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EXPLAINING SURVIVAL—DOMESTIC MATTERS

The survival of the Gulf monarchies to date—at least on a domestic level—has been predicated on the unwritten, unspoken ruling bargains or social contracts that exist between the ruling families and their populations. Together with the neo-patriarchal governments that have formed, these bargains and their constituent strategies have usually been enough to placate most citizens, satisfy the needs of resident expatriates and guarantee some degree of political acquiescence from the population, thereby allowing the monarchies to avoid repression or coercive 'maintenance of the polity'.[1]

Given the economic and demographic disparities between the six Gulf monarchies, these ruling bargain components differ from state to state and, as circumstances have changed; new components have been added while others have been withdrawn. Nevertheless within all of these highly dynamic bargains there are readily identifiable patterns and much common ground.

All of the Gulf monarchies have emphasised the state being first and foremost a distributor of wealth rather than an extractor, and arguably this remains the central pillar of monarchical survival. Drawn mostly from revenues derived from the region's hydrocarbon concessions or from rent generated by more recent post-oil activities, the largesse of these modern day rentier states has undoubtedly provided their ruling families and governments with considerable 'eudemonic legitimacy'—that is, legitimacy derived from economic well-being and the provision of social welfare.[2] Closely connected to this component has been the ability of these states to boost massively the national identity and social status of their citizens or 'locals'—immediately identifying them as recipients of distributed wealth and often positioning them in advantageous business positions. In the wealthiest monarchies, this automatically elevates citizens above all other sections of the population. Although technically not part of this 'rentier elite', the millions of expatriates living and working in the Gulf states are often similarly satisfied, as most are able to enjoy a competitive, tax-free income, and usually plan on returning home after a few years. Those that do not conform can easily be suppressed and deported.

Non-economic components of the ruling bargains also matter greatly, especially in those monarchies with a declining ability to distribute wealth. In many cases, rulers and their heirs have invested much time and effort in cultivating personal resources or even perpetuating personality cults; often based on sporting prowess, scholarly achievements, or celebrity status. The aim, it seems, has been to sustain an air of traditional authority for these individuals to keep governing their people. Connected to this has been the generous funding and support for museums and other projects that emphasise the Gulf monarchies' tribal heritage and pre-oil history, often serving as 'living memories' of how the incumbents can trace their lineage back to key founding fathers. Similarly important, especially in Saudi Arabia, but apparent in all six states, has been the exploitation and co-option of religion, mostly—but not exclusively—Islam. Ruling families have worked hard to generate an image of piety, while their governments have carefully funded and controlled most parts of the clerical establishment, thus heading off religious opposition. Other components have also recently been experimented with, often with mixed results. Projects and initiatives focusing on the environment or green energy, for example, have recently been proving popular. Despite the region's massive hydrocarbon production and extremely high carbon footprint per capita, they have served to win favourable headlines for the dignitaries involved.

Distributing wealth

Since the 1960s the traditional system of tribal leaders giving gifts to their subjects, friends, and enemies in exchange for loyalty or faithful service has been massively advanced. The verbal instructions or small chits of paper issued by sheikhs or their secretaries to grateful petitioners were quickly replaced by official documents drawn up by rulers' courts or new bureaucrats as hydrocarbon revenues allowed the nascent states to transfer wealth directly to their citizens and establish the most generous welfare states in the developing world, underpinned by subsidised utilities, fuel, and foodstuffs. One of the more visible benefits for citizens was the provision of government housing. Although fairly modest in the 1960s and 1970s, the free dwellings nonetheless allowed for air-conditioning and the connection of refrigerators, televisions, and other appliances. In the poorest parts of the region, especially in Saudi Arabia and Oman, the effect was to transform the lives of thousands. Many older Omanis today, for example, often state that 'before Qaboos there was nothing', referring to the poverty and lack of basic amenities prior to Qaboos bin Said Al-Said's succession in 1970. In more recent years, the quality of free housing, especially in the smaller, richer Gulf monarchies, has dramatically improved, while expatriates have often moved into the original government housing. Recipients in these states can now expect sizeable apartments and villas, usually with one bedroom for every child. In some cases, utilities are also provided for free, as are telephones.[3]

In Qatar, for example, the Barwa Housing Project has provided hundreds of families with reasonably high quality free accommodation complete with parks and playgrounds. The housing is available only to Qatari citizens, but allows for a relatively high monthly income threshold of $4,400.[4] Similarly, and more extensively in the UAE, the Sheikh Zayed Housing Programme provides 'deserving UAE national families' with three choices: either a government-provided house, an interest free loan to buy a new house, or a grant to refurbish or maintain an existing residence. Most of the government-provided houses are of good quality, especially in the wealthiest emirate of Abu Dhabi, and the quality of free houses in the poorer, northern emirates, has been improving of late. In 2008 the programme's annual budget was increased to $350 million, and an announcement was made that over 40,000 new villas would be constructed for UAE nationals over the next four years at a cost of $4 billion.[5] In parallel Dubai now has its own such housing scheme, unsurprisingly named after its ruler—the Muhammad bin Rashid Housing Programme—and in early 2011 more than 700 new homes were allocated to UAE nationals at a cost of over $250 million. Aiming to 'offer appropriate accommodation to Emiratis of all social classes and meeting their basic needs, especially a dignified housing' the programme has little in common with government housing in other parts of the world, as the units are of nine designs ranging from three to five bedrooms and have façades in different architectural styles including Islamic and Andalusian. Moreover, the beneficiaries have been receiving text message construction updates direct from the developer.[6]

Significantly, despite all of these new Gulf homes being part of official government spending, the keys are usually handed out to recipients in a more traditional setting—often by a ruling family member at some sort of cultural gathering. An incident heavily reported in the UAE's state-backed media provides a particularly good example: in 2008 the ruler of Dubai was apparently touring the eastern province of Abu Dhabi in his role as UAE prime minister when he came across a 99 year old UAE national. Upon seeing cracks in the walls of the man's house Muhammad asked him if he needed anything. Replying simply that he 'wished for a long and happy life', Muhammad reportedly replied 'here we will build for you a very comfortable home' before ordering the construction of a new villa for the man, and new accommodation for all the man's grandsons. Three years later, in 2011, the local reaction to Muhammad's earlier visit was understandably positive, with the elderly man explaining that 'there are no words to describe the generosity and care [Muhammad] shows towards his people' and with the district's governor being similarly enamoured of the sheikh.[7]

