

“Turn Your Brand into a Destination”: City Branding, Naming Rights, and
the Neoliberalization of Dubai, UAE

by

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BA, University of Calgary, 2008

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Abstract

As cities continue to compete for regional and global primacy, governments around the world have drawn upon a series of entrepreneurial tactics to secure investment. Along with city branding initiatives aimed at producing positive images of the city, governments increasingly seek to generate revenue through the corporate sponsorship of public place names, or what I term *toponymic branding*. Drawing upon government documents and 15 semi-structured interviews, this study examines how the neoliberalization of place through city and toponymic branding is currently reshaping the geographies of urban governance in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), by considering two case studies: the naming of the Burj Khalifa (formerly Burj Dubai) and the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative. In addition to semi-structured interviews conducted *in situ*, this research draws upon a variety of web-based marketing materials designed to promote the Burj Khalifa as an icon of Dubai and the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative as a cutting-edge tool to increase revenue generation for the Government of Dubai. This thesis suggests that, despite efforts to maximize profits through city and toponymic branding campaigns, the renaming of the Burj Khalifa undercuts previous positive associations stakeholders held with the “tallest building in the world,” the city, and its brand. This study also demonstrates that, through the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative, the Government of Dubai has used toponymic branding as a political tool to foster relationships with members of the business community. In doing so, the current research contributes to critical toponymic and urban geographic scholarship by examining the political economy of toponymic branding as a strategy of neoliberal urbanism in Dubai.

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Dedication

To my grandparents, one set real, the other imagined: Your sacrifices are my successes. You lost your country to give me mine. Thank you.

Preface

Throughout this thesis, I have inserted scenes from my field journal in hopes of conveying some of my experiences ‘on the ground.’ What I present in these vignettes is based on my adventures navigating the streets, malls, Metro, and the Emirate of Dubai. The descriptions and encounters I detail are by no means a synecdoche for my understanding of Dubai. Rather, I hope to illustrate some of the unending complexities associated with international empirical research, my positionality as a 1.5 generation Canadian-Iranian woman conducting research in an Arab country, and the difficulties we, as scholars, encounter when attempting to tease apart the theoretical and methodological knots matted together, seemingly forever, by academic research.

Old World, New Beginnings

May 4, 2012

“Flight crew: prepare for landing.” I jolt from a dreamless sleep, my joints aching an ache of airplane seats. How long have I been out? Over 24 hours in transit and I am groggy, stiff, and become aware of the cabin’s recycled air. I want nothing more than to get off this plane. I anticipate the satisfaction that will come when I can finally unfurl my spine, one vertebrae at a time. I want so badly to wash the tired off and down an unfamiliar drain. I look across my row and out the window, in hopes of catching a glimpse of Dubai’s skyline from above. My view is shaped by the profile of my neighbor, a businessman savoring the last stores of peanut-salt wrinkled in the depths of his snack-pack. He tilts his head back and constellations of light fill the window. This is not the Dubai I visited three years earlier, but a different, more developed city. Roads lattice across the landscape and cars travel on roads, organized, like ants. A flight attendant interrupts my thoughts: “Ma’am? Can you please return your chair to the upright position? We’re about to land.” “Sure,” I say, as I release my seat, think about the month ahead and how this city doesn’t belong in the Middle East I know, the Middle East I have been taught to know, the Middle East of the West. This city exists in the mythopoeia conjured by grandparents, displaced and forlorn, whose tales hoped to convince me that the Middle East is not inferior to the West, not a place to be forgotten. Sun-bleached photos of family members long past come to mind, framed by modern-looking cities, smiles on their faces.

The overhead PA system enlivens passengers with news of our arrival: “Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Dubai.” As I queue to deplane, a young woman says to somebody: “It’s my first time, here. There’s just so much I want to see. I promised my mom I’d ride a camel, see

the Palm, and take a picture in front of that building.” The crumpling of plastified aluminum drowns her voice out. I look behind to see the businessman crunch down on his last peanut. I have arrived in Dubai: city in the desert. Dubai: nexus between East and West, past and future. Dubai: a consumer’s dream, auguring a new world order.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Dubai Site Visits

May 13, 2012

I disembark from my driverless train at the Burj Khalifa/Dubai Mall station. I have come here to experience the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative in person. As I walk through the station, I anticipate a surreal spectacle of advertising overwhelming my senses. I have read about the Metro Naming Rights program for the past nine months. It is one of two case studies for my thesis. During this time, I conjured images of corporatized signs and spaces. In my mind, these scenes involve paragons of consumerism and egregious advertising. I have envisioned dystopic scenes of Metro terminals saturated with endless moving bodies and high contrast LEDs in the eye-searing colour schemes of New York's Times Square or Shibuya Square in Tokyo. My stomach churns with anxiety as I discover the opposite. I feel crestfallen and the backs of my ears burn as I try to make sense of my surroundings. This Metro station looks like any other. It is anomalous to my experiences as a transit user: it smells clean, the fixtures are new, and the air-conditioning works.

There are, however, immediate differences I notice between Dubai's transit system and the one I grew up with in Montréal. This Metro, for instance, wants for the usual smells of public transit. There is a distinct lack of scents, acidic and ammoniac, that hint to dried urine and the crystallized odours of post-work sweat. I have come to expect these smells from all Metro stations.

I climb up stairs sparkling with polish and follow signs that direct me to the Burj Khalifa. I wander through the terminal in shock, as I realize my assumptions about the Naming Rights Initiative remain unchecked. Other than placards denoting the station name, there is little evidence that the Metro is named for a corporation. Despite my expectations, there are few indications that I am immersed in a corporate, branded space. Rather, there are only a handful of backlit billboards advertising sports drinks and cars throughout. My fellow commuters don't seem to notice or care that the terminal they are walking through is what Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) calls "the ultimate branding and marketing opportunity" (IMG, 2008, p.14).

I leave the station, confused by my observations, and walk towards the site of my second case study: Burj Khalifa. The last time I visited Dubai, in 2009, the Burj had a different name. The tallest building in the world held the eponym of its city and Emirate—the Burj Dubai. Aborted, it vegetated in a skyline otherwise overrun by orphaned construction cranes and skyscrapers half-clad in unfinished exterior façades. Today, however, the Burj is re-born and alive with activity, a newly minted symbol of the Emirate's future economic growth.

Khalifa shatters Dubai's skyline in a phantasmagoria of architectural opulence and unfettered economic growth. It is an object of fantasy become real. It is the exception that proves the rule for those who believe the market will correct itself, champions of neoliberalism who extol the virtues of entrepreneurial techniques and promote them as solutions to economic crises.

During its 2010 unveiling, Burj Dubai became Burj Khalifa, named out of respect for the leader of Dubai's neighbouring Emirate, Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Sheikh Khalifa is responsible for bailing Dubai out of the Emirate's worst fiscal crunch in history (Hoffman, 2010). In this case, the act of renaming illustrates neoliberal logic in action.

The place-name changed and, with it, the symbolic landscapes associated with the Burj Dubai were reduced to an economic exchange value. The bequest of the Burj's name to Dubai's unofficial trustee, Sheikh Khalifa, commodifies the symbolic value of the toponym as well as the place-identities performed within the spaces associated with the name.

While the story of Khalifa is the stuff of fiction, what the building and the act of renaming portend are indeed very real. The Burj Khalifa heralds an age of mega-development, or to borrow Ong's (2011) term, hyperbuilding, as city branding and the increasing proliferation of naming rights agreements are lauded as drivers of economic growth.

Introduction to the Thesis

The above excerpt situates the following story in Dubai, in which the promises of growth, modernization, and national and international political stability come at a high symbolic price. The city becomes a spectacle of consumption promoted by the government to attract investment to Dubai. In addition, naming rights agreements corporatize an urban realm that is, in many parts of the Emirate, not yet built. Proponents exalt such branding processes and argue that they provide the Government with alternative sources of funding. Critics, on the other hand, suggest that branding campaigns commodify Dubai's material and symbolic landscapes. This transformation of the built environment through place marketing and corporate sponsorship programs, such as those discussed throughout this thesis, extend a neoliberal logic that values the role of entrepreneurial urban governance. Entrepreneurialism, in this case, includes the transformation of bureaucracies into active pursuants of economic development, the privatization of urban services, and the use of competition as a driver of growth (Leitner, Peck, Sheppard, 2007). Moreover, city branding campaigns and corporate naming rights agreements are strategies of urban neoliberalism, as both rely on entrepreneurial tactics to succeed. Further, both forms of

neoliberal urbanism exist because of governmental policies that bring them into existence.

Dubai, the focus of our story, becomes a metonymy for a new political economic order that recalibrates the city into a site of neoliberal urban governance. This form of neoliberal governance deploys “techniques of government” through concerted branding initiatives spearheaded by Dubai’s leadership in hopes of stimulating local economic growth (Foucault, 1997a from Walters, 2012, p. 11). Chief among such ‘techniques of government’ are the strategies of roll-out neoliberalism, which use regulatory reform to extend the powers of the state apparatus through entrepreneurial governance and privatizing initiatives (Peck and Tickell, 2002). In Dubai, such tactics arise through the promotion of iconic landmarks and the corporate sponsorship of Metro station names.

As city governments continue to face the dual challenge of balancing budgets and attracting investment, urban decision-makers increasingly take an active role in generating investment dollars through ‘innovative’ entrepreneurial approaches (Harvey, 1989; Dinnie, 2011). In reaction to a volatile global market and the rise of austerity modes of governance, many municipal governments continue to explore potential sources of stable, direct or indirect revenues (Harvey, 1989; Rose-Redwood, 2011). Prominent among such strategies are the creation and promotion of two types of branding initiatives: city and toponymic branding. The notion of city branding refers to the production of the *city-as-brand*, which involves the design, implementation, and promotion of a ‘place brand’ that constructs a new city-image. The city-as-brand comes into being through the commodification and, often, effacement, of previous or existing urban symbolic and material landscapes.

City branding is a popular tool used by municipal governments to secure investment (Parkerson and Saunders, 2004; Clifton, 2011; Dinnie, 2011; Haines, 2011; Shatkin, 2011;

Merrilees, Miller, Herington, 2013). Flows of global knowledge, for instance, encourage inter-urban competition driven by speculative urban development (Ong, 2011b). As a result, cities try to outperform one another in hopes of securing resources, talent, and tourism (Florida, 2002; Anholt, 2005; Dinnie, 2011). Branding campaigns also promote urban economic growth by attracting investors, potential residents, tourists and, increasingly, global attention. City branding is not a new phenomenon, but, as austerity measures become predominant conditions of urban development, it continues to gain widespread popularity among practitioners and municipal decision-makers worldwide.

By contrast, the corporate sponsorship of public place-names, or what I term *toponymic branding*, is also becoming an attractive option for deficit-ridden governments looking to solve their budgetary woes and remain in good political standing with constituents. Corporate partners, for instance, have been involved in the sponsorship of sports stadia since the 1970s (Boyd, 2000). In recent years, however, city governments have begun leasing out the naming rights to public facilities through targeted policies (Rose-Redwood, 2011; Burton, 2008; Bartow, 2007).

Much like initiatives attempting to produce the city-as-brand, rhetoric surrounding the economic benefits associated with the corporate sponsorship of public place-names is quickly becoming a script repeated by politicians worldwide who are desperate to re-fill municipal coffers and remain competitive on a global stage. Toponymic branding, unlike city branding, remains relatively unexamined and undertheorized (Rose-Redwood, 2011).

The fulcrum of this study involves the points of intersection between neoliberal urbanism and the critical study of place-naming practices. Scholarship on both topics currently remains disconnected. On the one hand, political economic studies of urban neoliberalism do not examine the role and politics of place-naming. The critical study of place-names, on the other hand,

seldom approaches the phenomenon of naming from a political economic perspective. By examining the empirical entanglements that link neoliberal urban processes with the corporate renaming of city facilities in Dubai, I hope to bridge the interstices that disconnect literatures discussing the political economy of neoliberalism and the cultural politics of place-naming.

The present study analyzes city and toponymic branding practices through two branding initiatives envisioned and approved by the Government of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Each case study unpacks the adoption and promotion of neoliberal modes of governance through an examination of discourses mobilized by city branding initiatives and toponymic branding programs. Central to this investigation is the analysis of the following branding initiatives spearheaded by Dubai's government and how both are infrastructural elements of an apparatus of neoliberal governance: the Burj Khalifa (Dubai) and the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative.

Research Goal and Objectives

The goal of this thesis is to examine how city and toponymic branding initiatives reshape geographies of neoliberal urban governance. Underpinning this study are three central objectives. First, this thesis critically examines the role and politics of municipal naming rights as place and toponymic branding strategies. Second, this study investigates the political and economic motivations underpinning place and toponymic branding initiatives undertaken by the Government of Dubai. Third, it contributes, through the analysis of empirical findings, to a critical theory of place branding as a political economic tool of neoliberal governance. By grounding my goal and objectives in a case study of city and toponymic branding in Dubai, I test my theoretical assumptions. I also offer a critical analysis of city and toponymic branding by exploring their interrelationships with different forms of neoliberal governance.

Significance of Research

While there exists a significant body of literature investigating the presence and use of place and city branding practices as examples of entrepreneurial urbanism, very little research examines toponymic branding and, in particular, how its use by governments neoliberalizes ‘place’ in contemporary cities. There is also a dearth of academic inquiry that investigates the growing popularity of toponymic branding initiatives as economic growth generators for struggling municipalities as well as the relationship between toponymic and place branding as revenue-generating strategies for municipal governments. Moreover, while place and city branding literatures continue to gain popularity in practitioner-led fields and among champions of urban development, very few studies apply critical perspectives to either phenomenon. City governments, meanwhile, continue the search for steady revenue sources to maintain existing infrastructure and services. It therefore becomes imperative for scholars to investigate the political economy of corporate naming rights programs in cities in order to glean knowledge about such initiatives, and their social, political, and economic effects.

This research also provides urban geographers with a model to undertake the critical analysis of place and toponymic branding initiatives. It adds to a nascent sub-field of political toponymic literature that attempts to draw out linkages between the critical study of place-naming and the political economy of cities (Rose-Redwood, Alderman, Azaryahu, 2010).

Data Collection and Analysis

I use the case study as the primary methodology to achieve my research goal. The case study facilitates the discovery of ideographic and context-specific knowledge, both of which are essential to this research (Baxter, 2010). As little to no academic inquiry has been done on toponymic branding and its interactions with city-branding practices, finding an entry point to

qualitative data on the topic will, at the very least, provide a point of reference to guide future scholarship.

In addition to a case study, this research draws upon fifteen semi-structured, in-person and telephone interviews (see Figure 3.1). All interviews were audio-recorded, subsequently transcribed and coded using a discourse analysis framework. I also employed discourse analysis to code newspaper articles and promotional branding materials collected and photographed *in situ* and via web-based resources. Web-based promotional materials include government and developer websites, national planning and strategic vision websites, web-based documents, and policy documents.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. I begin Chapter 2 by outlining contemporary debates in urban geography on the topic of neoliberalism, focusing primarily on two distinct veins of the literature on neoliberalism: neoliberal urbanism, as it has been discussed by political economists such as Harvey, Peck and Tickell, and Brenner, among others, and Foucauldian governmentality studies with a specific focus on neoliberal rationalities of urban governance. Both approaches are valuable to consider. A number of neo-Marxists, for instance, tend to focus on neoliberal projects and how they reflect a “*theory of the state*” (Walters, 2012, p. 16, original emphasis) through “expressions of free-market libertarianism ... [and the] outgrowth of neoconservative moral authoritarianism” (Peck, 2004, p. 403). By contrast, those who examine neoliberalism from a Foucauldian perspective pay closer attention to the “system[s] of meaning that constitute[] institutions, practices, and identities in contradictory and distinctive ways” (Larner, 2000, p. 12). Moreover, the study of governmentality, according to Dean (1999), “indicates an empirical terrain of the rationalities, technologies, programmes and identities of regimes of government”

(p.13). Governmentality also values the “specificity of different tactics of power” rather than emphasizing “the notion that power operates as a field of knowledge serving some purpose” (Springer, 2012, p. 134). By reviewing both strands of the literature, I situate my research amidst extant and contentious debates surrounding neoliberalism, contemporary political economic literature, and governmentality studies. I subsequently analyze scholarship on the entrepreneurial city (Harvey, 1989; Hall & Hubbard, 1998), place and city branding (Kavaratzis, 2004; Papadopoulos, 2004; Dinnie, 2011), and critical toponymies (Azaryahu, 2006; Berg & Kearns, 2009; Rose-Redwood, 2008, 2009; Yeoh, 2009). By highlighting central themes in all of the aforementioned sub-disciplines, my hope is to weave together a tapestry of theories drawn from prevalent paradigms in each respective literature.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the data collection and analysis procedures used to undertake this study. First, I present an overview of the theories justifying my research design through a review of a case study approach, discourse analysis, semi-structured interviews, and coding techniques. I then elaborate on how the research was carried out, highlight limitations encountered during and after fieldwork, and explore my positionality as a woman and an outsider conducting research in a Gulf State in the Middle East.

Chapters 4 and 5 present my research findings for each case study. In Chapter 4, I examine the mobilization of discourses surrounding the development, promotion, and re-naming of the Burj Khalifa (Dubai) as “the tallest building in the world” (Burj Khalifa, 2012). Chapter 5 focuses on the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative. In this section, I pay close attention to the Government of Dubai’s design, promotion, implementation, and perceived utility/symbolic value of the Metro as infrastructure, and the Dubai Naming Rights Initiative as a political technology. I analyze the ways by which discourses surrounding the Dubai Metro project reinforce the notion

that corporate naming initiatives operationalize neoliberal rationalities through political technologies. Projects like the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative exemplify political technologies that establish corporate toponyms. These new, commodified place-names can undercut previous cultural, historical, and symbolic connotations stakeholders associate with the material landscapes. They can also, as is currently the case, commercialize a city under construction.

In Chapter 6, I make suggestions for future scholarship examining the geographies of entrepreneurial urban governance through municipal decision-making and how specific instances of city and toponymic branding contribute to the neoliberalization of urban space. I conclude the thesis by reflecting on the scope and design of this research as well as the central methodological limitations I encountered in the field, in my codebook, at my computer, and in the margins of my research journals.

We All Go Down Together

May 8, 2012

“Dubai is OK,” the waitress says, after I ask her if she likes the city. She explains what prompted her decision to move here: “you know, it’s a place of opportunity. I come here during the crash. I was scared, you know? People at home, they thought I was crazy, you know, but I decided I had to. No other choice. The economy, I thought, it will get fixed. It did. Maybe I can get rich and go back [home] one day.” I ask her if she thinks the economy will continue to recover. She answers that “people, here, they come to make money, money, money, quick, quick, quick. But, after, they run away. The government wants you to make money and leave, and people do. I think Dubai will stay so rich. It will keep growing. We might go down again. All of us. But, maybe, after we go down, we go up again. Just like last time, after the crash. It’s a circle of money and, then, no money. Jobs, no jobs, again, and again. It will always be the same.” I thank her and she takes my drink order. She nods and smiles at me. As she walks towards the kitchen, I reflect upon her words. Dubai, city of booms and busts, economic growth and failures. In Dubai, the economy will correct internal errors to fix itself. But what happens if the waitress is wrong? What if next time we don’t come back up? What if we all go down together?

Chapter 2: Theorizing the Place of Branding in Neoliberal Urbanism

Introduction

Over the past two decades, human geographers have developed an extensive literature on neoliberal urban governance through micro- and macro-discussions of events occurring throughout the world. Geographical studies examining neoliberalization tend to fall into two broad categories: Marxian political economy and Foucauldian governmentality. In hopes of diminishing some of the theoretical factionalism that exists amongst contemporary scholars studying the neoliberal, I hope to contribute to what Springer (2012) calls “a culturally informed critical political economy” (p. 134). In other words, I will attempt to situate my research among those drawing upon Marx and those utilizing Foucault to explicate the neoliberalization of place in Dubai through the use of entrepreneurial governance technologies.

The theoretical aim of this study, then, is to draw upon the insights of Marxist and Foucauldian approaches to neoliberal urbanism to analyze critically city and toponymic branding. While geographers continue to investigate neoliberal ideologies that focus on political economic processes, much of the interdisciplinary literature on place branding is policy-driven and lacks a critical examination of such programmes. Critical toponymic studies, meanwhile, pay close attention to “the spatial politics of naming and the social production of place” (Rose-Redwood, 2011, p. 34), but, for the most part, do not take into account political economic themes that relate urban branding initiatives to the (re)naming process.

Chapter Outline

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section, “Trodding Down a New Path: Political Economy and a Neoliberal World Order,” examines articulations of political economic theories and how current paradigms often (mis)represent political economy as a metonymy for a greater, all-pervading neoliberal project. Many political economic discussions apply a neoliberal filter through which scholars can observe and comment on specific, real-world processes. But one should use different filters to perform different tasks. If we are interested in uncovering neoliberal phenomena in order to make future recommendations regarding the progress and changes in our societies, then scholars should clarify what specific neoliberalisms they are examining. It is, therefore, insufficient to argue that a study investigates a neoliberal process because it concerns an incident that rearticulates some aspect of the market. Rather, scholars should elaborate on why such events are considered “neoliberal.” Do they function to deregulate, privatize, marketize, or maximize some aspect of the market for profit? Are austere economic measures active in a particular setting? Is a study interested in examining neoliberalism as policy, ideology, or governmentality (Larner, 2000)?

In the following section, “Situating Neoliberalism: from Marx to Foucault,” I draw to light the fissures that disconnect traditional political economic treatments of neoliberalism *vis-à-vis* Foucauldian discussions of neoliberal governmentality. I argue that, whereas political economists borne out of Marxian traditions focus on the “neoliberal” as anything involving systematic attempts by governments to privatize, de-regulate, or marketize what were once considered to be public services, Foucauldian scholars examining neoliberal phenomena pay closer attention to what Larner (2000) calls “a useful distinction between government and governance” (p.12). Ong (2007), for instance, suggests that, to the intellectual Left, neoliberalism

is “a class-based ideology that attacks the welfare-state in advanced, liberal countries” (p. 3; Hall, 1988). Foucauldian governmentality studies, by contrast, focus on “the capillary nature and dispersed character of power” (Walters, 2012, p.15). In other words, Marxian approaches are often based upon a critical analysis of the spread of neoliberalism as a global project, or as a grand narrative, whereas Foucauldian scholars pay closer attention to the specificities of power relations that have come to be discursively framed as neoliberal.

The following section, “Risky Business: Entrepreneurial Urbanism and Branding the City,” links broader debates surrounding the neoliberal project to David Harvey’s (1989) concept of the entrepreneurial city. Harvey’s concept functions as an entry point into broader discussions about geographies of urban governance and, more specifically, current trends in urban geography and city/place branding literatures. In the sub-sections entitled, “Sell this City,” “The Good, the Bad, and the Brand,” “Consuming Brands,” and “Branding and the Politics of Place,” I examine urban entrepreneurial governance through Florida’s (2002) idea of the creative class, place and city branding, and how different groups interact with both. Entrepreneurialism continues to pervade municipal decision-making and, as such, it is important to establish an understanding of current trends studied by scholars who either extol the virtues of entrepreneurial strategies, or rail against them.

The penultimate sub-section, “The Naming Game: Legacy Gifts and Corporate Naming Rights,” weaves together discussions about place-naming practices and, more specifically, draws out associations between the act of toponymic branding and its resulting symbolic effects. Vital to this study is the examination of the corporate renaming of public places, and the fundamental critique that such projects, when left uncontested, lead to “legitimacy-without-controversy” (Berg, 2011, p. 20). Moreover, I will discuss major paradigms treated by critical toponymists and

compare them with those posited by scholars interested in neoliberal urbanism. In doing so, I will create a conceptual framework that will examine the corporatization of symbolic landscapes through the act of toponymic inscription.

In “Connecting the Dots: Political Toponymies and the Neoliberalization of Place,” I bring together theoretical threads from previous sections to synthesize the conceptual fabric I will employ in my study. Literatures on the political economy of cities, place branding, and the politics of place-naming will inform my philosophical approach. I have designed this theoretical framework as an epistemological ‘mash-up’ rooted in a critical method of inquiry to examine the “implication[s] of spatiality in the *production* of power and knowledge” and how power relations are reified in an urban context (Rose-Redwood, 2006, p. 480, original emphasis). In order to gain insight into cultural and spatial processes occurring in cities, academics should attempt to understand why municipal governments gravitate towards city, place, and toponymic branding initiatives to draw and retain investment, how brands reduce cities to an oversimplified representation of culture and location, and what effects city/place/toponymic branding campaigns have on a city’s many stakeholders.

Trodding Down a New Path: Political Economy and a Neoliberal World Order

By outlining what technologies are distinctly *neoliberal* about the cases examined for this study, I hope, in turn, to specify what those neoliberal articulations *mean* in their respective spatio-temporal contexts. My goal, here, is not to reject the concept of neoliberalism as a useful term to underpin this study. Instead, I hope to define my usage of the word in order to demonstrate that it does still, indeed, hold explanatory powers that might help us to better understand neoliberal phenomena of interest. Moreover, and, more importantly perhaps, by situating my research as one tile comprising a mosaic of perspectives on neoliberalism, I hope to avoid ambiguous

language and refine my investigation to focus on distinctly neoliberal events and political technologies.

The concept of neoliberalism has, in recent years, undergone multiple formulations in critical human geography. Harvey describes neoliberalism as a theory that seeks to “liberat[e] individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2005, p. 2). Similarly, Brenner and Theodore (2002) describe neoliberalism as an economic ideology centered on “open, competitive, and unregulated markets” (p. 350). Underpinning the ideology of neoliberalism is the mythology that a capitalist economy is “liberated from all forms of state interference” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002, p. 350). Despite neoliberal rhetoric against state interference through the promotion of free-market thinking, neoliberalism relies upon the roll out of state policies, and recent scholarship suggests that neoliberalism relies on tactics of governance that interfere with the market in specific ways. Neoliberalism involves a wide array of governmental policies that reshape markets through the absence of regulation, direct political interference, or both. Increasingly, scholars studying neoliberalism affirm the notion that current examples of neoliberal governance involve a series of complex interactions between deregulative processes and active political interference to facilitate the “financialization of everything” (Harvey, 2005, p. 33).

Nevertheless, neoliberalism has “reworked the institutional infrastructures upon which Fordist-Keynesian capitalism was grounded” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002, p. 350). This institutional reworking of the market does not always facilitate economic growth. Brenner and Theodore (2002) posit that, while “neoliberal ideology implies that self-regulating markets will generate an optimal allocation of investments and resources,” actual neoliberal practice has

“generated pervasive market failures, new forms of social polarization, and a dramatic intensification of uneven development at all spatial scales” (p. 352). Emerging political economic scholarship should, therefore, attempt to conceptualize neoliberal ideology in relation to “geographies of industrialization, state power, urbanism, and everyday life” (Brenner, 2004, p. 5).

Neoliberal thinking first rose to popularity in the 1970s and 1980s (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). It resulted, in part, from a reaction to the global economic downturn of the previous decade, and Harvey (2005) echoes Brenner and Theodore by arguing that, since the 1970s, “[t]here has ... been an emphatic turn towards neoliberalism in political economic practices and thinking” (p. 2). Neoliberalism has become a ubiquitous term that signifies “‘best-practice’ governance” based on “‘neo-Schumpeterian’ economic policies favoring supply-side innovation and competitiveness[,] decentralization, devolution, and ... deregulation and privatization of industry, land and public services” (Leitner et al., 2007, p. 1). It also recontextualizes urban economic processes, such as city and toponymic branding initiatives, through a normalization of individualism, entrepreneurialism, and self-interest, all of which aid in “redefining citizens as consumers and clients” (Leitner et al., 2007, p. 2).

Neoliberalism can be understood as a regulatory project, but one which is open-ended, at times contradictory, and protean (Springer, 2012; Peck and Tickell, 2002). According to Peck (2010), neoliberalism involves a “regulatory restructuring” under which lies a “mythology of market progress” (p. 7). This type of economic reshuffling, Peck (2010) claims, is rooted in “(mis)intervention[s] in the form of market-friendly governance” (p. 7). The rise in popularity of neoliberal agendas in the 1970s was, according to Peck and Tickell (2002), “associated with crisis conditions that were considered ‘external’ to ... [neoliberalism] itself” (p. 390). In

contrast, market changes occurring throughout the 1990s reflect ‘internal’ conflicts resulting from the failures of previous neoliberal strategies (Peck and Tickell, 2002). ‘External’ crisis conditions, on the other hand, revolve around the macroeconomic instabilities commonly associated with the 1970s, which, as Peck and Tickell (2002) suggest, led to the rise in prominence of neoconservative agendas and the institution of neoliberalism as a state project. ‘Internal’ tensions of the 1990s, conversely, involved governments who were forced to respond to the “previous market, state, and governance failures” that were “partly ... initiated by neoliberalism itself” (Peck and Tickell, 2002, p. 390). States attempted to mitigate the previous failures of neoliberalism by “downloading ... resources, responsibilities, and risks to local administrations and extrastate agencies” (Peck and Tickell, 2002, p. 391). Municipal governments, as a result of the neoliberal project, increasingly emphasized “local growth strategies and economic development” over the “local provision of welfare and services” (Hubbard & Hall, 1998, p.2).

