society. They are content with what they find because they do not consider Dubai to be their home. And this relationship is reciprocal.

Part of the reason why the royal family has not invested in deepening the connections between locals and foreigners is because the later are considered as transient, as a mere factor of production on a short-term basis. Syed Ali goes even further stating that "as human being they

are socially invisible, interchangeable, and ultimately disposable” (Ali 81). This is a very revealing quote since Dubai might be one of the most diverse cities in the world, but it has not achieved being a melting pot as most of the global cities in the world have. There is a time lag between the accelerated physical transformation of the city and the assimilation of its cultural diversity. A global identity is shaped by society and not by the decision of a man and a structure of glass and steel. The following generations will become more global over time surpassing the denomination of just a disrupted hybrid identity. However, the reality of Dubai today is one of an identity crisis.

Who is local in Dubai?

It is imperative to mention that the differentiation of who is a local versus foreign is relatively new in the Gulf. It was the discovery and exploitation of the oil reserves in the region, and the exponential economic development of the 2000s that attracted an increasing number of immigrants highlighting the distinction between locals and foreigners to a greater extent. On the one hand, ethnically, we call ‘locals’ those who have Bedouin origins in the Arabian Peninsula and some Iranian merchants residing in the area of Dubai for several generations. However, locals make clear distinction between both ethnicities. “For traditional Emiratis, the name of the family is very important. They stress very heavily on the purity of the lineage” (Kanna, “Dubai, The City as Corporation” 158). Dubai has been a city of merchants and travelers for the past century and a half and the distinction is a blurry line.

Nowadays, the distinction of locality has become a matter of holding an Emirati passport. The immigration laws have been designed to preserve that status since no matter how long

expatriates have been in Dubai, they will have to leave at some point. Thus, being local means being legally Dubayyan. Margaret Somers in her book *Genealogies of Citizenship* emphasizes that “with the casualties of market fundamentalism increasing civil society becomes more exclusionary on traditional ascriptive grounds (Somers 41). Dubai has been a clear example of this backward identity movement as the city modernized structurally and economically. A greater differentiation between who is local and foreign in Dubai since the 70s proves it.

Although September 11th heightened the tensions between Muslims and the Western world, we should trace the desires for social distinction on Dubai in the 1970s and 80s with the oil boom shifting the Indian to American and European influence. “Many in the region began discarding their Kashmiri shawls or Iranian turbans (or Western jackets and ties) and began wearing the white Nadji kandura or thawb and the traditional head gear, the red-check Nadji shimagh or the white eastern Arabian ghutra” (Kanna, “Dubai, The City as Corporation” 183). This outfit is considered a symbol of not only authentic national identity but also exclusivity among the rising foreign population. Syed Ali identifies this response as a ‘reactive identity’ as they start feeling a minority in their own country (Ali 12). There was a predominant thought in the native community that their privileges and status was not protected by the royal family, who was giving substantial benefits to the growing expatriate population.

Not only has Arabic become the second language, but many other social aspects make nationals believe that they are discriminated against in their own city. For instance, signs prohibiting the national dress have been placed in many resorts and hotels (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success” 203). Whether it is to make these areas friendlier for tourist avoiding the cultural misunderstanding in topics such as alcohol consumption, or public demonstration of affection, the issue is “not whether nationals are losing their identity or culture,

a dubious claim, but rather that their social significance in their own place is declining in the public sphere”, where a greater number of expatriates achieve similar social and economic status as nationals (Ali 184). Under the sentiments of threat and estrangement of locals in their own land, locals reacted by sharpening their differences. It is an expected response because when people feel threatened or attacked, they respond with a defense or another attack mechanism. Being a minority, many locals felt that by re-affirming their localness, they will be more connected to Dubai and maintain alive what they think the real, original Dubai is, which reverts to its tribal roots.

It has been argued that Dubai is still an Islamic city beyond its modern urban structure. Although far from the fundamentalist Islamism of the neighboring Saudi Arabia, mosques are predominant across the city and laws prohibit public display of affection or inadequate clothing (Nasr 31). However, it is not true in most of the newer areas of Dubai where the implementation of these laws is more flexible and the call of prayer is hardly heard. Many local families have decided to leave these neighborhoods and move to more suburban areas with a lower concentration of foreigners. Self-segregation has been a common response among the local community. These families find themselves on an ‘internal exile’ since moving presents itself as the only solution to fully preserve their Arab and Muslim identities. There are numerous examples of families “building a new family home in another emirate so that their children would still be able to grow up in an Arab city” (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success” 194). Even cultural intermixing through marriage is strongly discouraged. Not only will the Muslim bride or groom face family dishonor, but the state will not recognize the legitimate union, will cut the social security, healthcare, and free education state benefits along with the Emirati citizenship for them and their children (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success” 205).

