RAPID MODERNITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE:
THE IMPACT ON THE UAE

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Figure 1: "Abra" boat taxis waiting to cross the Dubai Creek, an area seen as the nucleus for Dubai's turn into modernisation taken in Feb 2022, by author.

Having been born in Dubai, and living there for 19 years, the UAE is a huge part of my identity. My time there is one I will treasure for the rest of my life, I have great memories of it. I wrote this thesis on the back of returning to Dubai for the first time since my family has left, and for the first time where it was possible to travel there because of the corona pandemic. Being back in my home made me somewhat emotional, it awoke memories of my childhood, and left me in awe of what I was lucky enough to have experienced being there. When still living there I took many things for granted, but going back I came to realise things which I never had before. So much has changed even in the two years I wasn't there, it is the result of people putting their life and soul into the city, often sacrifizing a lot to be there, these people deserve to be rewarded with a city that gives back to them, a city which embraces all, a city with spirit and identity.

The city has gone through so many changes in my time there, we always look back nostalgically at the 'old Dubai', I left my heart there, as these are the times which shaped my family and myself, as well as all of my friends, most of which have moved to far reaches around the world. However, my nostalgic feeling of the past cannot come close to that of the Emirati people, who have experienced a seemingly transforming country, with a different way of life through the relatively short existence of the nation. Their resilience when faced with a relative social adversity which is rarely mentioned is commendable, and should shape the future of development in the UAE. Development which should look back at the history of the country and region to inform the future.

Abstract

Research Question: *What are the social implications of the rapid onset of modernity on the UAE, since its unification? And how can this investigation be supplemented by autoethnographic research?*

This thesis focuses on the effects of the rapid modernisation of the UAE. And how this impacts the resident as well as local society. This modernisation is characterised by high foreign influence from largely the West, the Arab world, and the Indian subcontinent. The thesis uses post-colonial thought to analyse the intersection of cultures in the UAE, and how this conglomeration of nationalities is able to live together. Cohesive life between nationalities is largely influenced by policy, societal factors, and architecture. The young history of architecture of both housing and public spaces is analysed and used as a tool to discern conclusions on societal impact.

In addition to the secondary impact, an autoethnographic account based on memory and photograph's is written by the author of the thesis, a former expatriate migrant born and raised in Dubai. Through the intersection between autoethnography and secondary research, principles for further development are endorsed in the conclusions of the text. The use of autoethnography aims to provide a more personal reading experience in which a connection between reader and writer is fostered.

While providing additional information on the topic of the thesis, the method of autoethnography is reviewed, imparting a parallel research to that of the primary topic of the research.

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1. Introduction

Since its formation in 1971, the UAE has undergone rapid modernization. This modernization is dichotomous to changes within the social sphere. Changes in the social sphere are representative of a phenomenon seen throughout the Gulf countries. Modernization is coupled with a huge influx of immigration into the country, resulting in a unique architectural landscape, characterized by a local- foreign binary.

Due to a lack of media transparency, and a censorship of possibly negatively connotated criticism; although there is sufficient exploration into the repercussions of rapid growth on architecture in the region; there is a lack of critical literature outlining social repercussions. Hence, a divulgence into Architecture in the UAE and its ramifications on society is warranted. The research of these topics is supplemented by autoethnographic accounts, attempting to provide context in a vacuum of transparent information. Autoethnography is deemed a suitable choice given its profound ability to deconstruct the traditional boundaries between the researcher and the researched (Prasad, 2019).

The autoethnographic accounts are written in the format of personal stories of the author, from childhood memories of life in the UAE, having grown up there. These childhood memories are written on experiences with housing, and with the public sphere, indicating the personal nature of the connection between people and the surrounding built environment.

This paper aims to bring together multiple scales and time periods in the young history of the UAE to provide a narrative for the development of the country, and the undeniable societal repercussions of this development on the countries citizens as well as residents. A wealth of resources are used, secondary and primary, to string together an often shied away from subject matter. The resources used consist of books, research papers, news articles, videos and images.

With the sourced information, supplemented by personal experience, the development and nation building of the UAE will be reflected upon. Where a large focus will be placed on the approach of the UAE when faced with globalization, and the perceived Western ideals. A question which will repeatedly looked into is the mediation of this increased influence within the social sphere, and how the shunning of this increased influence can be navigated in a country which must host a large number of foreign expatriates to fuel its development.

1.1 Literature Review and Methodology

A wide range of literature and sources are used to inform on intersectional topics of modernity, architecture, globalisation and the socio-political climate of the UAE. The sources range from journal articles and book's, to videos sourced from the internet. Furthermore, to inform on the topic of autoethnography, additional sources are used. To provide a visual context to the autoethnographic accounts, childhood images are used, all of which are taken by parents.

The thesis aims to combine both autoethnography and secondary research in a coherant manner, where both methods intersect to produce a coherant narrative throughout. The paper begins by introducing the subject matter, while providing context for both researcher, and the area of interest (UAE). Then, the method of autoethnography, as well the effect of it on research is discussed. Followed by chapters on social, architectural and urban constructs on the context of the UAE is written about. Finally, both the research question, and the method of autoethnography is concluded.

1.2 Thesis Structure

Contextualizing of the self - An explanation of the self to lead into an autoethnographic account. This explanation highlights relations to research topic, integral to provide perspective on outcome of the autoethnographic research.

Contextualization of the UAE - A short introduction to the UAE, contextualizing the country and region in relation to the research

Defining Autoethnography in Frame of the Research Conducted - Defining autoethnography as a form of social inquiry, in relation to the context of the region and the research topic itself

The Evolution of Housing in the UAE - This section looks into the evolution of housing in the UAE, and how housing was seen as the harbinger of modernity

The Evolution of the Public Realm in the UAE - Beyond the four walls of the house, the public realm has massively changed in the UAE since its unification. This section aims to investigate the consequences of this.

2. Context

2.1 Contextualizing the Self

Throughout this report, as is typically done on autoethnographic writing, all autoethnographic accounts will be written in first person, this helps to facilitate more of a connection between researcher and reader. Hence, to prelude the research, contextualization of the self will be phrased in first person too.

Given the content, and the region-specific scope of the chapter, it is important to provide a small background on who I am. I was born in Dubai, UAE in 1999, to parents from Germany who had moved there a couple months before my birth. At the time of moving to the UAE my parents knew little to nothing about the country, as at that point it was going through the starting phases of its rapid modernization. Characteristic of this prelude to mass urbanization, the house I first lived in was on a dirt road in an area named Jebel Ali, which at the time was very far from the city, the surrounding area was engulfed by the desert, and big plains of sand and nothingness. Now, where the house used to stand, you would find yourself bordering the Dubai Marina, a neighborhood boasting countless skyscrapers, on the edge of an 8-lane highway.

