

'Glocalisation': politicizing Qatari Heritage

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Abstract

Since 1995 Qatar has seen rapid period of development as part of politicians' ambition to promote the country. This is a result of the Qataris' efforts to effectively invest their economic power and resources. The speed of development is striking for visitors, migrant workers and citizens alike, with skyscrapers filling the central area of Doha City known as 'Al-Dafna'. The expansion of the economy has also led to the establishment of educational organisations such as Qatar Foundation (opened in 1995), the Museum of Islamic Art (2008), the Oasis of Science (opened in 2009), the Cultural Village (opened in 2010) and the National Museum of Qatar, which is scheduled for opening in 2016. Alongside these moves to modernise the country, there has begun to be an emphasis on the need to preserve Qatar's traditions and heritage and the desire to rebuild some sites and cities from Qatar's history. Throughout these projects, Qatari and Islamic heritage have both been utilised in the politicians' vision and plans, in which the impact of globalisation and modernisation is seen as shaping cultural heritage in Qatar. For instance, in its design and purpose, the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) is both aimed at this modernising agenda and the push to reconstruct heritage. Both Qatari architecture and Islamic architecture were filtered through the wish to globalise and modernise the image of a new Qatar. When reading I.M.Pei's architecture, what one notices is that it actually represents the multiple ideas that are current in Qatar's attempt to define Islamic culture as modern, global, culturally relevant, and worthy of preservation. Consequently, it seems Pei was trying to tap into these multiple ideas, and in the process he simultaneously imposed his own, new ideas of architecture. Thus, globalisation, modernisation and even 'glocalisation' are all unquestionably complicit in this simulacrum. These narrative structures lie at the heart of the MIA. However, what is narrated within this site is not traditional Qatari heritage or an Islamic heritage; rather, it is a mark and presentation of the ambitions of Qatar today.

Within my paper, I will investigate why the transformations of the heritage and museum practices took place when they did. Perhaps it was planned deliberately at a time when the country was moving towards a new political era of what was claimed to be 'democracy' under the rule of Sheikh Hamad. This transformation marks a transition point between past and present, between the old politics, which resisted any reform in the social and economic sectors, and the new political system, which concentrates on making the country an effective competitor in the global market.