There is a governmental and social incentive of maintaining the local Muslim values against an increasing secular influence from the expatriate communities. Yet, the number of mixed couples exceeds the 14,000 mark in the UAE (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success”205).

Nonetheless, it is crucial to mention that there is a general consensus among scholars on depicting Dubai as the father of a new Arab identity. Ahmed Kanna is a firm believer that “the fusion of neoliberalism with Dubai’s unique national character emancipates the city-state from its “mere” Arabness, creating in the process an emergent Dubai identity both Arab and post-Arab or multinational” (Kanna, “Making Cadres of the “City-Corporation”: Cultural and Identity Politics in Neoliberal Dubai” 213). There is a thin line between the feeling of being an Arab and at the same time unique and modern in Dubai. Their past is not an obstacle for Dubai’s future; in fact, it is viewed as a strong foundation represented by a strong leadership with the Al-Maktoum family. “The past is not simply reproduced in museum exhibits; it is depicted as the repository of an authentic identity whose qualitative core remains unchanged in spite of immense quantitative change” (Kanna and Keshavarzian 39). Dubai remains a city of Arab soul but with a modern face.

The royal family has focused on drifting away from its Muslim counterparts’ beliefs that a good citizen is a good Muslim or believer. For them, a good Dubayyan is a person who adds value to the city. “Dubayyans should reduce their evaluation of family background (how they fit within the system of pedigree) and begin to frame value in terms of individual merit, entrepreneurialism, work ethic, and willingness to self-improve” (Kanna, “Dubai, The City as Corporation” 146). Dubai has become a global city in the past decade, and it is important for its inhabitants, and particularly for locals, to maintain their traditions but still be open to the modern and the foreign world that is extremely interconnected.

To be part of the network of global cities means to incorporate progressive values and rules in the political, social and economic realms. Bon Bayyat identifies neoliberal market values undertaken by Dubai's government as "the only ones that can drag Dubai and other Arab countries into a future beyond putative Arab maladies such as statism, inefficiency, and an allergy to the glories of the market" (Kanna, "Making Cadres of the "City-Corporation": Cultural and Identity Politics in Neoliberal Dubai" 212). Dubai's success proves the importance of that openness and receptiveness of the capitalist models in the world we live in today. In fact, although locals recognize that expatriates were the cost for development, they say that "nobody wants to go back to the days of the desert, the days before everyone came. We went from being like an African country to having an average income per head of \$120,000 a year. And we're supposed to complain?" (Hari) It is the balance between the modern and the local that has presented a development model for the region and has been a crucial element in the formation of Dubai's as a different type of global city, where the barriers between what is local or foreign still divide a 'global' society.

Sources of evolving identity

The structural local barriers to a common local identity come from opposite forces in Dubai. While globalization brings local openness and greater cultural diversity, the traditional and conservative familial values brings a 'reactive identity' that attempts to sharpen the differences between Emiratis and migrants. Dubai's hybrid identity originates from the constant interaction between both forces.

Globalization has exponentially increased the cultural diversity of Dubai up to 202 nationalities. However, it has brought a more important structural element to the Emirate, the free market economy. “New Dubai promises to provide everyone with a chance to participate in consumer well-being, to enact a consumer citizenship that reaffirms the free market ideal of egalitarianism of opportunities” (Kanna, “Dubai: The City as Corporation” 185). The implementation of an economy in which the state has as little intervention as possible, as shown with the tax-free system and the capitalist rewarding merit system, has changed the configuration of Dubai’s economy and society. Whether you are an immigrant or a local you are welcome to Dubai if you contribute positively to the Emirate’s economy. In fact, Sheik Rashid once said: “If a person lands in Dubai, he will take a taxi, buy a pack of cigarettes, have a meal, and we will all benefit” (Krane 72). People stimulate the economy whatever their consumer decisions are.

However, this system of merit raises tensions between locals, who harbor a sentiment of discrimination against foreigners. Out of the 300,000 jobs created in Dubai each year for the past decade, only 1 percent of those workers were for locals (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success” 206). Most of the jobs for the Emiratis reside on public departments where they find little competition against the immense comparative immigrant population. Contrary, this discrimination is not only based on origin but professional preparation where locals cannot compete against foreigners.