Growing up I would spend most of my days in an international environment, moving houses many times, and living in a variety of neighborhoods around the city, though my parents always found it very important to live in the proximity of local people, away from expatriate enclaves, this is something I am grateful for, as I always felt relatively connected to the culture. As I was living in areas which were often largely inhabited by Emiratis, I also lived in houses of the same typology in which locals around me were living. Although, being of German origin, we would have used the spaces in the house differently, due to different cultural practices, this I will come to explain later. Furthermore, I attended British-International schools in Dubai, this time caused me to encounter people who came to the UAE for a variety of reasons, and therefore with a variety of perspectives. I was attending schools which longer term residents were primarily attending, pupils in school with me were often born in the UAE, as I was. However, I also came across a large number of

Figure 2: View of Jebel Ali in 1979, by Anita van der Krol

people who stayed there for a short period of time, as their parents will have been working there for a couple years, before leaving. This again is something which I will address in the coming chapters.

Being from a German citizen, and coming from a German family, I have this within my identity. However, having never lived there I am not able to fully identify myself with the culture, the UAE is the backdrop in which I grew up in, and thus I affiliate to the country greatly, it is what fuels my identity. Yet, I see myself often having an identity crisis, where I am unable to say where I am truly from, as I was always just a foreigner, and the transience of the social framework of the UAE allows one to be like this. Yet being born there I was not transient, it was my basis, my home.

Social segregation as a result of government zoning policy, as well as personal choice in order to conserve the Emirati identity led to many people I know living in the UAE, and never getting to know a single Emirati. Luckily enough myself and my family were long term residents of the UAE, and in the earlier days living there came across Emirati's, building friendships that last till now. Consequently, one could say I am atypical for most migrant expatriates.

When I moved to Dubai, the country was already in a 'modern' state, yet the development I experienced is massive, although to me it always felt like Dubai, the different stages of development it went through made it feel like I was moving city, I found this to be very exciting.

As with most expatriate migrant children, I ended up moving abroad at the end of my High School studies. At the point of writing this I am based in the Netherlands, studying my Master of Architecture at the Technical University of Delft. An important phrase which has stuck with me is the fact that we experience one place through the latent memories of another. Moving away from the UAE has allowed me to reflect upon my life there, comparing it to my life here, something which you don't often come to do if you have only experienced life in a single place. This different perspective has allowed me to be critical of the surroundings of my upbringing, seeing the positives and the negatives. Furthermore, studying architecture has allowed me to be confronted with the concern for social topics, as well as a relative knowledge of the built environment, and the power it has on influencing our everyday life.

The combination of personal stories, and the research conducted in this report is something which allows me to further investigate the social framework in which I find myself, therefore, this report can act as a good tool for the evaluation of my surroundings, and the socio-historical context.

2.2 Contextualizing the UAE

Figure 3: Arab city planner Dr Abdulrahman Makhlouf discussing a master plan for Abu Dhabi with the UAE's founding father, Sheikh Zayed (The National, 1974)

Since its unification in 1971, the political changes with which the 1970's opened for the seven states of the United Arab Emirates, are to be seen against the background of economic and social changes (Heard-Bey, 2017). The discovery of oil in the Gulf has led to the region undergoing rapid change, socially and infrastructurally, initially it is due to oil that throughout the whole region economic, social, and political patterns have been rapidly superimposed on traditional patterns (Heard-Bey, 2017). Resulting economic gain, brought to the country by foreign investment, primarily from the West has led to an idealization of Western social constructs. Due to a longing for a 'modern' Western way of life, echoed in government building policy, and ambitions of the population, the UAE urbanity faces a deep societal and cultural identity crisis (Rashid, Ara, & Abdalla, 2022).

This identity crisis is complimented by a love-hate relationship with manifestations of Western culture, the local population, and government is inclined to take from Western culture what appears to be 'useful or desirable'. This frame of mind often draws local people in conflict with Arab immigrants amid the population (Heard-Bey, 2017). External influences are not limited to those of the West. Prior to the discovery of oil, external cultural influence came primarily from India, and from Arabs of the fertile crescent, apart from influencing the culture of the UAE, engineers from these countries characterized the Architecture of the UAE and the Gulf. (Heard-Bey, 2017).

The desire of the UAE to 'reproduce the past', has been a recurring pattern in the Arab world, and spurs a debate on the appropriateness of such an approach. This is due to the fact that rather than directly attempting to recreate the young architectural history of the Gulf, the Gulf countries often look beyond, towards the greater Arab world for cultural inspiration. One can compare the recent and current state of the Gulf countries architecturally and culturally to the duality in which Arab countries found themselves at the end of colonial rule. This period

is well documented in Arabic literature of the time (late 19th, early 20th century). Arab writers conceived of themselves, and their societies as trapped between, on the one hand, the residual cultural formations represented by the great Arabic classical heritage, and on the other hand, the appeals of modernity and modernization that European institutions and educations seemed to offer them (Makdisi, 1995). A question often posed at the turn of the 19th century in the Arab world, and in the post oil period of the Gulf, and thus the UAE is "how can you be Arab and modern at the same time?" (Kraidy, 2018) As people did not desire the duality in which they found themselves, there was either the option to revive the indigenous, a standpoint advocated by traditionalists, or there was a movement named 'Nahda'. The 'Nahda' movement insisted that the only way out of a double bind is to move forward in the direction of progress, development, modernization and ultimately the West (Makdisi, 1995). Although the term 'Nahda' is not applied to the current state of the Gulf, the similarity in cultural affairs leads to a viable comparison in which the Gulf has found, and still finds itself in a period of 'Nahda'.

Figure 4: View from the courtyard of the Qasr al Hosn in Abu Dhabi. In the background the World Trade Centre by Norman Foster. A typical example of the duality of tradition and Western Influence (Bradley, 2019)

The Nahda in which the UAE and the Gulf finds itself in differs from the clash of interests which was occurring in the rest of the Middle East throughout the 20th Century. In the UAE, migrant expatriates constitute to approximately 87% of the population (Al-Qassimi & Fabbri, 2022). This huge amount of foreign influx is de facto multiculturalism, where much of the social structure persists and directs the changes and serves to filter what is acceptable. This is de facto indigenous conservatism with which to face the continually incoming forces of globalization (Fox, Sabah, & Al Mutawa, 2006). The duality in which the UAE and the gulf finds itself is not only fueled by the idealization of Western constructs, but also with the huge amount of foreign people in the country, undoubtably causing a strain on cultural integrity.