Rethinking neoliberalism is, therefore, essential to any discussion on urban governance because it crystallizes current trends of development embedded in a narrative of “globalizing, neoliberalizing, and urbanizing capitalism” (Brenner, 2004, p. 5; Brenner and Theodore, 2002). As a result, cities and urban regions should not be treated “as mere subunits of national administrative systems” (Brenner, 2004, p. 2). Instead, urban policy becomes “an essential political mechanism through which ... profound institutional and geographical transformation of national states ... occur[s]” (Brenner, 2004, p. 2). The recalibration of administrative responsibilities refashions the role of local governments to bear the burden of enacting profound policy transformations that keep the city solvent and allow it to remain a viable competitor in the global market.

Leitner et al. (2007) claim that “[t]he propagation of neoliberal discourses, policies, and subjectivities ... [has] given rise to neoliberal urbanism” (p.4). As a result, “[t]he neoliberal city is conceptualized first as an entrepreneurial city, directing all its energies to achieving economic success in competition with other cities for investments, innovations, and ‘creative classes’” (Leitner et al., 2007, p. 4; Florida, 2002; Leitner, 1990). This transition towards increased inter-urban competition and entrepreneurial urban governance can, in turn, lead to a reification of neoliberal ideologies that are spatially grounded in specific policy initiatives. Such initiatives, in turn, act as political technologies that, as a collective, form an apparatus of neoliberal governance aimed at increasing urban economic growth. Chief among such strategies are growing attempts by municipal governments to devise city/place branding initiatives as well as corporate naming rights programmes. Branding campaigns presume to re-position cities in relation to others as entrepreneurial power-houses to be reckoned with on a global stage.

According to Harvey, the city “offer[s] its own brand of entrepreneurship and enterprise in facing the enormous economic and social change which technology and industrial restructuring bring” (1989, p.4). Harvey cites an intensifying shift towards global market capitalism and resulting changes to conventional methods of manufacturing (deindustrialization) as a key symptom of neoliberalism (Harvey, 1989). Inter-urban competition has, as a result, become the default for cities struggling to survive in the face of globalizing markets, more flexible modes of production, and comparative advantages (Short and Kim, 1998). Transitions by municipal governments from managerial to entrepreneurial modes of governance demonstrate a fundamental shift in global market forces, deindustrialization, and the adoption of neoliberal values.

Situating Neoliberalism: from Marx to Foucault

Unlike scholars drawing upon Marx's ideas, those approaching neoliberalism from a Foucauldian perspective do not "start with the proposition that some have power and others don't" (Walters, 2012, p. 14). Rather, as Walters (2012) argues, governmentality studies "insis[t] that any macro-level order is a shifting, provisional constellation" which does not rely on a "broader pattern of order" (p. 14). Walters' (2012) point, here, is imperative to unpack if scholars are to gain any long-lasting insight into neoliberal ideologies through real world examples of "actually existing neoliberalism" (Brenner & Theodore, 2002, p. 349).

Discussions like Walters' (2012), Dean's (2009) and Larner's (2000) draw attention to neoliberal forms of state and non-state modes of governance, whereas scholars such as Peck (2001) argue that critical human geography should "probe the macro-political, contextual, and inter-institutional logics of neoliberalism" (p.446). Both interpretations of the neoliberal project are useful as they "enabl[e] understandings of the entanglements of power ... in an increasingly interdependent neoliberal world" (cf. Springer, 2012, p. 134). As this research is probing and exploratory, I enrich my analysis of neoliberal urban phenomena not by concentrating only on neoliberalism as an ideology; rather, I construct a theoretical matrix that includes the investigation of specific articulations of neoliberal urbanism.

Governmentality, according to Foucault (2007), comprises state and institutional powers that hold "the population as ... [their] target, political economy as ... [their] major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as ... [their] essential technical instrument" (p. 108). For Hamann (2009), the logic of self-interest pervades the individual behaviours of a "free and autonomous" subject (p. 38) and, in turn, reshapes our interactions with one another. A neoliberal governmentality, Hamann (2009) asserts, comprises the "strategic production of social

conditions” steeped in a neoliberal *ethos* that depends on the pervasiveness of market values (p. 38). This, he argues, relies on the calculable creation of “social conditions that are conducive to the constitution of *Homo Economicus*” (Hamann, 2009, p. 38, original emphasis). *Homo Economicus*, here, refers to the idea that the “economic man” is economic in every way: his daily practices are predicated on the adoption of market-based values (Hamann, 2009, p. 38). Neoliberalism, then, involves the performance of free-market principles upon one’s conduct in day-to-day life (Hamann, 2009). This, in turn, enables individuals to accumulate human capital who, as a result, become “entrepreneurs of themselves” (Hamann, 2009, p. 38).

Contemporary debates involving neoliberalism continue to be fraught with issues surrounding the politics of knowledge. What constitutes the ‘neoliberal project’ and what does not remains a central point of contention among social theorists studying what Larner calls “market governance” (2000, p. 12). Larner (2000) draws significant distinctions between three dominant interpretations of neoliberalism in existing literatures: neoliberalism as policy, neoliberalism as ideology, and neoliberalism as governmentality. Defining our usage of the term *neoliberalism*, then, becomes essential to any study examining neoliberal phenomena, as failure to clearly demarcate how and why we are using the word can obfuscate any investigation thereof.

Springer (2012) states that neoliberalism “is simply too nebulous to isolate or determine” (p. 136). He does not, however, suggest that scholars reject any commonly held definition of neoliberalism. Rather, he acknowledges recent debates surrounding the concept of neoliberalism and the inherent problem of relying on a generalized definition of the term. Castree (2006), for instance, describes neoliberalism as a “necessary illusion” whose “embedding in real-world situations muddies the clean lines of its conceptual specification” (p. 1). Part of the problem, as Castree (2006) states, is that there is no conceptual fix to determine precisely what is or isn’t

neoliberal. Neoliberalism can be variegated, or protean, and, as a result, it does not “possess stable characteristics” (Castree, 2006, p. 3). Despite continuous attempts by geographers to provide a critique of neoliberalism through empirical studies, “consensus on what is actually meant by ‘neoliberalism’ has diminished” (Springer, 2012, p. 135).

This project examines specific instances of the neoliberalization of place in Dubai. Central to this study is the idea that neoliberal phenomena are borne out of a multiplicity of factors and manifest through everyday experiences (Ong, 2007). Marxian political economists facilitate the analysis of neoliberal processes as ideology to help scholars uncover the political motivations behind decisions to create a corporatized cityscape. In contrast, studies from a Foucauldian perspective enable researchers to expose how specific neoliberal policies are unique to their urban contexts and, as Brady (2011) suggests, emphasize an investigation of “concrete practices of how governance is enacted” (p. 265). This case study demonstrates elements of both perspectives by drawing on scholars from both sides of the debate. Neoliberalism remains a contested term, the limits of which are up for discussion, but existing definitions attempting to make sense of ‘the neoliberal’ continue to be useful to researchers unpacking empirical examples ‘on the ground’.

Risky Business: Entrepreneurial Urbanism and Branding the City

Central to Harvey’s (1989) thesis is the notion that urban governance has shifted from a “managerial” to an “entrepreneurial” role (p. 4). As Harvey (1989) maintains, “[t]he task of urban governance is, in short, to lure highly mobile and flexible production, financial, and consumption flows into space” (p. 11). He argues that, since the mid-1980s, “there seems to be a general consensus emerging ... [that] positive benefits are to be had by cities taking an entrepreneurial stance to economic development” (Harvey, 1989, p. 4). The rise of the

entrepreneurial city, for Harvey (1989), is a phenomenon that “hold[s] across national boundaries[,] ... political parties and ideologies” (p. 4). The shift from a managerial to a more entrepreneurial mode of urban governance results, in part, from increasing deindustrialization, structural unemployment, and financial austerity measures employed by local and national governments alike (Harvey, 1989). Entrepreneurial urban governance, then, is borne out of neoliberal ideology. For Harvey (1989), these factors, coupled with neoconservatism, explain, in part, why entrepreneurial urbanism can appeal to governments struggling to retain and increase investment dollars.

The transition towards entrepreneurial governance encourages local governments to take on characteristics commonly associated with the private sector (Mollenkopf, 1983; Hall and Hubbard, 1996). In particular, municipal governments take more risks, attempt to distinguish themselves and the cities they govern through innovation and promotion, and are motivated by the possibility of profits (Hall and Hubbard, 1996). Hall and Hubbard (1996) claim that, beyond labeling cities as entrepreneurial, future research should focus on testing the empirical successes and failures of entrepreneurial modes of governance.

Central to Hall and Hubbard’s (1996) analysis is the notion that entrepreneurialism is not a new phenomenon. Rather, they argue that “entrepreneurial forms of governance are merely the latest in a long line of political strategies which have attempted to create conditions conducive to the economic success of cities” (Hall and Hubbard, 1996, p. 155). The authors attempt to distinguish entrepreneurialism from other modes of urban governance. Many cities, for instance, are equally if not more concerned with growth management than growth creation (Hall and Hubbard, 1996). Growth management involves the control of growth by governments, whereas growth creation involves the implementation of policies specifically

aimed at sparking further economic growth (Hall and Hubbard, 1996). Hall and Hubbard's analysis attempts to make sense of local and global phenomena that shape the ways in which entrepreneurial governance reconfigures the organization of cities to encourage economic growth through urban development. The political economic order of the city gets re-organized and, as a result, so do the daily lives of its inhabitants.

The rise of the entrepreneurial city does not only augur a change in governance for cities struggling to secure investment and remain viable competitors against other cities. It can also create the illusion that transforms cities into "active agents" (Harvey, 1989, p. 5). Entangled with the process of urbanization, Harvey (1989) claims, are a set of practices rooted in class politics, which are "spatially grounded" (p. 5). Such processes bring together various actors, each with different agendas (Harvey, 1989). This illusion that Harvey (1989) mentions can, in turn, lead decision-makers to take economic risks and develop initiatives directed at bettering their cities which, in reality, might be detrimental to future economic growth. Municipal governments are encouraged to actively solicit investment from corporations, through public-private partnerships, or by re-imagining the city with large-scale developments or mega-projects. This refiguring of municipal governance results, in part, from diminishing transfers from senior levels of government and austerity measures activated by governments that scale-back state interference. As a result, revenue-generation becomes an essential indicator of the city's potential to decline, survive, or grow. The entrepreneurial city, as a result, is often perceived by urban practitioners to be a harbinger of economic growth and, by extension, stability.

Entrepreneurial urban governance, in turn, enables local governments to make decisions on behalf of all of the city's stakeholders, but to the benefit of a select group. Often, for instance, municipal governments will move forward with projects with little to no public consultation

(Harvey, 1989; Greenley and Foxall, 1997; Mitchell *et al.*, 1997; Parent and Deephouse, 2007; Houghton & Stevens, 2011). Existing hierarchies of power can objectify the city by “dominat[ing] daily practices and confin[ing] subsequent courses of action” (Harvey, 1989, p. 6). City governments jumping on the entrepreneurial bandwagon might find short- to mid-term financial success but often incur the social costs associated with top-down governance that inherently elides certain publics from participating in any aspect of the decision-making process. According to Smith (2002), supplanting the welfare state with neoliberal market schemes can lead local governments to “deliberately excludes significant parts of the population” (cf. p. 437; Swyngedouw, 1997). Due to a “fear of social resistance,” Smith (2002, p. 437) argues, the state increases its presence through forms of social control. This, in turn, “provokes heightened state authoritarianism” (Smith, 2002, p. 437).

Jessop (1998) argues that “being an ‘entrepreneurial city’ has ... become a central element in many cities’ self-imaging” (p. 77). Jessop (1998) asserts that the rise of neoliberalism has led to a number of cities applying an entrepreneurial label onto many governance strategies that would, outside of a neoliberal context, be considered “neo-corporatist” (p. 77). For Jessop (1998), the entrepreneurial city is not a generic pattern of economic success that governments can transpose onto their individual cities; rather, it is a template that each government can use as a tool from which to build its own, unique design. The entrepreneurial city, then, does not provide a touchstone to a universal quick-fix for struggling municipalities. It does, however, signal potential economic rebounds for cities hoping to create a singular brand of success for themselves.

Jessop (1998) goes on to redefine entrepreneurialism and re-emphasize its significance for cities looking to attract and generate revenue. The concept of entrepreneurship, he states, is

applicable to any field of activity “where innovation generates benefits which are appropriable – at least temporarily – by the innovating agent” (Jessop, 1998, p. 82). Jessop’s definition is significant because the notion of innovation, and how cities themselves can create new, dynamic ways to compete for dollars, resources, and talent, becomes a necessary addition to Harvey’s (1989) initial concept of the entrepreneurial city.

Harvey’s (1989) entrepreneurial city is demonstrative of what Hubbard and Hall (1998) term a “new urban politics” wherein cities experience a shift in governance that values the pursuit of economic development and growth over the government’s provision of services (p. 1). As cities become more entrepreneurial, local governments are “imbued with characteristics once distinctive to businesses” (Hubbard and Hall, 1998, p. 2). The effect of neoliberal policies and, as a result, entrepreneurialism can increase “competitive urbanism” where cities must compete against one another for economic resources (Short and Kim, 1998; Berg, 2011; Dinnie, 2011).¹

The adoption of businesslike characteristics by urban governments also leads to a reimagining of the city, which increasingly takes the form of city marketing (Jessop, 1996; Hubbard and Hall, 1998; Dinnie, 2011; Insch, 2011). According to Short and Kim, “[c]ities are marketing (selling, promoting, advertising) themselves to create and change their image with the intended goal of attracting business, tourists and residents” (1998, p. 55). Short and Kim (1998) also claim that global market forces as a driving factor for increased inter-urban competition. The idea that cities are, in fact, sites where institutional and spatial restructuring occurs illustrates a “decline of national state powers as a result of political uncontrollability of global economic integration” (Brenner, 2004, p. 1).

Cities react to the neoliberal project in order to effectively attract and retain investment.

¹ Cities often compete with one another to attract and retain investment, talent, tourism.

Location, for instance, is progressively driven by labour costs rather than its proximity to economic activity and skilled labour, which forces municipal governments to rethink the way cities are promoted in a global context (Short and Kim, 1998). If cities lose investment to more affordable locales, then municipal governments must look elsewhere to recoup dollars lost to more economically seductive cities. One method of attracting revenue that many municipal governments are beginning to investigate involves the branding of public places, their names, and, more specifically, the financial acquisition of public naming-rights by corporations (Rose-Redwood, 2009; Vuolteenaho and Ainiala, 2009). Entrepreneurial governance becomes a “central element in many cities’ self-imagining and/or place-marketing activities” if they are to be successful in their attempts to secure investment and dollars (Jessop, 1998, p. 77). As municipal governments continue to adopt entrepreneurial strategies to attract and secure investment, place promotion rhetoric becomes more commonplace, especially when undertaking systematic corporate renaming programs. The programmatic corporate renaming of public places, or *toponymic branding*, continues to gain popularity among proponents of the entrepreneurial city paradigm. Those promoting toponymic branding perceive corporate naming campaigns and *ad hoc* agreements as yet another way to fill paltry municipal coffers without raising taxes.

Despite an ever-growing dependence on place promotion tactics by municipal governments desperate to secure investment, Hall (1998) argues that measuring the success of entrepreneurial urban governance remains difficult because research on the topic lacks reliable evidence. There are numerous indicators to account for when investigating entrepreneurial governance strategies, including the design of the metric of success itself. Will a study compare economic growth longitudinally, or draw out similarities and differences between different place promotion campaigns? Conversely, if a research project measures success by compiling

stakeholder reactions to a particular campaign, then results measuring success can vary wildly. Further, while municipal governments continue to use place promotion as an avatar of economic growth and geopolitical stability, some academics remain skeptical (Hall, 1998). A major concern for critics of place promotion programs, for instance, involves the necessary ‘start-up’ investments made by local authorities (Hall, 1998). Holcomb (1994) echoes critics of place promotion by arguing that, despite its popularity, “cities continue to be ‘undersold’ compared to most commercial products” (cf. Hall, 1998, p. 27). Despite disagreements about the usefulness of entrepreneurial tactics like place promotion for urban governments, entrepreneurial thinking has and will likely continue to permeate urban politics in the foreseeable future (Harvey, 1989; Boyle and Hughes, 1994; Ward, 2003; Keil, 2009; Acuto, 2010; Müller, 2011; Shapely, 2011).

Sell This City: Place Branding in Urban Contexts

According to Dinnie (2011), a significant amount of the literature on city branding is “devoted to the concept of the creative city” (p. 4; Bayliss, 2007; Healey, 2004; Hospers, 2003; Ooi, 2008). Developed by Florida (2002), the theory of the creative city is based upon seeking to attract the Creative Class, which includes a set of white-collared individuals, or “‘idea workers” (Winfield-Pfefferkorn, 2005, p. 17; Florida, 2002). Comprising of “scientists, architects, writers, artists, and others who create new ideas, technology, and creative content” (Dinnie, 2011, p. 4), the Creative Class is believed to be “almost essential to the survival of a city” (Winfield-Pfefferkorn, 2005, p. 17). Moreover, place branding scholars deem the ‘creative’ factor vital to a city’s economic viability because, as residents, Creatives “galvanize local economies” (Dinnie, 2011, p. 4).

Moreover, Florida’s discussion in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) has popularized the concept of city branding (Glaeser, 2004; Peck, 2005). Florida argues that, in order to remain competitive in today’s creative age, cities must secure “Talent, Technology, and Tolerance”

(Florida, 2002, p. 21, p. 249). He states, for instance, that “[a]s creativity becomes more valued, the Creative Class grows” (Florida, 2002, p. 71). This notion underpins Florida’s central theory of “creative capital” (Florida, 2002, p. 223). Creative capital, according to Florida, is the theory that “regional economic growth is driven by the location choices of creative people ... who prefer places that are diverse, tolerant and open to new ideas” (Florida, 2002, p. 223).

According to Peck (2005), however, Florida’s creative capital theory leads to “hipsterization strategies” adopted by governments who “pa[y] handsomely to hear about the new credo of creativity ... [and] learn how to attract and nurture creative workers” (p. 740; Shea, 2004). Florida’s (2002) idea that cities must be ‘cool’ to be livable offers a ‘cookie-cutter’ solution to inter-urban competition. What is considered ‘cool’ to one city stakeholder, for instance, might differ completely from other stakeholders’ conceptions of the city (Dinnie, 2011).

Scott (2006) also contests Florida’s creative class theory. He argues that the sheer existence of a creative class does not necessarily produce a vibrant economy (Scott, 2006; cf. Dinnie, 2011). Florida’s concept of the creative class remains significant to include in any analysis of place branding precisely because it demonstrates an “increasingly pervasive urban-development script” adopted by city administrators and lauded by governments to increase a city’s brand powers (Peck, 2005, p. 740).

The Good, the Bad, and the Brand: Unpacking Urban Entrepreneurialism

Kavaratzis (2004) claims that city branding is “the appropriate way to describe and implement city marketing” (p. 58). The application of corporate branding strategies, he argues, provides “the basis for developing policy to pursue economic development and ... serves as a conduit for city residents to identify with their city” (p. 58). Kavaratzis’ point illustrates a shift in urban

politics, as the use of marketing in cities is perceived as a “natural consequence of ... entrepreneurial governance” (p. 59). This transition towards entrepreneurial urbanism demonstrates an enmeshing of the neoliberal project in urban contexts, as the marketization of cities and places through brand creation, management, and promotion becomes a central aspect of municipal governance.

Pike (2009), however, argues that despite the potential for rich geographical inquiry on the topic, “the geographies of brands and branding have been underinvestigated and neglected” (p. 620). He suggests that geographical reviews on branding processes can contribute to an understanding of the “diversity and variety of the ways in which they are enmeshed in space and place” (Pike, 2009, p. 621). By looking at the spatialization of brands, geographers can begin unpacking the interconnections between branding processes, the ways in which they become materialized, and how they function discursively to refashion existing place-identities.

A central problem with the practitioner-targeted city branding literature involves the omission of scholarship critically examining the socio-spatial implications of entrepreneurial tactics on city users. McCann (2004) suggests that the use of “extra-economic factors” by proponents of urban entrepreneurialism legitimizes inter-urban economic competition (Jessop, 1997; Jessop, 1998; Jessop and Sum, 2000). This focus on what Ward (2003) calls the “non-materiality of political practices” exemplifies a reconfiguration of “how governance is performed, and who is involved ... [and] the way it is couched, or narrated” (p. 117). Geographers like McCann (2004) and Ward (2003) point to an important question for critical scholars to discuss: urban entrepreneurial tactics may herald local economic growth, but at what cost? If Pike (2009) is, indeed, right to claim that “[b]randing practices ... construct meanings and forge longer-lasting entanglements ... [by] appealing to sophisticated, aesthetically aware

and reflexive consumers, especially from affluent and élite social groups” (p. 624; Urry, 1995), then city branding practices can fail to engage with a significant portion of a city’s stakeholders. By extension, city brands produced as a result of entrepreneurial policies can misrepresent the associations deemed culturally, socially, and politically significant to potential and real stakeholders.

Despite the economic potential that city branding holds for city governments looking to adopt entrepreneurial strategies, Kavaratzis (2004) acknowledges that decision-makers often fail to create city brands that represent all stakeholders involved because many do not “understand the nature and consequences of marketing” (p. 60). Brands endow a product with a distinct and unique identity, and Kavaratzis (2004) argues that city marketing should also aim to achieve this. An underlying problem, however, is that creating a comprehensive and representative brand for a city, its residents, and all involved stakeholders can often prove a difficult task (van Gelder, 2011). Dinnie (2011) notes that city branding initiatives also remain complex in part because they involve an “obligation to address the needs of a spectrum of fundamentally different target audiences” (p. 4). Who the city brand targets and for what specific purpose (i.e., tourism, sports stadia, fashion, potential and existing residents, to name a few) can lead to planning decisions that inherently omit audiences from the design of that particular place/city brand (Greenberg, 2000; Chalip & Costa, 2005; Martinez, 2007; Bickford-Smith, 2009; Zenker, 2009; Dinnie, 2011).

Consuming Brands

Place marketing analysts suggest that more frequent and effective communication between decision-makers and stakeholders would increase the deemed success of place marketing strategies (i.e., more stakeholders would identify with the brand) (Houghton and Stevens, 2011; Kavaratzis,

2004). Additionally, Houghton and Stevens (2011) claim that city brands tend to fail specifically due to limited or no public consultation and civic engagement. They contend that many city branding campaigns are unsuccessful because they do not “engag[e] or energiz[e] local people, businesses, and community groups in shaping, articulating, and conveying the brand” (2011, p. 45). Academics like van Gelder (2011), echoing Houghton and Stevens, applaud urban analysts and champions of city branding who attempt to establish and maintain partnerships with stakeholders. City brand partnerships, van Gelder (2011) argues, are “hybrid form[s] of organization” that allow “key stakeholders to jointly develop, create and lead on the implementation of the brand” (p. 43). Central to this joint partnership between stakeholders and government is also the idea that responsibility is shared (van Gelder, 2011).

An underlying problem with place branding approaches predicated on civic-governmental communication, however, involves the actual establishment and maintenance of such relationships. While a call for more civic participation in the city branding process is a noble one, being able to implement such a policy is often difficult and can prove lengthy. Moreover, while increased civic engagement involves *more* members of the public, it does not necessarily include *all* members of the public. Such partnerships can marginalize stakeholders who are not considered ‘key’ to the partnership (i.e., transient populations) or lead to internal conflicts within the partnership (i.e., two or more groups with divergent value-systems, or needs).

Other proponents of city branding propose a multitude of factors that, presumably, will lead to ‘successful’ city brands (Dinnie, 2011; Hospers, 2011; Middleton, 2011). According to Middleton (2011), successful brands create “distinctive appeal and then buil[d] awareness based on that appeal” (p. 25). Hospers (2011), for instance, suggests that successful city brands tend to leverage the tourist gaze of a city through ‘image carriers’ such as photographs to create an

“accumulated advantage” or “the Matthew effect” (p. 31).² Popular destinations, trend more due to their prevalence in the public’s eye and this is often achieved through the reproduction and dissemination of representations of those cities. Scott (2006) argues that city branders should attempt to implement urban planning practices, which do not solely rely on the existence of a creative class to create a vibrant economy to project a *successful* city brand (Dinnie, 2011).

While Kavaratzis’ (2004) framework provides city branders with a more comprehensive toolkit to develop and undertake city branding initiatives and, by extension, entrepreneurial urbanism, his discussion is primarily aimed at policy-driven scholars looking for the *right* set of tools that will enable cities to achieve economic success through the creation of a city brand. What is included in the *right* set of tools, however, remains unclear. Many proponents of city branding advocate “holistic urban planning” (Scott, 2006; cf. Dinnie, 2011, p. 31), “the involvement and participation of civil society” (Belloso, 2011, p. 120), and the “communicative competence of a city” (Grabow, 1998; cf. Ebow Spio, 2011, p. 104) as indicators of success. While such indicators might link to ‘successful’ city brands, city branders seldom expound on such indices and whether they can actually lead to transferable or generalizable knowledge. Instead, city branding literature tends to read like ‘how-to’ guides for those looking to devise and implement a city brand. As such, success indicators are seldom contested.

Authors like Kavaratzis (2004) illustrate an underlying reliance prevalent in city/place marketing and branding literatures, wherein city branding is understood as a policy measure available to municipal decision-makers looking to get city budgets back in the proverbial black. Place and city branding literatures more often than not fail to critically examine urban marketing

² The Matthew effect refers to the biblical citation found in Matthew 25:29, which reads: “For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away” (Merton, 1968; cf. Hospers, 2011, p. 31).

and branding practices. Their analysis of the creation, management, and promotion of city and toponymic brands is often uncritical and does not expose how the branding of places can demonstrate the transformative powers of the neoliberal project. Moreover, place and city branding analysts do not discuss how both forms of marketing reshape ways in which municipal decisions are made and, as a result, how neoliberal processes can function to reshape and re-image the city, for better or worse.

Proponents of city branding emphasize its value to policy-makers looking to diversify their economies and generate significant revenues by attracting investment (Dinnie, 2011; Winfield-Pfefferkorn, 2005; Parkerson and Saunders, 2005). Advocates championing city branding claim that “places of all kinds can benefit from implementing coherent strategies with regard to managing their resources, reputation and image” (Dinnie, 2011, p. 3). Parkerson and Saunders (2005), in turn, suggest that branding campaigns can improve cities by repositioning them as “attractive leisure and business tourism destinations” (p. 242).

Critics, on the other hand, warn of the dangers associated with entrepreneurial urbanism and favouring inter-urban competition as a central urban planning policy. McCann (2004), for instance, cautions against the “serial reproduction” (Harvey, 1989, p. 10) of entrepreneurial policies developed to spur economic growth. He emphasizes, by drawing upon Cox (1995) and Jessop (1998), that urban entrepreneurial governance encourages a “‘treadmill’ effect in which every city feels an external pressure to upgrade ... its policies, facilities, amenities” to remain economically competitive (McCann, 2004, p. 1910). This pressure, McCann (2004) suggests, results from “weak competition” and a “crowding of the marketplace” as cities embark on campaigns to secure investment from other municipalities (p. 1910).

Branding and the Politics of Place

A brand can be defined as “an identifiable product, service, person or place” (Kaplan et al., 2010, p. 1288). Brands are imbued with meaning through the “constitut[ion] of values or ‘equity’” entangled with their spatial interactions and associations (Pike, 2009, p. 619). Names hold symbolic capital that is both socially and legally institutionalized to identify persons, places, or objects (Bourdieu, 2002). Central to this research is the concept that brands and names have significant overlap: both provide a toolkit to label people, objects, or places through a system of identification, and perform meaning through their labels.

Names and brands are also political in nature. According to Bourdieu (1991), social relations are actualized through the “linguistic exchanges” that result from speech acts (p. 37). Speech acts, he adds, “are also relations of symbolic power” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 37). Brands and names, as a result, hold the power to influence the interpretation or utility of a place through their symbolic values (Bourdieu, 1991). The act of naming/branding performs meaning and can, in turn, produce new place-identities.