As well as houses, the government-led granting of land for agricultural and commercial use to citizens has also proved popular—a straightforward resource for many Gulf monarchies to exploit given that in most cases the state or even the ruler himself owns all land unless specifically re-assigned. For citizens still dwelling in rural or hinterland areas, many have been provided with plots of land to develop into working farms. And in the wealthier Gulf monarchies, especially Abu Dhabi—where Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan had a particular keenness for 'greening' the emirate with trees and vegetation—many nationals have been provided with grants to purchase the necessary farming equipment and hire expatriate workers. Alternatively, and sometimes in addition to agricultural land, citizens have also been provided with plots of land in urban or industrial areas—either to be developed as retail outlets, workshops, or simply to build blocks of apartments to then rent out to expatriates. In some instances these plots of land have never been developed, serving simply as car parks or rest areas for lorries—but either way, they still generate rent for their respective landlords. As with the allocation of houses, the process is usually linked directly to key members of ruling families, despite being a part of official government spending. In Abu Dhabi, for example, the Khalifa Committee for Social Services and Commercial Buildings—named after and chaired by Zayed's eldest son and Abu Dhabi's current ruler, Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan—has dispensed over $10 billion in such property or grants since its inception in 1981.[8] Undoubtedly its popularity helped bolster Khalifa's status as Abu Dhabi's long-serving crown prince. Similarly in Qatar, all citizens are eligible to receive a plot of land ranging from 700 to 1,500 square metres, and an interet-free loan of about $250,000 towards its development. In order to claim these plots an application must be made directly to the ruler's court—a process through which 'the Emir's patronage is reinforced both symbolically and practically'.[9]

In addition to social security benefits for unemployed citizens—which are very generous, about $3,000 per month in the wealthier Gulf monarchies,[10] and modest in all but the poorest Gulf monarchies of Bahrain and Oman—the welfare states that have been set up since the 1970s also include free healthcare and education. Again there is marked disparity between the quality of services offered in the wealthiest and poorest of the six states. In Qatar, for example, a new $2.4 billion hospital is being established in co-operation with Cornell University,[11] while the state-sponsored Qatar University is believed to operate with a massive endowment. In the UAE and Kuwait, similarly well-equipped hospitals have been in place for years, and students at state sector schools and universities can usually expect to receive free textbooks and in some circumstances even free laptop computers. In Saudi Arabia, a new public research university—the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology—was launched in 2009 at great expense. Comprising eleven faculties and already educating several hundred students, the university even offers stipends of several thousand dollars per year to its students. While Bahraini and Omani state sector hospitals, schools, and universities clearly lack the same level of attention and funding as in their neighbours, they are nevertheless far in advance of facilities available elsewhere in the developing world and are still easily among the best facilities available in the Arab world. Oman's Sultan Qaboos University—established in 1986—

enjoys a long and distinguished history in the region, as did Bahrain's Salmaniya Hospital until recently.

Another important and highly visible feature of the Gulf monarchies' allocative states has been the provision of public sector employment to most citizens, provided that they meet the most basic of qualifications. In the 1970s and 1980s almost all citizens who graduated from university were guaranteed jobs in the civil service, in ministries, or in other government departments. Moreover, citizens invariably enjoyed higher salaries than their expatriate counterparts, along with generous pensions, relaxed working hours, and good promotion prospects. Although something of a taboo subject in the region, it remains fair to say that citizens—especially at this period—were not required to work to international standards, with very few ever being fired from their positions. Put politely, with reference to Saudi Arabia '…royals have on many occasions used their fiscal authority to…employ veritable armies of idle bureaucratic clients'.[12]

In recent years it has become harder for the Gulf monarchies, especially those with declining resources or larger populations such as Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, to keep creating and funding such generously paid and well-protected jobs. But in the smaller, wealthier monarchies it undoubtedly remains a central strategy, with public sector salary increases usually being tied to important political events. In the UAE, for example, within days of Khalifa bin Zayed's succession as Abu Dhabi ruler and UAE president in late 2004 it was announced that all nationals working in the public sector would receive an immediate 25 per cent pay increase: understandably a popular decision.[13] Even more dramatically, in December 2009—just days after Dubai's economic crash was reported in the international media and many UAE nationals were questioning their real estate investments in the emirate—the federal government announced that all citizens in the public sector would receive a 70 per cent pay rise, including all staff employed by the giant ministries for health and education. Emiratis interviewed by state-backed newspapers were understandably impressed, with one remarking 'I would like to thank the Government for making it easier for Emiratis to live in the city, and for helping provide for their future plans,' while another claimed 'this increase will help me live more comfortably, buy property, and increase the limit on my spending'.[14] Significantly, as with most such salary hikes in the region, expatriates were excluded.

As discussed later in this book, in those Gulf monarchies where public sector employment can no longer be guaranteed for citizens, it has been harder for the ruling families and governments to rely continuously on salary increases to boost popularity. Nevertheless, steps have been taken to make sure that those who end up working in the private sector can still benefit from their nationality. In Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, for example, many jobs that appear to be in the private sector are very often in large, government-backed parastatals such as the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation or the Kuwait Projects Company (KIPCO). In this sense, employment conditions for citizens differ very little from those working in ministries or government departments. Similarly, in Abu Dhabi, which has recently streamlined the number of civil service jobs from 65,000 to 28,000, and has plans to trim the number to 8,000,[15] many new pseudo-public sector jobs have been created by giant government-backed companies and the many joint ventures they have sponsored. The aforementioned Mubadala Development Company is particularly noteworthy, as together with its many offshoot projects it now employs thousands of young UAE nationals.

Where genuine private sector employment opportunities for nationals do exist, for example in Bahrain and Dubai's export-processing free zones it is far more difficult to earmark jobs for citizens or to offer them different rewards from expatriates. Nevertheless, efforts have been made—though not always successfully—by some Gulf monarchies to encourage companies to help indigenise the labour force, either by imposing quotas or by introducing legislation that offers citizens greater job protection or better working hours than their expatriate peers. In 2004, a report conducted by Tanmia—the UAE's National Human Resource Development and Employment Authority—recommended that the 'system introduced by the Government of applying minimum quotas for employment of UAE nationals needs to be applied to more economic sectors to ensure jobs for nationals' and that private sector firms should contemplate introducing training programmes specifically for citizens.[16] Moreover, in late 2009, with concerns over the credit crunch growing, the UAE's federal government resorted to blatant protectionism, announcing that it would be illegal for employers to make UAE nationals redundant from their jobs, except in the most extreme cases.[17]

Other aspects of the wealth distribution strategy of the Gulf monarchies include the regular cancelling of debts, and the dispensing of 'government charity' to the minority of indigent citizens who somehow slip through the free housing and welfare state net. The former mechanism, much like the periodic public sector salary increases, tends to be deployed during economic or political crises as a means of reinforcing the loyalty of citizens. Kuwait provides the best example of this, with the government having revoked most personal debts and stock market losses following the 1982 Souq al-Manakh crash—named after the informal, unregulated bourse that had been set up in an air-conditioned garage. Thousands of Kuwaiti nationals had bought into the market, in many cases their first experience of personal investments, before having their stocks wiped out. In 1991, following Kuwait's liberation from Iraq, the government again moved to abrogate most personal debts, allowing citizens more quickly to resume their pre-war lifestyles. And in 2008 the government set up an $18 billion emergency fund, specifically to assist Kuwaiti nationals with debt problems. As the effects of the credit crunch on Kuwait's economy intensified, this was extended in 2009 following the government's purchasing of over $23.3 billion of consumer loans—this being financed from the annual interest accrued on foreign assets held by the Kuwait Investment Authority.[18] As discussed later in this book, widespread debt cancellation has re-emerged in Kuwait 2011 and in many other Gulf monarchies, as all grapple with the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

