

## Font of a Nation: Creating a National Graphic Identity for Qatar

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Even before he graduated from the School of Visual Arts' master of fine arts design program in New York, Tarek Atrissi had scored a solo exhibition at Virginia Commonwealth University. This is not the Virginia Commonwealth University in *Virginia*, mind you, but rather its School of the Arts nearly seven thousand miles away in Doha, Qatar. The show generated press that attracted the attention of the Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA), a state-run agency created in 2000 under decree of the emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and chaired by the chief executive officer of Qatar Airways. The QTA, placing a great deal of faith in this young but worldly designer, offered him a weighty commission: to develop a new "corporate" identity for the nation.

Qatar, independent from Britain only since 1971, had a logo already, but "it had everything," Atrissi (2006) said in conversation with me. "It had the palm tree and the camel and the sand dunes"—every Middle Eastern cliché in the book. Qatar, roughly the size of Connecticut and, at the time of Atrissi's commission, virtually unheard of outside the region, was about to launch a massive program of infrastructural development and diplomacy. If this was to be its global cotillion, it would have to find something to wear.

Atrissi, a native of Lebanon, moved to Qatar for a year to get a sense of what

I am indebted to Tarek Atrissi for his inspiration and generosity and to Michael Golec, Jaeho Kang, Barry Salmon, Jilly Traganou, and the organizers and participants of the 2007 Logo Cities conference at Reyerson University for their comments on an early draft of this work. Thanks also to Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, Ron Jennings, and the editorial committee of *Public Culture* for their guidance.

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defined the country and differentiated it from its neighboring nations. When he asked people, mostly nonnationals, what occurred to them when they thought of Qatar, most said, simply, that they *didn't*. People rarely had preconceived notions—either positive or negative—about the country, yet “the fact that Qatar did not have an existing national identity made [my job] easier” (Atrissi 2006). “Young nations are in a unique position to brand themselves,” writes branding consultant Fiona Gilmore (2002: 282), “because they are at an early stage of development and may not have acquired any negative perceptions or associations.” For these young nations, the process of establishing a national brand could present an ideal opportunity for the nation to catalog its assets and core values and to determine what the nation means, both to nationals and to those outside its borders. We might assume that only nations unburdened with centuries or millennia of history, nations that do not stretch across thousands of miles of territory or harbor heterogeneous publics and vast socioeconomic complexity, can consider these questions—can conceive of designing a national brand. Yet in recent years even Spain, India, and Great Britain have tried.

Gilmore (2002: 283) proposes that in branding “it may be useful to think of some of these smaller countries almost as large multinationals.” The idea of “branding” a nation could be distasteful to those who regard a nation as something more than a business or product in need of positioning and packaging (see Olins 2002: 241). Although the branding terminology might be relatively new (and, some might say, already passé), the practice—fashioning a collection of perceptions, making promises, about an object or entity—is not.<sup>1</sup> For millennia, political and religious authorities, minters and flag makers, composers, authors and filmmakers, and architects and urban planners have been responsible for creating and transmitting national identities, and their work has been studied by scholars in fields ranging from history to cinema studies to political science.<sup>2</sup>

Atrissi, starting with a blank slate, chose to forgo the clever icons and mascots that global brands often adopt in an attempt to overcome language barriers. Instead he focused on one symbol to which Qatar clearly holds exclusive rights: its

1. Advertiser David Ogilvy (1963: 100), whom some credit with developing the concept of branding, defines a brand as, simply, “a complex symbol,” an “intangible sum” of a product’s qualities or characteristics. Branding is thus the fashioning of that symbol—the practice of manipulating these variables so that they coalesce as an “intangible sum” that creates a lasting impression and promotes loyalty.

2. In 2002 the *Journal of Brand Management* dedicated an entire issue to nation branding. The editor of that special issue, Simon Anholt, launched *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, an academic journal on the subject, in 2004.

name.<sup>3</sup> Through typography and color Atrissi permits that name—featured twice on the logo, in Arabic script and in Latin letters—to “read” differently, to evoke differently, for its various audiences. Given the centrality of calligraphy to Islamic culture and its prominence among the Islamic arts, it seems fitting that the written word should be at the center of this Islamic nation’s self-definition and self-representation (see Welch 1979). Given the vital role that a shared language plays in defining and holding together a nation, according to many scholars of nationalism (see Fishman 1973; Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Billig 1995; Hastings 1997), it seems appropriate that the name of a nation—not only the word itself, but also its presentation—should serve as an effective binding force. Yet the word in the logo functions also as the image, enabling a non-Arabic-speaking audience to engage with the logo nonsemantically, to appreciate it as an aesthetic object.