Throughout this study, I will use the terms *name* and *brand* to denote places that become identifiable through their performative utterances (Austin, 1962). I draw upon Austin’s (1962) notion that “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (p. 6). My reasoning for this involves my epistemological approach: the legitimization of knowledge through language is a political process, and both names and brands are discursive “instrument[s] of action and power” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 37). It is, therefore, insufficient to “just sa[y] something” (Austin, 1962, p. 7). Rather, speech and, by extension, the acts of naming or branding involve what Butler (1993) calls “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (p. 2; Berg and Kearns, 2009).

Brands also function as signs that can “represent social differentiation ... and reinforce social relations” (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994, p. 466). What a name or brand connotes when it is recited, as well as what it produces, then, is imperative to examine if researchers are to gain knowledge about place and toponymic branding. Moreover, the relationships between signs and what they connote are socially constructed; meaning can be arbitrarily assigned, or designed, to reflect ideologies authorized by a dominant power structure (i.e., government) (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994).

What a brand is designed to advertise and what it actually signifies to stakeholders can be conflicting, as individuals engage with, interpret, and experience places differently. Baudrillard (1996) highlights a fundamental dichotomy between the theorization and practical interpretation of what signs designate: “[s]igns ... speak to us of objects, but they never (or scarcely ever) explain those objects from the standpoint of a *praxis*: they refer to objects as to a world that is absent” (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 192). The above quotation demonstrates an underlying problem with the signification of city brands: the creation of a system of signs for objects, or places, that signifies different meanings to different stakeholders (Insch, 2011). If Baudrillard’s object is used in a practical sense, then it can “acquire a social status” (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 92). If, however, an object is understood as a theoretical construct, or what Baudrillard terms the “abstract” function, then, he argues, it is “devoid of any function ... [and] takes on a strictly subjective use” (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 92). Moreover, the image advertised through the sign “creates a void, indicates an absence ... [and] focuses free-floating wishes upon an object” (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 192). Whether the subject chooses to engage with the object, or brand, in the practical or theoretical sense, can, therefore, alter the brand’s function, how it is valued, and what it signifies. The ways in which governments, communities, and individuals ascribe value to

places through the branding process, therefore, affect how individuals interact with those spaces (Berg and Kearns, 2009).

The Naming Game: Legacy Gifts and Corporate Naming Programs

We use names to identify people, objects, and places. As a result, questions surrounding who holds the power or right to name are valuable to consider. Naming rights have existed for centuries, but as governments continue to institute austere economic measures in hopes of keeping budgets trim, the commodification of naming rights is increasingly conceived as part of economic growth strategies.

It becomes useful, then, to explain what I *mean* by naming rights. Burton (2008), for instance, outlines three categories of naming rights: naming rights for legacy gifts, for a title sponsor of an event, and for a long-term corporate sponsor. Bartow (2007), by contrast, defines naming rights as “the right to name a piece of property, either tangible property or an event, [which is] usually granted in exchange for financial considerations” (p. 922). Both descriptions reduce the place-identities associated with the name of a particular public asset to an economic exchange value by allowing corporate or individual honorees to proffer dollars to public institutions in return for naming privileges (Bartow, 2007).

Although legacy gifts date back to the 16th century, the exchange of naming rights for legacy gifts became popular near the turn of the 20th century (Burton, 2008). Legacy gifts were, Burton (2008) suggests, popularized by a rise in American philanthropy. Legacy donors, he claims, often consisted of “upper class ... financially well-off individuals and families” who “offer[ed] financial support to a wide range of charitable initiatives” (Burton, 2008, p. 57). The Rockefeller family, for instance, has endowed countless institutions with legacy gifts since the

early 20th century (Burton, 2008).

The acquisition of naming rights for legacy gifts is a pervasive social tool used by philanthropists and institutions alike for mutual gain. Donors can have their names and, presumably, fame in return for a varying amount of dollars granted to the institution being renamed. The institution, in return, can utilize bestowed legacy gifts to fund internal projects or manage operating costs, depending on the parameters of the gift agreement. The legacy gift functions as a stream of direct revenue for the institution and a tool immortalizing the donor through the re-inscription of the toponym and the spaces therein.

Burton (2008) asserts that “[t]he tradition of granting naming rights in exchange for money has been gaining momentum over the last three decades” (p. 49). The parameters for a legacy gift agreement in the 19th century, for instance, greatly contrast with current instances of naming agreements. Whereas “little thought [was] given to the impact of [a] brand name” in naming rights agreements in the 19th and early 20th centuries, today’s legacy gifts include “suitable ... signage [which] can be extended to all organizational media material to ... boost the value of the brand name” (Burton, 2008, p. 63). Current naming rights agreements involve the use of marketing and pointed communications to “get the message out” and increase exposure of the sponsor’s brand (Burton, 2008, p. 67). By promoting the brand of a particular naming partner, governments enable a restructuring of urban space by the naming partner, which can also function to legitimize and normalize existing and new hierarchies of power over the place that is being renamed (Rose-Redwood, 2011).

In addition to legacy gifts, long-term corporate sponsorship is quickly becoming a tool used by institutions, non-profits, and governments to increase direct revenue (Burton, 2008). As local markets continue to globalize, bids to secure naming rights are becoming more competitive

and “are being challenged by nonprofits ... and other groups outside the nonprofit sector, including cities, state, and federal agencies” (Burton, 2008, p. 65). Burton argues that, “[i]n recent years ... public traditions have been absorbed by corporations seeking naming rights to enhance recognition of their brand names” (2008, p. 69). Corporate sponsorship, while not a new phenomenon, is becoming an attractive stream of potential revenue for cash-strapped cities.

Bartow (2007) argues that, while a “corporation may pay tens of thousands of dollars to ‘brand’ a public building with one of its trademarks,” the naming process can lead to legal and political issues that are often “difficult to discern” (p. 921). Public amenities such as “parks, schools, roads, [and] buildings” are considered valuable by the public “because they are visible and useful” (Bartow, 2007, p. 921). By appending a trademark onto a public asset, the “honoree or mark holder reaps some measure of this value, and thus this value is ‘privatized’” (Bartow, 2007, p. 921). This is significant, she asserts, because when “assets are [re]named” the political dynamics “are almost completely reversed” and can lead to a “usurpation of public goodwill” (Bartow, 2007, p. 921-922).

One of the underlying issues with the corporate sponsorship of public place-names, Bartow (2007) suggests, involves the “uneasy intersection between naming (or ‘branding’) practices and trademark law” (p. 924). Further, Bartow (2007) defines trademarks as “words, short phrases, symbols, pictures, designs, or other features used in conjunction with specific goods or services to indicate the source of the goods or services and distinguish them from commercial offerings of competitors” (p. 922). When public amenities undergo corporate renaming, new names become trademarks of that corporation’s brand. As such, the re-branding of a place’s name can lead to local stakeholders becoming confused, many of whom either fail to recognize the new name, or reject it.

Public place-names, therefore, play an important role in the communities within which they exist. Boyd (2000), for instance, argues that public venue names help create “memory places,” which allow individuals to identify themselves through the community’s construction of a particular place, the activities which occur in that place, and its name (p. 333). He states that “[e]very time the name is invoked on the building, on road signs, by a broadcaster, by a reporter, by a fan, it communicates the building’s role in the community” (2000, p. 333). The name of a place, therefore, denotes individual and collective memory (Boyd, 2000). If public place-names are corporatized, then the bonds between individuals, the community, and the city become vulnerable to conflict (Boyd, 2000).

Naming can also be used as a tool by local governments looking to control or legitimize a particular ideology (Azaryahu, 2006; Rose-Redwood, 2008; Yeoh, 2009). As Rose-Redwood argues, “[t]he official codification of place-names is the primary means by which governmental authorities have sought to establish the law as the sole arbiter of legitimate practices of toponymic inscription” (2008, p.891). The corporate renaming of a place is legitimized by government and, therefore, codifies the corporation’s brand as the official name of a place. It also commodifies public places in the urban realm through the naming act and transforms the space to fit the corporation’s brand image. It erases the cultural and historical significance associated with the place-name by de-legitimizing previous official and unofficial toponyms and instituting its own.

Berg and Kearns (2009) describe the naming process as “a form of ‘linguistic settlement’ that *produces* places through the simple enunciation of intentions to do so” (p. 19). For Yeoh (2009), “the naming process is ... not only of toponymic significance but also embodies some of the social struggle for control over the means of symbolic production within the built

environment” (p. 72). Similarly, Azaryahu (2009) highlights the historical importance of street naming and its descriptive functions. He argues that, traditionally, “street names ... designated either geographical orientation or referred to a certain peculiarity associated with local topography and history” (Azaryahu, 2009, p. 56).

Corporate naming rights reduce toponyms to their exchange values. By doing so, governments transform spaces that hold cultural, historical, or social relevance into commodities available for lease to private companies. Naming rights, in other words, facilitate the privatization of urban spaces, as they privilege corporate interests, which, as a result of such agreements, have the power to brand part of the city with their brand name, or logo. Corporate naming rights agreements also enable governments to use naming rights to manipulate urban spaces and control the types of markets they hope to foster. Naming rights are a form of public-private partnership and, as such, governments get to decide who wins the bid to a place-name. By actively pursuing and vetting naming agreements, governments partake in a form of roll-out neoliberalism that grants the state powers to be an active participant in the formation of state-corporate partnerships, or sector-specific growth initiatives. Further, by brokering the financial lease of public place names, decision makers can wield more control over which companies have a local presence. The state determines the economic rules of engagement and can, in turn, regulate the ways by which cities and the identities they hold are erased, rewritten, and branded for the world to consume.

Bartow (2007) contends that such agreements often obscure the naming process from the public. Naming rights, she suggests (Bartow, 2007), obfuscate the “political processes through which naming decisions are made frequently invisible to the public” (Bartow, 2007, p. 921). As a result, there is a dearth of research investigating the legal issues surrounding naming rights,

whether they involve individual or corporate honorees (Bartow, 2007). In order to better understand the naming of public assets, then, scholarship exploring the role of naming should pay close attention to the interactions between the act of naming, the name, and the socio-political implications of the thing, or place, named.

Connecting the Dots: Political Toponymies and the Neoliberalization of Place

Most of the scholarship on critical toponymies has, until now, focused on the politics of identity (Azaryahu, 2006; Berg and Kearns, 2009; Yeoh, 2009). Rose-Redwood (2011), however, contends that there are “many thematic areas that remain undertheorized” in critical toponymic literature (p. 34). As little research examines the points of intersection between the politics of naming and geopolitical events, toponymic research should attempt to develop a robust academic tradition that examines the role of naming and how it interacts with political economic practices that extend neoliberal techniques of governance. Rose-Redwood (2011), for instance, argues that critical toponymic study could examine the relationship between naming and “neoliberal corporatism within the banal materialities of public space” (p. 38). Especially as governments continue to adopt place and toponymic branding measures to secure revenue, scholars should pay close attention to toponymic inscription and how a practice as seemingly benign as naming rights can have insidious political implications that alter the symbolic and material landscapes in a city.

Naming rights agreements between governments and corporations function as political technologies that reshape the image of the city through the corporate transfiguration of toponyms. Naming rights policies involve conscious attempts by governments to rationalize urban space into a site of exchange and consumption in hopes of increasing profits and

amplifying market discipline. As a result of this process, urban spaces get commodified through the act of toponymic branding.

The proliferation of corporate naming agreements also functions as an instance of neoliberal urbanism, wherein municipal governments utilize entrepreneurial logic to raise new forms of revenue. There is, for instance, a growing focus on government-corporate partnerships that seek to “offer unmatched impact and visibility” to private sponsors (Roads and Transport Authority, 2012a). Naming rights deliberately recalibrate the politics of urban development and governance to utilize privatization and entrepreneurial tactics to attract investors. The selling of naming rights also facilitates efforts made by governments to simultaneously fund what were once public services through a corporatization of city amenities while intervening in the market through the creation and rolling out of revenue-raising initiatives. This is illustrative of Smith’s (2002) contention that “state abstention ... is matched by heightened state activism in terms of social control” (p. 437). Concerted attempts by governments to pursue naming rights programs are illustrative of political technologies that attempt to reposition cities as competitive and globally important. Naming rights provide yet another avenue for municipal administrators looking to unlock new markets and use them as catalysts for inward investment and economic growth.

Conclusion

Corporate naming programs are indeed becoming popular instruments for governments looking to secure fast-cash for their cities. As city and toponymic branding becomes more ubiquitous, it is also important to examine the ways in which both branding processes interact with each other. If a ‘successful’ city brand should attempt to create an ‘accumulated advantage’ through the

production of ‘image carriers,’ then how does the renaming of an iconic building like the Burj Khalifa (Dubai), or a state-of-the-art transit network, affect the production and interpretation of a city’s brand (Hospers, 2011)? Moreover, if *good* city brands increase awareness of the city by projecting a distinctive and appealing image to the world (Middleton, 2011), then would the periodic renaming of city infrastructure detract from the city’s distinguishing brand? Such questions provide easy entry points into academic examinations about the overlap and fissures between city and toponymic branding processes.

Finally, despite a robust literature on neoliberalism and its interactions with city processes, urban geographers have largely ignored naming rights. Conversely, while critical place-name theorists are beginning to explore these issues (Rose-Redwood, 2011), the literature linking naming rights to neoliberal urbanism remains underexamined. Central to this study is the examination of neoliberal urban processes and how they are concretized through examples of city and toponymic branding.

An Interview State of Mind

May 6, 2012

I come to, disoriented and irritable from the heat. It takes me a few moments to remember where I am, and why. I rise with the Fajr to begin my second full day in Dubai. I have come here to collect data that will shape my thesis and my future as a researcher. As I brush my teeth, I struggle to remember the advice and training my professors drilled into me. I have a mission to complete, and I cannot choke at this, my eleventh hour. I smudge my face with creams and powders tinted a unique shade of human, and think about the questions I'm supposed to ask. Don't forget to give the participant room to share information. Don't lose control of the interview, but be real. Stay in control. Be cool. None of this makes sense. I tell myself to act natural and be charming, knowing that there is no way for me to camouflage who I am. I recall questions from my interview guide and mouth the words, in silence, for fear of waking someone, or something, that ought to be asleep at this early hour. Don't lead with questions. Don't ask double-barreled questions. Use specific but unbiased language, I remind myself, as if this were possible. As I commute to the Jebel Ali Free Zone, I recite words from books I don't understand. Context-specific, dependability, validity, rigour. These words are my scriptures. These words are my rules of engagement. They will get me through my first interview, even though I know that they are loaded and full of contradiction. I don't know anything except that things will go wrong. Things always go wrong. I get out of the cab, pay the driver, and walk into an office. A beautiful young woman greets me. She is draped in London's finest, wearing Milanese shoes that make me lower my purse to hide my \$20 flats. She smiles a warm, kind smile and tells me that my

participant is ready for me. I swallow down bile, bare my teeth in the widest smile I can manage, and thank her. I am ushered into a cool, modern-looking boardroom, enclosed by glass, so clean and clear I can barely see it. My participant stands, extends a hand, and welcomes me. Here we go, I think. There's no turning back from here.

Chapter 3: Data Collection and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter is organized into five parts. I begin by outlining key differences between the definitions and usages of the terms *method* and *methodology*, and establish how both will be used for the purpose of this study. Next, I highlight two methodologies that I will use for my research design: the case study and critical discourse analysis. Subsequent to a brief review of both methodologies, I discuss my research design by outlining the research process and then examine the techniques I employed to carry out my research: semi-structured interviews and coding. Next, I discuss the role of rigour in this study. I conclude my analysis by reflecting on the limitations of my research design.

You Say ‘Methodology,’ I Say ‘Method’: Defining Key Terms For Qualitative Research

Lees (2004) claims that research novices often struggle to find studies that explain how to go about conducting discourse analysis. In order to clarify research, data collection, and analysis processes, it is important to situate the empirical findings present in this thesis. In the section that follows, I elaborate on my research design and define my usage of two central terms: method and methodology. I expound on my usage of both terms in order to avoid conflating the two.

A *methodology* can be described as “the assumptions, postulates, rules, and methods—the blueprint or roadmap—that researchers employ to render their work open to analysis, critique, replication, repetition, and/or adaptation” (Schensul, 2008a, p. 516). For Somekh and Lewin (2005), methodology involves the “collection of methods or rules by which a particular piece of

research is undertaken” (p. 346). Lincoln and Guba (2000) emphasize the importance of choosing the appropriate methodology in relation to a project’s research design. A methodology, according to Lincoln and Guba (2000), is a process of research that enables scholars to operationalize the theories and epistemic assumptions informing their research objectives. Baxter (2010) builds on Lincoln and Guba’s definition to make a case for methodology as “a theory of what can be researched, how it can be researched, and to what advantage” (Baxter, 2010, p. 82).

Conversely, a research *method* is described as “the ways in which qualitative researchers collect data to build their argument” (Schensul, 2008b, p. 521). Winchester and Rofe (2010) employ the term *method* to denote the specific investigative techniques used by researchers. Different methods, they argue, can be used to conduct different types of research (Winchester and Rofe, 2010). For Baxter (2010), a *method* is a “mechanism to collect ‘data’” rather than the underlying approach to research (p. 82).

It is important to note the distinction between *methodology* and *method* when constructing a research design. Whereas the former involves a methodical classification of data collection strategies, or *philosophy* of methods, the latter comprises the actual devices used to undertake research. Moss (2002) contends that a “method has to do with *doing* research, [whereas] methodology ha[s] to do with *approaching* research” (p. 2). Using a particular method, then, must relate to the methodological approach of the research at hand.

The lack of clear distinction between methods and methodologies can leave unfamiliar researchers with a limited toolkit to build a research design using the most appropriate approaches and techniques to achieve their intended research goals; the tools can be misused and the resulting research can be ill-executed, or lack rigour. As such, it is imperative to outline specifically what is meant by both terms. For the purpose of this study, I employ the term

methodology to denote the overarching theories informing the methods used to conduct my research. I use the term *method* to describe the specific techniques I use to collect my data.

Case Study: Place and Toponymic Branding in Dubai, UAE

This study employs a cross-sectional case study approach to investigate city and toponymic branding practices in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Baxter, 2010). A cross-sectional case study involves research that “is conducted in one block of time” (Baxter, 2010, p. 90). The use of a cross-sectional case study allows for real-world observations of the phenomenon of interest (city and toponymic branding), the results of which can then be abstracted to generate new ideas about the political economy of cities and urban governance.

A case study methodology enables the production of idiographic, or intensive, depth-oriented research (Baxter, 2010). It allows researchers to build or explain theories through the study of an event, a process, or a place. A case study also leads to context-specific knowledge rather than statistical and generalizable data (Baxter, 2010; Mansvelt and Berg, 2010). For the purpose of this study, context-specific refers to the notion that knowledge is situated and makes the “knower accountable to [her] ... position” in relation to the research undertaken (Mansvelt and Berg, 2010, p.338). The use of a case study will contextualize theories relating to city and toponymic branding as tools of neoliberal governance by providing tangible examples of such branding practices in Dubai and how their uses articulate the practice of a neoliberal mode of urban governance.

Description of Case Study Area

Located in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Dubai provides the ideal study site for research that investigates the geographies of urban governance through city and toponymic branding initiatives. In nearly fifty years, Dubai has managed to effectively efface its image as a “backwater pearl diving village best known for its duststorms” by recreating itself as a “model market economy ... [and] beacon for legitimate, non-oil business in the Arab world” (*Business*, 2004). Dubai’s transformation has primarily resulted from top-down policies instituted by its monarchs, starting with its first ruler, Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, to its current Sheikh, His Highness Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (*Business*, 2004; *His Highness*, 2012; *Why Dubai*, 2012).

Dubai serves as an excellent case study to examine city and toponymic branding and how it reshapes geographies of urban governance for several reasons. First, the Emirate’s recent and rapid economic growth provides an ideal site for research hoping to gain a better understanding of the political economy of cities that transition from pre- to post-industrial status over a very short period of time (Smith, 2005; Government of Dubai, 2012). As Dubai has experienced extremely rapid economic, political, and urban restructuring in the last three decades, an examination of the role of neoliberal governance strategies would provide scholars and policy-makers alike with a touchstone for future research on the political economy of cities, and the neoliberalization of place(s) in the Emirate.

Second, the government of Dubai has, in recent years, aggressively pursued investment by adopting economic policies that “work with market forces, not against them” (*Business*, 2004). According to the Emirate’s official website, Dubai’s economy provides investors with “a competitive combination of cost, market and environmental advantages that create an ideal and

attractive investment climate for local and expatriate businesses alike” (Government of Dubai, 2012). The website also boasts “no exchange controls, quotas, or trade barriers” to encourage an “open” and “pro-business” economic climate with minimal regulation of private sector activities (Government of Dubai, 2012). The government of Dubai’s anti-regulatory and marketization policies led to the creation and promotion of an “[o]pen and [f]ree market system” predicated on entrepreneurial forms of capital accumulation (Government of Dubai, 2012; Jessop, 1998). Such policies demonstrate the government’s avowal to the neoliberal project, as a primary tenet of governance involves the state decreasing its role as a market regulator while increasing its political presence through the promotion of a neoliberal “ideological framework” associated with economic competition, globalization, and spatial restructuring (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

Third, critical geographical studies investigating the relationships between the city-as-brand, toponymic branding, and urban governance seldom focus on cities or states in the Middle East. Dubai’s status as a regional hub for international trade and development continues to gain momentum. It is, as a result, imperative to examine issues relating to neoliberal urbanism and how existing theories about the political economy of cities and place branding can be culturally and spatially contextualized.

Dubai’s government, while autocratic in nature, has been described as “benign” and promotes itself as a friendly hub for international firms, expatriate communities, and tourists (*Business*, 2004; McLeod-Roberts, 2010). From the late 1990s until the 2008 global economic collapse, Dubai experienced exponential economic and urban growth that propelled the city to a post-industrial and cosmopolitan status (Pacione, 2005). Demographic data also demonstrate significant population growth. From 2000 to 2010, the estimated population of Dubai grew from 862,38 to 1,905,476 (*Population, Buildings*, 2005; *Total Population*, 2005; *Population Bulletin*,

2010). Such rapid growth illustrates quick immigration and economic development, which has, in turn, altered urban development patterns and city morphology (Pacione, 2005).

Case Studies: The Construction and Re-Naming of The Burj Khalifa (Dubai), and The Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative

Dubai's pro-business approach is not only predicated on free markets but also places specific emphasis on the adoption of entrepreneurial forms of governance (*Business*, 2004; Pacione, 2005; Acuto, 2010). This study details two specific instances in which city and toponymic branding initiatives, informed by entrepreneurial decision-making, carry out the neoliberalization of place in Dubai.

First, I examine the construction and renaming of the Burj Khalifa (Dubai). The Burj Khalifa, known as "the tallest building in the world" (*The Tower*, 2013), promotes "a symbol of Dubai as a city of the world" (cf. Surk, 2007). After undergoing a last minute name-change before the building's grand opening in January of 2010, what was formerly known as the Burj Dubai became the Burj Khalifa (Bedell, 2010; Bloomberg, 2010; De Santiago, 2010; Hoffman, 2010). The name change, according Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed, was done in "honour of the ruler of Abu Dhabi" (Bloomberg, 2010). More interestingly, perhaps, is the fact that the change also came briefly after Abu Dhabi's ruler, Sheikh Khalifa, gave the Emirate of Dubai a \$10 billion bailout to "stave off financial collapse" (Bedell, 2010). The Burj exemplifies city and toponymic branding efforts that are conceptualized to attract and stimulate economic growth through the promotion of a landmark unique to its city. The construction process, name-change, and its subsequent marketing as a tourist 'hot-spot' are part of a greater narrative of entrepreneurial urbanism that aims to produce an image of the city-as-brand. The Burj Khalifa

(Dubai) is a symbol of the UAE that pays homage to the federation's commitment to market-based initiatives through "civil and economic progress" (Bloomberg, 2010).

The second case in this research project is an analysis of the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative. The program involves the Emirate's recent decision to promote the corporate sponsorship of public infrastructure by selling naming rights as a means to create new sources of revenue (Al Theeb, 2008; Rose-Redwood, 2011; *Roads and Transport Authority*, 2012b). In 2006, the government of Dubai created a plan to lease the naming rights of 23 metro station names to corporate sponsors in return for financial compensation. DubaiMetro Naming Rights is a systematic and Emirate-wide corporate naming program that "[t]urn[s] your brand into a destination" through immersive marketing techniques (*Businessweek*, 2008; cf. Rose-Redwood, 2011, p. 35). The program operates as a political technology informed by neoliberal rationalities that functions to commercialize public places and names through a corporatization of the symbolic and material landscapes. The Dubai Metro Naming Rights Project illustrates an increasing adoption of neoliberal values by Dubai's government, whose focus remains to enable corporate entities to "become a part of DubaiMetro, an eagerly awaited mega-project that will continue to drive Dubai's growth and success well into the future" (*Businessweek*, 2008).

A case study approach can also be useful for research that is exploratory, or looking to develop new theories (Baxter, 2010). As Baxter states, "qualitative case studies are often used to delve into under-explored and thus under-theorized phenomena" (2010, p. 89). The use of city and toponymic branding as strategies to promote neoliberal urban governance in Dubai is, indeed, under-explored and under-theorized. A case study approach provides a practical entry point into an examination of city and toponymic branding in Dubai.

Discourse Analysis: A Critical Approach

In addition to a case study, a second methodology I use is discourse analysis. I have chosen this form of textual analysis instead of other approaches, such as content analysis, as I seek to uncover ideographic evidence by employing qualitative data collection and analysis tools.

According to Cope (2010), content analysis is “essentially a *quantitative* technique” often used in statistical analysis of populations (p. 282). Conversely, the analysis of discourse, according to Brown and Yule (1983), “cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs” (p. 1).

Van Dijk argues that, because critical discourse analysis does not “have a unitary theoretical framework,” there exist “many types of [discourse analysis]” (2001, p. 354). For Gee (2011), discourse analysis, in the broadest sense, is “the study of language-in-use” (p.8). Gee (2011) outlines two main types of discourse analysis: what he terms *descriptive* discourse analysis and *critical* discourse analysis. Descriptive discourse analysis, he claims, “describe[s] how language works in order to understand it” (Gee, 2011, p. 8). Critical discourse analysis, by contrast, attempts “to speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, social or political issues, problems, and controversies” (Gee, 2011, p. 8). As all language is politicized through its interaction with “non-language ‘stuff’ ... [and] enact[ed through] specific identities and activities” (Gee, 2011, p. 7), the analysis of all discourse becomes inherently political and should be acknowledged as such.

Waitt (2010) argues that discourse analysis enables researchers to “identify the sets of ideas, or discourses, used to make sense of the world within particular social and temporal contexts” (p. 217). Discourse analysis also attempts to explain “how particular knowledge systems convince people about what exists in the world (meanings) and determine what they say (attitudes) and do (practices)” (Waitt, 2010, p. 218). Language, according to Gee (2011), is used

to fit “a situation or context that ... language, in turn, helped to create in the first place” (p. 11). Discourse analysis, then, involves the ways through which knowledge is produced. This analysis, in turn, enables researchers to distinguish between what words mean in their respective contexts and how they can be validated (Waite, 2010). By examining language through its context, then, discourse analysis promotes research interested in uncovering the naturalization of dominant meanings, attitudes, and practices through an examination of language and the ways by which it gets constructed (Waite, 2010; Gee, 2011).

Applying discourse analysis to city and toponymic branding materials in Dubai, for instance, draws attention to the authorship of the materials themselves. How branding campaigns are designed, constructed, and promoted throughout the Emirate points to the dominant power structures informing the municipal decision-making process in Dubai. The use of discourse analysis makes explicit the social and cultural apparatuses underpinning place and toponymic branding, and how they can be used as a tool to reshape geographies of urban governance (Gee, 2011).

I use discourse analysis to evaluate textual content, including promotional city and toponymic branding materials (i.e., physical documents, internet websites, and visual media portraying local brands) produced by the government of Dubai, outsourced brand consultants, and developers in the region. In addition to promotional materials, I analyze government policy documents discussing city and toponymic branding campaigns, reports on socio-economic indicators and proposed sectors for growth to gain insight into government motivations behind the systematization of city and toponymic branding. Finally, I scrutinize visual representations of local city and toponymic brands, including photographs of local sites and media (i.e., websites, radio ads, billboards). By analyzing photographs, I uncover individual, industry, and government

perceptions about the interrelationships between the city-as-brand, toponymic branding, and the politics associated with naming rights agreements.