With regards to 'government charity', much like the free housing projects, the organisations involved tend to remain very closely tied to the state and are invariably patronised or very publicly subsidised by key members of the ruling families. In the UAE for example, there exists the Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan Foundation in Abu Dhabi which donates to a wide range of causes, and the Emirates Foundation which is chaired by the crown prince and has recently focused on distributing grants for nationals with special needs. In Dubai and the other emirates there exist similar, albeit less well-endowed, bodies. Qatar also provides a good example of this strategy, with its largest domestic charitable body—Qatar Charity—providing a range of funds to help less well off Qatari families and to support Qatari orphans. Crucially, although it styles itself as a non-governmental organisation and is headed by a general manager,[19] rather than a member of the Al-Thani ruling family, Qatar Charity is nonetheless inextricably linked to the establishment. It receives financial and logistical support from government bodies including the Ministries for Civil Service Affairs and for Housing, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Economy and Trade, Islamic Affairs, and Education. It is also assisted by the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and the Planning Council—both of which are key social policy vehicles for the Qatari government. As such, it has been argued that Qatar Charity's various efforts are fully in line with state policies and objectives.[20] Ironically, it is now difficult for citizens of Gulf monarchies to give money directly to the poor and thereby bypass such state-sanctioned charities. And in some cases such private charitable acts are frowned upon by the establishment. In recent years in the UAE, for example, in advance of Ramadan—the holy month during which all practising Muslims have a duty to be charitable—the Ministry for Interior has been issuing statements that beggars should not be tolerated, and that those caught would be arrested, deported, and blacklisted from returning to the UAE, meeting the cost of the deportation themselves. In 2007 it was reported that over seventy such beggars, mostly of Arab origin, were arrested and deported in this manner, with any nationals caught having been directed to official charities and threatened with punishment if they repeated their behaviour in the future.[21]

An important corollary of the Gulf monarchies' allocative states is the visible lack of taxation, or at least any obvious extractive practices. It is often assumed that the region has no real history of tax, and that hydrocarbon exports and the resulting rentier structures have allowed states to avoid such unpopular measures. This is partly true, as there has never been a system of direct taxation in any of the Gulf monarchies. However, prior to the oil era there were a substantial number of indirect taxes, licence fees, and other charges levied by the old, traditional governments. Taxes were levied on the size and quality of pearls that merchants attempted to sell and sales of camels, dates, and fish were taxed too. Payments also had to be made to sheikhs for all fishing or trading vessels that were moored in their ports. In some cases these indirect taxes—or more modern variations—have been reintroduced, especially in those Gulf monarchies that have faced declining hydrocarbon resources. In Dubai there are now significant charges levied for parking cars, crossing bridges, purchasing alcohol, and waste removal. Government fees have also been added to utility bills. In the near future value added taxes may start to appear in the Gulf monarchies, but it is far from certain. In 2008 all six of the Gulf monarchies began planning to introduce a modest VAT, but despite IMF recommendations to press ahead,[22] in late 2011 the plans were delayed until at least 2013 given the tense political situation in the region.[23] Nevertheless, there remain no plans to introduce income tax in any of these states, as this continues to be regarded as deeply unpopular among citizens and thus politically unpalatable for the ruling families and their governments. A recent study on Saudi Arabia puts this well, describing the 'large-scale fiscal obligations' owed by the state to its 'various clients in society', and demonstrating that 'over time this paternal largesse has proved difficult to reverse'.[24]

National elites

Given that most aspects of the welfare state and the various wealth distribution mechanisms in the Gulf monarchies are geared primarily towards citizens, it has become increasingly important for these states to develop carefully a sense of national identity. On a basic level, governments need to control exactly which of their residents are entitled to the many privileges and benefits of the rentier state and, especially in the more resource-scarce monarchies, there is a need to make sure that the national wealth never has to be too thinly spread. More subtly, the building of a clear social divide between citizens and expatriates, especially in those Gulf monarchies such as Qatar, the UAE, and Kuwait—where the majority of residents are now expatriates—has also created a readily identifiable elite status for nationals. Put simply, in these monarchies almost any citizen, regardless of background or education, can automatically assume a relatively high social standing, courtesy of their passport or identity papers.[25] For many years—and this is often still the case—this meant in practice that citizens could queue-jump expatriates, win arguments with the police (especially if the police were expatriates), and in general enjoy preferential treatment in public. While this obvious social stratification is now becoming a little blurred—notably in those monarchies such as Bahrain and Oman that have sought foreign direct investment or have established tourism industries—there nevertheless lingers an atmosphere of favouritism and state-sponsored social inequity. Either way, from a ruling family's perspective any awkwardness or resentfulness from expatriates is massively outweighed by the political benefits of having a national population that not only enjoys distributed wealth but also de facto elite status.

Although not an example of wealth distribution as such, the aforementioned sponsorship or *kafala* system is also heavily dependent on this elite status and the distinction between citizens and expatriates. While some of the more resource-scarce Gulf monarchies, notably Bahrain and Dubai, have gone to great lengths to liberalise their economies and create a more equitable competitive environment for foreign entrepreneurs and investors—either by removing the *kafala* requirement in the free zones or by allowing ministries rather than individuals to serve as sponsors—most Gulf states have shied away from abolishing the system, given the significant economic benefits it brings to many citizens. In the most straightforward examples, well placed nationals can essentially sell their status as a citizen to foreign partners who need to conform to existing legislation (such as having a sponsor control at least 51 per cent of the company's stock)[26] and seek a local partner. In these situations it is not uncommon to find that the local partner is effectively a 'sleeping partner', with the foreigner doing most of the work. As mentioned, this allows citizens to enjoy another stream of rent often above and beyond any land or property they may have acquired with the help of the state.

One important mechanism for guarding and preserving the narrow and distinct social base entitled to these privileges has been the control over citizens' marriages by using a mixture of formal and informal methods. Although there are many exceptions, and some significant variances between the different Gulf monarchies, it is generally the case that national women must marry national men. The usual explanation for this social requirement is that women marrying foreign men will erode cultural values, religious values, and the use of Arabic by their children. However, for an increasingly vocal younger generation of Gulf national women, this is becoming harder to make sense of, as their male counterparts have always been able to marry whomsoever they wish, regardless of nationality, race, or even religion. Moreover, earlier generations of Gulf women, especially in the pre-oil era, were much freer, with many marrying Muslim Arabs from neighbouring sheikhdoms or even further afield. After all, there is no Koranic requirement for a woman to marry a man from her own country.