As part of the development of the UAE, a lifestyle of leisure on the exotic Arabian Gulf was marketed, to attract tourism and retailing. Traditional Arabian symbols, combined with contemporary design created architectural manifestations of globalization. The synthesis of traditional and ultramodern is emblematic of Gulf society itself as a marriage of the latest technological innovation with a timeless social structure (Fox, Sabah, & Al Mutawa, 2006). This marriage, or lack thereof is a topic which will be discussed throughout this paper, whether architectural or societal. The way in which this duality is handled, and the way the UAE and the Gulf will approach further development will shape both the existing and the future of the country, having all-important implications on society. The UAE will have to consider its young history, as well as that of the greater Arab – Middle Eastern surrounding to inform itself on how to approach the future sensitively.

3. Defining Autoethnography in the Frame of the Research Conducted

The Gulf countries have always shared a culture rich in the spoken word, poetry, and storytelling rituals (Al-Qassimi & Fabbri, 2022), yet the spoken word is often problematic when trying to integrate within an academic piece of writing. Furthermore, traditionally formatting the spoken word to meet the boundaries of academic text often results in a partition between researcher, researched, and the reader. Hence, a method of inquiry which satisfies a need for a more personal account is longed for in this paper. Autoethnography is a qualitative form of research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore anecdotal and personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings (Ellis, 2004). A good example of autoethnography being used as a tool to understand societal meanings, written by Prasad, is the book "Autoethnography and Organization Research: Reflections from Fieldwork in Palestine". Where Prasad uses psychoanalytic and postcolonial thought to conduct research in the occupied Palestinian territories, and how first hand experiences of the neo colonial militarized border crossing between Jerusalem and Ramallah came to alter the researchers conceptions of self and other (Prasad, 2019). The realization of other through the self, while realizing the sensitivity of the researched topic is an essential quality of the autoethnography as a research method. The Autoethnographic method of inquiry suits the rich cultural context in the spoken word. Furthermore, the placing of the autoethnographic researcher in relation to the research provides a viable insight into the subject matter.

When approaching topics relating to the practice of ethnography, one must take a post-colonial standpoint to avoid cultural abstraction. One must understand that it is not possible to access the totality of relations of a society, or the essential workings of a culture in one place ((Jean Comaroff, 2003). Furthermore, through the use of ethnography, one must understand the critique of its own rhetoric, integrating this in the form of reflection within its writing. This is important in the context of this paper, where autoethnography must only serve as an understanding of the other through the self, not through appropriation of the other through the self.

The method of Autoethnography responds to the possible appropriation brought by ethnography. When writing autoethnography, one explores the self, and through exploring the self, one opens themselves up for criticism on the way they've lived. This opens an array of opportunities within this paper to draw relative conclusions between findings through the self, and secondary findings. Through using autoethnographic stories, one doesn't attempt to view the world from the standpoint of another, as a researcher forms part of the represented, and hence doesn't delve into the wrong. Autoethnographic research in this paper purely aims to provide a certain perspective on the subject matter. This perspective can then be reflected upon, but the method of gaining that perspective does not bear appropriative faults. The method first looks outward on social and cultural aspects of personal experience, then looks inward, exposing a vulnerable self, that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations (Ellis, 2004).

While autoethnography carries a range of benefits, its legitimacy as a path to social inquiry is routinely questioned. Critics of autoethnography have viewed the method the method as lacking rigor, and being too artful, and have accused those who adopt it of engaging in self-indulgence

and "intellectual masturbation" (Prasad, 2019). However, notwithstanding the extant critiques about the legitimacy of the method or the practical quandaries that may arise in its execution, autoethnography has been lauded for its ethical intent (Lapadat, 2017). As part of this paper, these considerations are taken into account, and are evaluated through the enquiry itself. Furthermore, autoethnographic research is complimented by secondary research to account for valuable comparisons, and thus evaluations on the method.

Autoethnography can be divided into a variety of categories. This research paper focuses on the use of reflexive/narrative autoethnography. Essentially, reflexive autoethnography involves an awareness of reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their settings and informants. It entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one's actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others (Anderson, 2006). In reflexive autoethnography, the researcher is a highly visible social actor within written text and is hence considered as vital data for the world being observed.

However, an aspect which differs in this paper in comparison to more common forms of reflexive autoethnography is the fact that rather than being conducted in the form of field research, the writings are based on previous experience. This is due to the fact that rather than the researcher being immersed in new environment for the sole purpose of conducting ethnographic research, autoethnography as a writing tool is used to reflect upon a circumstance of living, being immersed in a rapidly influenced and changing social sphere, as is the case in the Gulf.

4. The Evolution of Housing in the UAE

4.1 The Emirati Sha'abi House

The following section looks at the developments of housing in the UAE, which was influenced greatly with the coming of modernity. Spatial form is a means through which people articulate social relations (El-Aswad, 2016) The section will be supplemented by an autoethnographic account.

Following the oil boom in the late 1960's and the unification of the Emirates in the 70's, led by the ruler at the time, Sheikh Zayed, the UAE launched a national housing program, often referred to as the 'Zayed Housing Program', or 'Shabiyaat'. The national housing concept and welfare policies, allocate public housing free of charge in an effort to build up the nation and to lift up the number of citizens, furthermore, aiming to attract Bedouins from the desert (Alawadi & Benkraouda, The Debate over Neighborhood Density in Dubai: Between Theory and Practicality, 2019). Drawing Bedouins from the desert was seen as essential by Sheikh Zayed, as sedenterization was seen as a vital building stone on the path to modernity.
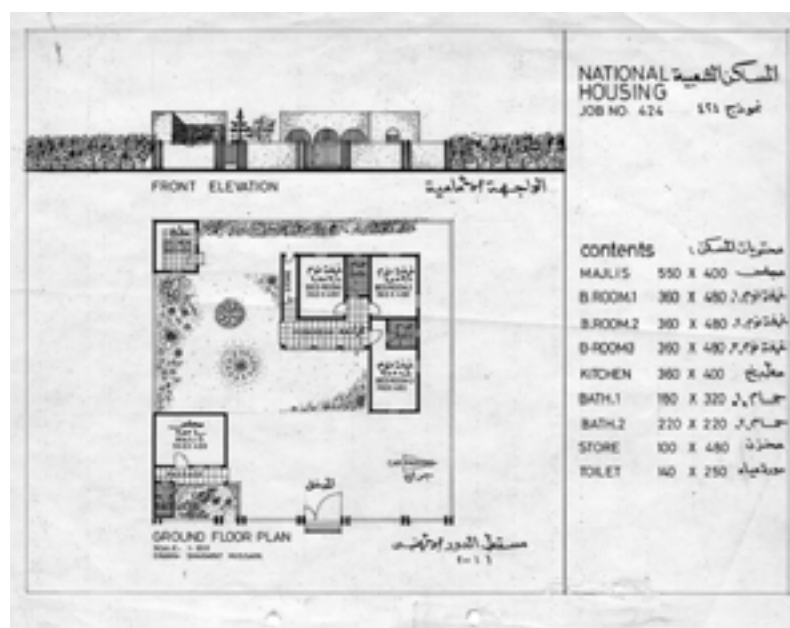
Figure 6: A 1974 Plan Illustrating one of the Sha'abi house Typologies. (Ministry of Public Works, 1974).