Locals find little incentive in obtaining greater professional training when public jobs are so well remunerated. The local youth are demotivated to obtain a higher learning education even though it is fully funded by the government for any locals studying at home or abroad (Ali 75). Kanna mentions that “only 20 percent of Dubai’s young adults are ‘worthwhile’ (with respect to productive work), and that 60 percent lack sufficient training or discipline for any private

sector work” (Kanna, “Dubai: The City as Corporation” 146). However, it is the rise of Dubai as a globalized city and its push for creating centers of higher academic learning encouraging locals to take advantage of these opportunities and slowly form part of Dubai’s flexible citizen community. Not only are 60 percent of the foreign institutions or programs in the Middle East located in the UAE such as the NYU campus of Abu Dhabi, but they are also mostly attended by locals, and particularly women whose cultural backgrounds have prevented them from attending academic institutions abroad as their male counterparts (Miller-Idriss and Hanauer 186). The generations to come will become more aware of the importance of their formation in order to compete with both foreigners, and the rest of their compatriots job-seekers.

The other way globalization has brought tensions in between the local and the expatriate communities in Dubai has been through its physical change. The built environment of the city of the past decade has targeted tourists and Western expatriates rather than the local population. Not only have hotels and malls replaced what were previously residential areas, but these are also now mostly gated communities with a low density of local community. “These spaces are clearly drawn from a mail –order catalogue version of modern, secular, Western private space” in which many locals do not feel they belong to (Kanna, “Dubai: The City as Corporation” 187). As it was mentioned before, local families are moving to suburbs leaving the areas in the creek and the palms, which are considered ‘foreign land’ in their own city. The possibilities for the interaction of different social groups are limited, and so is the formation of a unique Dubai identity when the separation keeps increasing. Again, hybridity does not mean a ‘melting-pot’ society in the Gulf emirate. They are closer culturally but spatially further apart. This reduces the social and cultural contact between locals and foreigners. The newly built environment, the decision of many locals to physically separate themselves from foreigners, and the alienation of

the expatriates in Dubai due to the visa system, leaves few opportunities for interaction and thus the formation of a common culture.

Globalization has brought a divisive urbanism by the assimilation of a society of consumerism rather than cultural barriers. There are two main social classes in Dubai: the upper-middle class and the poor. Western expatriates holding corporate jobs, locals and some middle-class Arab expatriates who are part of either the public or private sector are within the first group, while construction workers from Southeast Asia mostly form the second group. It is the inability of the poorer population, who cannot be included in the society of consumerism around which Dubai's Brand revolves, that has triggered a clear physical separation. These workers whose average salary may not reach the 200 dollars per month cannot be part of the image that the rest of the world has of Dubai. Thus, the best way to avoid the intermixing of both classes is through separating the residential spaces of both. The global-local economic nexus and the cultural bond have the somewhat unexpected consequence of creating and reinforcing local spatial segregation in a global or globalizing city.

The 'New Dubai' and some suburban areas belong to the wealthier strata of the population since Southeast Asian workers cannot afford the high rent, having a car to move in and out of the city, or the leisure activities such as shopping or sailing. In contrast, the construction workers who have built the luxurious apartments with their own hands (and many have even died doing so), live separated on camps outside the city and with scarce and costly transportation services into it. The largest of these camps is called Sonapur and hosts around 200,000 people (Ali 91). As everything in Dubai, it is the largest in terms of size in the world, although it is not the newest or most proper. Dubai has been called the second greatest Indian City; yet, most of the people who visit the emirate would disagree with that because they are

invisible to both Dubai's inhabitants and the rest of the world. Nowadays, Southeast Asian's underprivileged living and working conditions have become a well-known issue due to the active movement of global human rights organizations. Thus, there are few chances for Dubai's identity to unify into one diverse identity as long as these physical barriers persist. However, it is questionable that tourists and other wealthy expatriate would be interested in coming to Dubai if they would disappear.