At the family level, a system of stigmatisation remains in place for women who marry foreigners, and many such women are effectively ostracised from their families if they press ahead with these unions. While no laws exist in the Gulf monarchies to prevent such occurrences, there is little doubt that pressure continues to be exerted from the top—with rumours and discussion of 'unpublished decrees' still frequently circulating that are rarely scotched by officials. What policies are in place are highly discriminatory, with Gulf national women generally being unable to pass on their passport to any offspring from such unions or—most crucially—both their husbands and offspring being ineligible to receive any of the rentier state benefits. A recent exception to this is the UAE, which in late 2011 announced that such children could apply for passports at the age of eighteen.[27] But it remained unclear exactly what benefits they would be entitled to before that age. Moreover, there is still no doubt that the offspring of UAE national men and foreign mothers—even those born and brought up in different countries, or out of wedlock—enjoy much better rights. In 2009, a UAE committee even visited Egypt and Syria to identify such children who might be eligible for UAE citizenship. A six-month Ministry for Interior programme was announced for these 'would-be UAE citizens to go under a series of educational, social and health orientation programmes to learn UAE customs, traditions, heritage and values that will smooth their integration into UAE society'.[28]

Also at the policy level, for those Gulf monarchies that provide 'marriage funds' to young male citizens—another wealth distribution mechanism, ostensibly to defray the rising cost of wedding ceremonies—payments will only usually be made to men who are betrothed to fellow nationals. In other words, there now exists a significant financial incentive for many men to marry compatriots rather than foreigners. An oft-cited example is the Sheikh Zayed Marriage Fund which began in Abu Dhabi in 1990, before later being made accessible across the entire UAE. In its first decade over 60,000 youths benefited from the scheme, which dispensed more than $630 million in grants.[29] Today, on average, it offers grants of $19,000 to each eligible applicant.[30] Similarly narrow incentives exist in Qatar, where the housing allowances are doubled for Qatari men if their wives are also Qatari.[31] And across the region ruling family-sponsored mass weddings for such marriages remain highly popular, often costing millions of dollars and involving giant feasts for hundreds or thousands of guests.[32]

Another prominent mechanism for guarding and preserving the social base of national elites in the Gulf monarchies has been the adoption of a 'national dress' code. There are significant variations across the region, with men and women in Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait wearing several different styles of garments, and with the younger generations in all six Gulf monarchies increasingly wearing western clothes during their leisure time. For the most part the older generations in all these countries, and most citizens—young and old—in the wealthiest of the Gulf monarchies tend to wear a fairly strict uniform of white *thobes* or *dishdashas* (men) or black *abayas* (women). Such quotidian sartorial choices allow the observer to differentiate instantly between a citizen and an expatriate, which helps the former to access the aforementioned privileges associated with citizenship and the concomitant elevated social status they bring. In those monarchies such as Qatar or the UAE where the material rewards of citizenship are the greatest and where the expatriate component of the total resident population is the highest, adherence to the dress code is most prevalent. As one recent study put it, 'it is no mere fashion that leads all Qatar national men to wear their traditional *thob* at all times… the emir and his government have perpetuated these neo-traditional myths of authenticity, allowing the creation of a citizen autocracy'.[33] Certainly, it is very important to note that this dress code is primarily a product of the oil era and the rentier state: although sometimes referred to as 'traditional dress' or even 'Islamic dress' by foreigners, the current national dress code in these Gulf monarchies has few roots in tradition or religion, with early pre-oil photographs from the region demonstrating that the indigenous populations once wore a variety of colours and styles.

Further connected to the dress code, it is also notable how in recent years some male ruling family members have increasingly adopted different colours for their *dishdashas*, especially when making public appearances. This often results in formal events or occasions where the most senior sheikh present is dressed in black, brown, or blue, while other nationals wear white. In this manner the patron distinguishes himself from the regular citizenry by being visibly superior. Also of interest, and reinforcing the argument that dress code marks elite status and those benefiting from distributed wealth, is the reaction to expatriates who adopt national dress. While little attention is paid to tourists buying and trying on such clothes, to Caucasian-origin western expatriates, or to prostitutes (who regularly wear national dress in order to move discreetly between locations), there is generally a negative reaction to Arab, South Asian, or African expatriates (or any person who could be confused with a citizen) who may try to wear such dress. These attempts are usually viewed as an encroachment on the entitlement of nationals, and on some occasions even lead to police intervention. From another angle, it is also interesting that some of the indigenous Gulf communities who seemingly have the least to gain from the survival of the current regimes choose not to adopt national dress. Notably, the Shia population of Bahrain (and increasingly the Shia population of Saudi Arabia's restive Eastern Province) now infrequently wear national dress. And since the onset of the Bahrain revolution in February 2011 it has become commonplace for protestors to burn effigies of white *dishdasha*s—representing the Al-Khalifa ruling family and their supporters—from washing lines in their back yards.

Co-opting expatriates

For decades the Gulf monarchies have relied on substantial expatriate workforces, not only because of the small size of their indigenous populations relative to the enormous development opportunities that have arisen since the first oil booms, but also because of the benefits and privileges enjoyed by citizens and their subsequent preference for public sector employment. Today, there are now several million foreigners employed in these states, working across all sectors, and from all parts of the world. While accurate figures are difficult to come by, given the obvious sensitivities of governments admitting to such demographic breakdowns, it is still possible to make useful generalisations. Most of the region's unskilled labour force (usually housed in worker camps outside the main cities) is made up of South or East Asians, while most of the retail and service sectors are made up of South Asians, or non-Gulf Arabs. Westerners, Australians, and South Africans, along with educated non-Gulf Arabs make up a significant proportion of the region's professional class and white collar private sector workforce.

In Saudi Arabia there are now nearly eight million expatriates—nearly a quarter of the total population.[34] In the more resource-scarce Oman, where there are fewer economic opportunities, there are unsurprisingly fewer expatriates. Nevertheless, as of 2011 there were still more than 600,000 foreigners living there, accounting for 17 per cent of the total population.[35] Meanwhile in Bahrain about 550,000 or nearly half of the island's population were thought to be expatriates—at least before the 2011 uprisings began.[36] The most dramatic examples are, however, in the more resource-rich small monarchies. In Kuwait, over 1.1 million expatriates account for nearly 70 per cent of the total population,[37] while in the UAE expatriates now seem to make up 90 per cent of population.[38] The latter figure is based on official UAE government data claiming that the total population has risen to 9 million[39]—this has been widely disputed and can be put down to the UAE's historic rivalry with the much larger Saudi Arabia. Qatar, now the fastest growing Gulf economy with the smallest number of citizens—only 290,000—will soon catch up with the UAE. Already the population comprises 80 per cent expatriates, and with a staggering annual population growth rate of nearly 60 per cent their proportion will increase dramatically.[40]

The presence of substantial expatriate populations has profound socio-economic consequences but in terms of political stability they may have greatly contributed to the survival of the Gulf monarchies. Most expatriates in the region are there to make money and eventually return to their home countries relatively better off. Indeed, most only stay in these states for two to five years, with very few regarding their host country as a real home or a retirement destination. In this regard they differ greatly from immigrants who arrive in 'melting pot' countries such as the US, Canada, and Australia—many of whom intend to spend their whole lives there and help shape their adopted nations. Gulf expatriates are thus better viewed as strictly temporary economic migrants. Although not entitled to the full benefits of the rentier state, they nevertheless enjoy a tax free salary which is usually better than that they could expect in their country of origin. Often they have no real interest in the politics of their host country, and certainly never revolutionary politics. In many ways they become a loyal, silent support base for the ruling families, as the latter usually portray themselves as the guardians of stable, fairly apolitical states where money can be made safely and smoothly. The Al-Maktoum ruling family of Dubai perhaps provide the best example of this. Styling his make-shift government as 'Dubai Inc'., the ruler's aim has been to portray himself as the chief executive officer of a corporation, rather than as an autocrat presiding over an unelected government. As the emirate's indigenous population has continued to shrink, relative to the influx of hundreds of thousands of expatriates each year, the government has regularly announced new initiatives to hold the situation in check. But in many ways it has suited the ruler's interests well—even if it has alarmed the citizenry—to govern over a city made up of temporary migrants.