The 'Shabiyat' program consisted of houses named "*Sha'abi*", and the collection of these houses in a neighborhood were referred to as '*Sha'abiya*' (Elsheshtawy, 2019). The housing type is characterized by its modernist interpretation of Bedouin living habits. The houses largely compromised in minimal ornamentation, in cubist forms of concrete boxes (Elsheshtawy, 2019). This aesthetic thought came with the idea that a modern and progressive lifestyle was

expressed through this form of architecture. The idea that a modern and progressive lifestyle is complimented by a loss of ornamentation is the beginning of a series of misjudgments which lead to a spiraling loss of habitual dwelling forms. Thus, the Emirati Sha'abi house is the ideal vehicle with which to explore issues relating to cultural identity, and the loss of it through time, an impact of modernity in the Gulf. However, it must also be noted that such struggles are not unique to the context of the UAE and the Gulf.

Throughout the UAE, the coming of non-permanent housing was initially greeted with much anticipation, for many, their temporary living quarters were a source of embarrassment (Elsheshtawy, 2019), as they were small, especially given the increasing size of families. The UAE Sha'abi houses were large in size, and allowed for a large degree of adaptability, thus catering for possible modifications prescribed by the Government. Residents had the permission to make changes on the house, however, only if approved by the municipality in a highly structured process whose aim was to minimize any significant modification (Elsheshtawy, 2019). Due to the speed at which the housing program was implemented no in-depth study of cultural traditions was conducted, and thus some form of interpretation took place (Elsheshtawy, 2019). The lack of leeway in adaptability, and lack of cultural sensitivity signifies the harsh, determined manner in which the UAE's government strived for the implementation of modernity. Sha'abi houses are constructed with sustained Islamic principles defining the relations between Men and Women (El-Aswad, 2016), although, the lack of sensibility in these relations was often criticized by the local population inhabiting the houses. Complaints about cultural issues regarding the sharing of bathrooms between guests and female inhabitants were reiterated (Elsheshtawy, 2019), however, extensions proposed by the government served to quell complaints.

From the standpoint of nation building, the Sha'abi houses were considered to be progressive and promising, they were often compared to housing styles associated with modernist schemes of Western progressing nations (Rashid, Ara, & Abdalla, 2022). However, in a bid to create integrated settlements, in which local people could construct a community came across problems, the attempt of an integrative approach merely led to an increased disconnection in society. 89% of Sha'abi houses had their walls raised from 2 to 2,5 or 3 meters (Fox, Sabah, & Al Mutawa, 2006), hence disconnecting families from one another. This accentuated disparity, and isolated sense of safety within the four walls of a family's home lead to streets being dominated by foreign presence, hence, there is a gap between lived domestic space, and a space that overwhelms the city in a form of foreign nomadism that overwhelms the city, stretched out by jet to the worlds four corners (Fox, Sabah, & Al Mutawa, 2006).

4.2 Where I lived

Throughout my 19 years in Dubai I lived in five different homes, with all of them being in totally different neighborhoods, in different parts of the city. Not only were the houses in different neighborhoods, they were also typologically different, with all but my last house most likely built to house expatriate migrants. Initially, I was moving from house to house as the location of my parent's job changed, where the first house I lived in was built far outside the city, neighboring the well-known Jebel Ali Village. Jebel Ali Village was built in the 1970's to house people working on the construction of Jebel Ali, an economic centre and port. The village is one of Dubai's oldest residential communities and could remind one of the British garden city developments, nowadays, although after renovation, this area is known to have a strong community feeling, I don't remember anything of the life I lived there as I was too young, but my parents always speak of their fond memories there.

The two houses I remember the best are the last two I lived in. When reminiscing about memories of Dubai, my family and I always earnestly remember the second to last house. The house was a bungalow, which somewhat mimicked the Emirati Sha'abi houses, having an exterior wall, with a smaller detached house consisting of a conglomeration of different units of the house. The house had a very private feeling, and was well shaded, as it was built approximately 40 years ago, climate considerations were of higher importance, at that time air condition units were not as powerful as they are now. What defined the house was the community spirit of the surrounding area, quality rarely found in Dubai, where the transient dispersed population doesn't prioritize fostering connections. The approximately 400 houses surrounded a small community center with sport facilities, and a pool, it was a great place to organize community events, such as birthday parties, it managed to bring the people of the area together. I remember playing with kids from all backgrounds, including local kids, which were often living in the surroundings. The houses had a certain informal feeling, where people were given plenty of options and garden space to expand parts of the house, as well as their outward appearance. Furthermore, a small front garden just outside the gate of the house allowed for a customization of what functions as a sort of public space. Grass patches were often used by workers working in the area to take a nap at their lunchtime. Another great aspect of the neighborhood was its connection to the rest of the city, where, one could walk to multiple restaurants, well known within the area, and again frequented by local people and foreigners alike. Although the houses of my neighborhood didn't house many local people, the directly surrounding areas did. Furthermore, unlike a lot of other housing developments in Dubai, it was not a gated community, what defined the community was the easily accessible community center. Such constructions are limited in Dubai due to the private sector controlled development.

Unfortunately that house, and all but one street of that community has been demolished. In order to make way for commercialized, higher density, characterless developments. Although not comparable to the Western context of gentrification, I see the increase of such renewal developments as a form of social gentrification, where longer term residents of Dubai are displaced, under which my family is included. The attrition of such neighborhoods fosters increased transience in Dubai, dismantling communities, which ultimately resulted in a lot of

the families of friends of mine moving out of Dubai.

The house I lived in for the last 5 years of my life in Dubai differs from the preliminary one. It was situated in a similar area, along the same road, yet the direct context of the neighborhood differed. My parents always saw the integration within local culture and surroundings as very important, a notion which may have also contributed towards my motivation on writing this paper. Houses in such areas are often constructed on plots of land which were sold off individually. The little to no laws on building style means that each house could be constructed in whatever form, hence resulting in an architectural circus. The houses often had large gardens, which one could see into, especially from neighboring houses, thus limiting privacy. In these gardens people often constructed makeshift Majlis', alluding to their cultural heritage.

The house I lived in was originally planned for an Emirati family. The layout was arranged to welcome guests. Almost the whole bottom floor functioned as an "entertainment space" with a large, interconnected living room, and a kitchen. All bedrooms were located around the more private top floor. In the back of the house, one could find a small service quarter, with a second kitchen, which in the case of a local family would have been used to cook. The kitchen in the front of the house would have rather served as a place to entertain guests. The layout of the house, was a contemporary evolution of the what the Sha'abi house provided. Where the double floor allowed for a grander outward expression, and a more efficient use of space in the densified city.