It is impossible to talk about a differentiated identity in Dubai without mentioning the rise on conservatism in the local population as the share of foreign community rose to such decompensated levels in the total population of Dubai. Although we have already talked about the cultural implications of this sentiment, it is crucial to mention the legal and structural restrictions in Dubai preventing the fusion of identities into one, that of Dubai. "It has been the priority of the ruling family to preserve and foster this small 'rentier elite', which it has achieved in part by offering benefits to those who keep their families 'pure' from foreign blood, and in some cases by penalizing those that flout these norms" (Davidson, "Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success" 152). Legal barriers and restrictions are present across all aspects of national, economic, and social life. "For Emiratis, this is a Santa Claus state, handing out goodies while it makes its money elsewhere: through renting out land to foreigners, soft taxes on them like business and airport charges, and the remaining dribble of oil" (Hari). Dubai has protected them during the globalization of its urban and economic structure.

The laws are gradually being changed to make it even more difficult to take advantage of an Emirati. The state works as a life saver for many locals, as long as they remain 'true locals'. While the marital union with an expatriate means the immediate removal of all state benefits from citizenship to free education or health care, in the labor market, the state forces companies

to have quotas of local citizens among their employers. Annual ‘Emiratisation’ rates of 2, 4 and 5 percent were imposed in trade-related companies, banks and insurance companies respectively (Davidson, “Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success” 207). This policy gives hopes for a greater intermixing at work since it does not take place in state offices, in public or private life. On the other hand, expatriates are either losing jobs or seeing other mates losing them to locals who might be less qualified for the position, which is raising even further discontent among workers. Yet, it creates a space for social interaction between locals and expatriates who hardly intermix, a step forward towards breaking the limits of a hybrid identity and transitioning into a truly cosmopolitan Dubayyan community.

Nonetheless, due to the Property Law by which foreigners cannot own any land or company by more than 50 percent, expatriate businessmen are victims of an abusive rentier system. Expatriates need an Emirati partner with more than 51 percent ownership in order to both set up a company outside the free zones and issue labor permits. “The Emirati partner does no work nor puts up any capital, but still receives ample yearly compensations. If the company goes bankrupt, the creditors will have precedence to recuperate costs, and the local owner is absolved of liability” (Ali 85). This system preserves both local status and access to market from foreign competition, but still brings divisive aspects with it. Expatriates see their revenues going to an “invisible” Emirati partner, an unfair law when they are the ones bringing business to the Emirate.

In addition, the restrictions on citizenship are among these divisive regulations in the pursuit for a common unique identity. The impossibility for an immigrant to obtain citizenship, and the *kafala system* by which visas are issued in a 3 year long basis and tied to a job offer and an employer, aggravates these differences among people in Dubai. This severe restriction already

poses a question about to whom Dubai's identity belongs. We could argue that expatriates should not influence Dubai's identity even if they are the great majority of the population since they will never be "from Dubai", and they will eventually leave. Their home resides somewhere else in the world. On the contrary, this would reject Dubai's effort towards the formation of a global city and society. This issue in fact is the one that has originated the greatest challenges to that intermixing and identity blending, since people do not feel Dubayyans, they do not put effort into creating of it their home, their culture, their society and thus, their identity. Because there is no attachment to Dubai, there is a lack of initiative to put down roots and contribute towards the formation of a common global identity.

It is relevant to point out that the government has started taking steps to reduce the gap between local and foreign communities, and thus between the local identity and the global city. In August 2009, visa sponsorship was provided by the government directly and not through particular companies, and residency permits could be granted to long-term expatriates (Ali 188). This step has been considered as not only a positive movement towards the abolition of the *kafala system*, and the new-type of 'slavery' scheme it imposes to construction workers in particular, but also a gratitude gesture towards those expatriates who have been a crucial element in the formation of Dubai as a global city. Today, there is a clear separation between the local and global elements of Dubai's hybrid identity. In fact, many expatriates interviewed by Hari for his article "The Dark Side of Dubai" affirmed that they had never spoken to an Emirati during the years they have been living there (Hari). Yet, policies like the mentioned above will slowly soften those differences and start forming a global Dubayyan identity, which would have caught up to the rapid physical change of the city. A global city can be formed in years as Dubai did, but a global identity can only be formed by the inviting conditions and the willingness of their

people, their intermixing and the assimilation of the changes through generations. Dubai will get to have both a global city and identity in the future.