How knowledge is produced and validated is central to qualitative inquiry employing a discourse analysis methodology. For van Dijk (2001), critical discourse analysis pays specific attention to the “way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (p. 352). Moreover, critical discourse analysts reject ‘value-free’ thinking often attributed to scientific investigations; rather, researchers using a critical discourse approach engage with research through the understanding that scholar and society are directly linked to each other (van Dijk, 2001). In order to gain insight into phenomena of academic interest, then, theorists applying critical discourse analysis to their studies must accept that knowledge is situated in the socio-political contexts within which it is embedded (van Dijk, 2001). By emphasizing the dynamism between the researcher and her research, critical discourse analysis equips scholars with a tool to create, describe, and explain theories that make explicit the social production of power relations and promote a social justice agenda (van Dijk, 2001).

Discourse analysis and a cross-sectional case study are appropriate data analysis tools for this research project, as they both help to “explore in-depth nuances” of existing power relations that underpin place and toponymic branding campaigns in a specific geographical setting (van Dijk, 1993; Baxter, 2010). Discourse analysis yields situated and in-depth knowledge that relates the political economy of branding to its urban context: Dubai. More importantly, it politicizes the development and social production of place and toponymic brands, which are often overlooked and understudied in the UAE (Waite, 2010). It also makes explicit how the selected materials

were produced. By examining the production of city and toponymic brands, I attempt to uncover how such tools are enmeshed in the promotion of neoliberal rationalities (Waitt, 2010).

Research Process

In order to conduct this study, I received approval from the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board. Prior to each interview, I provided each participant with a letter for implied consent that included an outline of the study, research goals and objectives, and additional details regarding the project and interview process. Before conducting interviews, each respondent supplied written consent to participate. Due to interview participants' unique social and professional positions, I refrain from associating the presented responses to individuals who took part in this project. Instead, I maintain the confidentiality of individual responses in order to protect participants' identities.

Methods: Semi-Structured Interviews

I used semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. A semi-structured interview utilizes a research guide, which means that the questions are, to some degree, organized (Dunn, 2010). The interview, while guided by questions posed by the researcher, can also remain flexible (Dunn, 2010). The choice to conduct semi-structured interviews rather than structured or unstructured interviews involves the method's flexible but directed nature (Dunn, 2010).

By creating a research design that is not too prescriptive, I was able to investigate different industry and government-specific perceptions about place and toponymic branding. Both populations and the geographical site (Dubai) posed significant barriers to access. A semi-structured format provided a conversational setting that was less formal and bureaucratic than a

structured interview or survey. As I am an outsider, a structured interview would have amplified the cultural, economic, political, and social barriers that distance me from potential respondents. A structured format would also limit space for participants to share a breadth of information on the topic of place or toponymic branding, as I lack the knowledge and skills necessary to interpret colloquialisms and nuanced subtext present in responses (Neuman, 2000). Structured interviews would have impeded my ability to develop meaningful relationships with my respondents, none of whom I knew prior to this study.

Interviews, for the most part, took place in Dubai, where Arabic is the official language (Salem, 2010). As such, designing a structured interview guide would have led to logistical problems involving language barriers and, as a result, raised questions about the dependability of the data collected. Conversely, an unstructured interview would have limited my ability as a researcher to collect motivations and behaviours relating to my topic of study, as an unstructured format would not generate focused information that would provide insightful knowledge relevant to my research goal (Dunn, 2010). Finally, as I did not know my respondents beforehand, an unstructured format would not necessarily lead to lengthy or rich responses, as respondents might have felt discomfort sharing their perspectives on city and toponymic branding initiatives.

The semi-structured interview enables the researcher to control the direction of the interview, but does not limit the discussion (Dunn, 2010). Semi-structured interviews can, as a result, help researchers “fill a gap in knowledge that other methods ... are unable to bridge” (Dunn, 2010, p.102). Moreover, semi-structured interviews can provide context-specific insight into the motivations and behaviours of key informants who are privy to local municipal decision-making and place branding processes (Dunn, 2010). As Dubai is a constitutional monarchy, decisions regarding place and toponymic branding strategies and governance ultimately lie with

the Government of Dubai and, more specifically, the ruler, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (*His Highness*, 2012). It is, therefore, imperative that informants consulted have first hand knowledge about municipal decision-making and place and toponymic branding processes in Dubai.

The sampling for this research project was purposive and based on specific criteria rather than comprising a random selection of participants (Bradshaw and Stratford, 2010). Central to this study is government and industry-specific perceptions related to place branding and governance in Dubai. I intended to conduct twenty to thirty in-depth, semi-structured interviews with members of Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority, the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, the Community Development Authority, the Department of Economic Development, the Department of Finance, and the Dubai Chamber of Commerce. I also intended to interview creative directors at Brand Union (an advertising company that specializes in the creation of destination brands in Dubai), Emaar, Nakheel, and Dubai Holding (three of the largest property developers in Dubai) (Bagaeeen, 2007; Brand Union, 2011a; Brand Union, 2011b). In total, I managed to conduct fifteen interviews with employees working for the government of Dubai, Brand Union, branding specialists, and industry professionals who either worked in the development sector, or at companies such as Emaar, Nakheel, or Dubai Holding (see Figure 3.1).

Interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Dunn argues that the use of an audio recorder can help "compile the fullest recording" of an interview (Dunn, 2010, p. 119). The use of an audio or visual recorder can also "allow for a natural conversational interview style because the interview is not preoccupied with taking notes"



Figure 3.1 Interview Process.

(Dunn, 2010, p. 119). Establishing a natural and comfortable setting helps build a rapport between the interviewer and the research participants (Dunn, 2010). Recording devices can, however, fail, which is why Dunn (2010) suggests note-taking as both a supplement and a safeguard to audio-visual equipment. I took copious notes during and after each interview in order to supplement interview responses with meta-textual information. Pre- and post-note-taking also helped me memo theoretical, methodological, and analytical dilemmas I encountered (Nairn, 2002; Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 156).

One caveat to recorded interviews involves the medium's permanence (Dunn, 2010). Informants, for instance, might get uncomfortable responding to questions knowing that the interview *records* what they share (Dunn, 2010). The use of an audio or visual recording device can also increase potential risk to research participants, who might face negative repercussions from their community if they share sensitive information and subsequently get identified (Dunn, 2010). During my fieldwork, many respondents asked to turn off audio-recorders in order to say

something off the record, as they did not always feel safe sharing information about place and toponymic branding campaigns they worked on, about fellow employees, or about the government of Dubai. To respect the interview-participant relationship and code of ethics, no ‘off the record’ response are included as part of this study. It is important to note, however, that such comments have enriched my understanding of the processes at work in Dubai.

Methods: Coding

I coded interview transcripts and branding materials (i.e., physical documents, internet websites, and visual media portraying local city and toponymic brands) to extract prevalent themes from the data I collected. I coded all transcripts and branding materials manually and examined each interview in detail. To be able to manage the data collected, I created and maintained a codebook (Pratt, 2002). I began the coding process by mapping each interview. I then created descriptive codes that relied on broad categories. I refined categories by developing analytical theme codes that enabled me to interpret data collected (Waite, 2010). Analytical codes are useful as they can provide discourse analysts with “insights into why an individual or collective holds particular sets of ideas by which they make sense of places, themselves, and others” (Waite, 2010, p. 232).

Ensuring Rigour

Important to any qualitative research study should be the notion of rigour. According to Taylor (2001), rigour in discourse analysis “can be linked to ... the richness of detail present both in the data and the analysis” (p. 321). For Baxter and Eyles (1996), strategies to increase rigour can be established through a number of criteria, including transferability and confirmability.

Confirmability, Baxter and Eyles (1996) argue, involves the “[e]xtent to which biases,

motivations, interests or perspectives of the inquirer influence interpretation” (p. 512). The above terms facilitate an ethical approach to qualitative study. There are, however, significant limitations to the language used to describe rigour, as the act of data collection and analysis can never be a-political or objective.

My role as a researcher, then, becomes pivotal, as the accuracy of transcription and the presentation of the data can affect the rigour of my study. Moreover, my coding and write-up of my analysis of the interviews and branding materials inform which data get presented and how. For the research to succeed, it is imperative that I represent the information shared with me in conversation, over the telephone, and in text, in an accurate manner. I have, to date, detailed the process of data collection and analysis in a field journal in hopes of remaining aware of my role as researcher throughout the research process.

Journals help me remain reflexive about my subject position as a researcher, a woman, an Iranian woman in an Arab country, and an outsider. By recording my research journey, I became aware of my positionality in relation to the data collected, participants, and the research process during and after fieldwork. Writing about my fieldwork also reminds me of the subject positions of my participants and my ethical duty to represent their perspectives in an honest manner.

Despite best efforts to answer questions about confirmability and transferability, it is, according to my worldview, impossible not to influence the interpretation of the motivations, interests, and perspectives solicited from research participants, as language itself is power-laden (Baxter and Eyles, 1996; Gee, 2011). As I conducted interviews in a nation where the official language is Arabic, and of which I have only an elementary knowledge, my ability to understand cultural and linguistic norms was limited, at the very least and inadequate, at the very most. Moreover, I entered a community to which I had no previous affiliation and where gender roles

differ from those of my own community. I had to take into account my position as a Western, non-Arabic woman. I also have to acknowledge limitations that result from my positionality if I am to gain any significant insight into city and toponymic branding practices in Dubai.

Limitations

There are numerous limitations to the research design of this study that I need to acknowledge. To begin, I employed a case study approach with the specific hope to access specialized and contextual knowledge about place and toponymic branding and their relationship(s) with modes of urban governance. The information produced as a result of this project should not be considered wholly generalizable, or transferable to other, similar examples of branding. Part of the rationale informing my decision to focus on specific cases of city and toponymic branding is to recognize that such neoliberal processes are “mutable, inconsistent, and variegated” (Springer, 2012, p. 135). Moreover, the neoliberalization of place can, according to Springer (2012), materialize in a number of different and hybrid ways, which are “contingent upon existing historical contexts, geographical landscapes, institutional legacies, and embodied subjectivities” (p. 136; see Peck, 2001; Peck and Tickell, 2002). As such, my investigation of branding initiatives in Dubai aims to illustrate the neoliberal project at work, but also to spatially and temporally ground my case studies as evidence of neoliberalism’s discontinuous and unstable constitution.

Another weakness of this project involves access to participants. This research project is qualitative and relies on the collection of situated, individual perspectives that have inside knowledge about the design, production, approval and implementation of place and toponymic branding projects in Dubai. As a Canadian woman, gaining access to potential interviewees has been a significant challenge. When existing networks of family, friends, colleagues, and

acquaintances yielded limited contacts that could serve as participants for this project, I resorted to cold calling professionals in the planning, development, construction and branding industries. Because I utilized acquaintances, family, friends, and friends of friends to contacts potential informants, many of my participants ended up identifying as Canadian, or expatriates. This is a noteworthy limitation, as a significant portion (nearly 75%) of my interviewees did not identify as Emirati. I also attempted to establish relationships with employees working for the government of Dubai, which often proved difficult, if at all possible.

One of the greatest challenges I faced when trying to establish relationships remotely involved time. In particular, I experienced difficulty coordinating telephone or Skype meetings due to time zone differences. My home base is in Victoria, BC, and the time differential between Pacific Daylight Time and Dubai's time zone, Gulf Standard Time, is eleven hours. In order to call potential participants during Dubai's business hours meant that I had to call within the hours of 10pm-6am on any given night.

Financial constraints also significantly restricted my ability to conduct research in the field. Travelling to Dubai can be, in itself, a costly endeavor. Undertaking fieldwork *in situ* can also be (and was!) rife with money, logistical, and health troubles, all of which narrowed my capacity to make contacts with informants and respondents, and collect intended data.

My access to participants, sites, and the 'field' in general limited the scope and outcomes of this research. My sample, while purposive, certainly omits perspectives that could be of value to this study, as I was not always successful in 'landing' interviews with many professionals and potential participants that I contacted. I remain, however, eternally grateful to those individuals who did participate in my study and provided me with the content that informs this thesis. Despite any limitations encountered in the field or at home, the research process yielded

significant insight into my proposed objectives, which I will discuss extensively in the following two chapters.

Entering the Record Books

May 29, 2012

Ears pop, my stomach drops, and we begin our ascent of the world's tallest building. Our elevator is erumpent with languages, distinct and similar, the quick tempo of Bedouin-inspired club beats, and a light show that threatens seizures. We move at the speed of light towards the top. Time slows as the elevator doors open. The contents of our car spill like liquid into a mass of tourists simultaneously moving in unison and pushing against one another. No forward movement, just sway on the spot and meld together. Feet trample smaller feet, hot breath condenses on ears, and the smells of sweat sting nostrils. We are all at the top of the world. My view is of the camera lens dangling from a man's neck, his belly pressed into my throat. His lens pushes the flesh of my face away from the bones that support them as he stands between me, the sky above, and the world below. We have reached the top of the Burj Khalifa: icon of Dubai, symbol of growth, and evidence that anything is possible.

Chapter 4: The Name Saved The City: Raising and Renaming the “Tallest Building in the World”

Introduction

In Burj Khalifa, we see the triumph of Dubai’s vision of attaining the seemingly impossible and attaining new benchmarks (*The Tower*, 2013).

In January 2004, Emaar Properties PJSC began excavation for what would become the “tallest man-made structure the world has ever seen” (*Building a global icon*, 2013).³ The Burj Khalifa, piercing Dubai’s skyline at 828 metres, encapsulates the Government of Dubai’s beguilement with superlative descriptors, legacy, and creating a city-as-brand that produces Dubai’s myth for the world to consume.

Years pass and it is now January 4th, 2010. After numerous hiccups, including the worst economic crash to befall Dubai, the Burj, in front of an international audience and with great fanfare, is finally born. Only, instead of bearing the name of its city and Emirate, the world’s tallest building, the icon of the city, is renamed after Dubai’s trustee and economic savior, Abu Dhabi’s Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan (Hoffman, 2010; Huang, 2010). Following the financial crisis of 2009, Sheikh Khalifa, the figurehead of Abu Dhabi and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), bestowed the Emirate of Dubai with approximately \$10 billion dollars in bailout money (Thomas Jr., 2010a).

In this chapter, I present the first of two case studies for this project: a critical discourse analysis of the Burj Dubai/Khalifa. I concentrate my analysis on the promotion of the Burj and how discussions surrounding it have shaped local perceptions of the building and the Emirate of

³ PJSC refers to a privately traded, publicly funded company (*About*, 2011). Emaar Properties is, as a result, a state-backed development company.

Dubai. The Burj functions as an entry point into a more in-depth analysis about three themes identified in interviews and media sources covering the construction, launch, and name-change of the world's tallest "superscraper" (Walid, 2010). The themes, I contend, indicate three discourses related to entrepreneurial governance: state-building and dirigisme (Müller, 2011), development and the creation of an 'instant-city' (Bagaen, 2007), and pastoral modalities of local governance (Foucault, 1981).

I begin the chapter by providing a brief introduction to the Burj itself, including an overview of the project. The Burj acts as a nexus between city and toponymic branding discourses. On the one hand, it is a flagship project used by the Government of Dubai to promote the Emirate. On the other hand, it is the site of the world's tallest identity crisis, during which, what was once called the Burj Dubai became, seemingly overnight, the Burj Khalifa.

I argue, based on empirical findings, that Burj Khalifa is a crucible of Dubai-as-brand. Further, its name change instantiates the norming of neoliberalizing political technologies through what Vuolteenaho and Ainiala (2009) term "linguistic globalization, [and] market-niche based theming" (p. 233). The act of renaming reflects the imbrication of conflicting performatives atop one another. The name change also fragments toponymies (Vuolteenaho and Ainiala, 2009) and, as a result, undercuts place-identities produced by the Burj's performances of Dubai-as-brand.

Dubai, in the eyes of many, is a "modern metropolis" (Hammond, 2013). The city, through the creation and existence of the Burj, remains, until a taller successor emerges, unmatched, unparalleled, and unrivaled in its pre-eminence. The *Official Tourism Portal of the City of Dubai* states that, "[i]n concept and execution, Burj Khalifa has no peer" (*Burj Khalifa*, 2012). Burj Khalifa, and the promotional rhetoric used to describe and advertise the building,

sum up the culture of development in Dubai, which relies on speculation, boosterism, and superlative descriptors.

The first theme that I consider concerns the Burj as a *superlative*. During my fieldwork, many respondents emphasized that, while the Burj Khalifa is a building (i.e. a material object), it also illustrates Dubai's obsession with developmental supremacy. The Burj Khalifa signifies Dubai. Its opulence and sleek design suggest "Arabian enterprise" (Hari, 2009) at its finest and allow it to fit in with the rest of Dubai's skyline, which Davis (2006) aptly describes as a "chrome forest of skyscrapers" (p.47).

After coding numerous transcripts, I realized that nearly every record used superlative language to describe, or refer to, the Burj. Moreover, participants referred to the brand and/or image of the city of Dubai by using similar or the same hyperbolic language. Interviewees employed superlative descriptors when discussing the relationship between the Burj and how its unveiling has secured Dubai's position in a global 'race to the top.' The city currently houses the tallest building and freestanding structure in the world and conversants noted that, with the completion of the Burj, Dubai is perceived as having achieved a status worthy of global recognition. Burj Khalifa is indeed part of Dubai's "chrome forest" (Davis, 2006, p. 47), but it is one that has contributed to an image of Dubai as *the best*, or *greatest*, city to invest in, live, or visit, in the Middle East. This image of Dubai as a superlative city forms part of a broader discourse on state-building through governmental control of economic development, or what Müller (2011) describes as dirigisme.⁴

The media also use superlative language when describing Burj Khalifa. As international interest peaked the most around the Burj's grand opening and name change, news articles I

⁴ Müller (2011) defines state dirigisme as a form of political economy in which the national state functions as the "primary driving force of regional development on the basis of a nationalist imaginary" (p. 2101).

analyze are dated, for the most part, on or around the building's opening ceremonies. The Burj Dubai/Khalifa's inaugural ceremonies took place on January 4, 2010, and it was during the grand opening that the name change was revealed to the public (Huang, 2010).

The second theme I extract from interviews and texts involves the concept of development as *legacy*. In conversations and on the Burj's official website, Burj Khalifa is often referred to as Dubai's "Living Wonder" (*The Tower*, 2013). The Burj Khalifa produces the ideal of the city-as-brand through its developmental and architectural supremacy, eclipsing all other firms and cities hoping to build the tallest building in the world. The Burj, however, also has a material presence. It is a physical structure, a building that houses offices, people, and other amenities. As a result, the Burj Khalifa creates two narratives of development that stand in opposition to each other: *development as legacy* versus *development as utility*.

By *development as legacy*, I refer to the notion that urban development does not only serve a utilitarian purpose; rather, its primary aim is to build a timeless monument and, in the case of the Burj, a global icon that metonymizes the city. The Burj Khalifa's principal function, then, is to project the city of Dubai-as-brand. *Development as legacy* values the cultural patrimonies bequeathed by the development in question. The theme of *legacy*, then, becomes imperative to explicate in relation to the idea that a material structure, such as the Burj Khalifa, can also perform a representation of the city of Dubai.

By comparison, I use the concept of *development as utility* to evoke the idea of urban development to serve a direct purpose: in the Burj Khalifa's case, a high-density, mixed-used building. In short, Khalifa is not a *practical* development. *Development as utility* embodies the opposite of projects (like the Burj) that primarily aim to create and establish legacies. Instead,

utility evokes the idea that buildings should mainly exist to perform functions: to shelter and provide spaces for users and inhabitants.

The third and final theme I explore is the topic of *myth*. During my research, I encountered varying descriptions of the myth of Dubai. Emiratis and expats alike shared their opinions about Dubai's government and the ways in which Sheikhs, both past and present, have been instrumental in creating the Dubai that exists today through their personal visions.

The creation of *myth* is integral to the production of the image of a city. The Burj Dubai, through its renaming, exemplifies the role of toponymic branding in reshaping the myth of Dubai by undercutting the Burj's production of Dubai-as-brand. The act of renaming the Burj *Dubai* after Abu Dhabi's Sheikh *Khalifa* has led to the creation of a shared legacy, in which the Emirate's crowned jewel, the Burj *Dubai*, has been bestowed to its neighbor, political ally, and rival city, Abu Dhabi. Many respondents view the renaming as an homage to inter-Emirati loyalty and an example of Sheikh Mohammed's visionary leadership. The Government of Dubai's decision to rename the Burj, I contend, mobilizes a discourse of pastoral governance in which the myth of Dubai is perceived as the result of leadership that makes decisions "in the interest of all" (Foucault, 1981, p. 229). A number of interviewees view Sheikh Mohammed as a Shepherd whose governance decisions protect the interests of his flock, in this case the people of Dubai. By renaming Dubai's prize project after Abu Dhabi's leader, Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed, Sheikh Mohammed is perceived by some to have "doubled down" by strengthening the political relationship between Dubai and Abu Dhabi (Thomas Jr., 2010b). In other words, by extending gratitude to Abu Dhabi through the Burj's renaming, Sheikh Mohammed has managed to simultaneously save political and economic face for the Emirate.

“The Tallest Building in The World”: The Burj Khalifa and Dubai as a City of Superlatives

Ever since the Burj Khalifa first hit its full 828m peak, rumours have circulated over the building that would beat it. Several one-km-high towers have been proposed but, as yet, nothing tangible has surfaced? (*sic*) and until they do, the Burj will remain at the top of the world (Gerbich, 2011).

Dubai is a city of superlatives (Personal Interview, May 2012).

The above quotations capture, in part, the frenzy surrounding the Burj Khalifa (see Figure 4.1).

While approaching the tallest building in the world,⁵ I become acutely aware of its physical stature. The Burj punctures Dubai’s skyline, dwarfing everything around it. Its record-breaking façade refracts the sun away from the building’s cladding. This creates two effects: the ground engulfed by Khalifa’s shadow feels impossibly hotter with each step and the building radiates a seizing, platinum brilliance. To write that the Burj is a spectacular structure would be an understatement. As I type these words, the Burj Khalifa continues to hold the following titles:

- The tallest building in the world;
- The tallest free-standing structure in the world;
- Having the highest number of stories in the world;
- Housing the elevator with the longest travel distance in the world; and
- Having the tallest service elevator in the world (Emaar, 2013).⁶

In addition to the above list of world records, the Burj also houses the world’s first Armani Hotel, a four-story fitness and recreation centre and, At.mosphere, the “world’s highest fine dining restaurant” (At.mosphere, 2011; Ali, 2010). The Burj Khalifa might be too tall for the world not to take notice, but the world’s tallest building also embodies Dubai’s obsession with ostentatious construction.

⁵ See Figure 4.2 for a visualization of the world’s tallest structures

⁶ Until April 28, 2013, Khalifa also held the title for the “highest outdoor observation deck in the world” (*The Tower*, 2013). The Canton (or Guangzhou) Tower in Guangdong, China, has unseated the Burj Khalifa as holding the “highest outdoor observation deck in the world” (Simpson, 2013).

According to Ellis (2008), the use of superlatives to describe a city demonstrates extravagant linguistic style rooted in exceptionalism. He argues that “[s]uperlatives and ‘firsts’ are rhetorical devices that prepare the reader for a theoretical move—the assertion that the city is a paradigm. Not just unique or exemplary, the city being discussed contains and portends the future” (Ellis, 2008, p. 184). The Burj is, currently, unique indeed. It is an architectural exemplar. At the moment, it continues to tower 200 m over the world’s next tallest structure and remains unequivocally incomparable to its competitors (see Figure 4.2). References of the Burj Khalifa in conversations with participants and the media often involve at least one allusion to its height, grandeur, or status as the world’s tallest superscraper. Such remarks also often include the use of superlative language, by which the speaker establishes the Burj’s supremacy, be it in regards to its size, construction, the materials used to erect it, or the lifestyles associated with the building.

Superlative language invokes symbolic imaginaries that are incomparable and fantastic as well as generating equally exaggerated place-identities. While superlatives are used to describe the Burj’s



Figure 4.1. Burj Khalifa (Photo by author).

physical structure, turgid prose is also mobilized to describe the place-identities created by the

Burj. These place-identities, in turn, produce representations of Dubai that create an image of the city-as-superlative. This performance of the city-as-brand replicates with each appellation of the name or image of Khalifa and disseminates across the Emirate and throughout the world.



Figure 4.2 “World's Tallest Towers” (Skyscraper Media Source, 2013).

Ellis (2003) claims that superlative language is often used to position cities as being on the “‘cutting edge’ of urban advance” (p. 184). By completing construction of the world’s *tallest* building, Emaar⁷ and, by extension, the government, create an image of Dubai as being a *superlative* city. The Burj produces an image of Dubai as being the *first*, *best*, or *greatest* city in the Middle East or, ostensibly, the world. As a young Canadian who visited the city claimed during an interview: “Dubai was seen as a juggernaut, [as] this city where anything was possible” (Personal Interview, November 2012). The use of fantastic adjectives establishes a baseline for the types of development projects suitable for Dubai’s growing and glittering

⁷ While Emaar is a public-joint stock trading company, the company is backed by the government (Gillet, 2008).

skyline. If Dubai can build the world's tallest skyscraper, then, the argument goes, the Government of Dubai could build *anything* it wants. Superlative labels establish the notion that places like Dubai can, indeed, be juggernauts of development and that, despite any potential challenges, they “can attai[n] the seemingly impossible” (*The Tower*, 2013).

Superlative Development and Performing Urban Entrepreneurialism

Superlative descriptors also help distinguish one place from another. The Burj Khalifa's opening ceremonies attracted international attention and ensured that media outlets around the world ranging from *Reuters*, the *New York Times*, and the *Guardian* covered the Burj's unveiling (Atkins, 2010; Booth and Hughes, 2010; Thomas Jr., 2010b). By concentrating the world's focus on the unveiling of the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa put Dubai on the proverbial map. It helped reposition the Emirate as a city of global importance and one not to be confused with other Emirates, or neighboring countries.

The *superlative* establishes a precedent for future development in Dubai. By securing a litany of world records, the Burj Khalifa diffuses hyperbolic rhetoric to the rest of the city. As an executive director for one of Dubai's largest development firms exclaimed, while pointing to the superscraper, “[w]ell, that's Dubai. Right there. The Burj [Khalifa] is Dubai ... and all of Dubai is in the Burj. That's the story Dubai will tell” (Personal Interview, May 2012). Buildings like the Burj Khalifa visually reinforce the government of Dubai's emphasis on, and interest in, attracting foreign direct investment through the acquisition and promotion of large-scale development (*Dubai Strategic Plan*, 2007). The Burj Khalifa and similar flagship projects are indeed redolent of dominant city branding paradigms, which suggests that place marketing tactics can function as harbingers of future inward investment in the city (Dinnie, 2011).

The Government of Dubai professes to raise the “productivity of economic sectors” by

“maintaining high production quality standards” (*Dubai Strategic Plan*, 2007, p. 22). These targets become reality every time the government partners with a company to announce plans to break ground on another premier golf course, man-made island, or tallest building in the world (Jackson and Della Dora, 2009; Hammond, 2013). According to a participant who resided and worked in Dubai since the 1980s, “all this discussion of firsts” has been an effective investment strategy: “Today, in the Middle East, Dubai is the centre for business, centre for finance, centre for trading, centre for multinationals. It’s a centre of excellence for almost any discipline you can think of for the Middle East” (Personal Interview, May 2012). The word *excellence* in the preceding excerpt follows directly after an enumeration of Dubai’s key economic strengths, thereby reinforcing the pervasiveness of superlatives in a greater discourse related to state-building through dirigisme.

The use of superlatives, then, illustrates a mechanism used by government to produce an ideal of the city’s image and reify those products through the creation and construction of equally fantastic material objects (e.g. the Burj Khalifa). The use of superlative rhetoric to describe mega-projects like the Burj Khalifa is foundational to representations of Dubai-as-brand. Superlative language, through textual and oral descriptions, sets a precondition for future development in Dubai to live up to, in which prospective development should be at least as amazing as its predecessors to attract potential investors, create media buzz, and be noticed by anyone who’s paying attention.

Fantastic, glitzy projects promote the object, mega-development, or Burj Khalifa in this case, by drawing the world’s attention. The Burj Khalifa’s height, construction process, and record-setting specifications have increased Dubai’s cachet as a world-class destination. As one branding expert stated: “[t]he fact is, with a lot of place branding in Dubai, it’s stuff like the Burj

Al-Arab, the Burj Dubai, the Palm. It's undeniable that, if you're in architecture, you can hate it or you can love it, but you definitely can't ignore Dubai" (Personal Interview, May 2012).