Figure 7: An image typical of my neighborhood, just around the corner from my former residence
(*Umm Al Sheif Neighborhood Guide, 2022*).

Figure 8: Wide roads, overlooking the Burj Al Arab (Key One Realty Group, 2022)

The center of activity of the neighborhood was the mosque, attached to the mosque were three small shops, a barber shop, a laundry, and a small kiosk. The laundry almost exclusively seemed to wash white and black clothing, as Emirati people wore their national clothing, the white Dishdasha for men, and the black Abaya for women. Furthermore, the barber shop was a common meeting place for local men, who held great importance for the upkeep of their facial hair, grooming the famous "Emirati Beard". The mosque was a space in which all people of the Muslim faith would come together, in a society where social status plays a big role, in the preordained ritual of praying, all were seen as equals. Every year we as a household would donate a hefty portion of biryani for Ramadan, a dish often shared communally and freely in mosques around Dubai.

Being part of the minority of foreign people in the local neighborhood did however not mean social cohesion. All my interactions with people around the neighborhood were undeniably very friendly, and I always felt welcomed. Yet neighborhood relations never progressed beyond a friendly smile. The fact that the only public place where the community came together was the mosque led me as a non-Muslim to be excluded. Apart from the mosque, empty plots of sand, and villas defined the landscape, all this was strung together by wide car intensive roads. The fact that people would move from place to place by car also reduced the possibility of social interaction.

Looking back at the two last houses I lived in, I believe that the first house can be deemed as a successful model upon which housing in Dubai or even the UAE should be constructed. The fact that the development was situated in a well connected manner around a focal node meant that although there is no total integration between local and foreign, or even between migrant expats. Given the context, the relative inclusion of people in the neighborhood created a positive living environment in which local people don't feel threatened, and foreigners don't live in culturally underexposed microcosmic colonies. However, the density and cost of living in such areas don't make it applicable to the whole of Dubai or the UAE.

4.3 Contemporary Emirati Villas – Looking at the Sha'abi housing Typology with Nostalgia

Figure 9: : An Emirati Sha'abi house bordering a modern villa in the Emirate of Al Ain (Johnson, 2016)

The Emirati Sha'abi house program was at the time seen as a radical instrument ushering in modernity, yet also acting as a catalyst for the loss of cultural practices of local people. However, with the progression of time, Sha'abi houses started to be seen in a nostalgic manner by local people looking back at 'old times', where the houses are seen as not only places of memory, but as visual descriptions of transformation (Goodfriend, 2016), hence, enforcing their heritage value. This opposes the complicated relationship with the notion of heritage exhibited in Gulf countries, where the regional definition of heritage tends to embrace what could be showcased as more authentic, or, in other words, perceived as local, traditional, Khaleeji, Islamic, and most commonly – non-western derivative (Al-Qassimi & Fabbri, 2022).

The urban fabric produced in the Gulf during the modernization era lost its original meaning but acquired today the potential to narrate the social changes, economic growth, East–West dynamics typical of the region, and citizens' memories of a recent past (Al-Qassimi & Fabbri, 2022). This newfound meaning of the once much contested Sha'abiya housing program is reinforced by the exponential growth of the city and its people, where local society has progressed to accept bourgeois consumerism, yet remaining socio-politically traditional, leaning on older values, as a defense mechanism against global forces that threaten national identity. 'Identity' is rarely defined and often invoked when the pace of change is perceived as a threat to prevailing norms (Al-Qassimi & Fabbri, 2022). In present times, Emiratis are tempted by more modern and larger villas with a large front garden (Fox, Sabah, & Al Mutawa, 2006) a suitable stage for the nouveaux rich to flout their prosperity. The contemporary Emirati villa is characterized by its huge, glazing, perimeter garden, sealed atrium, road facing orientation, and high energy consumption (Rashid,

Ara, & Abdalla, 2022). Due to the introduction of widespread air conditioning; accompanying increased prosperity; hermitically sealed spaces have eroded traditional transitional spaces, such as the courtyard.

Contemporary forms of dwelling are increasingly adapting Western principles, and thus an outward orientation, where in the West this compliments a vernacularly progressive, sociable, community-based neighborhood, in the UAE this leads to possible further disparity in community interaction. Western principles on community living cannot be transcribed into an Emirati context due to different cultural norms. The outward orientation of contemporary housing architecturally externalizes the culture of hospitality, a norm for which Arab's are famous, this sentiment contradicts the important notion of privacy in Gulf culture. The notion of privacy in the Arab-Islamic paradigm is largely related to the requirement of modest self-preservation for Muslims in public, especially women (Sobh & Belk, 2011).

In the previous chapter on Sha'abi housing, high perimeter walls are criticized as they cause a gap between lived domestic space, and the intermediatory space found beyond the walls of the houses. Yet, common Emirati contemporary housing typologies, and their perceived outwardness further accentuate the boundaries between the 'pure' private sphere and the 'contaminated' public sphere (Sobh & Belk, 2011). Where the public sphere is perceived as 'contaminated' due to different social, public activity practiced by foreigners. The outward façade is rather symbolic of the contradiction found in the Emirati approach to 'openness'. This clash of values further leads public opinion to look back at the superiorly culturally sensitive Sha'abi housing, now anchored within the Emirati heritage.

4.4 Conclusions

However, and despite its having often resulting in an incomplete vision, modernist architecture was the language – for better or for worse – of Gulf cities' global aspirations in the twentieth century (Al-Qassimi & Fabbri, 2022). The contemporary architectural language, although contested in its form, if more structuralized could also construct the language with which to narrate social changes, economic growth, and East-West dynamics typical of the region. Thus, although not documented largely within current research, the contemporary UAE, and the architectural output in the form on housing can come to represent the current social climate. Which people in the coming years may look to for memories of the recent past. A past that is being constantly reconstructed, a past of a country which is re-finding its identity, a vital step of which is fluctuations in the social construct which is desired by the people and their government. The UAE must mature further for the repercussions of architecture on the social sphere to be adequately realized, this will still take time, and comes at the toll of derogatory consequences.

5. The Evolution of the Public Realm in the UAE

5.1 Autoethnography and the Public Space

Figure 10: A picture of myself playing in the Safa Park ca. 2003

An Emirates plane flies over the largest man-made island, zooming out to show the vast Dubai skyline lining endless white sand beaches, rows of luxurious beach beds provide a peaceful rhythm to these shores. The camera pans into a waterpark, then zooms in further, to a local woman opening a large Islamic gate, welcoming in the gaze of the observer. The video ends with surfers, skydivers, a family dining in a luxurious hotel. These are all images from an advertisement to attract tourists to Dubai, the images of glitz and glam are interluded by occasional depictions of traditional Emirati life, a date farm, a spice market or a tent in the Desert.