V. CONCLUSION

Dubai's growth in the past 15 years is unprecedented in a state of such small size. The nature of the development project run by Sheikh Mohammad with a combination of economic diversification, legal reform, massive immigration and a strong emphasis in urban transformation has made Dubai a unique model of growth in the developing countries. It was thought that Dubai will fail as a project since "the Gulf States did not have the ingredients for the Asian recipe: state-of-the-art infrastructure, a skilled populace, internationally competitive wages and an efficient and far-sighted bureaucracy" (Diwan and Mohamedi 10). Although they needed to build a platform for growth from scratch and there were little expectations about the future of the federation after its independence in 1971, they were able to surprise the world with their results (Rizvi 664). The formula combining a family tribal state and their entrepreneurial instincts to rule the country have allowed for greater distinctiveness in all areas in which the government was involved. The Al-Maktoum family devoted its energy to put Dubai on the world map in the past decades. 'Brand Dubai' was extremely successful in doing so through the construction of unique landmarks in the entire world. The Burj Al-Arab or the Khalifa Tower became logos of the new corporation (state) rising in the Gulf, Dubai. There is hardly anyone who cannot recognize these buildings in the world nowadays.

Dubai has ripped off the benefits of becoming a sensational city. For the past years, people have been amazed by Dubai, and wanted to visit or work there. Dubai offered a different experience from any other city in the world. It was a Disneyland for adults, but an improved version of Las Vegas, which merely targets tourism. Dubai offered a perfect combination of high-paying jobs, no taxes, sun, beaches and parties in a unique urban environment. Dubai has been considered as one of the fastest growing cities in the world in the past decade; it just was

the right place to be. This exceptional arrangement, made possible by the legal and economic reforms undertaken by the government, created a ‘Dubai effect’, particularly in the Middle East. “People in the region who visit Dubai return home wondering why their governments can’t issue passports in a day or provide clean mosques and schools, better airports, airlines, and roads, and above all a better government” (Nasr 43). People saw it as the land of freedom and opportunities in the Middle East, a model to admire and follow. However, most of these people did not see the essential problems of Dubai, a global city that has emerged from a small town in only twenty years.

Dubai had failed in one of the most important aspects people look for in the place they live in: to be able to call it their home. More than 80 percent of the population cannot do so in Dubai. The kafala system, with its 3 year limit visa, has undermined the transformation of Dubai into a socially global city as well. It is impossible to describe a city as global when its population is transient. Society is diverse in Dubai, but it could stop being so when unemployment hits the city since no job means no visa, and thus, deportation. Immigrants do not have an incentive to make an impact and communicate with the local community. Dubai might be the place they live in, but their countries remain their home. There has been a lag in the formation of a global identity because immigrants would never be able to become Dubayyans.

The term hybrid has been used to describe Dubai’s identity because it is diverse in the surface but divided in its core. The cultural differences and the dramatic increase of the immigrant community have raised many tensions among the local community in particular. There is an overall rejection towards the immigrant community with who they share little cultural or religious ties in the most part. One of the forms in which rejection is expressed is

through racism. Neva Nora in her article “Producing Diasporas and Globalization: Indian Middle-Class Migrants in Dubai” argues that:

“Racism, as it was attributed to the failure of globalization in Dubai, was a catalyst for even further domaining the economy as distinct from culture and society. Identity and social relations got in the way of Dubai’s free market and therefore impeded upon market fundamentalism, but not at the cost of a belief in the market as the driving force in the contemporary world” (Vora 395).

The solution to the identity crisis, or at least the lessening of the social tensions, might come with what can be considered the disaster of globalization in Dubai, the crisis of 2008.

Many critics predicted that Dubai’s bubble would eventually burst. And the day was November 25th of 2008 with the announcement that Dubai World, the state’s main investment company, would delay its debt payments by six months. Five days later, Dubai government refused to guarantee the payment of this debt (Henderson 1). Relevant, but hidden, problems had been surrounding Dubai for a decade. Due to the rapid construction of new residential buildings in the city, there was a reluctance to accept properties that were a few years old preventing the formation of a re-sale real estate market, particularly for luxury homes (Krane 189). This estimation started to become true. By 2008, not only did real estate prices fall by 30 percent, but also construction projects were considerably decreasing or being cancelled leaving many of the Southeast Asian workers with the only option of returning to their home countries (Henderson 1). For instance, the Hotel Atlantis, which was inaugurated right before the crisis as one of the greatest later projects, is now empty, almost abandoned. “Its Grand Lobby is a monumental dome covered in glitterballs, held up by eight monumental concrete palm trees. Standing in the

middle, there is a giant shining glass structure that looks like the intestines of every guest who has ever stayed at the Atlantis. It is unexpectedly raining; water is leaking from the roof, and tiles are falling off” (Hari). Dubai’s image of success and luxury is in decay together with its urban revolution.