For the minority of expatriates who remain in the Gulf monarchies longer, the formula needs to be a little different. There are communities of Palestinians in Kuwait, communities of Iranians and Indians in Dubai, and other substantial foreign populations in the region that have spent decades living and working there, sometimes even having been born and brought up in its cities. A tiny minority can expect naturalisation, but this is controversial with the genuine indigenous populations and—as discussed later—has now become a major issue for some opposition movements. Instead, the governments prefer to create an atmosphere of sanctuary or unofficial asylum for these communities, even if it is illusory. Very often these expatriates are from underdeveloped or war-torn regions, many of whom either cannot return home or—in the case of Kuwait's hundreds of thousands of Palestinians (or at least those who were not expelled following the emirate's liberation in 1991)[41]—have no valid travel documentation. While most are aware that their livelihoods are at the whim of their hosts (many other nationalities apart from Palestinians also have been deported from Gulf monarchies due to political disputes), there is a general acceptance of the status quo. Thus, as with the more temporary migrants, most of these expatriates prefer to keep their heads down or try to save up enough to buy citizenship elsewhere.

Much international media attention focuses on the plight of the huge population of unskilled expatriates. In particular, the appalling living conditions in some of the workers' camps—some of which have no basic facilities or even sewerage—are routinely portrayed as a manifestation of evil, immoral, slave-based economies. There is certainly much truth to this, with 'workers' often viewed as somehow sub-human by citizens and skilled expatriates alike, and usually discriminated against by apartheid-like regulations (for example, not being allowed to enter shopping malls, parks, or museums). But in many ways the outrage is the result of having a First World society occupying the same uncomfortably small spaces as a developing world society. Very few of the workers can be considered slaves, as most have not made a step into the unknown. In many cases these men have followed their fathers, brothers, or other male relatives who have worked there before, usually with the same conditions. Most are still separated from their passports upon arrival, driven around on cattle trucks, and work punishingly long hours. Sometimes they do not return home for two or three years at a time. But this is usually expected and known to the new arrivals, and most are there—just like the skilled expatriates—to make more money than they could at home. Indeed, an independent survey published in 2009 claimed that the majority of foreign construction workers in the Gulf monarchies considered their current conditions to be better than those in their native countries.[42]

In this light the workers are best viewed as the dark side of a tragic, remittance-based economic system where South and East Asian countries sell their labour in exchange for salary transfers and investments from the Gulf states into their impoverished communities. When riots do break out in the worker camps the roots causes are only very occasionally political,[43] and the disturbances pose little threat to the survival of the Gulf monarchies. Usually, they are the result of workers not having been paid by an unscrupulous employer or perhaps an unsafe workplace or some other labour-specific complaint. Sometimes the government will move fast to address the problem and deport a few of the ringleaders. But not always, as the workers' embassies usually remain silent in the Gulf monarchies—unwilling to champion the interests of their countrymen lest they jeopardise the flow of remittance wealth.

The region's most violent labour camp episodes have taken place in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in the latter's case especially since 2009 following the collapse of many property developers and construction companies in the wake of Dubai's real estate slowdown. In May 2010, for example, at the same time that over 500 Syrian and Egyptian labourers went on strike in Mecca due to unpaid wages,[44] over 100 Vietnamese construction workers were arrested in and deported from Dubai. Apparently owed several months' wages—totalling less than $1,400 each—the men had marched to the UAE Ministry for Labour to demand their rights.[45] In early January 2011 it was the turn of Nepalese labourers, this time striking over the assault of one of their number by five Egyptian security guards—a confrontation which had apparently been sparked by complaints about the absence of sanitary facilities.[46] And later that month more than seventy Bangladeshi workers were deported from Dubai—part of a bigger strike of about 5,000 men. The protestors claimed they had not been paid their overtime, and were asking for an increase in their weekly wage of barely $55. When asked for a response, the Bangladeshi consul-general in Dubai was unsurprisingly cautious, agreeing that the UAE authorities had the right to break up the strike because it was 'illegal' and stating that the company in question '…had not breached the contract in paying the salaries… if the workers had problems, they should have solved it through a dialogue with the employer'.[47] Overall, Pakistani construction workers are most likely to face imprisonment, followed by deportation from the Gulf monarchies, not least because they outnumber other nationalities in most worker camps. In early 2011 the Pakistani minister of state for foreign affairs estimated that over 4,000 Pakistani nationals were being detained in Middle East states, almost all of them in the Gulf monarchies with nearly 1,800 in Saudi Arabia and over 1,600 in the UAE. He also clarified that a special government department had been set up to provide one-way tickets home for these destitute prisoners.[48]

The most unfortunate cases seem to be those workers who have simply become marooned in the Gulf monarchies. With bankrupt or nonexistent sponsors, they are often unable to leave their host countries and have remained in a state of limbo, often having to take out loans in order to survive until they can afford their return flights. As a spokesperson for Human Rights Watch described in 2010 '…because of the layoffs and the fact that some of these workers are stranded, we are seeing an increase in suicides, where some workers feel the only way out is to kill themselves, hoping that the people who have lent them money will avoid going after their families or their houses back in India and other locations in South Asia… unfortunately, that is not the case; the creditors still go after the families even after the death of migrant workers'. Furthermore, he claimed that the governments involved have not '…committed to fundamentally changing the way that migrant workers are brought in and the way that migrant workers are treated, so I think it is a problem that is going to be here for a while, especially given the economic downturn'. Similarly, the founder of a rare, Sharjah-based NGO committed to helping such labourers—Adopt-a-Camp[49]—described how her work used to be '…heart-warming—it used to be English classes for labourers, hygiene workshops … and care packages, and seeing wonderful stuff and doing wonderful stuff and the men's smiles'. But then her work changed, becoming '…heartbreaking because rather than teaching men and enlightening them and expanding their horizons here, and trying to give them a good experience, it becomes like a man who is starving. The top priority for me becomes getting him food, getting him water, and seeing men in those conditions is heartbreaking'.[50]

Cults of personality

Of the non-economic components of the Gulf monarchies' ruling bargains, the most visible is the extensive personal image-building under-taken by select members of the ruling families. Much like other Arab authoritarian regimes, large portraits of rulers and their key brothers or crown princes adorn street corners, the walls of government departments, banks, and even most private sector companies. The aim is usually to portray the men in question in a soft or flattering manner. As such, most portraits feature beaming smiles, wrinkle-free faces, white teeth, and generally avuncular expressions. Almost all depict national dress, helping observers make the visual connection between their rulers and the country's history and heritage. A few portraits, however, also display the rulers as 'hard men', with more serious expressions and often sporting large sunglasses or occasionally military uniforms. Crucially, these are a minority, and are always in close proximity to more gentle portraits. The aim here, it seems is to demonstrate to the population that the rulers should be both loved and feared, and certainly never crossed. Further to this, in many Gulf monarchies rumours and urban legends of rulers and their sons' involvement in violent acts also abound—often connected to familial disputes or business deals that have turned sour. These are often widely and publicly discussed, but rarely with any substance, and never suppressed—likely because they provide the subjects with a certain cachet and machismo.