However, this polysemic logo struggles to represent Qatar both internally and externally, to encompass otherness within and without the state’s borders, and to reinforce both the history, values, religion, and language it shares with other Arab countries and, simultaneously, the commitment to progressive development that aligns it with the West. The contradictions ultimately prove too much for a typeface—and even for the nation—to sustain. Instead of grappling with its own contradictions, including its ethnic diversity and political disparity, Qatar “manages” these social problems, “domesticates” its differences. What is being branded is not a nation but a marketing-driven entity circulating amid flows of labor, capital, and image—the nation fetishized.<sup>4</sup> The state, depoliticized and incorporated, is ostensibly fashioning itself into a *corporation* with a clearly defined set of local and global stakeholders. Qatar is thus something “beyond the nation” (Chatterjee 1998).

This campaign allows for the investigation of a reflective, dialectical process of constructing a place-based identity—a process that involves considerations of who Qataris think they are, what they think others think of them, and what they want those others to think. The answers to these questions have global relevance—for diplomacy, trade, and security, for instance—and the world should watch closely as developing states, like those emerging from the former Soviet Union and in eastern Europe, reshape themselves and present their new identities to an international public.

3. The name-as-logo recalls Theodor W. Adorno’s (1991: 48) reference, in “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” to the “What we want is Watney’s” billboard, on which “the wares masquerade as a slogan.”

4. Appadurai (1996) also discusses the fetishization of both cultural production and consumption that results from the globalization of culture.

### Qatar on the World Stage

For centuries, colonial powers, Islam (Wahhabism, in particular), natural resources and the foreign labor and investment they drew, and, within the past decade, the rise of representative government have collectively shaped, though not clearly defined, the identity of the land that we now know as Qatar. Today the nation is most readily recognized as home to Al-Jazeera (which has traditionally been silent on domestic issues) and the U.S. Central Command and known for its relatively liberal sociopolitics and openness to foreign investment and property ownership—qualities that have made the country fertile ground for rapid infrastructural and economic development. This development is driven in large part by the royal family's presence in several of the state's ministries and its involvement in Qatar's construction industry and real estate markets (see Gause 1994: 42–77).

“With economies centered on petroleum—and with supplies slowly dwindling,” writes the *New York Times*' Seth Sherwood (2006), “many oil-dependent nations are scrambling to diversify their revenue streams.” Qatar has branched into science, technology, and education—much of it imported from America. The Qatar Science and Technology Park has attracted ExxonMobil, General Electric, and Microsoft, while Doha's new Education City contains satellite campuses of several American colleges and universities, including Virginia Commonwealth, Weill Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M, Carnegie Mellon, and Georgetown.<sup>5</sup> Another strategy involves building places like the Pearl, “a \$2.5 billion, 985-acre artificial island loaded with five-star hotels, two million square feet of high-end shopping and ‘beach clubs like you would find in the South of France.’” The Pearl “is just one of the Xanadu-like attractions suddenly appearing as if from a rubbed Aladdin's lamp” (Sherwood 2006). Resorts like the Pearl, the Science and Technology Park, the university buildings, new museums, a new national library, and a new airport—many designed by high-profile, international architects—are all part of the tourism master plan, whose goal is to triple Qatar's annual number of tourists, to 1.4 million, by 2008.

One of Qatar's primary tourism competitors, and inspirations, is Dubai, which draws roughly 5 million tourists a year. But how will Qatar position itself in rela-

5. American universities are benefiting from tuition dollars from many Muslim students, including Qataris, Egyptians, Syrians, Jordanians, Moroccans, Saudis, and Bosnians. Furthermore, Education City, funded entirely by Qatar, offers some invaluable public relations for the United States: “Having these academic programs represents only the beautiful face of America,” Her Highness Sheikha Moza said (quoted in Mendenhall 2005). Supporters say that these domestic services eliminate the problems that many Middle Eastern students face while attempting to acquire visas to study in the United States and also open up opportunities for young women, who are rarely permitted to travel abroad.