Such depictions are broadcasted around the world, and these preconceptions cloud people's perceptions of where and how I grew up, in the country I was born in. When I was younger, when people abroad would ask me where I'm I was often greeted with a blank face, as people at that point had never heard about Dubai. At the point my parents had moved to Dubai, in 1999, it was a move into the unknown, the city was still in its minor stages of development and had not yet been recognized as a major center of tourism and commerce. In the periods from 1970 to 2001, Dubai's urban development could be considered as conservative, whereas after 2001, a true boom in construction, and thus shaping of the city commenced. Hence, Dubai grew bigger and bigger, as a result people around the world became more and more aware of the city. This is in part shaped by the development of the internet, which allowed for a platform with which the city could advertise itself, with advertisements such as the one described in the opening of this section. Ever since the increased awareness of Dubai, when asked where I grew up, upon answering, people would often have a rather ignorant depiction of actuality.
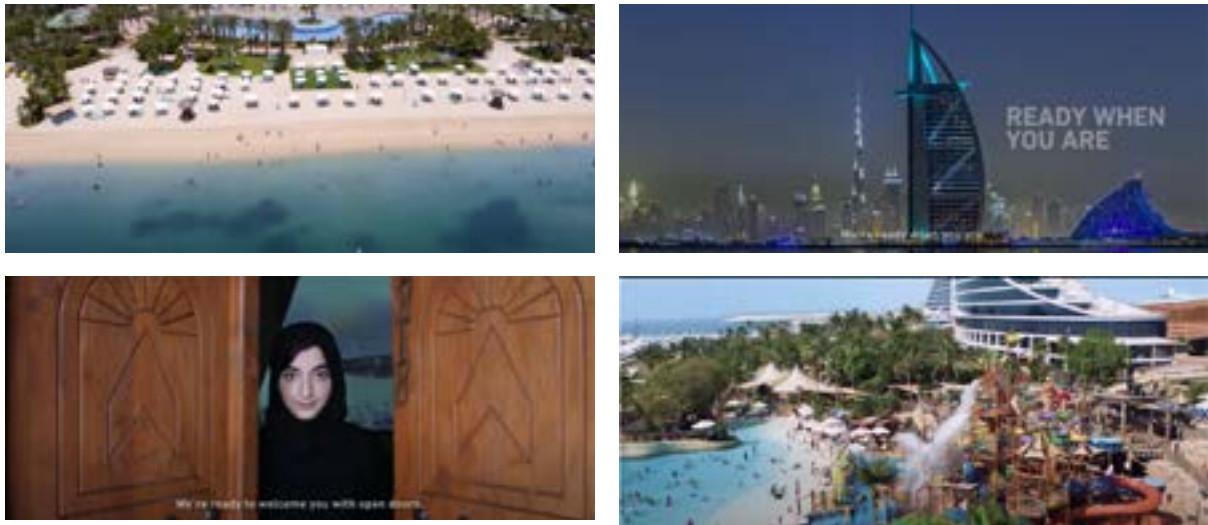
Figure 11: A combination of screenshots from video advertisement of Dubai (Visit Dubai, 2020)

Although such advertisements somewhat represent the UAE's hybridization approach when faced with globalism, it is often forgotten that this is but a mere perception, where there is in fact a life between the extremes, a life in which I grew up, and remember fondly.

The primary school I attended was named the *Dubai English Speaking School* (DESS), one of many such schools, although *DESS* was the first of its kind, founded in 1963. Stated on the website of the school: "The aims of education at *DESS* in 1977 were to prepare children for the common entrance examination and for transfer to primary or secondary education in the U.K. (About DESSC & Our History, 2005). Such an approach is still withstanding, where most schools cater towards the children of transient migrant expatriates. Many of my class members would change, with people joining and leaving, this was part of the norm, although the schools I attended had this in less extremes to some of the newer schools situated in expatriate compounds/housing developments on the fringes of the city.

Figure 12: My schoolgroup at DESS.

Figure 13: An aerial image of the Dubai English Speaking School. (DESSC, 1982)

One thing which was noticeable in my school was the lack of local children. Emirati children often attended government funded schools, or the prestigious *Al-Latifa* school for girls and *Rashid School for Boys*. If I remember correctly, my high school had a grand total of 7 Emirati out of 700 students, which was even a number my school often boasted as being high. Furthermore, not only were there a lack of Emirati children, but my school was distinctively British, where half of the school consisted of British students. This was the case for all schools, where each school would follow a curriculum of a certain country, with there being a huge amount of Arabic, Indian or American schools. As the syllabus was often that of a certain country, those schools would overwhelmingly attract migrant expatriates from the curricula which was being instructed. Logically schools were located around neighborhoods which houses a large amount of people from the syllabus being instructed, as a result, there would be a lack of interchange between nationalities, and in turn a lack of interchange between the local Emirati population and all foreign migrants.

5.2 Globalization and Urban Spatiality in the UAE

While this report investigates housing and its implications on Emirati society, socio political implications of Architecture and modernity in the UAE go beyond the four walls of the house, as well as beyond solely Emirati society. Social political implications of modernity in the UAE, in both macro and micro scale lies in the confrontation of the country with foreign influence.

Many would argue that globalization has been part of the socio-political landscape of Middle Eastern Countries since colonial times, where theoretical justification can be found through disciplines such as 'orientalism' which were meant to establish the superiority of the West, and the establishment of an 'other' (Elsheshtawy,2004). The establishment of the 'other' is perpetuated in the development of the UAE since its unification. Where Western principles had a strong influence on the UAE's nation building, aiming to attract foreign investment and tourism. However, recently, a theoretical shift has occurred, where the ultimate hegemony of Western forms have been replaced by a 'cultural hybridization' paradigm (Elsheshtawy,2004). Especially as the UAE and the Gulf countries grasp for an 'identity'. However, this viewpoint is opposed by 'cultural hybridization' in the UAE being used as a tool for its cities to symbolize and market themselves as the ultimate triumph of globalization.

The UAE, and especially Dubai has, as a result of its inhibitions to become ultimately globalized has reconfigured city spaces to attract maximum international capital, to allow market forces, and top-down planning to determine how space is used (Alawadi, 2016). This has resulted in a very transient population, which in turn leads to little effort being made by others to resolve social problems, as the majority of the population doesn't face problems for long enough to have to assure a better future in the UAE. The lack of initiative to address social problems is either capitalized upon by local people, who take advantage of a 'disposable' workforce, or it leads

to disparity in the population, where each social group maintains its own sets of institutions (Elsheshtawy, 2004).