Projects like the Burj Khalifa are indeed unignorable. People may not know what the tallest building in the world is named, but, when Dubai gets mentioned, many people associate the Emirate with cutting-edge architecture and glitzy buildings. One participant, a strategy director for a branding firm, claimed that, in his mind, "Dubai has always been about glitz, superlatives" (Personal Interview, May 2012). Another respondent, a British expat living in Dubai, echoed a similar sentiment. During an interview, she described her first impressions of the Emirate: "I read about Dubai, you know, in magazines. I heard about [it] from the television, but then you visit and ... it's as crazy as you thought, so you just can't believe what you're seeing. The hype, about the city, the buildings, the money ... they were right" (Personal Interview, May 2012). In addition, an English expatriate working in the Emirate explains that she "first travelled [there] because of what I'd heard, what I'd read. I wanted to see for myself ... is this [place] really what the world thinks it is?" (Personal Interview, May 2012). Dubai's reputation as a glitzy and superlative city precedes itself.

This reputation is not the result of spontaneous development. Rather, it is indicative of a governance strategy that employs urban entrepreneurialism to attract investment through flashy development. As the executive director of one of Dubai's major real-estate companies noted: "the Government of Dubai ... ha[s] redesigned their processes to match the speed of development of Dubai" (Personal Interview, May 2012). The executive director's comments exemplify Cox's (1993) "new urban politics," in which city governments undertake speculative projects that are often high risk in hopes of developing "local capital interests" (Boyle and Hughes, 1994, p. 454). Urban entrepreneurial tactics, in other words, lead to a cultural shift that

reconfigures the ways by which the government of Dubai “relates to capital” (Boyle and Hughes, 1994, p. 454).

The creation, launch, and promotion of the Burj Khalifa as a superlative structure reinforce a discourse of entrepreneurial urbanism that “prioritises economic growth as a political goal ... [through] place promotion and profit thinking” (Müller, 2011, p. 2091; Harvey, 1989, Hall & Hubbard, 1996; Ward, 2003). With a collection of world records and despite prevailing economic woes, the Burj Khalifa’s completion and global debut mobilizes the notion that fantastical development projects will beget growth. The hype generated by the creation and completion of the Burj entices potential investors looking to undertake equally ostentatious projects with the idea that situating in a city that already houses world-class developments, such as the Burj Khalifa, will also increase the cachet surrounding their project(s). By locating near the tallest building in the world, investors can piggyback off of Khalifa’s geographical entanglements and global fame to benefit from positive superlative associations.

A Brand New Political Entrepreneurialism

Ong (2007) suggests that neoliberal forces in emerging economies beyond the West involve a technique “that is about the re-management of populations” (p. 5). This form of “political entrepreneurialism” involves a transition from the “production of goods” to the “production of educated subjects” (Ong, 2007, p. 5). Such a shift fosters ‘elite subjects’ who can, in turn, become globally competitive.

Superlative language describing the Burj Khalifa is also a technique that can produce ‘educated and elite’ subjects. One interviewee, a Canadian expat working in Dubai, for instance, discussed the relationship between the Burj Khalifa, the adjacent shopping centre, and the ‘elite subjects’ that frequent both regularly (excluding tourists): “you walk into Burj Dubai and Dubai

Mall and you're, like, blown away. What you see is *[pause]* ... It's all high-fashion, high-end shops, restaurants. And the people there are high-end. Classy locals and expats only. It's a nice district" (Personal Interview, May 2012). The respondent's description illustrates the self-improving and competitive strategies that are spatialized through the Burj's brand association as a superlative structure. Moreover, her mention of "[c]lassy locals and expats only" echoes Ong's (2007) claim that neoliberal refigurations can lead to racial, religious, and caste factionalism.

Pike (2009) claims that "branded objects and branding processes accumulate histories that are social and spatial and matter to their evolution" (p. 620). The geographical enmeshings, including entrepreneurial tactics, interact with the object being branded (the Burj Khalifa). These interactions between the object, and its spatial surroundings, function to facilitate the state's calculated management of "population and space for optimal gains in profit" (Ong, 2007, p. 4). When discussing the Burj Khalifa, one executive working in development suggests that the Burj's primary economic potential involves the "marketing" of the lifestyles associated with it and the adjacent mall. Consider, for instance, the passage below, extracted from an interview with the respondent in question:

It's so funny. The revenue they generated [from the actual building] is really nothing when you compare it to the money they make from marketing the building. It's phenomenal. The mall, too, makes more money. People love consuming new, exciting places, but they'll, you know, eventually get bored. I'm sure they'll build a bigger one when the shoppers, the rich shoppers, expat wives, Emiratis, when they get bored. They have no choice if they want to attract investors (Personal Interview, May 2012).

The above description of the Burj Khalifa and Dubai Mall provide a palpable example of the geographical enmeshing of the Burj Khalifa's brand and how that brand is deployed through a "unstable constellation shaped by interacting global forms and situated political regimes" (Ong, 2007, p. 5).

From the Burj Khalifa as ‘History Rising’ to a ‘Living Wonder’: Development As Legacy Versus Development As Utility?

In fewer than 30 years, this city has transformed itself from a regional centre to a global one. This success was not based on oil reserves, but on reserves of human talent, ingenuity and initiative. Burj Khalifa embodies that vision (*The Tower*, 2013).

World's tallest building. A living wonder. Stunning work of art. Incomparable feat of engineering. Burj Khalifa is all that. (*The Tower*, 2013).

Throughout my fieldwork, participants consistently linked the Burj Khalifa to Emaar’s positioning statement for the superscraper: “A living wonder” (*The Tower*, 2013). The aphorism’s popularity illustrates two successes for Emaar and, by extension, the Government of Dubai. First, Emaar’s branding campaign was and continues to be an effective place-branding tactic. Branding companies always strive to have their positioning statements connect with their consumers, or in the case of the Burj Khalifa, those who consume the building by seeing, naming, invoking, touring, and living in Khalifa. Second, the Burj Khalifa is a global icon. It conjures up a distinct image of Dubai: a city that houses the tallest building on Earth. This building remains unmatched by any other in the world (for now, at least), is a monument to the city’s architectural and developmental prowess, and a nod to histories in the making for future generations to come. If we are to believe its developer, Emaar, then the Burj Khalifa is indeed “a living wonder” (*The Tower*, 2013) and the Government of Dubai is trying to create a history all its own: one fixated on the creation of legacies.

In conversations, many participants focused their responses on what the Burj Khalifa *meant* to them and for Dubai’s future. As a Canadian expat suggests, the Burj Khalifa functions as a “global icon” of Dubai. In conversation, she proposed that the building illustrates that Dubai “is more than just a city; it will be the heritage of the Gulf” (Personal Interview, May 2012). The Burj Khalifa signifies Dubai’s transformation into a city designed by its visionaries to disprove

naysayers who continue to ascribe value to colonial preconceptions about, in general, Central Asian cultures, and, more specifically, Gulf countries in the Middle East. Moreover, as Dubai has experienced concentrated growth in the past 20 years (Bagaeen, 2007), Sheikhs have had a unique opportunity to build the city they envision. By “building a city from scratch” (Personal Interview, May 2012), the leaders of Dubai, past and present, get to elide any previous (mis)conceptions about the Emirate by creating the city and, by extension, leaving the legacy they want behind for generations to come.

Building an ‘Instant City’ and The Legacy of Urban Entrepreneurialism

The rate and types of development underway in Dubai, namely flagship projects like Burj Khalifa, are part of a concerted effort by local leaders to “create their own brand of urbanism” (Bagaeen, 2007, p. 173). Dubai’s rapid transformation and growth is also inextricably linked to an active attempt by government to compete and secure investment through real estate development (*Dubai Strategic Plan*, 2007). This, according to Bagaeen (2007), illustrates a “natural consequence of urban entrepreneurialism” (p. 175). The *Dubai Strategic Plan 2015* (2007), for instance, outlines that much of the Emirate’s growth in the first half of the aughts resulted from “policies aimed at improving business ... [and] initiatives to establish specialized zones and mega projects” (p. 17). These mega-projects, according to the document, “helped attract excess regional liquidity in the form of Foreign Direct Investment” (*Dubai Strategic Plan*, 2007, p. 17).

Informing Dubai’s current legacy is the idea that the government has achieved something baffling: it has built and populated a city in a short amount of time (Bagaeen, 2007). One participant, a young Canadian in his twenties, describes Dubai’s legacy: Dubai, he suggested, is “well known for being one of those crazy cities that has sprouted out of no-where, really”

(Personal Interview, November 2012). Another respondent, a transportation planner and consultant, discusses Dubai's rapid growth with amazement. As he put it: "the growth itself. It's unheard of. In such a short time, such a, such a growth. And, it's new, also. You know? It's new development everywhere that you see" (Personal Interview, May 2012). By encouraging such rapid urban growth and development, the government of Dubai can re-create the city's identity through development projects like the Burj Khalifa. It can choose to focus its efforts on flagship projects, target particular growth sectors in its economy, and attract specific investors.

Development of flagship and mega-projects in Dubai, like the Burj Khalifa, deploy urban entrepreneurial tactics to create the city-as-legacy. In other words, projects tend to be superfluous, glitzy, and, according to one conversant, breed anticipation for "what comes next" (Personal Interview, May 2012). Legacy also informs a broader discourse of urban entrepreneurialism that emerges through the reproduction of "image carriers" such as the Burj (Hospers, 2011, p. 31). This functions to attract tourist gazes to the building in hopes of replicating the idea of the Burj to the world and, by extension, a representation of Dubai through a consumption of the brand.

On its website, Emaar refers to the Burj Khalifa as a "living wonder" (*The Tower*, 2013). By repositioning a skyscraper as a *living wonder*, Emaar transforms the image of the Burj Khalifa from one centred on promoting a flagship development project, or a superscraper, to a global attraction. Through its branding, the Burj Khalifa produces an image of the city of Dubai to local residents, tourists, and the world.

The production of this image of the Burj rested on Emaar's launch of the project. According to the Brand Union, the branding company tasked with re-inventing the Burj Dubai's brand, "[t]he launch is a very important stage in Dubai's development. Burj Khalifa has been

under construction for five years now and during that period Dubai has succeeded in spinning a lot of messages around it as a visionary development” (Hamadeh, 2010). By focusing its efforts on ‘spinning messages’ around the Burj Khalifa, those awaiting the building’s completion and launch associate the building with Dubai as a city, as a destination, and as a hub for economic development (Hamadeh, 2010). As the CEO of a development company suggested during an interview:

What comes to mind when you think of Dubai? Dates? Maybe. Beaches? Maybe. But, most of all, the people of the world, they know Dubai through its star buildings. They know Dubai through the Burj Al-Arab, Palm Jumeirah. And, of course, Burj Dubai [Khalifa]. They know this (Personal Interview, May 2012).

Projects like the Burj refashion Dubai and, by extension, the Gulf’s image as a developed, modern city that offers Western-style amenities. Burj Khalifa overrides stereotypes Western audiences often associate with the Gulf as being a politically unstable region, unsafe, and teeming with the potential for religious fundamentalism (Elsheshtawy, 2002).

Legacy as State-Building

The Government of Dubai can build the city’s legacy through development for a number of reasons. First, because Dubai’s leadership is “hereditary and ascriptive,” the Emirate’s ruler “dispense[s] justice, exercise[s] control of his subjects, and maintain[s] legitimacy” (Peck, 1986, p. 125). The Sheikh can make most internal governance decisions with little to no resistance (Peck, 1986). Freedom to approve and build large-scale development projects in a democracy, for instance, would prove significantly more challenging, as there would ostensibly exist some form of political opposition, or public dissent. Moreover, projects like the Burj Khalifa could not be possible without political will, power, and the ability to raise large amounts of capital through foreign investment, civic boosterism, speculation and intra-federation cooperation. In Dubai’s

case, all of the aforementioned factors played an integral role in enabling its government to develop the city it wanted to develop: a vanguard of luxe, leisure, and conviviality.

The erection of the Burj Khalifa echoes the Government of Dubai's efforts to create a legacy predicated on representations of Dubai as the city-as-brand, which builds on Dubai's "distinct identity as a modern and dynamic Emirate" (*Dubai Strategic Plan*, 2007, p. 9).

According to the Dubai Strategic Plan (2007), Dubai enjoys "a global reputation as an economic hub and an excellent location for investment" (p. 9). Whether or not the Burj Khalifa is, in fact, a revenue generator, the tower still functions to reinforce assumptions about the *type* of development the world should come to expect from Dubai. Such assumptions, in Dubai's case, are underpinned by global high-rollers looking to become a part of this exotic economic hub and get in on the action. By appealing to middle-class foreigners, Dubai circulates images that "are about landscaping hope and desire" (Haines 2011, p. 165).

The Burj Khalifa represents the economic hub that Dubai has become, but it also illustrates an underlying problem associated with the building itself and, more importantly, the Government of Dubai's interest in creating a legacy for future generations through the development of large-scale mega-projects. The Burj Khalifa, along with similar proposed projects and ventures currently under construction in Dubai, are economically inefficient. The Burj Khalifa may function as a global icon that represents the wealth and investment dollars up for grabs in Dubai, but it is also yet another mixed-use skyscraper. In other words, it's simply another building.

At an estimated USD \$1.5bn, the Burj Khalifa was by no means budgeted for frugality (Kamin, 2010). As one article in the *International Herald Tribune* covering the Burj's grand opening claims, "some have questioned the utility of such a towering project" (Thomas Jr.,

2010a). Consider the following statement, for instance, from a senior executive working for one of Dubai's largest developers. He argued that, for consumers, the Burj "is a bad investment ... I could rent or buy there, but guess what the condo fees are? Half a million Dirhams!"⁸ The condo fees are ridiculous. I would rather live on the 4th floor of the building across the street. At least I can afford it" (Personal Interview, May 2012). The Burj's perceived condo expenses reinforce a legacy of development rooted in luxury, exclusivity, and economic inefficiency. Emaar could have, for instance, built a cheaper building, or series of buildings to attract more tenants. By appealing to a wider base of potential buyers/renters, the Burj may not have been perceived as iconic, but it could have attracted more residents and be deemed as a more successful development project. As a real-estate agent noted when asked about purchasing a suite in the tallest building in the world: "Burj Khalifa? Nobody but the people with too much to spend will buy [a unit]. I mean, I would, but it's too expensive. Too much. I can buy something in Business Bay, in the area, for cheap compared to Khalifa. I have clients who are interested [in Khalifa], but they are the big deal buyers. Maybe you could buy when it first opened, but not now" (May 2012). Both participants responses illustrate the Government of Dubai's decision to engage in a distinctly entrepreneurial endeavor that creates an "accumulated advantage" by enabling "cities that are already in the public eye [to] attract more than unknown places" (Hospers, 2011, p. 31).

By building the Burj Khalifa, the Government of Dubai also contributes to a discourse of rapid urbanization that establishes precedence for more superfluous development. One respondent, a young professional who visits Dubai periodically, argued that buildings like the Burj, while magnificent, are instrumental in feeding "an appearance of progress [which] ... promotes wild use of money and investment." Buildings like the Burj, she says, "mak[e] Dubai

⁸ This amount converts to approximately CAD \$ 139,950.72 based on May 18, 2013, conversion rates.

visible to other investors looking to distinguish themselves” (Personal Interview, May 2012).

Further, the young professional described her perception of development in Dubai by stating that:

First, you had SkiDubai, then the Burj Al-Arab, the Palm, the World, all of these developments. And, now, it's the Burj Khalifa that's front and centre. Big projects like that create a culture of development that will bring more companies to build star projects in Dubai (Personal Interview, May 2012).

The respondent's point, here, illustrates the logic of city branding undertaken by Dubai's government, which is predicated on the idea that, with the construction of a building like the Burj, the city will be able to attract similar high-profile projects. This, in turn, leads to the perpetuation of Bagaeen's (2007) notion of the “instant-city” through which governments concentrate growth by promoting real estate (p. 173). In Dubai, developers are encouraged to join the city's globally recognizable skyline and become part of the legacy of Dubai.

Burj Khalifa's expensive building costs and condo fees might alienate potential dwellers, but the building is also observed as being logistically impractical. One executive, a Canadian working for a development firm, believed the Burj was:

not practical. Who wants to live on the 130th floor of a building? What if there's a fire? How do I run down 130 floors? You want me to parachute down, or get into some sort of panic room. And then what? Wait? For how long? It sounds crazy. It's make believe (Personal Interview, May 2012).

Another Canadian expat claimed that “[i]t's not so much purposeful. It's not that [the Burj] lack[s] purpose entirely. But they really emphasize aesthetic. It creates a come ‘check it out’ vibe” (Personal Interview, May 2012). The Burj promotes an urban image of Dubai that is predicated on ambitious fantastical projects which, according to Bagaeen (2007), are “inextricably linked to the entrepreneurial governance” of cities (p. 174). The government of Dubai's avowal to develop projects like the Burj also leads to hurried urbanization,

which in itself reshapes the city's image as a place of inherent growth and progress (Bagaeen, 2007).

The Burj Khalifa was completed during an economic downturn, which left the Emirate otherwise peppered with unfinished developments (Sudip, 2009). An article in *Euromoney* covering the Emirate's financial collapse in 2009 alluded to Emaar chairman Mohammed Alabbar's baffling and contradictory comments on the state of Dubai's economy and the Burj's completion. When asked about the financial crash, Alabbar stated: "[w]e've learned the art of managing business, which has changed forever in my opinion ... I thought I was a conservative. I think I could have been more conservative ... I am much harsher in the operation now" (Sudip, 2009). As the author of the *Euromoney* piece observes, Alabbar's comments are "as close to an admission as one will get from a senior Emirati that mistakes were made; that Dubai's phenomenal growth was unsustainable" (Sudip, 2009). Despite fiscal uncertainty, the Burj Khalifa opened shortly after the government of Dubai received significant financial aid from the government of Abu Dhabi (Booth and Hughes, 2010). The Government of Dubai's decision to proceed with the Burj's grand opening despite looming economic problems illustrates the cultural and political significance of completing the project. The Burj Khalifa is not, as most buildings, built to serve a specific function of housing individuals, companies, and other amenities; rather, the Burj Khalifa is legacy.

"Tallest Among the Tall"

One of the Burj Khalifa's many supposed and imminent successors, Broad Sustainable Building's (BSB) Sky City building is estimated to be completed in 90 days, from start to finish,

and at a fraction of the cost (Deulgaonkar, 2012).⁹ The Burj Khalifa illustrates the Government of Dubai's conscious decision to focus on creating a building that will function as a legacy for the city, its residents, and future generations. This strategy, while not cost effective, or lasting – as I write these words, Sky City is poised to unseat the Burj Khalifa as the tallest building in the world – is politically useful for the Government of Dubai. The Burj embodies the Government of Dubai's entrepreneurial spirit, by building the city it wants, not the city it needs, from scratch. Burj Khalifa might not remain the tallest building in the world, but it will forever be known as the building that changed Dubai; it created a 'living wonder' for all to visit, photograph and, eventually, dismiss as just another skyscraper.

The construction of superscrapers is part of a place-branding strategy used by a number of rapidly-growing cities, many of whom are seeking to distinguish themselves from other cities on the rise (Bagaen, 2007; Jackson, della Dora, 2009). One tactic to ensure that a city gains international attention, albeit momentarily, is to embark on what one informant termed "a race to the top." A resident of Dubai observed that "this is the way cities like Dubai get the media's attention. They build crazy buildings and islands on water. And, it's great until the next guy comes along and builds a bigger, better building" (Personal Interview, May 2012). Projects like the Burj, once again, illustrate the Emirate's dependence on ventures that build legacies. These legacies favour speculative construction projects, like the Burj, that are often economically inefficient over-development borne out of a need for the city to grow. Development as legacy is yet another tactic used by entrepreneurial decision-makers to promote a city in hopes of attracting economic growth through investment, labour, and tourism.

⁹ Changsha, the capital city in China's Hunan Province will house the skyscraper. Construction was originally scheduled to begin in December 2012, but the project has been stalled due to red tape (Lecher, 2013).

Brand Politics: From a ‘Living Wonder’ to a Living Blunder?

The Burj Khalifa’s tenure of *firsts* and world records illustrates the Government of Dubai’s focus on the creation of legacy through development rather than utility. The Government of Dubai approved Emaar’s initial plans for construction despite knowing that, sooner or later, the Burj would be topped by another, taller building. Despite its imminent unseating by BSB’s Sky City, or another skyscraper, the Burj Khalifa continues to promote itself worldwide as *a living wonder* (*The Tower*, 2013). The Burj Khalifa’s brand loses its cachet as one unpacks it: a world wonder implies timelessness and permanence whereas something that is *living* suggests ephemeral qualities, dynamism, and relevance. By calling the Burj Khalifa *a living wonder*, Emaar attempts to impose global importance onto the world’s tallest building.

Moreover, world wonders are monuments that are unique. The Burj Khalifa may be unique right now, but once unseated from its throne as the tallest building in the world, it will no longer be incomparable. As a respondent who travelled to Dubai for work noted,

I think it’s good to name a couple of things after historical, local things, or people. I think that’s important ... [Dubai] needs something to root itself a little. You look at that big tower, you look at the big malls and you think, all right [claps]. It’s not as impressive anymore. You look at the Empire State Building and it was a big deal. We were like “wow, it’s this amazing building,” you know? But now it takes a lot more to impress us. Nothing’s that impressive anymore (Personal Interview, November 2012).

The moment another building grows above 829 metres, the Burj Khalifa will no longer be a living wonder. Instead, it will become yet another skyscraper in Dubai’s skyline.

Renaming the Burj: How Toponymic Branding Re-Wrote the Myth of Dubai

On January 4, 2010, Emaar alongside the government of Dubai unveiled the Burj Khalifa to the world. Details surrounding the building’s grand reveal remained secret until the opening ceremonies. Residents and enthusiasts alike had their eyes on Dubai to experience Emaar’s *pièce*

de résistance: an 828 m superscraper reaching for space. Along with the usual fanfare surrounding the grand opening of an iconic building came a surprise name change. The Burj Dubai, the structure Emaar had been building since January 2004 (*Construction*, 2013), was unveiled to the world under a new name: Burj Khalifa. The name change commemorated UAE President and Sheikh of Abu Dhabi Khalifa Bin Zayed for providing financial assistance to the government of Dubai, which had been caught in the grips of a financial squeeze (*Burj Khalifa*, 2013).

The Burj's name change is an example of toponymic branding. While the renaming of Burj Dubai might not, on the surface, appear to fit into the category of a corporate sponsorship, the name change exemplifies "what looks like the most expensive naming rights deal in history" (Thomas Jr., 2010b). As such, the case of the Burj Dubai/Khalifa involves toponymic branding, though of a more subtle variety. The name change alters how we refer to the building both orally and in text, and it embodies the power relations that exist between the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

The Burj Dubai was renamed Burj Khalifa to pay homage to a figurehead that helped Dubai rebound from the 2009-2010 financial crash (Booth and Hughes, 2010). Had President Khalifa Bin Zayed not bailed Dubai out with an estimated 10bn Dhs,¹⁰ then Dubai might not have been able to ward off collectors of unpaid debts, or catapult flagship projects like the Burj Khalifa to global icon status. Burj Khalifa, and the pageantry surrounding its grand opening, might not have been completed due to insufficient financing or might have been tailored down to be less ostentatious in its design and, as a result, less iconic.

¹⁰ Approximately \$ 2,799,014,432.15CAD (based on May 18, 2013, conversion rates).

The act of renaming the Burj Khalifa alters the myth of Dubai by effacing previous symbolic landscapes created by the government of Dubai, residents, expatriates, visitors, and any other stakeholders. According to Dubai's *Department of Tourism and Marketing* website, the Burj Khalifa is "tangible proof of Dubai's growing role in a changing world" (*Burj Khalifa*, 2012). The Department of Tourism and Marketing also mentions that the Burj Khalifa embodies a vision. Central to this vision was the government of Dubai's ability to achieve an "[i]ncomparable feat of engineering" without relying on revenues generated through oil and gas industries (*Burj Khalifa*, 2012). The website, instead, highlights the use of "human talent, ingenuity, and initiative" (*Burj Khalifa*, 2012). Dubai's 2015 Strategic Plan also links the Emirate's current successes to "bold and visionary leadership and innovative human resources" (*Dubai Strategic Plan*, 2007, p. 17). The government of Dubai emphasizes its ability to promote growth in ways that are different than other gulf states, namely Abu Dhabi. By distinguishing the Emirate from its neighbors, Dubai's government reinforces a myth perpetuated through rhetoric surrounding iconic projects like the Burj Khalifa. Dubai's myth centres on the idea that it is *different* than other Emirates: Dubai's government asserts that its economy is not oil-dependent and instead utilizes a variety of 'innovative' growth strategies (*Dubai Strategic Plan*, 2007).

By renaming the Burj Khalifa, the government of Dubai illustrates that, indeed, "power relationships [are] embedded in the landscape" (Myers, 1996, p. 237). Despite renaming the Burj Dubai as the Burj Khalifa, the government of Dubai remains beholden to the Abu Dhabi government. As Krane (2010) states: "[r]enaming the Burj Dubai after Sheikh Khalifa of Abu Dhabi – if not an explicit quid pro quo – is a down-payment on Dubai's gratitude for its neighbor's \$10 billion bailout" (cf. Thomas Jr., 2010b). The government of Dubai demonstrated its gratitude by renaming one of its "iconic landmarks" after Abu Dhabi's leader (*Sightseeing*,

2013). It also illustrates its financial and political dependency on Abu Dhabi. According to one news article, renaming the Burj Dubai “carries a symbolic weight in light of the billions of dollars that ... Abu Dhabi has poured into Dubai in order to cover its debts” (Thomas Jr., 2010a). The weight of this symbolism is heavy, indeed. The Burj Khalifa is no longer a beacon of Dubai’s growth and progress, but a rope that yokes the Emirate closer to Abu Dhabi.

The Burj Dubai’s name change, while a symbolic gesture, still involves material exchange between the honoree (Sheikh Khalifa) and the authority allowing the naming agreement to go ahead (the Government of Dubai). The proverbial weight of renaming a flagship development after Abu Dhabi is not only symbolic, but also carries political and economic weight. The Burj Khalifa, colloquially referred to as ‘Burj Dubai,’ no longer holds eponymous significance for Dubbayans. As an entrepreneur and resident of Dubai explained, “the Burj doesn’t belong to us anymore” (Personal Interview, May 2012). When discussing Khalifa, another participant, a real estate agent, noted that she felt betrayed by the name change. She claimed:

Burj Dubai, we watched it grow up, to the sky. We had to hear the sounds of its birth, during construction. For years, we watched it rise. For what? In the end, the name change and nobody even ask us, the people, about [it]. So, this Burj Khalifa, it can belong to you, or whoever. I don’t care about it (Personal Interview, May 2012).

Responses like the one above exemplify the indignation felt by some residents, who felt slighted by the sudden name change. Moreover, it illustrates a disenfranchisement that took place following the building’s renaming. Many residents were, until the renaming, proud of the Burj Dubai. One informant who lived across the superscraper during its construction felt that Dubai gained prestige and international attention because of the Burj Dubai. When asked to elaborate on her position, she stated that the “Burj literally elevate[d] Dubai, and on the global stage”

(Personal Interview, May 2012). After the name change, however, some residents felt let down by the government's decision to gift the Burj's naming rights to Abu Dhabi, their rival and neighboring Emirate.

The act of renaming the Burj Khalifa exemplifies what Azaryahu (2009) calls the intersection "between urban space and official ideologies" (p. 54). He maintains that commemorative names "mediate between political elites and 'ordinary' people" by valuing official ideologies over ones that are not comprised of the "ruling socio-political order" (p. 54). Azaryahu's point is important to consider when examining the Burj Khalifa's name-change, as it demonstrates the inherent politics associated with the practices of daily urban life (Azaryahu, 2009).

Pastoral Governance and Toponymic Branding of the Burj

The word impossible is not in the leaders' dictionary. No matter how big the challenges, strong faith, determination and resolve will overcome them.

– His Highness Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum (*Sheikh Mohammed*, 2004)

Underpinning the theme of *myth* is the notion that the sovereign of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed, acts a "shepherd of men" (Foucault, 1981, p. 227). Rather than imposing all-encompassing rule upon his subjects, the leader of Dubai is viewed as a leader that galvanizes his flock, or his people. The decision to rename the Burj Dubai in honour of Abu Dhabi's leader mobilizes a discourse of pastoral power.¹¹ Participants noted that Sheikh Mohammed's rule and ultimate approval of the Burj's renaming exemplifies his ability to lead. As one resident of Dubai states, "[p]eople love Sheikh Mo. He has done what he had to in order to provide for his people and

¹¹ Bevir (2011) argues that pastoral power consists of individuals "internalising various ideals and norms so that they both regard an external authority as concerned with their good and strive to regulate themselves in accord with the dictates of that external authority" (p. 462).

even provides foreigners with opportunities that they can't even get in their own countries.” One real estate agent described Sheikh Mohammed as a leader who “make[s] decision in the interest of all” instead of governing based on his personal interest (Personal Interview, May 2012).