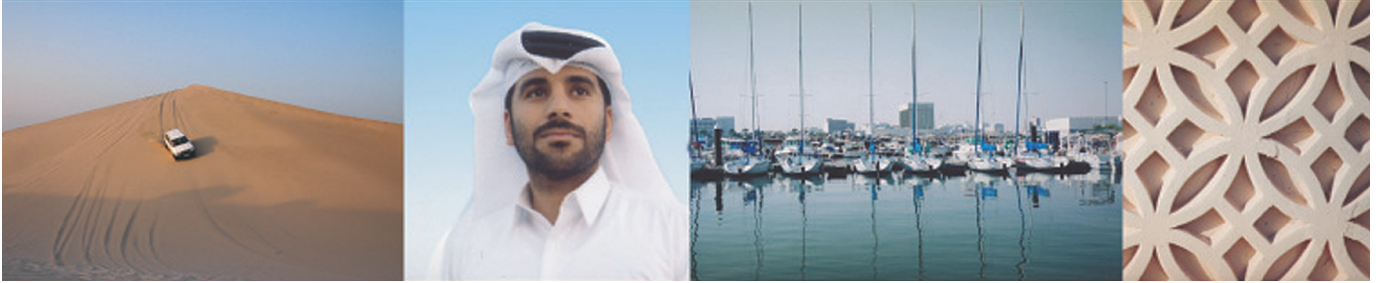
tion to this neighboring rival? In Dubai, says Jan Poul de Boer, Dutch-born chief executive of the QTA, “every single month brings something bigger, newer, more fantastic. . . . Is that sustainable? . . . We have embarked on a different course. We want to be a more exclusive destination” (quoted in Sherwood 2006). “If Dubai is Orlando or Las Vegas,” says Nick Bashkiroff of the Pearl, “then I’d say that Qatar is more Palm Beach or Santa Barbara” (quoted in Sherwood 2006). Although it is interesting that the analogy is between a nation and a city, it is clear that those responsible for branding Qatar realize that each of these American cities has its own brand—and they would much rather be associated with refinement than with . . . well, plastic.<sup>6</sup>

### Typography of Place

“The concept,” Atrissi (n.d.b) admits, “was to simply say what the country is: Qatar.” We would “keep it as simple as possible, as abstract as possible”—and thus as inclusive as possible. With the typographic logo, there could be “no specific visual connotation [of Qatar’s identity] missing” (Atrissi 2006). None of the populations to which this logo was intended to communicate would feel excluded, it was hoped, since the country’s name was sufficiently objective and inclusive. Yet of course even place-names are political and contestable.

Other cities, countries, and regions—like Glasgow, the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Canada, and Catalonia—have attempted to brand themselves through text-based graphics or typography. Their experiences attest to the difficulties of making a place-based typography communicate on both semantic and, for those who cannot read in the branded site’s language (or cannot read at all), aesthetic levels and the challenges of creating a unified, stable typeface that encompasses internal diversity, or even discord, and instability (see Large 1991; Baron 1997; Julier 2000; Abrams 2003; Worthington 2003). Meanwhile, scholars have examined how particular typefaces, although not necessarily designed for the purpose of capturing a particular place-based identity, come to embody particular place-specific qualities and on occasion even come to be seen as *national-*

6. Anthropologist Claus Bossen (2000: 128) describes how national identity can be constructed through tourism: “To any state engaged in nation building, international tourism adds a new factor, because the industry implies an ‘expanded cultural role’ for the state. . . . Choosing which part of the national heritage should be marketed is simultaneously a statement on national identity, and, in order to provide a suitable environment for tourists, the state has to adjust and control the public arena . . . [and] become organizer of cultural reproductions (e.g., museums, national parks, cultural centers).” Little anthropological work on tourism has addressed “the implications of tourism for nation building”—or branding—and “the generation of national identity” (Bossen 2000: 128).



**Figure 1** A collage of Arabic “flavors” that Atrissi used in a multimedia presentation to the Qatar Tourism Authority. Tarek Atrissi Design, the Netherlands

*ist* (see Schwemer-Scheddin 1998; Shaw and Bain 1998; Worthington 2003: 118; Unseth 2005).