Social polarization of communities in the UAE is coupled with vast spatial polarization. As mentioned in the text on Sha'abiya housing, Sha'abiya planned areas are the epitome of spatial polarization, where a state-devised socio-spatial segregation strategy (Alawadi & Benkraouda, 2019) dictates zoning. Furthermore, high end developments for wealthy 'expatriates', usually controlled by the private sector, are walled off from surrounding areas or developments, hence creating a controlled, yet exclusionary urban fabric. The exclusionary nature of these developments comes as a result of efforts to hinder mixing between expatriates and the local Emirati population. Private sector corporations are often owned by members of the Royal family or the state, hence producing a city form that is "a spatial expression of economic strategy" (Alawadi, 2016), typical of 'globalized' cities. However, the notion of globalization is contradictory in the UAE, where one would think it leads to inclusion, its effects are the opposite, a common theme exhibited throughout this study.

5.3 Living in a Hybrid World

Figure 14: Taken by my Mother, an image of myself with the Burj Al Arab in the background ca. 2003

I remember when I was a child Christmas was a big thing, it wasn't because I was religious, it was just the excitement of the festive period. Supermarkets, shopping centres, and even road lamps were adorned in sparkling lights, English radio stations played festive music, and kitsch plastic trees outnumbered the number of trees in the desert. As with Christmas, during the holy month of Ramadan, Dubai is festively decorated with lights of all sorts, especially in anticipation of Eid. The decorations set up for Ramadan were very similar to the Christmas decorations set up yearly, I had never questioned the similarity, yet I wonder if the need to make a holy celebration festive stems from Western influences.

The picture above was taken during a special time, a time my mum often reminds me of fondly. Ramadan shifts be approximately 2 weeks every year, and during the first years of my life, Ramadan coincided with Christmas. The two celebrations came together, and everywhere was double decorated, although I was very young, I have vague memories of these times. The harmonious coming together of festivities, objectified the hybridization of UAE society, yet, this may be visually ostensible, as decorations are a mere expression, a form of beautification, which may not reflect the actual situation. My view of this is mixed, as I always had great respect for local practices, and found there to be a beautiful harmony between cultural practices, all of them were somewhat celebrated, if Hindu, Muslim or Christian.

The picture is important to encompass in my accounts of growing up in the UAE, I guess my mum took it to send it out as a Christmas card, she did this every year us kids were around. I miss the times when the Jumeirah beach was empty, free of hordes of tourists, indulging in the numerous alternative activities they have set up on the beach now, almost overpowering the beach itself. Figure 15 shows a picture of the time I was last there, to me it felt apocalyptic to see the beach destroyed in this way, it signifies the superfluous development of Dubai in the name of attracting and accommodating tourists, the benefit of this superfluous development is purely financial. When walking down the beach at night, one comes across the select few local men living on the beach, historically, they probably worked as fishermen, or pearl divers, now they seem almost lost, lost within a faceless Disneyland-like coastal stretch. The only remnants of traditional life are the occasional 'majlis' (historical spaces of congregation of local men) scattered along the beach, built recently, probably to 'give back' to the local community. Yet, observing them, they almost seem like miniature stages built to exhibit the local minority to tourists.

Figure 15: Taken at dusk, same view as that of figure... yet, 20 years later, taken by author.

5.4 The Loss of Public Space in the UAE

Public space plays a vital role in shaping the identity and the daily practices of people in a city. Adaptations to public space can come as a result of social change, but they also hold the power to impose socio-cultural change. The form of cities in the UAE are ever evolving, and hence, the public spaces acting as a meeting point for the population are constantly changing.

Landscapes of traditional habitation, which were repeated daily, consisting of a host of gestures for meeting and departing, of rituals adhering to visiting times, have all but vanished in the modern UAE cities (Heard-Bey, 2017). An important element shaping most traditional communities has gradually disappeared from urban planning, a consequence of that is that social community life has been eroded (Ezzeddine & Kashwani, 2019). Furthermore, because of modernization efforts adapting modernist principles in the UAE, neighborhoods have been progressively disconnected. The meeting space is a vital element in Gulf culture, and this is evident on many scales of the urban environment, starting from the scale of the Majlis, up until the scale of the market square.

Figure 16: A image taken above the old neighborhood of Bastakiya (Ingram, 2006) public squares are marked in red by author.

The traditional form of the UAE city, existing in its entirety up until the oil boom, consisted of what are called: *Al Saha, Al Baraha,* or *Fereej,* this form of public square was in turn reached by narrow pathways called *Sikka* (Ezzeddine & Kashwani, 2019). These spaces provided spaces of sheltered interaction beyond the four walls of the house, it was a community space, which were however used more privately between families, and were not accessible to the public (Ezzeddine & Kashwani, 2019). Figure 16 shows the neighborhood Al Bastakiya in Dubai, the remnants of a small merchant village sitting by the Dubai creek. This neighborhood has been preserved as a sort of open air museum complex, preserving the remnants of heritage in the old city facing the Dubai Creek. One can see the smaller network of squares sandwiched between the densely clustered housing. The *Sikka* streets winding through the spaces, connecting the *Fereej*', served pedestrian purposes, and their narrow build up allowed for the streets to be shaded, hence providing a cooler environment than one would find in the wide concrete streets of the contemporary UAE city.

Since the modernization of the cityscape of the UAE, kickstarted by the Sha'abiya housing program, western ideals of urbanization were introduced. The western fascination for 'unregulated public space' which lead to the introduction of coffee shops and restaurants, built around park landscapes and boulevards provided a public space which is unrelated to traditional forms of meetings. Public spaces in the traditional Gulf city were a matter of personal relations, people could enter spaces once they were invited by the owner (Fox, Sabah, & Al Mutawa, 2006), this stems from the tribal nature of the historic Emirati culture.

The traditional relation to public space, defined by its private nature, is one which cannot be transcribed into the contemporary city, especially due to the large amount of foreign influx. Points of congregation between people now primarily consist of air-conditioned malls, a public space with a lack of identity and informality, a built form objectifying the privatization of the

globalized city. Due its large multi-ethnic social makeup, the Gulf city lacks a dominant, integrated, homogeneous cultural ethos or character (Fox, Sabah, & Al Mutawa, 2006).

Figure 17 & 18: : Cricket being played on the streets of Dubai, an informal reclamation of lost, needed public space. (Nastasi, 2018), (Elsheshtawy, 2019)

The few remaining squares in the UAE no longer hold true to their nature, they are no longer spaces for social gathering, they have now been converted to roads, street intersections, or parking lots (Ezzeddine & Kashwani, 2019). Within the context of Gulf cities, cricket is a particular form of utilizing public space that is unique to the region due to the large population of South Asian expatriate migrants (Elsheshtawy, 2018). Such activity signifies the desire for public spaces, particularly in the expat migrant population. However, the informality of such activities can be unsettling in the Gulf context, as the Gulf Arab city is envisioned by its more conservative local Arab population which generally prefers a lifestyle of privacy, an orderly place, where everything follows a carefully constructed script (Elsheshtawy, 2018).