Foucault's (1981) analogy of the shepherd-king proves useful when discussing Sheikh Mohammed's perceived role as ruler of Dubai and, more specifically, when analyzing his decision to rename the Burj Dubai. As Foucault (1981) states, a pastoral modality of power implicates a leader “whose role is to constantly ensure, sustain, and improve the lives of each and every” member of his flock (p. 235). Sheikh Mohammed's vision is often cited by participants as *the* underlying reason for Dubai's current status as a leading city in the Middle East, and a globally identifiable city. According to an op-ed piece in *Gulfnews.com*, the Burj Khalifa is seen “by many as concrete proof of the resilience of the economy, the technical skills of its people and the realization of Shaikh Mohammad's [*sic*] vision for its economic and social development” (*Burj Khalifa underlines*, 2010). The Burj Khalifa would not have come to fruition had it not been for Sheikh Mohammed's initial vision and ultimate resolve to complete the project despite economic uncertainty clouding Dubai's horizons. His will, in other words, enabled the Sheikh to envision the project and follow it through until the end. Foucault's description of the shepherd echoes the narratives of leadership surrounding Sheikh Mohammed. As Foucault (1981) describes, the shepherd's “will is done, not because it is consistent with the law, and not just as far as it is consistent with it, but, principally, because it is his *will*” (p. 237, original emphasis).

The decision to rename the Burj Khalifa illustrates Sheikh Mohammed's avowal to his people, to Dubai, and to the UAE's unity. During the unveiling of the Burj Khalifa's nameplate, Sheikh Mohammed stated that “[w]e built the high-rise for people with strong will and determination. The highest point in the world should be linked to the big names and I announce

the opening of Burj Khalifa Bin Zayed” (*Burj Khalifa underlines*, 2010). Sheikh Mohammed pronounciation of the Burj Khalifa’s new name enjoins his flock, or residents of Dubai, to rely on a new shepherd, Sheikh Khalifa. The citational legacy that emerges from the shepherd’s act of naming reconfigures the commemoration of what would have been the city’s eponymous landmark (Butler, 1993).

Conclusion

Figure 4.3 depicts a poem that is on display as one proceeds down Khalifa’s walkway, towards the top. Visitors can read the poem during their tour of Burj Khalifa. Enmeshed in the poem are a number of themes discussed in this chapter: the city as superlative, development as legacy, and the myth of Dubai. Phrases like “surpassing limits and expectations” illustrate, for instance, the hyperbolic rhetoric used to describe the Burj Khalifa. Superlative language mobilizes a discourse on entrepreneurialism typified by the capillary forms of neoliberal rationalities. These rationalities, in turn, perform a representation of Dubai that “attracts the wide-eyed tourist” (Figure 4.3).

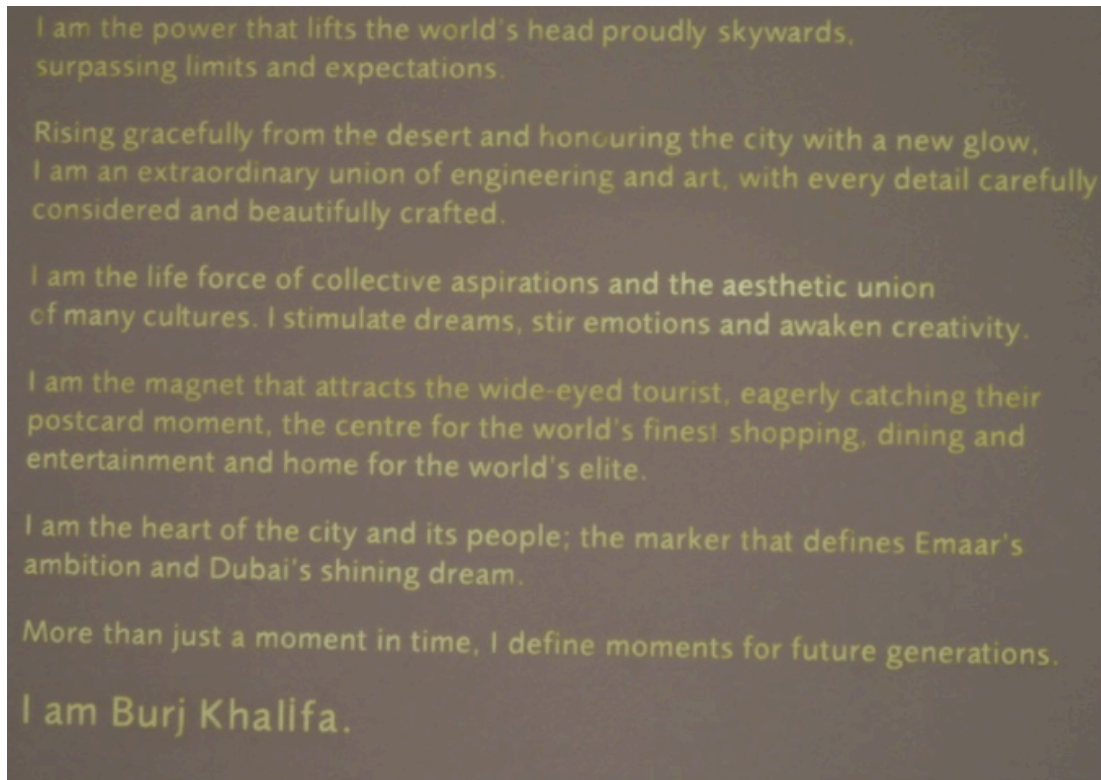


Figure 4.3 Poem for Burj Khalifa (Photo by author).

The theme of legacy projects a city brand that draws the world to Dubai. The Emirate, in turn, becomes “the centre for the world’s finest shopping, dining, and entertainment and home for the world’s elite” (Figure 4.3). The Burj Khalifa is more an icon than a building. It reifies a bequest produced by the building’s brand as a tool of entrepreneurial governance that hopes to attract and secure similar ostentatious projects for the city of Dubai. In other words, the Burj Khalifa diffuses its brand power as ‘a living wonder’ to increase the cachet of neighboring developments, amenities, and of the Emirate itself.

Pervading rhetoric and promotion surrounding the Burj Khalifa and, more specifically, its name change, is the notion of myth. Myth, in this case, is enacted through a pastoral modality of governance in which Sheikh Mohammed’s ultimate decision to construct, complete, and rename the Burj demonstrates the leader-shepherd’s power over his flock, or the residents of Dubai. By

funding extravagant construction, the Shepherd promises his flock a future defined by decadence. He is aware of the sacrifices he must make to accommodate his flock's desires, which, in the case of the Burj, involved a political move to bring Dubai closer to its neighbor and economic savior: Abu Dhabi. Moreover, the act of renaming refigures the commemorative powers associated with the Burj, as it elides its previous toponym. It also incites the creation of a new legacy, one that yokes Dubai to its sister Emirate and, as a result, unites the Emirates to "define future generations" (Figure 4.3).

Riding the Rails

May 5, 2012

I feel my face redden as I run to catch a train destined for “Downtown Jebel Ali.” Past the first flight of stairs now and I quicken my steps. Countless forms distance me from my train. The Metro has pulled into the station. I’ll need fancy footwork to make it, but I just might. I weave through shopping bags held up by hands attached to bodies, tired and slouching, holding conversations and cellphones out of boredom, to kill time, to forget the heat. Escape. Everybody is looking to escape: some from themselves, others from the realities that await them outside and across however many kilometers of rail they will travel to get there, and I from them, onto a train. I leap and land one foot on concrete, the other on the car’s non-slip metal divets. Doors close and I sneak both feet inside the train. My breathing slows, softens each time my lungs gulp, greedy for more oxygen. The air around me cools, sweat cools, too cool now. I’m inside a moving fridge, sweat trickling treacle-slow down my neck. We’re at capacity.

Chapter 5: From Utility to Value: The Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative and the Banality of Toponymic Branding

We don't need to hype this. You just need to get on the train.
– Dubai Government official (cf. Bhojrul, 2009)

Introduction

I now shift my focus to the second case study for this project, the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative. Beginning in 2008, Dubai's Road and Transport Authority (RTA), a ministry of the Government of Dubai, unveiled a "world first revenue model for public transport infrastructure" ("Roads and Transport Authority," 2012a). The initiative, commonly referred to as Dubai Metro, enables corporations to "put [their] brand[s] on a Dubai Metro station of [their] choice" ("Roads and Transport Authority," 2012a). Interested companies can either enter into naming rights agreements with the RTA, or gain naming rights by funding the construction costs of one or more Metro stations (Al Theeb, 2008). Within months of its launch, RTA officials unveiled the names of the first sponsors (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2¹²) and exalted the project for its "three-fold" benefits: "unprecedented" corporate exposure, revenue generation, and its (eventual) re-investment in the Metro system (Al-Theeb, 2008).¹³

Underpinning the program is the concept of immersive marketing (Rose-Redwood, 2011). Montgomery et al. (2011) describe immersive marketing as a "technique designed to plung[e] users into the center of the action" (p. 6). This is often achieved by distorting the distinctions between reality and the brand identity. In Dubai's Metro stations, reality and the

¹² *Asterisk denotes stations funded by Dubai Holding, a "global investment holding company" ("About Dubai Holding," n.d.).

¹³ Data for both tables are by no means complete. The information presented in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 was compiled through personal observations, the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative website, and through web sources (Al Theeb, 2008; "Roads and Transport Authority," 2012).

brand are barely distinguishable from each other. To my surprise, Dubai's Metro terminals do not *look* commercialized. Sponsors' logos are displayed throughout the network, but are not

constructed around a message or ad campaign like most advertisements. Rather, evidence of sponsorships is much more subtle. At first sight, it is difficult for a tourist (me) to discern corporate place-names from their unsponsored counterparts. The only indication that something is different is that the names of the train stations, on the highway road signs, on the marquees of Metro terminals, and maps display corporate names (see Figure 5.1). Some, like the Mall of the Emirates,

Partner	Type of Sponsor
Burj Khalifa/Dubai Mall (Emaar)	Developer
*Creek	Investment group
*Jaddaf	Investment group
*Emirates Tower	Investment group
*Dubai Health Care City	Investment group
*TECOM	Investment group
*Business Bay	Investment group
Emirates	Airline
Jumeirah Lake Towers (Dubai Multi Commodities Center)	Government authority

Table 5.1 Funding Partners: Dubai Metro Naming Rights.

have plaques commemorating the sponsorship agreement and are dead giveaways (see Figure 5.2). Others, like Burj Khalifa/Dubai Mall, for instance, are barely noticeable (See Figure 5.3). It is only due to my unending scrutiny of every space that I came to learn which stations hold corporate names, and which do not. In this respect, the initiative is successful: the

Partner	Type of Sponsor
Deira City Centre	Business Conglomerate
Burjuman	Business Group
Danube	Building Materials
GGICO	Conglomerate
Sharaf DG	Investor Group
Mall of the Emirates	Business Conglomerate
Dubai Airport Freezone	Government authority
First Gulf Bank	Bank
Etisalat	Telecommunications
Nakheel	Developer
Nakheel Harbour & Towers	Developer
Palm Deira	Developer
Noor Islamic Bank	Bank

Table 5.2 Dubai Metro Naming Rights: Sponsors, by Type.

program obfuscates the differences between non-corporate names and corporate brands in liminal spaces.¹⁴

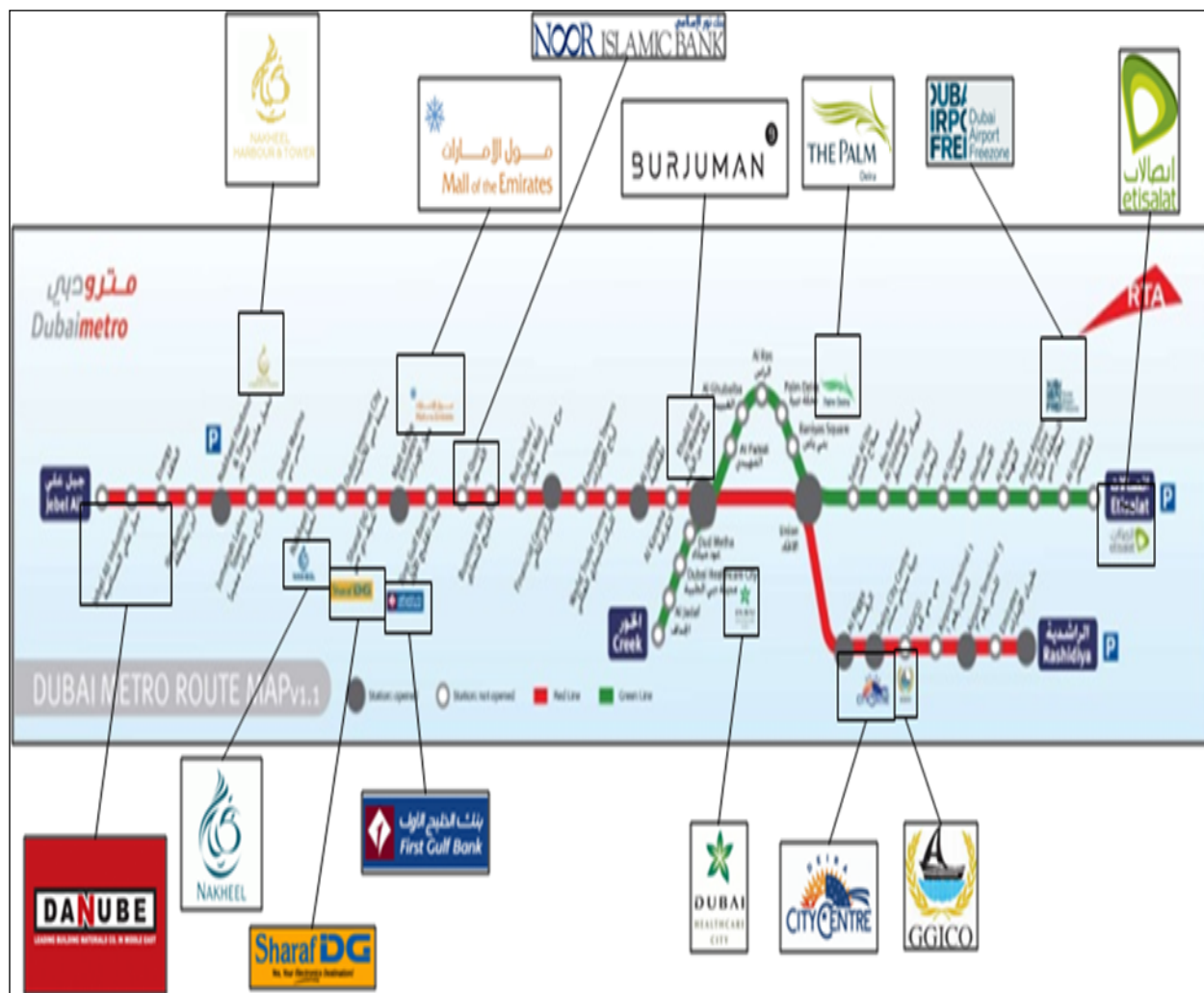


Figure 5.1 Dubai Metro Naming Rights: Map of Sponsors (Adapted from *Dubai City Guide*, n.d.; “Burjuman and Danube”, 2012).

¹⁴ As I left the station to meet a prospective participant, I reflected on my experience as a user and wondered how different my interpretation of the Metro system would be if I was unaware of the naming rights initiative, if I didn’t speak English or Arabic, and, moreover, if I had to navigate this network daily. Would I be able to find my way easily? Would I notice the corporate names? Would I care? Would anybody?

Chapter Outline

Before entering the field, I spent hours exploring the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative website. Until I began interviewing participants, the project site

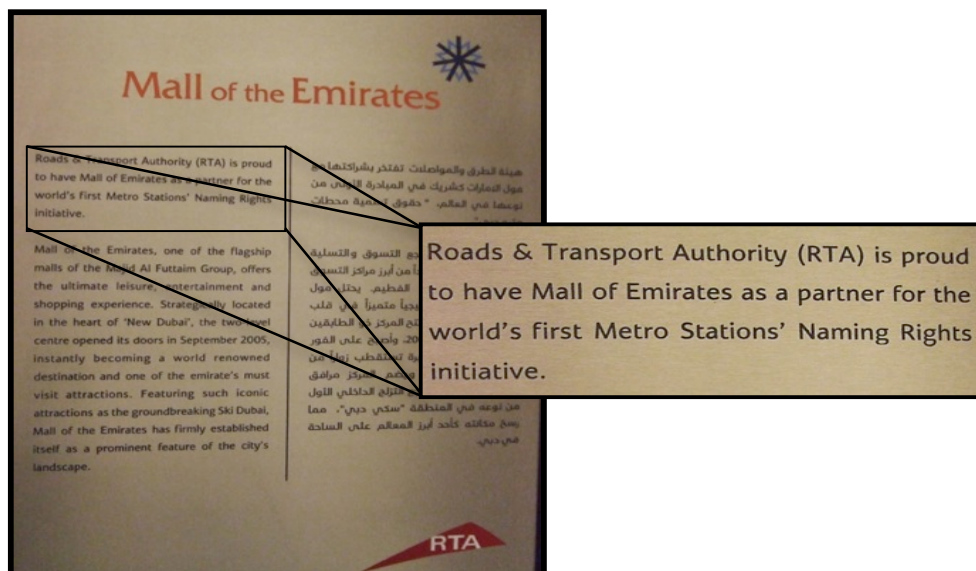


Figure 5.2 Mall of the Emirates Sponsor Plaque (Photo by author).

was my only anchor to the case study. The Metro was still under construction during my previous visits to Dubai. Ironically, the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative website, and the



Figure 5.3 Burj Khalifa/Dubai Mall Station (Photo by author).

virtual space it existed in, was, for a long time, my only connection to Dubai's Metro, and the various places I would eventually experience firsthand.

In addition to interview data, my analysis of the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative includes a discourse analysis of the RTA's campaign website.

During my fieldwork, many respondents made claims about the Metro and the naming rights project. Participants were excited to discuss whether the Metro and the Naming Rights Initiative were worth the professed costs to the government (i.e., the Municipality and Emirate of

Dubai), the corporate sponsors (potential and existing), and users. In my evaluation of the transcripts, I examined two themes, or what I term values, mentioned by informants. First, I discuss the utility of the Dubai Metro as a material object for each of the three stakeholder groups. Second, I analyze the symbolic value of the Dubai Metro as perceived by the three targeted populations.

Utility, in this case, includes how stakeholders perceive the built environment of the Dubai Metro. For marketers, this infrastructure might be a canvas for advertising space. For residents, the Metro might be a direct line from home to work. For government, Dubai Metro might be the key item on a tourism brochure. When considering each of these groups, I ask, does Dubai Metro live up to the expectations set by other transit systems around the world? The material object, in this case, refers to the Dubai Metro as a collective piece of infrastructure. As this thesis attempts to uncover individual perceptions about city and toponymic branding initiatives, my aim is not to examine individual stations. Rather, my hope is to glean some preliminary insight into city and toponymic branding in Dubai through an investigation of Dubai's Metro network as a whole. The theme of utility engenders a discourse of neoliberal urbanism in which the Government's commitment to building a Metro network in Dubai exemplifies state-building through the rapid construction of large-scale projects. Dubai's Metro refashions the city-as-brand into a modern city, complete with state-of-the-art infrastructure. The perceived utility of the Metro by corporations and users can also boost Dubai's brand as a convivial, business-friendly metropolis that attracts potential companies, residents, and tourists.

The second theme I analyze involves the perceived symbolic value of the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative. The symbolic value concerns the Dubai Metro Naming Rights campaign as a political technology designed and implemented by the government to extend a

discourse of entrepreneurial governance. During interviews most informants did not find the Metro Naming Rights Initiative remarkable enough to discuss. Following Berg's (2011) suggestion that banal names, or names that generate little discussion, can lead to "legitimacy without controversy" (p. 20), I contend that lack of interest in the corporate naming program normalizes the commodification of Dubai's namescapes and the place-identities produced therein.

I organize my interrogation of both themes (the perceived utility and symbolic costs of the Dubai Metro and the Naming Rights program) by treating each identified stakeholder group individually. I examine my discussions of each population through two foci of analysis: the utility of the Metro and the symbolic values associated with the infrastructure through the naming program. By treating the perceived utility and symbolic values separately, I prevent conflating any discussion about the physical attributes of the Metro system with the geographical imaginaries they might evoke or reconfigure for government, corporations, or users. I also avoid privileging the geographical imaginaries over the built environment, and the physical over the symbolic realm. If my goal is to examine how city and toponymic branding reshapes geographies of governance, then it is useful for my research to include a discussion that examines how such forms of branding materialize in the urban realm. Moreover, I hope to uncover ways by which material structures can, like the symbolic, "have specific political effects" (Rose, O'Malley, Valverde, 2006, p. 93). The financial cost to government to initiate and fund Dubai Metro, for instance, does not include considerations for the symbolic consequences of corporatizing public place-names. It also does not reflect the refiguring of place-identities through the act of corporate naming. By exposing the internal components of each theme, I illustrate the complex relationships between material objects of interest, the actual Metro system, and the symbolic

capital entwined with those objects through the act of toponymic branding. I untangle the meanings stakeholder groups associate with those physical structures through the interpretation of the signs, texts, and rhetoric used to create, implement, promote, and discuss the Dubai Metro Naming Rights project.

I conclude the chapter by unpacking the idea of the *public* in Dubai. While thinking through the ideas presented below, I was fortunate to receive a great deal of feedback from friends, peers, mentors, and through questions posed by members of the academic community. In conversations, I was frequently stumped by interrogations on the existence and formation of a *public* in Dubai. Who is the *public* in this case? What are their subject positions? Does a *public* consist of all Metro users, real and imagined, or is the *public* limited to subjects privileged by their ethnic, economic, gender, and social positions in Emirati society? By constructing a *public* in Dubai, I hope to magnify issues related to the user's subject position and the ways by which they can impede or enable their access to the Dubai Metro. By situating the *public* in this case study, I will untangle the theoretical knots that twist together the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Program and immersive marketing techniques to produce corporate toponyms and that recalibrate previous place-identities to reflect the commodification of urban spaces.

‘Dolla Dolla Bills Y’all’: The Dubai Metro Naming Rights Website as Neoliberal Urbanism in Action

The RTA, with the approval of the government, primarily disseminates the naming rights program through a separate website (Figure 5.4). As one peruses the initiative’s homepage, it quickly becomes apparent that the targeted audience is the corporation, not potential or existing users. As Figure 5.5 demonstrates, the application process is, in essence, a simple ‘how-to’ guide for corporations interested in applying. The ‘application process’ webpage, for example, has a simple design that clearly outlines how easy it can be to put in a proposal to sponsor a station. The page functions as a virtual display case, which presents the commodity (the rights to a Metro station name, with other possible advertising perks) to potential customers.

The website, like most government sites, provides information about a government-led initiative, but it does so with the intent to sell a good. As Figure 5.6 illustrates, the details surrounding the “Partnership Package” clearly outline the direct benefits to corporations (*Partnership Package*, 2012). This element is interesting to unpack when considering the political implications surrounding the RTA’s approach to attracting corporate sponsors. Nowhere in sight, for instance, is there any mention of the “community” or how the toponymic branding

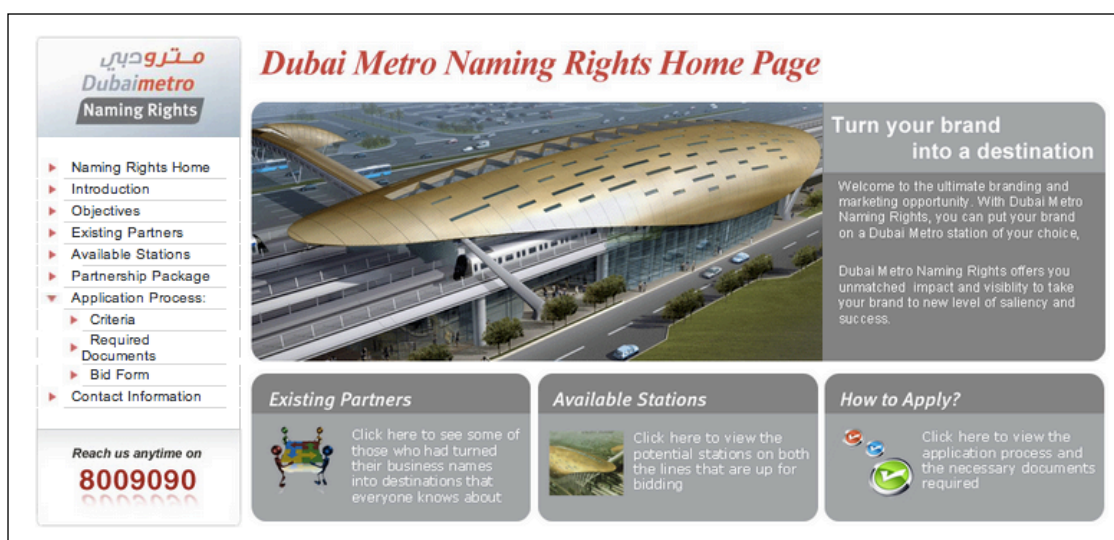


Figure 5.4 Dubai Metro Naming Rights Webpage (Roads and Transport Authority, 2012a).

(and potential future re-branding) of Metro terminals might affect users. In fact, the entire webpage is dedicated to potential corporate partners, which follows Vuolteenaho and Ainiala's (2009) argument that naming can be linked to the creation of competitive advantages.

Application Process

The application process consists of of three easy steps. Read the Criteria used to analyze offers, prepare the documents if interested, print and fill the BID form. if still have queries please contacts us via the [contact information](#) provided on this website.

STEP1: CRITERIA	STEP2: DOCUMENTS	STEP3: BID FORM
<p>1</p> <p>Criteria used to analyze the offers submitted by Companies..</p> <p>read more >></p>	<p>2</p> <p>What documents needed before applying to naming rights partnership ...</p> <p>read more >></p>	<p>3</p> <p>Form to be printed and filled to start the process of partnership ..</p> <p>fill the form>></p>

Figure 5.5 Application Process Webpage (Roads and Transport Authority, 2012a).

Partnership Package

NAMING RIGHTS	ADVERTISING RIGHTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collateral Material • Signage Inside the Station • Signage Outside the Station • Inside the Trains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising Panels • Wrap up a section of the station • TV Commercials • On Line Presence • Metro News • Right of First & Last Refusal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Site Rights • Retail Rights • Other

Figure 5.6 Partnership Package Webpage (Roads and Transport Authority, 2012a).

The Government of Dubai's decision to finish the Metro project while the Emirate was still recovering from aftershocks of the economic crash alludes to a broader neoliberal discourse involving state-(re)building as a way to re-image the city-as-brand. The Dubai Metro is illustrative of "spectacular infrastructure that attracts speculative capital and offers itself as

alleged proof of political power” (Ong, 2011a, p. 207). While describing the Dubai Metro shortly after its launch, for instance, journalists suggested that the Metro portends Dubai’s economic comeback as a globally significant city. As an article in *Arabian Business* describes: “Make no mistake, last night is proof that Dubai is back on the big stage. Have you been on the Metro? You really should go” (Bhoynul, 2009). Positive press covering urban development such as the Metro’s completion recalibrates Dubai’s political rank as a city capable of overcoming economic obstacles while reasserting its sovereignty through political decisions aimed at spurring growth.

The government’s commitment to the Metro project is also indicative of Peck and Tickell’s (2002) ‘roll-out neoliberalism’ in which governments engage in “active state-building and regulatory reform” (p. 384). The Metro was, indeed, a costly project, but the government of Dubai succeeded in financing its construction (*Dubai metro costs soar*, 2009). Moreover, with the rolling-out of the Naming Rights Initiative, the Government of Dubai managed, according to one report, to diminish infrastructural costs by \$244 million CAD (Al Theeb, 2008). According to the RTA, the initiative enables the Government of Dubai to create infrastructure and provide essential services to residents without increasing user fees, or taxes (*Objectives*, 2012).

The Government’s plan to implement Emirate-wide and cutting-edge infrastructure rested on its claim that the venture would generate revenue (*Objectives*, 2012). Rather than hollow out government coffers, the initiative involves a form of “metaregulation” used by government to intervene in the market while encouraging the proliferation of “marketing and business opportunities” with existing and new corporate partners (Peck and Tickell, 2002, p. 384; *Objectives*, 2012). Dubai Metro enables a regulatory restructuring that activates a dirigiste agenda on behalf the state. State and market building crystallize through the politics informing

and facilitating the physical construction of projects like Dubai Metro, which purport to ameliorate the city while promoting the growth of new markets through government-corporate partnerships (Peck and Tickell, 2002). According to the Dubai Metro Naming Rights website, for instance, the project “generate[s] potential business opportunities” and is “a win-win partnership between the RTA and leading brands” (*Objectives*, 2012). The promotion of state-private partnerships like those touted by the RTA are indicative of what Jessop (2002) calls “enhanced state intervention to roll forward new forms of governance” (p. 454).