Atrissi was directed to make Qatar appear modern and progressive but also reverent of its traditions and cultural heritage. It must be characterized not by blind growth but by sustainable development and refined luxury. It should be clear that Qatar held a unique position “at the heart of the Arabian Gulf, a meeting point for East and West,” although it was likely that Qatar’s competitors—Bahrain and Oman as well as Dubai—were making the same claims (Atrissi n.d.b; see also Boyer 2001: 20). Finally—and perhaps above all, given the frequency with which this directive appears in Atrissi’s project documentation—Qatar’s identity had to stress its “Arabic flavor.”<sup>7</sup>

What does it mean to reduce Arabic history or culture to a “flavor”—or to an “ethnic motif,” as Peter van Ham, senior research fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, calls it? The “brand state,” van Ham (2001: 2) writes, can draw on “its history, geography, and ethnic motifs to construct its own distinct image.” Should a nation’s history, geography, and customs be mined for such purposes? What happens when we depoliticize the symbols that societies have fought to create and control, the languages and arts and institutions that have united people into communities, and we repurpose those symbols as design “motifs”? Van Ham (2001: 2) argues that the repurposing, and the larger branding exercise of which it is a part, is a welcome alternative to “the deep-rooted and often antagonistic sense of national identity and uniqueness that can accompany nationalism.” The nation brand “marginaliz[es] nationalist chauvinism” and thus contributes to “pacification.” What happens to the Arabic language when it is made to stand in as a cultural flavor on Qatar’s logo—and just how “benign,” as van Ham (2001: 2) suggests, is national branding?

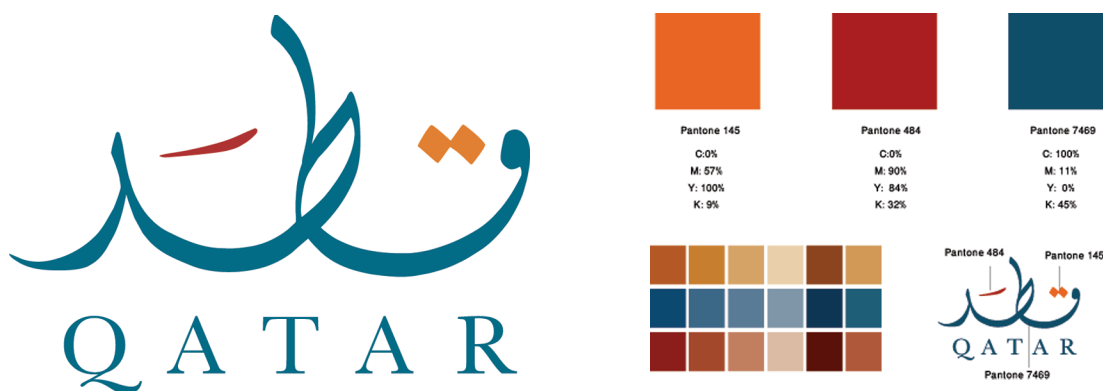
7. I was granted only limited access to the documents created in producing this design and no access to the QTA, so, aside from what I discussed with Atrissi, I was not privy to the research or decision making that inspired this vision statement.

## Reading Semantically and Aesthetically

On top of the logo is the word *Qatar* in an elegant, fluid, almost languid Arabic script, a font Atrissi designed specially for this project. Perched at the surface of the two basins in this three-letter word, rendered in turquoise blue, are two sets of marks. To the right—the script is read from right to left—are two mustard-yellow dots whose diamond shape, suggesting that they have been created with a thick-nibbed pen, calls to mind the calligraphic origin of this digital typeface. Although these two dots are in a color contrasting with that of the curved line below, they are related to that line in the same way that the dot, or tittle, is to a lowercase Latin *i* or *j*—but in this case they identify the first character as a *qaf*. The middle, vertical character with a loop to the right side of its stem is a *ta*. Immediately to the left of the *ta*, a brick-red dash representing an *a* vowel sound precedes the final character, *ra*, which slopes down to the baseline without a flourish, providing a modest and abrupt closure. The colors are meant to be evocative. The blue symbolizes hospitality and the sea. The complementary gold and red are

**Figure 2** Atrissi's "corporate identity" for the nation of Qatar. Tarek Atrissi Design, the Netherlands

**Figure 3** The palette of symbolic colors. Tarek Atrissi Design, the Netherlands



intended to represent the colors of the sun and the desert and to present Qatar as a warm, welcoming place. Brick red, furthermore, is Qatar's national color.