Again, as multiply thematized throughout this chapter, the approach of hybridization in response to the globalization of the UAE results in losses of the public sphere for both the migrant population as well as the local population. Due to the attempt of mediating or segregating the populations a standoff of interests results in the ultimate loss of public space, thus having deeply rooted consequences upon the social construct of the UAE, whether that be the local population, or the expatriate migrant population, both of which need to be satisfied in the urban planning of the city, which ultimately cater for both populations.

5.5 Conclusions

The nomadic, conservative nature of historical customs of local people of the UAE is overwhelmed by foreign influx and modernity. To respond to the rapid modernization, and ever-changing public sphere, the UAE and its people are faced with no option but to reinvent their customs, even if those customs remain conservative when faced with Western influx, and the attractiveness of Western principles. The duality between modernizing and retaining customs, which may not be adjusted to what people see in their vision of modernization leads to confusion, within both government policy and residents of the country, a relative confusion which hinders successful developments. The UAE is yet to find a way in which to satisfy its needs for a cohesive public sphere. Yet this does not only lie in urban planning principles and government policy, but it also lies in the will of the people, who ultimately have the power to influence social interaction. The UAE requires maturity to find its identity. This development of identity must also be spurred by a decrease in the transience of the population, a less transient population is more likely to claim, and identify with urban spaces, which then in turn must be implemented by planners, with sensitivity to the context, culturally as well as environmentally. Only through a successful framework and will of the people, will the public realm of the UAE develop an attractive identity, an identity with informality included in its principles, an informality which would allow for the public realm to adjust to changing times. And times change rapidly in the UAE.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Evaluating Autoethnography as a Method

The autoethnographic accounts allowed my critical thoughts to come to fruition through a form of academic based storytelling. Through doing this, the mutually constitutive relationship between me as a researcher, and the researched has helped to highlight certain discourses in the topic.

Usually, as a researcher, one is preoccupied with finding more and more knowledge on a topic, getting lost in it, often straying away from discussing the impact which the field may have on us. Yet discussing this impact helps enforce a higher understanding of the topic through more reflexivity on what is researched. Throughout my writings I was able to think of relations which I wouldn't have done otherwise, not only about the discussed topic, but also about myself, on a personal level. The personally fueled writings inspired me to conduct further research on other topics, as through being able to write my own stories, I felt more attached to the research conducted.

The personal stories also allow for more engagement of the reader. Through finding out more about the writer the reader understands the context of the writing better. The reader is able to further read into the moral standpoint from which the writer bases arguments on. Further engagement and understanding of the reader lead to the reader being able to have a better discourse on the topic of the paper, hence allowing for a more accurate interpretation of the research, providing a better foundation for further research. The idea of the autoethnographic accounts was that they would function in a supplementary nature, rather than functioning as a basis, around which the research is conducted. This supplementary nature allows for a pleasant balance between research text, and personal text, allowing for alternation on writing style, increasing the dynamism of the paper.

Throughout my writings it is clear that the topic of modernity in the UAE is looked at from a certain perspective, that of an expatriate migrant in the UAE. This perspective shapes the research around these personal stories, hence the outcome of the research drifts towards a certain perspective. Yet through postcolonial thought, also guided by personal opinion on the topic, multiple standpoints on the topic of research are considered, veering away from the possibility of polarizing information being published.

I wonder how this research would look if written by a writer with a different background, also supplemented by autoethnographic content of similar nature. Yet relation to the study conducted in the rest of the chapter, included in each autoethnographic account doesn't present a skewed idea on the topic, it rather only provides further context which the reader is free to interpret. This adheres to the fundamental nature of a thesis, serving those willing to inform themselves on a topic, where the background of the researcher is important to formulate a certain point of view.

Finally, due to the supplementary nature of the autoethnographic accounts, the conclusions of the research are not directly affected. However, the autoethnographic accounts did bring things which I lacked awareness of to light, this quite possibly shows how our experience in conducting

research does in the end inform our ultimate findings. Therefore, the autoethnographic accounts are in the end essential to the findings of this paper, and serve as a good addition to researches of this nature conducted in the field of architectural history.

6.2 Conclusions on the Impact of Modernity in the UAE

Since the onset of modernity in the UAE, the country has been in a state of constant transformation. This rapid pace of transformation is reflected upon, and expressed within the public realm, solidifying the transient nature of the country and the region as part of its identity. Throughout this paper, the hybridity of the existence of the UAE is constantly reiterated. The themes of hybridization as a result of the globalization and development of the country are expressed in all forms, impacted by and impacting society. This hybrid duality in which the UAE finds itself is characteristic of countries which are permeable to foreign influence, which is most commonly from the West. Yet, this permeability to foreign influence, and this social change results in oppositional standpoints in society, where opposite standpoints on outside influence are often polarizing.

The Gulf which exists between tourists and non-tourists, the leisured and the working populations, the consumers and the consumed is arguably self-perpetuating (Alsayyad, 2001). The self-perpetuation of extreme consumerism, on both sides leaves a vacuum between Emirati and foreign, a vacuum which is ignored in the quest of fueling a lifestyle of consumption.

The Development of the UAE has happened so quickly that one could almost consider it to be instant urbanism. The instantaneous nature of urbanism left little to no time for contemplation, resulting in choices for which consequences are not accurately reflected upon. The constant need to develop, and to conform to international frameworks, has led public policy, and people to ignore the importance of the nature of heritage and urbanism. Rather than emulating something which exists elsewhere, through the transcription of foreign ideals, the UAE should attract through its own identity. Giving both local and foreign people an anchor of meaning, an anchor of Emirati identity to which people can give meaning to themselves, beyond capital mechanisms, mitigating the vacuum of cultural difference, which leads to further polarization within both Emirati and foreign migrant populations.

Further urban-societal development in the UAE must not be based upon nostalgic memories, but the need of the population. The UAE should see the development up until now as part of their heritage, a heritage of prosperity in the region, and undoubtably the architecture resulting from this time objectifies this significantly. Yet looking towards the future, a balance must be found through the inaction of principles and projects which benefit citizens. This cannot be done through the ever-increasing intensification of capital-intensive development, spurred on by the government backed private sector.

The UAE and the Gulf countries should be seen as fluid, in continuous transition, and with transformative states of identity (El Amrousi, Reus, & Paleologos, 2020). The rapid change of the UAE, which has been socially in continuous transition should be embraced. Yet a certain stability must be found, where there is a mediation between local and foreign, as both groups rely on one another for prosperity and wellbeing. Through stability, and decreased brevity of stay in the country, the identity of the UAE can be solidified, through a mediative approach embracing the young history, future, and heritage of the country. Such a standpoint can only be reached through maturity of the country. And with this standpoint on heritage and identity, the rapid modernization of the UAE and social consequences can be mitigated, enforcing a more cohesive, interconnected public realm, in which architecture and urban principles play a decisive role.

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