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PAPER ABSTRACT

PAPER TITLE:	Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah: Conflicting Pasts in a Coordinated Present	
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ABSTRACT:	<p>National identities are constructed, reinforced and mutually agreed upon, based on historic landscapes, languages, histories, or pasts. In the UAE, however, the nation is not an eternal entity. Rather, it is a newly constructed unit forged since independence in 1971, held together by the mutual agreement of the rulers that cooperation is preferable to separation and mediated by a plethora of competing identities to emirate, sheikh, city, tribe, and family. It is further complicated by the memory of the colonial past and the youth of the nation itself. Historically, the port cities were independent entities whose relationship with the British government, lent only the thinnest veneer of coordination between them. In reality, these port cities were economic and political rivals, whose past antagonism informs present relationships.</p> <p>One need only travel in the emirates by car to recognize the different faces that adorn nationalist billboards. Though the visages of Sheikh Zayed and Sheikh Khalifa, past and current UAE Presidents are present, they are not alone. Regional rulers are also displayed roadside. This very public exhibition of regional affinity raises questions of integration and points to areas of contestation within the national narrative. The UAE provides a case study to see how these contestations are remedied or not within the context of a newly formed state. This paper will examine the areas in three emirates—Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and Dubai— and examine how their local identities reveal contestations with the government sanctioned narrative of national identity that reflect both historic tensions and contemporary needs. To do this, I will draw on newspaper articles published since federation, British government documents, museums, and public art installations.</p>	