Below the Arabic script, in uppercase Baskerville Regular and in the same turquoise blue, is the Latin transliteration *Qatar*, its five letters aligning with the peaks and valleys of the Arabic script. Arabic speakers, of course, do not need the Latin transliteration—but even for them the presence of the Latin letters suggests that their nation is compelled to transform itself for others invested in Qatar, that this script is not just for them. To an Arabic speaker, viewing this logo is

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Figure 4 Qatar written in various calligraphic styles. Tarek Atrissi Design, the Netherlands

somewhat like watching a subtitled movie shown in one's native language: the presence of the translation makes it clear that this text, which seemingly regards Arabic speakers as its primary target audience and thus places the symbols meant to reach them within the diegesis, must also circulate among global audiences that see the picture but do not understand the words.

Even though they could read the Arabic script, Atrissi said, many native readers noted its hybridity. It is a combination of several calligraphic styles, perhaps including Naskhi, an elegant script known for its rhythmic line and commonly used by the general population and by copyists of the Qur'an, and Ta'liq, originally a Persian script noted for its "hanging" style and lines that vary in thickness. Atrissi's script's impurity elicited varying responses, which he attributed to generational differences: young people saw Arabic with a "contemporary look," which they regarded favorably, while older people were more likely to be troubled by the script's hybridity. In his work on the politics of script choice, Peter Unseth (2005) claims that allegiance to pure script types may reflect a rejection of external influence or modernizing forces. Or perhaps Atrissi is simply making the common assumption that cosmopolitan ideas, like modernizing scripts, are sometimes slow to trickle down from the elites to the masses—in this case, from the worldly youth to their elders, who moved with the pearling industry and grew up without foreign cars, transnational media, and American universities.

For non-Arabic speakers, the alignment of the two lines of text may suggest a direct correspondence between them. Aside from their opposite orientation—the Arabic reading right to left, the Latin left to right—segments of the continuous line of script do not correspond to particular consonant and vowel sounds from the phonetic alphabet. The "curve with two dots on top," for instance, does not equal a *Q*. Nor does a red dash mean an *a*. The alignment thus offers a false trans-





lation. Still, it *is* a translation—a conversion of the first line of text in a code that the Latin-character-reading audience can comprehend.

Yet non-Arabic speakers may not be reading for meaning; they may appreciate this upper line of text not as something semantic but as something that offers “endless possibilities of abstract forms and shapes” that can be “read”—or rather, interpreted or appreciated—in any number of ways (Atrissi n.d.b). As Atrissi (n.d.b) explains: “Some people see in the logo the dunes of the desert, some the waves of the sea; some see a smile, others a boat or a tent; and others see three big giant leaps. In short, the abstract look does not limit the entire country to one visual or one symbol or one idea.” Writing about the “semantic density” of the images used in the Polish union Solidarity’s unofficial postage stamps, Kristi S. Evans (1992: 750) argues that “polyvalence is useful in the construction of an imagined community with a strong ideological commitment to pluralism. . . . An image allows differing perspectives to unite at a subdiscursive level without imposing orthodoxy.” To those who cannot “read” them, the letters and diacritical marks—which have their own interesting political history—become waves and

**Figure 5** Atrissi’s logo used on a sailboat.  
Tarek Atrissi Design, the Netherlands

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smiles. Like the Catalan logo, in which the work of Joan Miró is mined for design cues but emptied of political content and used to represent, both abstractly and figuratively, “Mediterraneanism” and modernity, Atrissi’s design draws on linguistic forms that become abstractions — “ethnic motifs” — that evoke a friendly, dynamic Qatar with plenty of sea and sun (Julier 2000: 127–28). In this nonsemantic reading of the Qatar logo, in which the first line of text is regarded as an image, the Latin letters “anchor,” Roland Barthes (1977: 39–41) might say, the interpretation. The subtitle, or caption, pares down the possible meanings of this polysemic image. *I.D.* magazine’s Julie Lasky (2004: 13) praises the design’s ability to function on both literal, or semantic, and abstract, or aesthetic, levels:

Atrissi . . . managed to look beyond the literal meaning to the abstract beauty of the calligraphy as it would be viewed by Europeans and Americans. All he hoped to cram into this simple mark — elegance, distinctiveness from other national identities, a contemporary spirit, and the distillation of an ancient culture — is there. This feat required the suppleness of a multilingual and perhaps youthful [read: cosmopolitan] intelligence.