Upon the launch of the Metro, an article in *Arabian Business* reported that “[t]he trains are good and the stations are what you’d imagine a Dubai Government project to be - spacious, shiny and glamorous (yes, they even have chandeliers)” (Egbert, 2009). Egbert’s (2009) description of the Metro adds to a discourse of entrepreneurial urbanism, in which the construction of lavish urban projects like transit systems attempts to increase the “global recognition of the city” (Ong, 2011a, p. 209). The construction of a transit system in Dubai ostensibly raises the profile of the city in the Middle East and throughout the world. Dubai, once again, through the rapid development of urban infrastructure invokes what Ong (2011a) calls a “(capitalist) iconicity that influence[s] the quality of the experience in these cities” (p. 208).

The establishment of a Metro system in Dubai also functions to distance the Emirate from other, nearby cities, states, and the geopolitics of the region. As a local resident mentioned, “Dubai is not like other Emirates. Not like Kuwait, Saudi, or anywhere in the region. Nobody wants to go to Qatar. But you tell somebody, anybody, ‘do you want to visit Dubai?’ and their eyes will get big. It’s paradise compared to other places in the region” (Personal Interview, May 2012). As another participant, an entrepreneur living and working in Dubai for over twenty year, explained: “Dubai has become the mecca for people from the gulf, from Saudi, from Kuwait,

from Qatar” (Personal Interview, May 2012). A Canadian engineer working in Dubai also stated that “Dubai has become a metropolis. It’s not just a pearl diving centre anymore, but a place where you can live safely, there is good food, good restaurants, jobs, and people are generally looking to have fun” (Personal Interview, May 2012). All three passages about Dubai are important to note as they draw on Dubai’s brand as a convivial, liveable, and safe city. Moreover, through their descriptions of life in Dubai, all three participants perform Dubai’s brand by reproducing an image of Dubai that is modern, safe, and anomalous to the region.

A Material World: Costing Out the Dubai Metro Project

Dubai Metro ... [is] an eagerly awaited mega-project that will continue to drive Dubai’s growth and success well into the future.

—(*Businessweek*, 2008)

There is a realization that roads cannot be the answer.

— (Personal Interview, May 2012)

Dubai’s metro system includes 75 km of rail installed throughout the Emirate (*DubaiMetro*, 2010). The network is currently the world’s “longest automated Metro system built in one go” and is one of the “world’s most technologically advanced Metro systems” (*DubaiMetro*, 2010). The Metro’s official pocket brochure claims “0% carbon emissions,” utilizes electric trains, and boasts wi-fi and network-wide mobile phone coverage among other amenities (*Official Pocket Brochure*, n.d., p. 1).

The acquisition of rapid rail transit is a significant marker of Dubai’s infrastructural and economic growth. It connects hubs of development across the Emirate to “its economic nerve-centres” (*DIFC Governor*, 2009). During an interview, for example, an Emirati businessman claimed that “the Metro is fantastic. You can travel across the Emirate. No problem. You need to go to the airport? You can take the Metro. You need to shop? You can take [it]. Work, the beach,

anywhere. Where else in this region can you do this?” (Personal Interview, May 2012).

Public rail increases services to users, but it costs a significant amount of money to build. Further, Metro systems do not always generate profits, as they require large capital investments to begin with (Kane, 2009). Costs associated with the design, engineering, construction, materials, and labour also come with a hefty price tag. One participant, an engineer and executive for a local development company, argued that “the cost of [building] the thing is huge. The piling, geo-tech analysis, materials. All of it, expensive ... The piling, geez, the cost alone was phenomenal” (Personal Interview, May 2012). The respondent went on to explain some of the costs associated with the construction of Metro infrastructure:

a project like that, well, it's intense. You've got to think of the sub-contractors, labourers, and materials. Materials, they get expensive. Especially as it's a multi-year project, you have to re-evaluate costs and pricing every year. It's a massive, big project to undertake. It must have cost billions and billions of Dirhams. But, hey, guess what? They did it anyway (Personal Interview, May 2012).

The project did, indeed, cost billions of Dirhams. In fact, news sources cited the Dubai Metro as over-budget by more than 3 billion dollars (Billing, 2009).

As the CEO of a real estate company suggested, “the challenge of any development is the economy and finance, the availability of finance. Dubai, during the global economic collapse, got shattered economically. And, the global effect of this, nobody has been exempt” (Personal Interview, May 2012). Despite growing costs and the aftershocks of a crippling recession, the Dubai government went ahead with the project. According to one senior official, the Metro is a “crucial component of the Emirate's infrastructure” (*DIFC Governor*, 2009).

Soaring costs and an economic recession did not, however, deter the government from completing the project. The chairman of the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA), Matar Al Tayer, highlights the significance of securing a metro for Dubai. According to Al Tayer, the

government “continued to invest in [the metro] even as the economic crisis battered Dubai's real estate market and sent tens of thousands of workers home” (*Dubai metro costs soar*, 2009). He also remarks that even “during a time of crisis[,] investing in infrastructure is the key that will drive the economy and help attract foreign investments while the world recovers” (*Dubai metro costs soar*, 2009).

Don't Tell Me What I Can't Do: Dubai Metro and the Perceived Utility to Government

Statements like those made by Al Tayer illustrate the perceived importance of the Metro system to Dubai's leaders. Despite the project's large scale, rising costs, and economic instability, the government went ahead with construction. Completion of the Metro facilitates the Emirate's ability to re-position itself as a contender for regional primacy. Upon inspecting the Metro stations, Sheikh Mohammed reportedly “expressed happiness about this achievement, describing it as a source of great pride, not only for the people of the UAE, but for all Arabs” (*Mohammed Officially Launches Dubai Metro*, 2009).

By building a Metro system, the Government of Dubai can quell fears about the economic recession, the Emirate's ability to compete for investment, tourists, and talent in the Middle East, and throughout the world. Following the Metro's launch, for instance, an op-ed piece in *Arabian Business* proclaimed Dubai's return as a key economic player in global markets (Bhojrul, 2009). Consider the following excerpt in which the writer explains the significance of the Dubai Metro during its official launch:

[I]ast night was also the best possible message to the rest of the world, particularly the foreign media that has been busy writing Dubai's history. Now it must write the future again, as the Metro puts Dubai high in the league of mega-cities. There was no summer panic, no mass exodus, no second crash (Bhojrul, 2009).

The above quotation exemplifies the government's use of the Metro to re-image the city-as-brand. The Metro's launch and perceived success is part of a broader strategy by the government to remodel its own image and by boosting the city's brand through an infrastructural campaign aimed at effacing perceptions of a flailing economy, stalled mega-projects,¹⁵ and fleeing expatriates (Hari, 2009). In response to bad press invoking images of "ubiquitous cranes ... paused on the skyline" and what Davis (2006) calls "a hallucinatory pastiche of the big, the bad, and the ugly" (p. 51), the Government of Dubai has used infrastructural projects like the Metro to rearticulate the city's brand. The Sheikh's resolve to complete the Metro in a sheer 49 months (Bhoyrul, 2009) is redolent of the Emirate's fascination with distinctive mega-projects like the Burj Khalifa that create a legacy of hyper-construction. Dubai Metro also confirms Sheikh Mohammed's avowal to the design of a political technology that reshapes the city as a site for potential investment and the state as a force capable of completing development projects in a relatively short amount of time.

Chief among the benefits to all three stakeholders is the idea that the provision of new infrastructure modernizes the city. By constructing a vast network of rapid rail transit, the RTA along with the Government of Dubai repositions the city to be more attractive to investors, talent, and visitors. An article in *Construction Week* published shortly after the launch of the Metro system explains the symbolic value of Dubai's Metro system: "As you watch the ultra modern train glide past the iconic Dubai World Trade Centre - one of the first tall towers to be built in the region, you can't help but smile in wonder at how far this little seaside port-town has come"

¹⁵ Following the recession, companies like Emaar, Nakheel, and Limitless were forced to shelve projects that were at various stages of development (Sudip, 2009; Giuffrida, 2010).

(Egbert, 2009). An engineer working in development also discussed the benefits of having a Metro system in Dubai:

the system itself is phenomenal. It's become this transportation landmark, so it makes Dubai more competitive with other cities. Now, every city in the Middle East is looking to Dubai because they have a Metro. It's considered as something so, so, European. People want to think they live in Paris now that there is a Metro. It's modern, cosmopolitan, like the city itself. In that sense, it has really benefitted the city. (Personal Interview, May 2012).

The executive's impressions about the Metro encapsulate Ong's (2011b) point that "claims about city ranking and power ... are political statements that are inseparable from the processes of urban development" (p. 3). The passage extracted from a conversation with an executive working in development (shown above) demonstrates the power of urban infrastructural development to boost one's perception of the city and those governing the city.

Minding the Gap: The Dubai Metro and its Utility to Users

While discussing the Dubai Metro during an interview, one respondent, a young British entrepreneur working in Dubai, claimed that the Metro "is great. It gives me a respite from the awful traffic" (Personal Interview, May 2012). When asked to comment on the transit system, an executive working in development stated: "[t]he idea, I think, was that from one end of the city to the other, you're travelling 35 to 40 kilometers. And a lot of low-income, or middle-income workers, live far from their jobs, so they can use it. It's good for them" (Personal Interview, May 2012). Statements like the previous passages illustrate the perceived competitive advantages resulting from the construction of the Metro. Moreover, such testimonials echo recent discussions on city branding techniques that improve residents' daily experiences (Insch, 2011).

The notion that public transportation infrastructure helps distinguish Dubai from other cities in the region aligns with Insch's (2011) suggestion that issues such as "improved

transportation ... are a higher priority for residents” (p. 10). Such statements demonstrate, in part, the utility of the Metro for residents of Dubai. Like other public transportation networks, it provides potential users with alternatives to private, vehicular travel. Moreover, as the Metro is in itself an established network, it connects nodes of development across the city in ways that, prior to the Metro’s construction, were impossible.

In conversations, many respondents mentioned that they seldom use the Metro as a mode of transportation because it is inconvenient. When asked if she used the Metro, a British expat stated: “it can take too long to get to where you need to be” (Personal Interview, May 2012). She also suggested that the Metro can be unreliable at times. When probed about her reluctance to use the Metro, the same informant answered: “[y]ou hear all of these reports about the Metro having glitches and then the people getting stuck for half an hour, sometimes. I can’t keep my clients waiting. I have my car, so I can get wherever I need to much faster” (Personal Interview, May 2012). The Dubai Metro has indeed experienced technical problems, including signaling issues, stalled trains, and cars that move at a “snail’s pace” (*Technical Snag*, 2011), which have delayed service in the past (Al Majaida, 2010). But according to a transportation planner, there are other reasons why the Metro has yet to reach a critical mass of users. He noted:

In general, I mean regardless, whether in Dubai, or elsewhere, you cannot say, 'okay, I'll put two best metro systems, and now I'm a public transit friendly city.' It's more than that. You cannot widen your sidewalk and say 'oh, now I've got a pedestrian friendly city'. There is a whole package of features and functions that need to work together in order for a city to become public transit friendly. So the good side is, yeah, I've got a metro station, I've got a toll road, and the total is a push and pull factor. You gotta push people into public transit and you've gotta pull them out of private cars. And toll pulls them out, to some extent, and you know that just having a good, convenient system like the metro will push them into public transit. But, what lacks is, first of all, you need density, so that public transit will work great. And, by density, you get origins closer to destinations ... there are densities here and there, but in my opinion, it's in islands. By islands, I mean hubs of development here ... It's not quite integrated (Personal Interview, May 2012).

Both of the statements above speak to the apprehension many residents of Dubai feel regarding the Metro's usability, or convenience.

The previous passage in particular exemplifies the Government of Dubai's fixation with hyper-fast development. Following Ong's (2011a) use of the term hyperbuilding, spectacular and speculative construction projects similar to the Dubai Metro evoke Brenner's (2004) competition state, which "attempts to promote economic regeneration by enhancing the global competitive advantages of its territory" (p.172-173). The competition state, Brenner (2004) argues, entwines urban entrepreneurial policies and state rescaling processes through "state spatial projects" and "state spatial strategies" (p. 176, italics in original). While the former purport to "establish customized, place-specific regulatory capacities ... to decentralize key aspects of economic regulation" (Brenner, 2004, p. 176), the latter seek to "reconcentrate socioeconomic assets and advanced infrastructural investments within the most globally competitive city-regions ... to enhance the territorial competitiveness of major local and regional economies" (p. 176). The state, in this case, intervenes through 'spatial strategies' that facilitate urban development through infrastructural projects like the Dubai Metro in an attempt to facilitate transportation Emirate-wide. This active decision to construct rail works to connect different 'islands' of development, or 'spatial projects,' to one another in order to attract more inward investment and economic growth (Brenner, 2004).

High Risk, Low Return? Dubai Metro and Perceived Utility to Corporations

Corporate naming rights agreements are rising in popularity for municipal governments looking to increase revenues (Hopper, 2011). If users perceive the infrastructure to be lacking in some

regard, aesthetically displeasing, inaccessible, or disconnected to nearby amenities, then the sponsor's brand that is visible on the station and throughout the Metro network might suffer by association.



Figure 5.7 Outside the Entrance to the Nakheel Harbour and Towers Station (Photo by author).

During field visits, one exit for the Nakheel Harbour and Tower station was completely severed from its surroundings with few to no amenities nearby (Figure 5.7). This, according to one user, discouraged him from using the station. As a young Canadian expat working in Dubai explained, he felt apprehensive about visiting the Nakheel Harbour and Towers station: “[i]t seems unsafe. Like, nobody’s around, ever. I don’t know why any company would want to be associated with that” (Personal Interview, June 2012). The desolate-looking surroundings of a train station might discourage consumers from using the facility. In addition, sponsors risk alienating potential consumers who associate the corporate brand to the physical building.¹⁶

Corporations also benefit from the tax incentives unique to Dubai. As one transportation and planning expert maintained, sponsors can benefit much more from a naming program in Dubai because there are little to no taxes to pay. When asked about what factors made the Dubai Metro Naming Rights initiative compelling to potential investors, the informant answered: “You

¹⁶ Nakheel is a real-estate developer based out of Dubai (*Corporate*, 2011).

know, these high people they don't pay much tax here ... I think [corporations] are willing to spend on advertisement, due to the competition, due to the structure more than maybe in other places” (Personal Interview, May 2012). During another interview, a corporate manager working in the transportation industry in Dubai also mentioned taxes as a significant catalyst to corporations embarking on the program: “[w]e don't have the tax shield, here, in this country, as such. When people, they go for advertising, sometimes they have a tax shield and the amount being spent on this kind of thing is in order to reduce the tax level” (Personal Interview, May 2012). Low to no tax duties would provide favourable rates for corporations looking to gain exposure without having to pay handsomely for giant billboards. The Naming Rights Initiative facilitates a form of corporate sponsorship that pervades day-to-day urban life. As Figure 5.1 shows, corporate names are embedded in the material landscape in a subtle manner. This is illustrative of an immersive marketing technique, wherein “[e]xposure to marketing may be less important than the nature and degree of engagement with marketing and brands” (Montgomery et al., 2011, p. 7, original emphasis). The implications for immersive marketing techniques like those visible throughout the Dubai Metro can recalibrate interactions between individuals and marketing messages to become more comprehensive across time, space, and multiple platforms.

Reading Into the Silences:¹⁷ Banal Naming and the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative

“living people do not speak much of the dull”

—(Wallace, 2011, p.85).

The impetus for this project stems, in part, from Rose-Redwood’s (2011) critical interrogation of the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative. In his analysis, Rose-Redwood (2011) suggests that

¹⁷ Thanks to Rhianna Nagel for suggesting the title of this section.

toponymic branding efforts like those enacted through the RTA's naming rights program portend a "corporate 'take-over' of the public namescape" (p. 35). As a first year MA student, I spent countless hours exploring the politics of naming rooted in a case study of the RTA's Metro naming project. Imagine my disillusionment, then, when few respondents commented extensively on the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative. Contrary to my assumptions, most of my informants either answered questions about the naming program by changing the subject, or by stating platitudes such as "who cares" (Personal Interview, May 2012).

Government officials also had little to contribute on the symbolic values of naming rights. When queried on the topic, a senior official who worked on the project found the *act* of toponymic branding irrelevant. The official stated that,

maybe somehow, it's not that much relevant. The name, just having [the] name. The station is not something that can have so much meaning ... to, say, the guy [who] is living beside [it] ... the name for them is x or y. I mean ... the name itself is not maybe something which has serious impact on people. It's not the project itself. Like having the station here, or having the line here, or something like that. Here we are talking about just the station. [It] is there already and they are given a name. So the name could be x or y or z, or so (Personal Interview, May 2012).

The previous excerpt encapsulates the banal interpretation of certain toponymic brands. The corporate namespaces produced and codified through the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative echo Berg's (2011) assertion that banal names, or in this case the unremarkability of the naming act, "play a key role in the processes of fetishization that efface the social relations that underpin landscapes of dispossession" (p. 17). Corporate naming programmes such as the RTA's initiative might not incite interest in the connotations of commodified namespaces, and they might not lead to the physical dispossession of marginalized populations. They can, however, contribute to symbolic dispossession of stakeholders who, as a result of the corporate naming agreements, are immersed in commercialized spaces throughout the city. As private companies sponsor station

names, brand logos and names are physically embedded throughout the city (see Figure 5.1).

This commercialization of the urban realm prescribes, to some degree, the symbolic values associated with the Metro stations and the geographical places they imbue with meaning.

Users, too, remain oblivious to the corporate naming of local Metro stations. In response to a question on the Metro naming program, one participant maintained that, “people don’t give a shit what you name a Metro station. You think people care? They don’t” (Personal Interview, May 2012). The previous passage exemplifies the normalization of entrepreneurial governance as it is operationalized through the Dubai Metro’s corporate naming program. Neither quotation includes an acknowledgement that the namespaces legitimized through the naming program are the result of a financialization of what is infrastructure often considered a central part of the public and urban realm. Instead, responses indicate that Metro station names are unimportant details of an Emirate-wide infrastructural project.

In other words, the naming rights initiative, while new and “a world first” corporate naming program (*Introduction*, 2012), remains relatively unnoticed by the public. Rather, the naming program and any potential critical interpretations of the corporate sponsorships take a back seat to the competitive advantages Dubai holds over other regional centres through promotional campaigns aimed at boosting the city’s image.

When participants did mention the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative, some contended that the program limits users’ interactions with spaces they feel should be available to the public. As one woman who visits Dubai periodically explained, she doesn’t like the naming rights program because it “feels artificial.” The woman goes on to critique the program: “[i]n the grand scheme of things, you’re just a pawn in the corporations’ scheme. They dictate where you should play and how. You’re used by them to create money by sacrificing your history, your

culture” (Personal Interview, May 2012). Other informants also disliked the notion of corporate Metro names. Consider the excerpt below, for instance, taken from an interview with a transportation planner working in Dubai:

I mean I think it's public transit, so I don't think it should be commercialized and linked to corporate structure[s]. I mean, it gets rid of its feeling that it's for [the] public. It becomes another commercial thing. From that aspect, I'm not so much for it, of course ... It should be less commercialized as opposed to belonging to certain corporate structures. (Personal Interview, May 2012).

Both participants’ impressions illustrate the targeted entrenchment of neoliberal thinking that commodifies public spaces (Rose-Redwood, 2011). Statements like those made by the young woman and the transportation expert also highlight the discomfort exhibited by participants towards corporate naming schemes.

The government views the Metro and the naming rights program associated with it as boons to the Emirate’s infrastructure. Such perceptions are produced and disseminated by the RTA through an aggressive promotional campaign. Figure 5.8 depicts the objectives of the Dubai Naming Rights Initiative (*Objectives*, 2012). The webpage is carefully crafted to present the project as a measure taken by the RTA to benefit all involved, from members of the “[c]ommunity” to the RTA itself (*Objectives*, 2012). While the page acknowledges the importance of “improv[ing] public programmes, facilities and services,” the central objectives all involve “strategic alliances” that result in a “win-win partnership between the RTA and leading brands” (Figure 5.8; *Objectives*, 2012). Figure 5.8 also demonstrates a privileging of corporate voices over those of the ‘community’ or the public, who, with the exception of one mention near the bottom right of the webpage, do not factor into any of the initiative’s primary goals.

Home >> Rail >> Metro Naming Rights >> Objectives

مترودبي
Dubaimetro
Naming Rights

Objectives

- ▶ Naming Rights Home
- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Objectives
- ▶ Existing Partners
- ▶ Available Stations
- ▶ Partnership Package
- ▼ Application Process:
 - ▶ Criteria
 - ▶ Required Documents
 - ▶ Bid Form
 - ▶ Contact Information

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- By aligning with the leading enterprises from all industry sectors, the programme will provide long-term global commercial opportunities and holistic synergies across the board, from a marketing, business-generating and supply perspective.
 - For RTA:**
 - Increase / Generate revenues to:**
 - » Improve stations / lines / facilities
 - » Service expansions
 - » Additional maintenance
- These strategic alliances can tap into segments to which either party may not normally have access. They offer incremental marketing exposure, ultimately gaining new customers.
 - Corporations:**
 - » Exclusive rights to an innovative marketing platform
 - » Corporate social responsibility
 - » Networking opportunities
 - » Business Opportunities
- Moreover the programme will leverage complementary brand assets and core competencies to bring innovation to existing business assets.
 - Community:**
 - » Improvement of public programmes, facilities and services without increasing taxes / fares
- Integrated platforms would develop marketing activities and generate potential business opportunities. The result: a win-win partnership between the RTA and leading brands.

Figure 5.8 Objectives Webpage (*Objectives*, 2012).

In particular, the website draws attention to the opaque nature of property relations in Dubai, which seem to pay closer attention to state-corporate relationships than any dynamic interactions between members of any other ‘community’ and the government. As Figure 5.4, taken from the Dubai Metro Naming Rights website illustrates, the naming rights program is specifically targeted at corporate parties interested in “tak[ing] your brand to new level [sic] of saliency and success” (*Dubai Metro Naming*, 2012). The Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative home page lacks any information or tabs for the public or non-corporate stakeholders. By directing the webpage at corporate entities, the RTA concretizes entrepreneurial policies that transform urban sites into commodities through the aggressive pursuit of investors.

Other responses concerning the corporate naming program in Dubai indicate that the naming initiative is culturally irrelevant to users. Consider the excerpt below from a mother of

two living in Dubai. When queried about the Metro naming project, she responded with the following question:

[w]hy are you studying the Metro names? At least the Metro is there now. Other cities don't have the same idea, but maybe they will. But, here, in Dubai, nobody pays attention to these things. Especially not with the Metro because it's not as important to people. It doesn't affect them. I think you are asking the wrong question. You should look all the big projects, like the Palms, instead. Everybody loves learning about the Palm (Personal Interview, May 2012).

The example presented above suggests that Metro names are unimportant to one group might indicate that the Metro system itself is not prevalent in that population's consciousness. It could also suggest that the proliferation and overstatement of large-scale projects have, themselves, become banal, or unremarkable. Consider, for example, the following passage from a young woman visiting Dubai. She claims that, "[s]omehow, the name doesn't matter as much. It's not like I care about those places, or whatever else they could be named. So, yeah, it's fine, I think. It just becomes normal, like every other advertisement everywhere else" (Personal Interview, May 2012). This quotation points to a disillusionment with corporatized spaces and of advertising in general. In other words, as advertising platforms become more sophisticated, members of the public stop paying attention to 'new' innovations on old advertising techniques.

While most participants found the issue of corporate naming rights unremarkable, others did not feel comfortable with the idea of sponsoring place-names that held *meaning* to them. As one Metro user explained,

[t]he naming rights for the stations, I think, they help the Government make money and bring some good, high profile, companies to Dubai. And those companies, they boost Dubai in the world, you know? If a bank sponsors the station, then people, tourists, they might think 'wow. This place has money.' Or something. Haha. But, actually, I think they shouldn't let corporations name everything (Personal Interview, May 2012).

The previous passage encapsulates a sentiment presented by most informants, many of whom expressed few if any qualms about the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative but did not feel comfortable with the idea of a fully, corporatized cityscape. Moreover, many participants conveyed some level of discomfort with the idea of opening up the Emirate's namespaces to corporate sponsors, but experienced difficulties in communicating *why* they felt uneasy about the idea. Perhaps, as Bartow (2007) suggests, the naming act can encounter a number of complications when "public amenities are accorded more colorful denominations" (p. 921).

Apprehension towards an *overly* commercialized namespace could also suggest that sites like Dubai's Metro are liminal. Leitner, Sheppard, and Peck (2007) argue that "frontiers" of the market can spread into the urban realm to create liminal "zones of struggle" between different actors (p. 311). These liminal 'zones' are sites of contestation in which different sections of the population might contest the geographies of those spaces (Leitner, Sheppard, Peck, 2007). Such liminal "zones" may indeed exist in and around Dubai's Metro, but there seems to be minimal struggle to resist or protest the commodification of station names.

A Metro by any Other Name: The Dubai Metro Naming Rights and its Symbolic Value to Government

In 2008, the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) of Dubai unveiled plans to implement the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Project (*Introduction*, 2012). The initiative, lauded for providing companies with "the ultimate branding and marketing opportunity" (*Businessweek*, 2008), transformed Metro stations into platforms for corporate advertisements (*Introduction*, 2012). The program's bedrock involves the idea that naming rights agreements between the RTA and select corporations will result in a 'win-win' situation for government and industry. As an Emirati man

with intimate knowledge of the project suggested, the initiative had two main purposes. First, he claims, the program would “strengthen the partnership relationship with those, let's say, main commercial players ... in the city. And, second, [it would] ... generate a kind of revenue resource for RTA” (Personal Interview, May 2012).

Despite promises of raised revenues and “holistic brand/business integration and partnership” (*Objectives*, 2012), the naming rights project involves a number of risks, or ‘costs,’ to the government. The cost of privatizing toponyms that could otherwise function to commemorate the past in some way, for instance, might reap symbolic havoc on the city. Moreover, leasing toponyms to public infrastructure can undercut the image of Dubai created through architectural marvels and superlative development (i.e., the Burj Khalifa; see Chapter 4).

The Government of Dubai’s decision to design and implement a naming rights program illustrates a few things. First, the naming rights initiative is part of a wider set of neoliberal measures deployed through specific austerity policies. The privatization of municipal names through naming agreements and the corporatization of the urban realm are two examples of political decisions that are often associated with ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Second, despite political decision-making predicated on the creation of public-private partnerships that aim to produce “holistic synergies across the board” (*Objectives*, 2012), the Naming Rights Initiative seems to be, thus far, economically and politically successful. Within months of its launch, for instance, one news outlet reported that the naming program generated nearly 1.8bn Dhs (*Revenues from Dubai Metro*, 2008).¹⁸

Naming rights initiatives like that of Dubai Metro sanction corporate names over commemorative ones through the act of toponymic branding. Rather than naming stations after

¹⁸ Approximately CAD \$ 490 million. June 4, 2013. Ahmed (2010) suggest similar revenues.

local geographical features or existing toponyms, the Dubai Metro Naming Rights initiative commercializes stations through the naming process. Stations, through their sponsored names, are removed from the public realm. Once corporatized, stations and their names no longer function as venues through which government can “create a culturally shared experience” (Azaryahu, 2009, p. 54). As one young man who has travelled to Dubai for work suggests, historical names could provide a platform for the Government of Dubai to showcase the city’s cultural and social histories to residents, expats, and tourists traversing the city by rail. When asked to comment on his perceptions about the initiative, the young man noted that:

something’s gotta be sacred. You can’t sell out every time ... there’s gotta be a balance. There are a few places where you wouldn’t want to name it the HSBC Gold Market. Ugh, really? I guess it wouldn’t matter if it was still known in the town as the Gold Market. But, you don’t want to name it the Monsanto station, or Coca-Cola, or whatever. I think it’s good to name a couple of places after historical people, places, things. Just anything to connect yourself to this place. Otherwise, it’s completely synthesized ... Even if they could somehow show the story of Dubai and how crazy it is and where it’s going in the future instead of just having the glitzy parts. It just needs something to root itself, a little. Just, anything. People want substance and it definitely lacks substance (Personal Interview, November 2012).

The above comment encapsulates the risks taken on by government to enter into naming rights agreements with corporations. By leasing out the naming rights to government-paid infrastructure, the RTA risks paying homage to corporations instead of local figures, events, and places of social and historical significance. The RTA, with the blessing of the Government of Dubai, “connote[s] ideology about what should be commemorated and where” (Azaryahu, 2009, p. 54). Unlike the commemorative names Azaryahu discusses, however, the Government of Dubai honors a corporate ideology and, moreover, one that prevents the establishment of culturally-significant names that could, with the absence of the program, instill a city in the midst of rapid growth with a sense of shared culture and history (Azaryahu, 2009).