In most Gulf monarchies the public portraits are usually triptychs, often with the centre figure's portrait being raised slightly higher than those on the left and right. In Kuwait, for example, the emir is at the centre, with his crown prince to the left, and the prime minister to the right. The recently deposed Nasser bin Muhammad Al-Sabah's prime ministerial portrait, for example, usually depicted him as laughing or grinning. Similarly in Bahrain, the triptych usually follows the same pattern, albeit with a king instead of an emir. For many years it has also been common to see solo portraits of Bahrain's powerful unelected prime minister, Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, clearly reflecting his centrality to the regime. In Qatar the three portraits are again those of the emir, his crown prince, and the unelected prime minister. Recently, however, the emir has often been depicted on his own, wearing western dress and usually representing some historic achievement or victory for Qatar. In 2011–12, for example, large pictures of him holding aloft the soccer World Cup appeared on billboards in recognition of Qatar's 2010 announcement that it would stage the 2022 World Cup. Portrait politics are a little more complicated in the UAE, given the federation and the relationships between and within the various ruling families. In Abu Dhabi, the triptych's centre figure is still usually the once popular and handsome Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, despite his death over seven years ago. The current ruler—an unassuming-looking character—is displayed on his left, with his image being either heavily enhanced or badly out of date. The powerful crown prince is always on the right. In some cases Zayed is still portrayed on his own, as a younger man on horseback, or sometimes holding a falcon or some other symbol of the country's heritage. The other emirates usually feature their current ruler in the centre, with their crown prince and either a powerful brother or 'deputy crown prince' at their sides. Exceptions include Sharjah, where the ruler is often depicted on his own—likely due to his crown prince not being a son, and a long history of internecine disputes in the emirate. In Dubai there are occasionally solo portraits of Rashid bin Said Al-Maktoum—the father of the current ruler and the man credited with building up Dubai over much of the twentieth century. On major highways and sometimes in federal government buildings it is now common to see dual portraits of the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, or perhaps a triumvirate of these two along with the crown prince of Abu Dhabi. In Oman and Saudi Arabia triptychs and other public portraits are less common. In the former, as described, the sultan reserved most authority for himself, being reluctant to elevate other ruling family members. As such, where portraits do exist, they are usually of the sultan alone. In Saudi Arabia, despite power being more evenly shared among ruling family members, the king is also usually depicted alone. This is likely due to the large number of similarly aged relatives who rival each other in the succession process, thus allowing the king to be visually depicted as the 'linchpin of the political system',[51] symbolising unity, and taking on the role of supreme mediator.

Titles as well as portraits also matter in terms of personal image-building in the region. Over the years the various ruling families and their principal members have taken on increasingly grandiose titles—usually ones that have no connection to the region's history and which, in some cases, are sacrilegious. Given Saudi Arabia's more autonomous state formation process, the Al-Saud family quickly took on the guise of royalty, adopting a system of titles in the 1940s not dissimilar from Britain's. Notwithstanding a clear emphasis on egalitarianism in Islam, the male descendants of the king became 'His Royal Highness' or 'HRH', while other, lesser, ruling family males became 'His Highness' or 'HH'. Similarly in Oman, it appears that the sultan has taken on the full-blown 'HRH'—a title which no previous sultans have used. The other Gulf monarchies—ruled simply by 'sheikhs' until Britain's departure—also quickly upgraded their titles upon independence. Though most were careful not to antagonise Saudi Arabia or embarrass Britain, with their various rulers settling on the title of emir rather than king, they nonetheless took on the title of 'HH' while lesser members of their families adopted 'His Excellency' or 'HE', despite the title usually being reserved for government ministers or ambassadors. More recently, there have been efforts by these smaller monarchies to further glorify their leaders. Most notably, the aforementioned 2002 Bahraini constitution upgraded the emir to a king, despite the tiny size of the kingdom. While more subtly in the UAE the state-backed media has started to refer to the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai (but not the other emirates) as being HRH, with their families being 'royal' as opposed to merely 'ruling'.

Another interesting phenomenon has been the celebrity status desired and cultivated at great expense by some ruling family members, especially in those states where political mobilisation is most limited—such as Qatar and the UAE.[52] For many years young sheikhs, often those associated with horse-riding, falconry, or other manifestations of sporting prowess or activity linked to tribal heritage have been celebrated and venerated by younger sections of the indigenous populations. With the advent of new internet technologies and communications, this celebrity culture has been taken to an even higher level. No longer are images just built up by the state-backed media or by appearances at large weddings and other traditional events. Instead many ruling family members now have their own websites, Facebook fan pages, and even Twitter feeds. Most put modesty to one side and are dedicated to highlighting their various personal accomplishments, often with extensive accompanying photographs and videos. For many years the best example was the crown prince of Dubai—who became ruler in early 2006. Indeed, Muhammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum was the first prominent Gulf sheikh to have his own website,[53] and this was used extensively to demonstrate that he was not only an active politician, but also a prolific poet, a rifleman, and a champion horse-rider (winning medals at several international events).

Today, the current crown prince of Dubai—Hamdan bin Muhammad Al-Maktoum—has adopted much the same strategy, although in many ways he—or rather the ruling family's advisors—has taken personal image-building even further. Most of his activities still resonate with tribal heritage, such as horse-riding, falconry, and the writing and reciting of Bedouin-style poetry. But other activities are also featured to demonstrate his relative modernity (such as appearing in rap music videos), his fearlessness, and the tougher side to the personality.[54] In a rare personal interview conducted in 2011 the twenty-nine year-old Hamdan stated that he 'learned to be an effective leader through hobbies from skydiving to poetry' and that 'the hobbies exercised by the Crown Prince of Dubai are the hobbies of leadership in the foundation'. The interviewer summed these up as '…the hobby of parachute-jumping from aircraft to learn the courage and bravery and self-confidence, and the hobby of horse riding to learn leadership and a major focus, along with scuba diving, to learn patience and the search for secrets', before concluding that 'all of these hobbies give Hamdan bin Muhammad a major role in formulation of the outlook for the Emirate of Dubai, and paving the way for development plans in the emirate'. While on the subject of poetry, Hamdan also made clear references to taking on the role of 'philosopher king' having stated that 'I have lived childhood delighted, along with my father and my mother and my brothers and I grew up in an environment that allowed me to get to know the true meaning of life, and meditate on the greatness of the Creator and the natural beauty of the desert, which gives a sense of harmony and consistency with nature, all contributed in building my character poetry since childhood, [and] on the other hand taught me and my father Sheikh Muhammad bin Rashid, from a young age that hard work guarantees conquering the impossible'.[55]