**Figure 6** Various print applications of Atrissi’s logo. Tarek Atrissi Design, the Netherlands

Should we be concerned that this abstraction has desemanticized the script, has depoliticized the Arabic language, which, like all languages, is instrumental in constructing national identity? No, says Atrissi, because this script functions as typography is meant to function, and it is perceived as Arabic calligraphy, in particular, is meant to be perceived. “Typography by definition goes beyond seeing the letters as letters,” Atrissi (2006) says, to “looking at them as . . . pure forms.” Designer Sherry Blankenship (2003: 61) argues that appreciating Arabic language for its beauty does not amount to fetishization, since Arabic lettering is self-consciously aesthetic: “Arabic uses letters as forms of great beauty, but also to communicate meaning. The formal content takes precedence over the meaning of language in such a way that distortions of the letterforms rarely effect [*sic*] legibility. In Arabic, the reader understands first, and then reads” (see also Drucker 1998). The reader may appreciate the connotations, or even the aesthetic experience, of a script before seeking its denotative meaning.

A consideration of the formal properties and aesthetics of both texts can shed light on how both communicate, semantically and evocatively. Atrissi has worked for several years on developing typography that bridges the Arabic and Latin alphabets, whose integration, he says, is particularly challenging because the two scripts are “not compatible”—aesthetically, logistically, linguistically (Atrissi 2006).<sup>8</sup> Blankenship (2003: 61) addresses the different forms and connotations of Arabic and Latin characters:

Since Arabic has a sustained calligraphic tradition, predominantly used for religious purposes, its forms can be characterized as linear, musical, rhythmic, fluid, dynamic, decorative, individualistic, contemplative, mystical, and asymmetric.

Arabic calligraphy expresses the significance of timelessness with a marked sense of rhythm, and with endless repetitions and decorative patterns. The primary purpose of the pattern is to transform matter so that it loses its solidity and heaviness. The abstract nature of the designs is more significant than the material aspect. . . .

[By comparison,] Latin letters can be perceived as formal, impersonal, rigid, separate, symmetrical, static, grey, geometric, vertical and mechanical. . . . Latin instead reflects Western thinking, with an emphasis on the individual, and with rewards for innovation and diversification, as well as concerns about efficiency, progress, profit, and production. It is concerned with legibility and clear communication.

8. See Atrissi's work at [www.arabictypography.com](http://www.arabictypography.com).

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The fact that both Arabic and Latin characters are present in Atrissi's design might suggest that Qatar is a mix of the qualities represented by each. It is an Islamic state that makes room for secularism. It is rich in tradition yet committed to innovation. It honors handicraft and technology, the mystical and the scientific. It is a land of harmonious contrasts. This is precisely the national image that Atrissi was asked to embody.

Yet these two writing systems are not quite as dissimilar as Blankenship might suggest. Both the "fusion" Arabic script that Atrissi has designed and its Baskerville partner embody hybridity within themselves.<sup>9</sup> Thus this mixing of differences that supposedly characterizes Qatar is represented not only by the juxtaposition of Arabic script and Latin type but also by the individual typefaces. Typographic historian Robert Bringhurst (1992: 97) describes Baskerville as an English neoclassical typeface that, when it was designed in the 1750s, was more popular in France and America than in England. It has "a rationalist axis, thoroughgoing symmetry and delicate finish" (Bringhurst 1992: 97). The typeface is not so rationalist as to be completely mechanical, though. Bringhurst (1992: 128) explains that in neoclassical letterforms, like Fournier, Baskerville, and Bell, "an echo of the broadnib pen can still be seen, but it is rotated away from the natural writing angle to a strictly vertical or *rationalist* axis." Baskerville is considered a "transitional" typeface: it is part of a group of faces that bridged the "old style" (e.g., Caslon, Garamond, Palatino, Goudy) and the modern (e.g., Bodoni, Didot). The old-style faces were designed, like Atrissi's script, to imitate the written hand, and consequently they feature "counters"—the space enclosed within a character—with a diagonal stress, reflecting the angle at which a pen would be held. The modern typefaces, which appeared in the 1780s, featured a pronounced vertical orientation, with no more diagonals to mimic handwriting. The transitional typefaces were moving away from the diagonal orientation of the old style and toward the vertical orientation of the modern.