By implementing the naming rights initiative, the Government of Dubai is not only jeopardizing the city's image, but it also risks forfeiting some of its autonomy over the cityscape, and the symbolic landscapes that users will privilege in the future. The commercialization of infrastructure that is newly built, under construction, or slated for development, facilitates efforts made by the Government of Dubai to create a business-friendly environment that honors corporate interests over social, cultural, and historical artifacts. By ceding long-term rights of toponyms for newly constructed spaces to corporations, the RTA inscribes the city infrastructure and spaces with corporate brands.

Azaryahu (2009) suggests that street names enable "spatial orientation in the city" (p. 54). Metro station names, I argue, should perform the same primary function. Transit stations are places where people go to travel across cities and, as such, they become landmarks imprinted throughout the built environment. The names of such landmarks, when invoked, help users and passersby understand their surroundings and navigate the city.

The utterance of a name also produces a place-identity. Corporate naming agreements override those place-identities and impose the corporation's brand asset overtop previous existing toponyms. This can cause confusion for users if and when the corporate toponym changes, or is replaced by any other name.

The RTA also incurs the potential costs associated with a negative brand image. A corporation could, for instance, obtain naming rights to a Metro station and subsequently experience bad press. As a young woman who travels to Dubai often noted: "[t]here are all kinds of risks. You don't know if the company's reputation will change, or how it will change. Look at BP, or Enron. You just don't know what that name will mean in one, five, or ten years" (Personal Interview, May 2012). If the brand image suffers, then a station bearing the corporation's name

and, by extension, the government approving the naming agreement, could also be interpreted as part of that brand's asset. The Metro station could, as a result, be subject to the same backlash the corporation faces from the media and, as the press diffuses or goes viral, other stakeholders. Further, if the RTA enters into a naming agreement with a sponsor embroiled in a scandal, other potential partners might be reticent to partake in the same corporate naming program. Corporate stakeholders participating or interested in the initiative might be discouraged from doing so for fear of sharing headlines or advertising space (i.e., maps) with other, scandal-ridden corporations.

Despite laudatory claims made by municipal governments partaking in sponsorship programs, policies similar to Dubai's Metro Naming Rights initiative are perceived by some to be a bad investment of government dollars. As a transportation planner pointed out:

I think the best way, if you want to actually recoup money and invest it in public transit is to discourage road usage by imposing toll, parking costs and all that. Because what you said is, basically, the objective, in a way, is to raise capital. I mean that's why they go to different corporate [partners] and, you know, ask them to participate and all that. But, that sort of investment is not quite targeted. I would, you know, put high parking costs, impose toll, and this sort of mechanism. Get the capital out ... [and] allocate it to public transit (Personal Interview, May 2012).

The previous passage highlights an underlying assumption made by proponents of corporate naming projects similar to Dubai's Naming Rights Initiative. Although programs like Dubai's profess to raise revenues while providing essential services to local stakeholders, naming policies do not intend to encourage residents or the public to use those services. As such, while governments proclaim to improve the city's built environment without raising costs to residents or users, naming rights programs do not always specifically target the public to entice them to use the renovated or new infrastructure. Rather, corporate naming programs like those developed

by the RTA focus primarily on developing government-corporate partnership and the tangible, financial, impacts for both parties associated with such agreements.

Get Money, Get Paid, Brand Stations: The Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative and its Perceived Symbolic Value to Corporations

Corporations should consider the effects of interactions between the quality of experience associated with infrastructure (Metro stations, in this case) and the perception of the corporation's brand. In addition, companies embarking on the naming rights bandwagon should think twice about investing in programs like the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative. As one branding expert argues, companies engaging in naming rights agreements for public infrastructure projects can suffer from poor exposure. When asked to comment on Dubai's Metro Naming Rights program, the Middle Eastern CEO of an international branding firm maintained that,

the train project, in terms of the brands that have been used, or been associated with the train stations, I think that has been a mistake. I think it's cost a lot of money and I don't think the brands have actually gained the recognition that they would have liked to see themselves get (Personal Interview, May 2012).

The participant also suggests that the program has resulted in "a waste of investment" for participating companies. He expounds on his position below:

the reason being is what the brands do when they badge themselves onto a station is they try to change people's natural description of a particular place. So, where a station may be station 5, or station Sheikh Zayed, or [the] station outside the Dubai Mall, or whichever station it is, you know, if somebody then goes and calls that Al-Utta station, or another station name and, and they want to try and get people to use the name of the badge, the badge brand rather than the primary destination brand, I think there is a risk that that won't happen. And I think that's what's happened. I don't think any of the station brands have really gained significant recognition. I don't think RTA have been particularly, um, good at helping those brands gaining recognition, either. I think there's a lack of awareness and a lack of promotion of the

brands that have actually bought the naming rights to the stations (Personal Interview, May 2012).

The lack of recognition for brands, as the branding CEO suggests, can result in less exposure for corporations. The establishment of a new corporate toponym, for example, does not necessitate its immediate or popular use. Rather, individuals can continue to associate stations with previous place-names or pre-existing place identities. This, in turn, can alter the perception of the brand by would-be and existing consumers (users, in this context).

The comment presented above also demonstrates the geographical unevenness of the spatial circuits of brands (Pike, 2009). As Pike (2009) argues, “[i]n seeking to shape and respond to the particularities of different geographical market contexts, branding practices may similarly be spatially attenuated and heterogeneous – even for the same brand in different places” (p. 620). Geographical heterogeneity, Pike (2009) asserts, can be fundamental to the ways in which individuals experience and interpret brands across time and space. The citation of unofficial colloquial names represents the persistence of previous histories that imbue spaces like Metro stations with meaning. If, however, corporate place-names permeate the vernacular, then they amplify the socio-spatial and economic inequalities produced through the corporate naming process (Pike, 2009).

The impermanence of corporate naming agreements such as those approved through the Dubai Metro program also poses significant risk to existing and future sponsors. The Dubai Metro Naming Rights website, for instance, does not provide information regarding the length of tenure for corporate naming agreements.¹⁹ Despite a lack of official documentation on the duration of naming tenure, an executive level transportation specialist with intimate knowledge of the project claims that naming agreements are good for 10 years. As the informant in question

¹⁹ One news source suggests that agreements between the RTA and companies are for 10 year terms (Al-Theeb, 2008).

explained: “[t]he name will be printed on the maps, everybody will be knowing about them, so we cannot keep changing the names, so that's why we put it, like, for ten years” (Personal Interview, May 2012). If this is indeed the case, then the station names would ostensibly be up for grabs once the current terms expire or are up for renewal. Further, if a sponsor backs out of a naming agreement, then the station name can be up for negotiation much earlier than anticipated. In the chance that a station does get retitled, the name-changes would produce what Vuolteenaho and Ainiala (2009) call “fragmented linguistic landscapes” (p. 233). A fractured linguistic landscape could cause confusion for stakeholders, including transit users, who rely on maps and existing spatial inscriptions to navigate the city.

The toponymic branding act could, then, result in a privileging of the old sponsor’s brand over the new corporate name. As the previous toponym gets diffused across the city through utterances, maps, and signs, it becomes part of the public’s consciousness. A new corporate name does not necessitate the erasure of the previous toponym and, as such, can continue to contribute to the invocation of place-identities associated with prior toponymic brands. This can, in turn, undercut the visibility of the new toponym and thus negatively affect the new brand asset.

The Dubai Naming Rights Initiative produces a corporate imaginary in which uncommercialized place-names are no longer sacrosanct. The program commemorates corporate names over geographic or other toponyms. This privileging of commercial toponyms, much like geographic names, “bestow[s] prestige or conjure[s] romantic associations” (Azaryahu, 2009, p. 53). In the case of Dubai Metro, these associations romanticize a neoliberal script, which promotes the privatization of public toponyms as a revenue-generating tool. Moreover, by spearheading the campaign, the RTA along with the Government of Dubai sanction the

corporatization of the symbolic realm. This, in turn, can render the city into a giant billboard for advertising, as marketing techniques pervade quotidian experiences through their material embeddedness in the landscape. By favoring corporate toponyms over community or geographical names, the Government of Dubai propagates a discourse of neoliberalization in which the corporate names on Metro stations become concrete realities that illustrate dominant political ideologies. The resulting commemorations, in this case corporate in nature, beget a culturally shared history rooted in neoliberal axioms. While corporate patrimonies venerate private companies, they also prevent the celebration of non-official, or dissenting experiences, histories, and values.

Imagining a Public in Dubai

Before leaving for the ‘field,’ I paid little attention to the idea of a public in Dubai. This shortcoming was the result of a number of factors. First, my philosophical influences, for the most part, were writing from a Western or North American perspective. My graduate study had also taught me to approach every word critically and to be cautious of the liberalizing, masculinist, and class connotations critics could associate with the now topical public sphere (Gambetti, 2009).²⁰ Second, Dubai is an Emirate with a complex constitution that “leaves somewhat fuzzy the delineation of powers delegated to the federal government and those reserved to the member Emirates” (Peck, 1986, p. 125). As an outsider, my access to information on the topic is limited to government documents available online, many of which fail to elucidate specific legislation that might be useful to my study.

²⁰ I began research for this project in the Fall of 2011, at the height of the ‘Occupy’ movement.

It wasn't until I found myself *in situ* that I realized that the distinctions between public and private spaces were not only opaque, but class-specific and, overall, very nuanced. Emirati culture is not visible to the public and, as Ali (2010) describes, "it is not dominant in the public sphere in Dubai" (p. 66). In 2013, During a Question and Answer period at the end of a conference presentation, I realized that, despite my reluctance, I would have to address questions surrounding the public sphere. Upon my return to the comfortable confines of my research lab, I came to terms with my realization: unless I acknowledged the question of the 'public sphere,' there would be a (significant) missing piece to my empirical puzzle. I began to think: who is the public in Dubai? What is a public? Is the public sphere directly tied to the notion of civil society? How does the examination of neoliberal urbanism through branding processes alter the discourses on those affected by corporate naming programs?

Like most if not all of the Middle East, Western media outlets present the public in Dubai as a thing of fiction. Following Shami's (2009) description, cities like Dubai are constructed by its "Orientalizers ... as not only lacking in civility but also in public-ness and public-ity" (p. 14). Moreover, the Habermasian notion of the public sphere, in which participants are for the most part considered equal to one another, provides us with an outmoded version of the 'public' (Moors, Jureidini, Özbay, Sabban, 2009). The public sphere, for Habermas, enables 'rational' conversations between members of a particular citizenry, which ostensibly results in widespread agreement about 'the common good' (Fraser, 1990). As Fraser (1990) contends, however, Habermas' examination of the public sphere does not take into account different, non-liberal, non-bourgeois iterations of the public sphere.

There is no public in Dubai. There are, however, multiple publics. I adopt Fraser's (1990) suggestion that there can exist alternative publics, or what she terms "subaltern counterpublics"

(p. 67). These counterpublics enable “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). Fraser’s conceptualization is useful to consider when grappling with questions surrounding the public sphere and governance, but it remains incomplete. As Moors et al. (2009) contend, there can still exist inequalities, or heterarchies, within different subaltern counterpublics. Nevertheless, there are different publics that are visible to the observer in Dubai: from privileged expats, to South Asian or North African migrant workers, each group (and innumerable others) is, in some way, ‘present in Dubai’s public’ (Moors et al., 2009). In other words, I define the public not by the powers it holds, but through its presence in everyday life. The publics of Dubai are variegated and in constant flux. No single public holds a totalizing power in Dubai. But through their individual performances, the city’s *counterpublics* can challenge the ‘traditional’ forms of power that reshape the city through entrepreneurial forms of governance. Through the constant performances of *subaltern counterpublics*, individuals can reproduce or challenge the dominant political orders that govern the public sphere (Tripp, 2013).

The End of the Line: Conclusion

The Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative provides, as one government official states, “a one-stop shop” for corporations looking to maximize their brand’s exposure (Personal Interview, May 2012). The program, designed and implemented by the Government of Dubai’s Roads and Transport Authority (RTA), targets potential sponsors hoping to turn “their business names into destinations everyone knows about” (*Dubai Metro Naming*, 2012). Through the toponymic branding act, the naming program transforms everyday spaces used by residents and visitors of Dubai into private, commercialized places. By immersing users and passersby into a

commodified space, the naming rights campaign transforms members of the citizenry into, for the most part, oblivious consumers. The use of immersive marketing strategies blurs distinctions between what is real and what is part of the advertisement and, as a result, commuters interacting with the spaces in question “inhabi[t] media environments” (Montgomery et al., 2011, p. 8).

In this chapter, I examined the perceptions of three distinct stakeholder groups (the government, corporation, and users) through two themes: the perceived utility of Dubai’s Metro system and the symbolic values associated with the Dubai Metro Naming Rights. I suggested that, while the Dubai Metro as infrastructure is perceived by all three populations to boost the image of the city, the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative barely warrants discussion. In other words, the corporate naming campaign, as many informants explain, remains unremarkable, or to borrow Berg’s (2011) term, *banal*. This perception illustrates the ubiquity of commodified spaces in the city. The corporate naming program functions as a political technology that extends an entrepreneurial logic through the formation of a neoliberal state apparatus. Market-driven logic prevails in hopes of forging new corporate partnerships between government and corporate actors. Government authorities like Dubai’s Roads and Transport Authority aggressively target potential sponsors in hopes of securing direct revenues and thereby generating growth.

The Dubai Metro also provides the Government of Dubai with yet another iconic construction project that represents the city-as-brand in a glamorous and superlative way. State-of-the-art driverless technology, hyper-rapid construction, and a sleek, modern terminal design all feed into representations of Dubai as a city whose star continues to rise, despite a near fatal economic recession. Dubai Metro and the naming rights initiative both bolster the Emirate’s image in the region, and as the place to conduct business, invest, or reside in the Middle East.

Public Enemy No. 1

May 2012

“Welcome to your Dubai Metro” (DubaiMetro, 2010).

Dubai’s Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) uses the above slogan on promotional materials, including informational brochures available throughout the Metro network. This axiom is ubiquitous throughout Dubai’s transit system and plastered on billboards throughout the city (Figure 5.9). While in Dubai, however, one quickly realizes that things are not always how they first appear. There exists, for instance, a clear demarcation between what we, as Westerners, consider public and private spaces in Dubai. This is expected if one is familiar with Middle Eastern cities and the cultures and histories that inform their morphologies. As I walk through the Mall of the Emirates Metro station at the beginning of my fieldwork, I am told by an informant to avoid making too much eye contact. I initially discount this suggestion as limited and narrow-minded. ‘You’re being overly cautious. Nobody cares,’ I tell myself.



Figure 5.9 "My City, My Metro" Billboard (Photo by author).

It isn't until later that week when, during dinner with some contacts, I am again told to rethink my comportment. One of my dinner mates tells me that people in Dubai "have two personalities. One is for the outside, the city, the other is for the inside, inside the home. You should be careful, here" (Personal communication, May 2012). I ask for a more detailed explanation. My new friend tells me that, while in Dubai, I should "keep [my] head down and be careful about asking too much from people. They get uncomfortable" (Personal communication, May 2012). I smile and nod politely. In my mind, however, I discount the warning as alarmist and overblown.

Skip ahead one week. I am mid-way through my field 'season' and riding the Metro back to my hotel. As I bask in the mercurial sunshine, I feel like a regular user. Like an athlete repeating the same bodily motions, over and over, I ride the Metro. The act has become muscle memory. I feel connected to the network in a corporeal way. My understanding of the Metro is embodied. I can anticipate maximum speeds, angle deviations that will shift the car through space, and have achieved the ultimate goal of public ridership: I can make space in the most packed of cars.

I disembark early, at the wrong station, to take a look around. Maybe I'll snap a few photos, I think. As I run up the stairs, a young man in uniform catches up with me. He has a stern look on his face. "What you doing?" he asks. "Taking a few photos," I say. After a lengthy discussion about my intent, nationality, age, marital status, and, eventually, a query about my dinner plans, the officer informs me that I must stop taking pictures. "Everything here," he says, "is public space until it isn't" (Personal communication, May 2012). Befuddled by his statement, I acknowledge his reprimand, thank him, and move towards the platform. As I enter the car, I no longer feel like an insider. The car begins to move and I lose my footing, bumping into an older

woman. I nearly fall over as the car rounds a corner into the next terminal. The train stops and an unending stream of people push inwards. It's getting tight in here, I think. Before long, I am pinned between raucous, sweaty tourists. I am stabbed by edges of cardboard, jagged and emblazoned with French names in serif fonts, relics of tax-free shopping spoils. I begin to panic as reality sets in: I am no regular, no insider. I am yet another sweaty tourist buying into the idea of a public, the myth of Dubai. There is no public space, here, nor will there ever be. This: the Metro, the malls, the squares, the fun, are but imitations of public spaces. And, we, as users of those spaces, are but a simulacrum for a public.

Chapter 6: Ruminations

She had not a thought in her head that was not a slogan.

– (Orwell, 1987, p. 69).

Thesis Redux

The goal of this study has been to examine geographies of governance through an examination of city and toponymic branding processes in two case studies in Dubai. In the case study on the Burj, I paid close attention to three themes that emerged from interview transcripts and media sources on the “tallest building in the world” (Burj Khalifa, 2012). The first involves the creation of Dubai as a superlative city, in which the promise of hyperbuilding performs an idealization of the city-as-brand as a fantastical place. This image also fuels the idea that through similar, large-scale projects, the Government of Dubai can fulfill the neoliberal dream and attract investment, residents, and tourists. By doing so, the city becomes an entrepreneur and, so the story goes, can create multiplier effects that lead to economic growth. Moreover, the construction and promotion of the Burj Khalifa leads to the creation of its myth as a ‘living wonder.’ Central to this idea is the theme of *development as legacy*, in which the construction of formalist, flashy development projects like the Burj extends a neoliberal discourse rooted in state-building or dirigiste behavior. Finally, I argue that the Burj Khalifa’s name change illustrates pastoral modalities of power that aim to espouse the role of Dubai’s ruler, the Sheikh, as a Shepherd looking over his flock.

For the second case study, I focused on two themes that emerge from interview transcripts surrounding Dubai’s new Metro system and the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative: the perceived utility of the infrastructural system and the symbolic values three

different sets of stakeholders associated with both. I contend that the Metro network elevates the image of Dubai and, with it, the city's brand. The Naming Rights Initiative, on the other hand, for the most part, is perceived by many participants to be unremarkable, or *banal*. This lack of stakeholder interest in the corporate naming campaign, I suggest, illustrates the ubiquity of commodified place-names.

Another outcome of this research involves the analysis of the interactions between representations of the city-as-brand and toponymic branding in Dubai. As I discuss in Chapter 4, the re-naming of the Burj Dubai to Khalifa undercuts positive associations reproduced and performed through the building itself. The Burj Khalifa is often marketed as synecdoche for the Emirate, and populations worldwide ascribe symbolic value to the fact that Dubai houses the world's tallest building. By rebranding the tower as Burj Khalifa, the new toponym erodes pre-existing geographical imaginaries associated with the building and, more importantly, with the city's image. The last minute toponymic rebranding of Burj Khalifa rearticulates Dubai's brand asset, as the name change resulted from Sheikh Khalifa bailing out the Emirate of Dubai during its 2009 recession (Ali, 2010). This, I argue, illustrates the risks associated with an avowal to city and toponymic branding initiatives. It also exemplifies the dangers of neoliberal urbanism through the shortcomings of entrepreneurial governance tactics, including the decision to promote Burj Dubai as *the* icon of Dubai and subsequently renaming the building after Abu Dhabi's Ruler, Sheikh Khalifa. Toponymic branding, in short, can re-image the city-as-brand and devalue its brand asset. The case of the Burj also demonstrates that entrepreneurial tactics like city and toponymic branding function as state-building exercises.

This thesis expounds on the notion that language, through its performance, is an inherently political process. I engage in a critical, discourse analysis use to situate language in its

socio-political contexts, which enables the emergence of meaningful impressions of city and toponymic branding in Dubai (Gee, 2011). This approach becomes particularly useful when unpacking the significance of the perceived banality of the Dubai Naming Rights Initiative by interview participants. The lack of interest in discussing the naming program exemplifies the normalization of neoliberal logic that seeks to marketize different geographical imaginaries embedded throughout the city. It also leads to what Berg (2011) calls “legitimacy-without-controversy,” as the government legitimates the commercialization of Dubai with little to no dissent from the public. My analysis draws attention to the political and social contexts enmeshed with city and toponymic branding events in Dubai (Gee, 2011).

The perception of Dubai Metro’s utility and the symbolic values stakeholders associate with the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative points to an important finding that materializes from this examination. Based on impressions conveyed through interview transcripts and promotional materials promoting both the transit system and the naming campaign, I argue that members from three distinct populations—users, corporations, and the government—find utility in the Dubai Metro’s construction. Stakeholders from each distinct group proclaim the economic and logistical utility of the Metro, which simultaneously boosts the image of Dubai-as-brand through discourses surrounding its rapid construction, sleek and modern design, and as yet another tourist attraction that exalts Dubai’s brand.

In contrast, interview participants found the Dubai Metro Naming Rights Initiative unremarkable. In conversations, most respondents had little to say about the naming project. Instead, many evaded questions about the corporate naming program, or brushed aside the corporate sponsorship of Metro names. This is a central lesson to take away from the study, as most stakeholders were indifferent to the program. Few, in fact, linked the new, corporate

insignia etched throughout Metro stations as worthy of critical scrutiny. As a result, most stakeholders did not make explicit connections between the commodification of places through the toponymic branding act and the symbolic values they associate with the now corporatized geographical spaces.

Limitations

As I acknowledged in Chapter 3, there exist many methodological caveats to my arguments, namely the ways by which I performed the research, collected data, and subsequently analyzed it. Time, for instance, is always a limiting factor. In my case, it was my albatross. The duration of my program is a hearty two years. Unfortunately, visa and financial constraints shortened my field ‘season’ to a mere month.

Geographical distances also limited my ability to access different populations and conduct more interviews. Dubai and Victoria, British Columbia, operate in different time zones. Trying to cold call potential informants who live across the world and in a bustling desert city from a stormy, laidback, Pacific outpost on Vancouver Island certainly complicated my attempts at recruiting participants.

As an outsider, my positionality certainly shaped my experiences before, during, and after my visit to the field. I had limited contacts entering the field and securing participants proved more challenging than I could ever anticipate. I gained access to most of my participants through personal contacts, which also means that many of my respondents were not Emirati. The interviews I did manage to conduct, whether with Canadians, other expatriates, or Emiratis, were often ‘on message’ or loaded with politically motivated silences, most of which evaded me until I started the coding process. As this project is interested in individual perceptions about city and

toponymic branding in Dubai, it is important to acknowledge that, despite my best efforts, the researcher-participant relationship is embroiled in power relations and my subject position alters the interpretation and outcomes of this research. Much like my albatross, I wear these shortcomings in plain sight, around my neck.

Future Considerations

One of the greatest challenges I encountered while producing this thesis surrounds the limited time I spent in the field and establishing relationships with informants. Future research would benefit from longer *field seasons* to help the researcher immerse herself in her surroundings. It would also enable the researcher to forge more and various relationships with informants or potential participants.

After my proposal defence, I set out to interview decision-makers and industry professionals producing and implementing city and toponymic branding technologies in Dubai. Despite completing fifteen interviews, I still believe that there are numerous voices that could be included in a study such as this. I recommend that further study on city and toponymic branding include a greater diversity of perspectives, and at a greater depth. One way to accomplish such a task could involve extended ethnographic study that focuses on distinct populations (i.e., city and toponymic brand consumers), or a participatory research design that plunges the researcher into the case(s) under study. By exploring the perceptions of one group of stakeholders during an extended period of time, future inquiry would, I believe, yield more detailed responses.

The outcomes of this research, in many ways, lay the groundwork for future investigations of urban processes, and how entrepreneurial governance strategies extend the state apparatus through city and toponymic branding campaigns. Few geographic studies examine the

politics of naming in a critical manner and even fewer scholars approach critical toponymies from a political economic perspective. This thesis provides a touchstone for academic inquiry interested in analyzing the relationships between city and toponymic branding and entrepreneurial urban governance. Moreover, future study on the topic can easily expound on the neoliberalization of place through the performance of state power, or address questions surrounding sovereignty, geopolitics, Middle Eastern political economies, neoliberal rationalities, and the politics of public space. As municipalities continue to jump on the naming rights bandwagon, the findings in this thesis can function as a reference tool for decision-makers intrigued by or wary of the idea.

In addition to theoretical contributions, I add to a burgeoning field of geographical research that deals with Middle Eastern articulations of power and governmentality through empirical and qualitative inquiry. I employed a discourse analysis approach in hopes of extracting ideographic knowledge about the effects of entrepreneurial urbanism on the city through political technologies such as city and toponymic branding. Further studies using a discourse analysis approach could incorporate the analysis of behaviours and interactions between users and branded spaces.

While this thesis includes numerous philosophical traditions, prospective research could branch out to focus specifically on the performative enactments of city and toponymic branding technologies, or the embodied experiences of interacting with branded and immersive marketing environments. City and toponymic branding policies alter how different stakeholders interact with spaces, and the ways by which the different publics of a city imbue those spaces with meaning. In order to begin to scratch beneath the theoretical surface on place-making and place-naming, we should pay close attention to the experiences individuals have in the city, and

whether city and toponymic branding efforts alter one's understanding of the city. Academics should seek insight into why certain groups in the city find toponymic branding programs unremarkable, or to borrow Berg's (2011) term, *banal*, how different stakeholders experience and interpret different branded spaces, be they cities or names, and what effects such branding initiatives have on members of the public, or counterpublics, and their understanding of places in the city.

Final Checks

June 3, 2012

3AM and we're still on the tarmac. I've been in and out of sleep for the past three hours, waiting to leave Dubai. I look over my shoulder and read a few lines of my neighbour's book. My sister-in-arms on this flight, a slight woman of ambiguous ethnic origins, is reading, from what I can sleuth, a coming of age tale. I turn away, look back at the cabin and regret waking up. The cabin is loud with the staccato screams of babies. I grok these babies. Like them, I am hungry, tired, and confused by the frenzied impatience around me. The word that comes to mind is impotent. I am powerless to change my situation. A month ago, a man stamped my visa and passport. He permitted me to enter Dubai. I was excited, hopeful, optimistic. I was intrepid as I strategized which customs queue I could snake my way through the fastest. All in hopes of doing field work. To find over thirty people willing to talk to me about my research project. Back then, I had that. As I bite my fingers to cope with the stabbing pains triggered by the parasite persisting in my gut (an unpleasant souvenir), I try to convince myself that I've accomplished all of my goals. I chomp a bit too aggressively on my thumbnail and come away with more hangnail than I wanted. Great, I think. Can't do anything right. I spit out two centimeters of dead skin and begin to suck on the droplets that bleed into the wrinkles at the top of my thumb. The safety videos click on and, I think, this is it. We're leaving. A flight attendant blows lasciviously into a flotation device that has the word DEMO watermarked across the entire thing and I reflect upon the successes and failures of the past month. On the one hand, I tell myself, I only got 10 interviews with the promise of 10 more. Not good. Not bad, either. In total, it's 20 more than my committee expected. On the other hand, though, I am no longer sure I asked the right questions. What I

experienced during my time in the field is disjointed from the ideas I spent the last two semesters reading about. We come up with these ideas about how places are and should be, sitting at our desks, across time and space. I knew fieldwork would be difficult, but I am alone, afraid, without a Dollar or Dirham to my name. The PA system drones instructions to turn off all devices, to ensure that our seats are upright. The Airbus gains speed as the lights in the cabin dim. Within seconds, the nose of our plane tilts up and we lift off the ground. We rattle in our seats as we fight gravity and move upwards, through the atmosphere. I wipe my thumb on my jeans and look outside the window. The plane rolls to the right as if to put the city on display, one last time. I struggle to locate my study sites and eventually sit back in my seat, no longer interested in playing. I hear the low whine of a newborn, four rows back, who will continue to wail throughout the entire flight. I lean my head back, make myself small to conserve heat, and resume chewing my thumbnails. In lieu of flesh around my nail, I feel the skin burn as my body works overtime to repair the damage I've caused. There is a faint whir that indicates the landing gear has successfully been tucked away. I relax as the plane straightens out and our movement through space feels slow. My month 'on the ground' leaves me feeling spent. Despite my emotions, I know I can do this. I am grateful for my experiences, however confusing or complicated they may have been. I finally begin to feel my thoughts slipping away as we drift through the sky, farther away.

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