Heritage and history

Helping remind citizens why hereditary monarchies still exist, why some individuals are entitled to build cults of personality and promote localised nationalism, and why these monarchies enjoy special characteristics that somehow exempt them from democratic development, the Gulf ruling families and their governments have expended considerable effort and expense at creating museums, restoring old buildings, and funding other projects connected to tribal heritage and the region's history. While such activities in themselves are not unusual, what is remarkable is the central role they often play in government planning and the vast resources assigned to them—at least compared to elsewhere in the developing world where other priorities usually loom higher. In many cases government authorities responsible for heritage have been set up in Gulf monarchies before even departments for tourism or the environment. And in Oman, the only full minister (apart from the deputy prime minister)[56] who is actually a member of the ruling family is the minister for heritage and culture.[57]

Although there are a few exceptions—especially in Qatar and Abu Dhabi, where more broadly focused museums are being established—most of the museums and cultural projects in the region tend to be quite narrowly focused on the pre-oil past. There is usually an emphasis on the background and history of the ruling families themselves, and it is commonplace to see giant ruling family trees adorning walls in the region's museums. In most cases these provide a quick visual link between centuries-old founding fathers and whoever the current ruler is—the latter usually having his name printed in bold, circled, or with a larger picture than his ancestors. In the case of Qatar, this has been described as 'heritage and history [being] mythologised to support the ruling family. It is in appearing to preserve Qatari heritage… that the legitimacy of the Al-Thani, especially the emir, is assured'.[58]

There is also usually an emphasis on traditional, pre-oil economy activities such as boat-building, rope-making, basket-weaving, pottery, or glass-blowing. Often these are housed in 'heritage villages' which are usually staffed and operated by citizens employed by the responsible government authority. Old forts and watchtowers have been lovingly restored, often at great expense, and many of these look magnificent. Some older looking buildings have, however, been built from scratch—sometimes with breeze blocks behind the façade—including forts on islands, brand new 'old souqs', as in Qatar and Kuwait, and dozens of newly built 'windcatcher' or *barjeel* towers, as seen in Dubai's 2004-built Madinat Jumeirah development. Heritage-focused festivals, competitions, and other events have also been set up in recent years. These have included date-growing tournaments, $250,000 heritage awards sponsored by rulers,[59] falcon-hunting and sword dancing tournaments, the unveiling of world record-breaking 15 metre swords, and the staging of the world's largest *youla* Bedouin dances.[60] Well-funded camel races also take place across the region, but mostly in Oman and the UAE. Much has been written on these races, often demonstrating that they were never a traditional pursuit, and are instead examples of 'invented tradition'[61]—providing a spectacle that can bring together ruling families and their citizens in a pseudo-traditional context, far away from the urban skyscrapers and other evidence of the oil era.

Together, these developments form part of an entire region-wide industry that seems committed to creating 'living memories' of the Gulf monarchies' crucial early period of state formation.[62] Or, as a recent study described of Qatar, they are 'expensive and widely publicised attempts to showcase Qatari and Islamic culture [which] attest to the concern with the preservation of the image of cultural authenticity'.[63] Given that many of the attractions are visited by nationals, expatriates, and tourists alike, the industry is in many ways helping to re-orientalise the region and its population from both inside and out. As discussed, this process has important political benefits for the surviving traditional monarchies. Significantly, the more awkward aspects of the monarchies' state-formation—namely the relationships between the ruling families and Britain, or the region's reaction to Arab nationalism in the 1950s and '60s—feature rarely in these state-sponsored projects. The massive impact of oil wealth on society and the economy also often remains out of focus, although there are notable exceptions, such as the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Exhibition, which has done much to catalogue that emirate's transformation. In general, the school and university curricula in the Gulf monarchies also tend to shy away from these topics: in some cases local or regional history is never taught, or if it is it dwells on the pre-oil era and skirts more sensitive issues. There are, however, some exceptions, such as Qatar University, which recently introduced modules in Gulf history and society. It is likely that more of the region's schools and universities will soon have to follow Qatar's suit, as demand for the subject will probably grow from both young nationals and expatriates. Bahrain is also an interesting case, given the sectarian tensions discussed later in this book. School and university textbooks have been used to promote an official history of the country, which seems to have little bearing on reality. The ruling Al-Khalifa family is usually portrayed as having liberated Bahrain, rather than conquering it, and earlier periods when the island was ruled by Shia dynasties appear to be glossed over.[64]

Co-opting religion

Viewed as a double-edged sword, religion—and most especially Islam—has been considered both a threat and an opportunity for the Gulf monarchies. As will be discussed later, Islamist movements—both intellectual and militant—have frequently questioned the status quo in these states. Most have highlighted the un-Islamic behaviour of the various ruling families, the slide into autocracy, the reliance on non-Islamic foreign powers for security, and rampant corruption among other matters. As such, these groups have often represented a powerful alternative and sometimes dissenting voice on the Arabian Peninsula, and in some cases have even been joined by establishment figures. Indeed, as has been noted, '…because Islam is a transcendent religion that can never be fully co-opted, [even such autocratic] governments must cede some autonomy to state-supported religious institutions or elites, thereby raising the prospect that elements of the religious establishment could defect to the Islamist opposition'.[65]

The Saudi ruling family has always been in the tightest position, given its described alliance with the Wahhabi movement, given the presence of two of Islam's holiest shrines in Mecca and Medina, and given its hosting of millions of Muslim pilgrims each year. Since 1986 the king of Saudi Arabia even changed his official title to 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques'[66]—reviving a pious title formerly used by the caliphs, the Ottoman sultans, and Egypt's Mamluk sultans. But the smaller Gulf monarchies, even though none claim such specific religious credentials, are also wary. Much like Saudi Arabia, all rely on non-Islamic powers—namely the US—for their security guarantees, with most also physically hosting such troops on their territory. And since 9/11, and the Anglo-American invasions on nearby Muslim countries—Afghanistan and Iraq—their position has clearly become more precarious.

The strategies for containing and co-opting Islam have varied in each of the monarchies, depending on their circumstances, although there are some common patterns. In a similar manner to the recently deposed leaders of the Arab authoritarian republics, loyal clerics of the Gulf's ruling families have from time to time invoked certain Koranic passages in order to justify absolute power. As per a late-2011 statement by Al-Azhar University on the Arab Spring, this has usually been done by narrowly interpreting a verse[67] which states 'O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you'. The verse has frequently been cited in isolation, but as the Al-Azhar statement contends, it should never have been cited out of context, and especially without considering the preceding verse,[68] which states 'Indeed Allah commands you to render the trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice'.[69] The Saudi ruling family has probably gone the furthest with this strategy, with the Wahhabi religious establishment and its government representatives claiming that the Al-Saud enjoy 'rightful leadership' or *wali al-ahd* on this very basis.