Thus both of Atrissi's texts represent a "benign" hybridity—somewhere between a solution and a mixture, neither dissolving one culture into another nor placing diverse cultures into stark, and potentially volatile, contrast. This lack of conflict is not necessarily a sign of stability or harmony; it may be a symptom of an unhealthy lack of internal resistance. Political scientist Jill Crystal (1989: 441) argues that Kuwait and Qatar have enjoyed relatively smooth transitions from "pearls to petroleum, poverty to prosperity" not because of benevolent rulers, a

9. Even some of the oldest known Arabic documents, from the sixth century AD, are trilingual; they contain Greek and Syriac scripts as well (Boutros 2005: 31).



**Figure 7** Promotional materials demonstrating Qatar’s harmonious mix of history and modernity, nature and culture. Tarek Atrissi Design, the Netherlands

content populace, or sound economic or governance policies but because of the withdrawal of the merchant class, a potential check on government power, from political life after the crash of the pearling market. This withdrawal has created new political alliances “between the emir and the ruling family, whose political role has expanded, and between the emir and the national population, through social services and transfers”—and, finally, between the government and foreign allies. Crystal explains that the Gulf states only *appear* stable, “not because they are able to handle opposition, to co-opt and coerce, but because they have not yet faced the challenges that produce resistance.” The harmony between these disparate graphic and typographic images of the country might be similarly illusory.

The Baskerville type is an acknowledgment of Qatar’s Western allies, or investors, without whom the country’s identity would not be what it is today, and without whom Qatar will not be the nation *tomorrow* that is being built by Qataris and their international partners for *today*. Yet there are residents of Qatar who are essential to the nation’s everyday operations but who are not included in the “imagined community” presumed by this logo. Laborers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia, and the Philippines make up the majority of the population of roughly nine hundred thousand, only 40 percent of whom are Qataris. These foreigners often earn substandard wages, are often subject to human rights abuses, and are usually denied citizenship. While wealthy outside others are incorporated in the national image—arguably, into the nation

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itself—these inside others are excluded. But of course it is not the “inside others” at whom a tourism campaign would be targeted.

### Branding the Postnational

Many scholars argue that exclusion—not only in representations of the nation, as in this case, but in the very conception of the nation itself—is inevitable. According to Claus Bossen (2000: 129), “The ‘imagined community’ . . . of the nation is always constructed in a process of identification where a self is defined in contrast to external or internal others.” Still, it seems that there are limits to a nation’s sovereignty and the elasticity of its finite borders—both of which Benedict Anderson (1991) identifies as defining characteristics of a nation. In Qatar’s case, these internal others are not separatists but laborers on whose backs this new Xanadu is rising. The nation thus “imagined” in the logo and in Qatar’s other nation-branding projects acknowledges an acceptable degree of otherness but excludes whatever clashes with its Palm Beach–on–the–Persian Gulf image. Nation-states “exercis[e] taxonomic control over difference,” Arjun Appadurai (1996: 39) notes, “by creating various kinds of international spectacle”—like the phantasmagoric architecture and stylized brands several Gulf states are manufacturing—“to domesticate difference.”