The decreasing economic activity, the raising inflation, the 75 percent male population of Dubai, and the few political rights could not hold expatriates for long either, who remain essential for the economic prosperity of Dubai (Nasr 41). Dubai’s heavy reliance on poor unskilled labor and professional Western expatriates to foster its growth has left a local unskilled and unprepared labor force to take over this task, to the contrary of developing countries in Asia. The formula of construction and tourism as the main pillars of the economy, the lack of higher education in the local youth, and expatriates loyalty with the heavy restrictions on visa and citizenship have not set strong bases for sustainable growth. Nonetheless, the increase in unemployment and the exit of an important percentage of immigrants from Dubai would ease the unbalanced society in terms of local and foreign population. Locals may feel less threatened, accepting more either legally or socially the remaining immigrant communities. Because they may need to take the jobs expatriates had to leave, they are also incentivized to increase their skills and education to match Dubai’s requirements. This economic crisis will be a key to the hybrid identity in becoming global and catching up with the tremendous advancement of Dubai’s urban transformation.

However, the expectative of the future are not too optimistic about the easy recovery of Dubai. One of the central concerns is the strong connection Dubai holds with Iran, a historic crucial trading partner. This relationship may not only risk Dubai’s chances of being financially backed by Abu Dhabi, a loyal ally with the United States, but also trigger terrorist activities if the

latter takes place. Iran's trade reached \$14 billion in 2008 (Davidson, "Foreclosure of a Dream" 13). Dubai has tremendously benefited from the terrorism discourse and discontent between the West, and Iran and Pakistan since trade has been deviated to Dubai directly. However, as Seyyed Nasr mentions in his book *Forces of Fortune* "actual war or terror attacks will undermine the peace and security necessary for economic growth. Tourism and finance do not thrive amid war" (Nasr 42). Dubai's main challenge is to remain the meeting place of global and local trade; role that has been challenged after Abu Dhabi accepted to bail out its economy. By the end of February 2009, Dubai's stock exchange had to refinance \$3.8 billion. The government was on the verge of declaring bankruptcy when it accepted a \$10 billion five-year bond repurchase with a 4 percent interest by the UAE Central Bank (Davidson, "Foreclosure of a Dream" 13). Now, while Dubai's trade links with Iran are balanced on a knife edge, Abu Dhabi has almost free way to dictate the rules in the UAE and maybe achieve its dream of centralization of the country on its state, and Dubai will take a secondary place in the picture of the UAE.

Since 2009, Dubai has remained in the shadow, in a standby point. Kanna even defined it as "a smoldering ruin of casino capitalism" (Kanna, "Dubai: The City as Corporation" 76). The delayed or cancelled projects, the empty buildings, apartments and hotels in the city give a very different image from the Dubai of the billboards 5 years ago. Speake points out the importance of a city to maintain its competitiveness through the marketing of 'authentic' locations that people may consider as 'sensational' (Speake 11). However, that strategy has become obsolete as of right now. The best solution for Dubai should be to focus on what they excluded in its "magnificent" Dubai Brand model, its citizens. Promoting social engagement and improvement on infrastructure could help Dubai to not only manage the exponential demographic growth of the last decades, but also generate economic growth (Diwan and Mohamedi 11). In order to be

global, Dubai needs to focus on the local and strengthen the foundation of its society which will smoothen periods of boom and bust.

Dubai's model of growth has not been as successful as its rulers have portrayed it to be. Yet, the world has learnt much from it. The race for becoming a global city has been 'cancelled' for right now. Yet, it is giving its society time to assimilate to the economic, legal, social and urban changes of the past two decades. Asian countries have experienced a similar state-led growth model, yet none of them has gone through a crash as Dubai has recently. Time will determine whether Dubai goes through a renaissance in stabilizing its status as a global city with a society accompanying what the term global truly entails.

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VII. APPENDIX

Appendix A: Old Dubai (Dubai Tourism)



Appendix B: New Dubai (Dubai Tourism)



Appendix C: Burj Al-Arab (Dubai Tourism)



Appendix D: Palm Jumeirah (Brian McMorrow Collection)



Appendix E: The World Island (Rediff Business)



Appendix F: Burj Khalifa (Burj Dubai Skyscraper)





Appendix G: Mall of the Emirates (Mall of the Emirates)