The smaller Gulf monarchies, notably Qatar and the UAE have instead concentrated on using their resources to police and fund their mosques and domestic religious establishments. Almost all clerics are government employees, and these are quite closely monitored. Most have to carry photo identification cards, and their sermons usually have to be chosen from an official list of approved topics, drawn up by the relevant government body each week. A 2006 cable from the US embassy in Abu Dhabi confirms this practice, describing how 'UAE officials publicly and strongly condemn extremism and terrorist attacks, anti-extremism has been the focus of government-approved Friday sermons in the mosques'.[70] As well as providing generous salaries to clerics, thus slotting them into the rentier state's giant public sector, wealth in these monarchies has also been used to build large and often lavish mosques, religious schools, and other institutions. Unsurprisingly some of the biggest mosques in the world are now in the Gulf monarchies—such as Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, which was built by the government and can accommodate 40,000 worshippers. Taking several years to complete, it cost more than $540 million and is the burial place of the late Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan. Although there are some exceptions—such as Qatar's largest mosque, which is simply called 'Qatar Mosque' or 'Fanar',[71] and the proposed new Al-Farooq Mosque in Dubai—most of the largest mosques in the Gulf monarchies usually carry the name of a key ruling family member, despite invariably having been built using state funds. There are of course countless other projects connecting Islam to the largesse of the ruling families or the state, some of them highly innovative and often winning positive headlines for the sponsors. In the UAE, for example, the Dubai International Holy Koran Award Committee has begun planning and designing a holy book collection or *mushaf* named after Abu Dhabi's ruler—the 'Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan Mushaf'. The aim is to produce a million of these volumes which will then be freely distributed 'under orders of the prime minister'.[72] Set on its own island and designed by the same architect as the contemporary section of the Paris Louvre, Qatar's enormous Islamic Arts Museum is another powerful example; one closely associated with the ruler and his high-profile wife Moza bint Nasser Al-Misnad. It opened in late 2008 and has been featured in dozens of international newspapers and magazines.

Also providing ruling families with religious legitimacy, or more accurately allowing rulers to portray themselves as tolerant, benevolent monarchs, there has been much support for other religions in some Gulf monarchies. With the exception of Saudi Arabia—where all other religions are banned—Christianity is booming in the Gulf monarchies, courtesy of substantial Indian and Filipino expatriate populations. Churches for almost all denominations exist in the five smaller Gulf states, including even evangelical chapels. Prime land, usually donated by a ruling family member, continues to be gifted to these churches to aid in their expansion. In Abu Dhabi, an ancient Nestorian Christian monastery which had been discovered on one of the emirate's outlying islands was even opened to the public in 2010 by the government's Tourism and Development Investment Company[73]—thus acknowledging and celebrating the country's pre-Islamic past. Hindu and Sikh temples also exist in some of these states, as does a Zoroastrian tower of silence in Dubai, which has on occasion been the location of Zoroastrian world congresses. Although, as discussed in the following chapter, there remains a nominal boycott on Israel by the Gulf monarchies and synagogues are not permitted in any of these states, there are nonetheless some pockets of tolerance for Jews. In Bahrain for example, there exists a tiny community of Bahraini Jews. Although their number has dwindled from several hundred to just a few dozen, they are reportedly well respected and have served in the upper house of the parliament. In 2008 the king even appointed a Jew as Bahrain's joint ambassador to the US, Canada, and Brazil.[74]

Environmental credentials

The Gulf monarchies rarely conjure an image of being environmentally friendly, given the centrality of hydrocarbons to the region and the various associated heavy industries, most of which rely on abundant fossil fuel. Moreover, the generous public sector salaries, the extensive welfare benefits, and the other trappings of the rentier state also lead to expectations of high consumption lifestyles for many Gulf nationals, including multiple vehicles per household and a heavy reliance on air-conditioning. According to the US Department of Energy's Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center, the Gulf monarchies now suffer from some of world's highest per capita carbon dioxide emissions. In 2008 Qatar was the worst ranked country in the world, with 53.5 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per capita. The UAE was the third worst, with 34.6 metric tonnes, while Bahrain was ranked fifth, with 29 metric tonnes. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Oman were all not far behind, being ranked seventh, thirteenth and fourteenth respectively.[75] Given the rapid development in the region since 2008, especially in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, it is likely that they remain among the world's worst offenders—perhaps having increased their lead. Waste per capita is also believed to be very high in the Gulf monarchies, with a recent study concluding that Abu Dhabi had one of the highest waste per capita rates in the world—some six times greater than Western European countries.[76] Improvements have been made across the region, but most waste is still thought to be dumped in desert landfill sites. Although vehicles per capita is a less useful measure for the Gulf monarchies, given that the rate for citizens is likely to be much higher than that for expatriates, it is noteworthy that Qatar is now firmly in the world top ten according to World Bank figures, with 724 vehicles per thousand residents, while Bahrain and Kuwait are close behind.[77]

Nevertheless, despite the region's poor track record, protection of the environment has recently become a high profile policy in some Gulf monarchies. The UAE and Qatar governments in particular have transformed what was previously a liability for their regional and international reputations into something of a strength. A plethora of projects, institutions, new government departments, and other initiatives have been announced—most of which aim not only to remedy their domestic environmental crises, but also to promote international research and development into cleaner energy and other environmental clauses.[78] In much the same way that wealth distribution strategies to citizens and funding of religious establishments have been closely associated with key members of the ruling families, the same has often been true with these environmental projects. The state-backed media have provided extensive coverage, often publicly linking a specific ruling family member to a development, thus winning him or her favourable domestic headlines. It has also been a policy area which has largely attracted favourable international coverage, with many of the articles being republished for domestic readers.

The new Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute for example falls directly under the umbrella of the ruler's wife. Aiming to 'mitigate climate change and contaminants harmful to the environment' and focusing on 'Qatar's desert and marine ecologies, plant and animal life, and air quality', it is well financed and has thus far been lauded by the domestic media[79] and further afield. A recent RAND Corporation publication focusing on the institute, for example, begins by stating that 'Qatar's leadership has created a vision of sustainability for the country'.[80] More extensively, Abu Dhabi has set up the new Environmental Agency Abu Dhabi (EAD) and recently commissioned the Stockholm Environmental Institute in Sweden to formulate a rigorous climate policy for the emirate.[81] Since 2009 there has also been the Zayed Future Energy Prize which now presents winning companies or government departments with prizes of over $4 million.[82] All photographs displayed on the prize's official website feature the crown prince in the centre of groups of high profile international dignitaries, while all text descriptions of the prize refer to the 'legacy of Sheikh Zayed'.[83] But by far the most high profile environment-related initiative in the region has been Abu Dhabi's Masdar City. Being built by the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company (ADFEC), which is a subsidiary of the crown prince's Mubadala Development Company, the plan has been to create a large carbon-neutral development in the emirate's hinterland. The broader aim is for Masdar to provide the infrastructure for a free zone that will allow up to 1,500 renewable energy and other environment-related international companies to base themselves in Abu Dhabi, or at least have their regional headquarters there. Some of these will be focused on carbon capture technologies and it is expected that they will export their services to nearby countries still relying on outdated hydrocarbon extraction technologies.[84] ADFEC is also hoping to attract research and development focused companies to Masdar in an effort to make Abu Dhabi the region's capital for green technologies.[85] Similarly, Mubadala's investment in the Finnish company WinWinD is likely to lead to a wind power joint venture in Masdar.[86] In support of all these companies is a new research centre—the Masdar Institute—and several leading international research bodies are already operating there.[87] Again, there has been extensive coverage by the domestic media, and although there has been some criticism of Masdar in the international media, Mubadala and the crown prince have generally benefited from ADFEC's overall aims.