In the case of Qatar’s nation-branding campaign, we have a young state aiming to define itself as an internally coherent entity (something distinct from the other nations of the Middle East) while acknowledging that that internal coherence incorporates extensive external investment, which it hopes to maintain and build on, and also recognizing that the Arabic language, the Muslim religion, and oil (variables that define most Middle Eastern nations) are potent qualities defining Qataris’ identity. Atrissi and the QTA are branding the nation for nationals and, just as important, for those who are invested—and those whom Qatar wants to be invested—in its national identity, including its foreign investors, tourists, and hundreds of thousands of temporary foreign residents. Qatar’s bilingual brand attempts to embrace the country’s demographic, cultural, and linguistic diversity—but only in “domesticated” form (Boyer 2001: 27; see also Rajagopal 1999). Instead of marginalizing chauvinism and promoting pacification, as van Ham (2001: 2) suggests, the brand marginalizes difference, masks inequity, and promotes depoliticization. What is ultimately branded is a corporation-nation seeking to appeal to a clearly defined set of stakeholders.

It does not matter how those stakeholders approach Atrissi’s graphic—whether they can or cannot read the Arabic script, whether they notice the false trans-

lation, whether they resist the brand altogether—because the brand still does its job: the scripts offer the “warmth of cultural wholeness,” as anthropologist Dominic Boyer (2001: 27) calls it; they constitute what David Ogilvy called the “intangible sum” that creates a lasting impression of the nation of Qatar: fun and sun and Arabic “flavor” alongside rationality and modernization. It seems that one cannot “resist” this brand, because a failure to read, or a *misreading*, would be an equally valid form of reception; if nothing else, one can appreciate the brand aesthetically—or uncritically, distractedly, as a commodity. Yet ultimately we find that Qatar’s brand, like the nation’s leaders, fails to “fac[e] the challenges that produce resistance.” The brand’s stability, as well as Qatar’s political stability, as Crystal argues, is only tenuous. One must examine the consequences—economic, political, ethical—of rendering invisible a foreign labor force that comprises 60 percent of a nation’s population, of “managing” diversity and inequality rather than tackling these social challenges politically. Zachary Lockman (1997: n.p.), who studies Middle Eastern labor issues, argues that “we need to . . . explore how various subordinate social groups accept or reject, in whole or in part, the forms of identity their social superiors seek to disseminate, forms that are, moreover, always contested. This in turn implies that we cannot treat ‘ignorance,’ or ‘collaboration,’ or even ‘resistance’ for that matter, as simple, transparent, uncomplicated categories.” How might those groups not “imagined” into this branded community ignore, collaborate, or resist not only the representation of national identity but also the material contradictions behind it?

As more places adopt the language and techniques of international marketing to sell themselves in a global economy, we might consider whether some nations—smaller, newer, more homogeneous ones—are better candidates for a brand than others. Partha Chatterjee (1998) emphasizes the value of examining the contradictions between national- and community-level—and, I would add, regional and global—affiliations in the age of globalization. Appadurai (1996: 170–71) argues that America, for instance, must begin to look at itself as a “node in a postnational network of diasporas” rather than as a “land of immigrants”—and must begin to ask questions similar to those that Lockman (1997: n.p.) proposes about “the whole problem of diversity,” about the contradictions between pluralism and immigration, between group and individual identities. Qatar needs to ask the same questions. We might also ask whether what countries are “branding” is something other than a “nation.”

Appadurai (1996: 168, 177) proposes that a “postnational imaginary”—a new conception that, compared to the “multinational” or the “international,” is “more diverse, more fluid, more ad hoc, more provisional, less coherent, less orga-

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nized”—may overcome “the incapacity of the nation-state to tolerate diversity.” But the nation *brand* is not such a potentially liberating “imaginary,” since such commodity formulations are concerned more with seeking homogeneity than with accommodating diversity and transformation. In Qatar’s case, and undoubtedly in others, what is branded is a simulacrum of a nation, complete with imported, prefabricated universities, science parks, and cultural institutions. And for this simulated nation we have a simulated national typeface: one that is calculatedly cosmopolitan and selectively pluralistic. Qatar’s logo is made for global symbolic exchange, and it—like the Pearl and Doha’s other resorts, where the Indian workers’ boot prints are swept away before opening day—is severed from the social character of its production. The digital typeface obsolesces, or “disappears,” the hand that once created the script, and the transformation of the script into an image—a smile or a boat, no less—has the potential to erase the social history of Arabic calligraphy. By reducing a script, a language, to a “taste,” a “motif,” we transform these political and aesthetic constructs into fetishes. By branding the nation, we erase it and put in its place a multinational corporation.

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