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Skylines and hemlines: A visual exploration of expatriate women's negotiation and definition  
of appropriate dress in the changing cityscape of Doha

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL  
COMMUNICATION

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JULY, 2016



AMY CHRISTENSON, 2016

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### Abstract

This paper uses visual ethnography to explore the narratives of definition and negotiation of appropriate dress for eighteen expatriate women who currently live in Qatar's capital Doha. Rapid shifts to the physical and cultural landscape are a product of Doha's re-imagining of itself as a global city. New sites of interaction between locals and expats lead to collisions of definitions, discourses, values, and images of appropriate dress for expatriate women. Photovoice, photo elicitation activities, and comparative analysis of a local dress campaign use women's "selfies" of clothing to create a dress resource map (see website). Clothing choices display an interconnectedness of factors largely dependent on clarity of guidelines, enforcement, repercussions, and perceptions of ownership of space. Dress-altering communicates messages of respect and awareness for local values and power relationships as women cover reproductive areas, hide shape, and seek invisibility by manipulating length, tightness, cut, fabric, print, and colour. Basing my analysis on a social semiotic approach, I draw upon post-colonial theory and ideas of intercultural encounters and integration to navigate broader contexts of discourses and images of expatriate women.

*Keywords:* visual ethnography, photovoice, social semiotics, expatriate women, fashion, Qatar

Skylines and hemlines: A visual exploration of expatriate women's negotiation and definition of appropriate dress in the changing cityscape of Doha

Qatar actively promotes the image of its capital, Doha, as a cosmopolitan city to attract highly skilled, career driven professionals (Nagy, 2008; Scurry, Rodriguez, & Bailouni, 2013) through their engagement in large-scale building projects such as the Pearl, or shopping centers such as Villaggio and Lagoona. With such projects comes the re-scripting of population flows (Jansson & Lagerkizt, 2009) as the creation of new consumption spaces like cafés and promenades attract once mutually-segregated populations of locals and expats (Walsh & Cole, 2010). Foundational to Qatar's development is the so-called "2030 vision": a plan that calls for the recruitment and retention of the "right mix of expatriate labor" (Nagy, 2008, p.18). As a result of this policy the imposition of strict controls over immigration and highly nationalized recruitment strategies have resulted in a remarkable 88% expatriate population (Snoj, 2013).

Expatriates in Doha, as in other global cities such as Dubai, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, are experiencing shifting narratives of emplacement (Coles & Walsh, 2010; Farrer, 2010; Fechter, 2010; Leonard, 2010). Rapidly changing cityscapes provide new spaces for intercultural interactions and interesting sites to explore how different value systems may experience friction. One of the most interesting, and yet least discussed such domains is the notion of appropriate dress—an especially important issue for the everyday lives for expatriate women. Although Qatar does not impose strict rules of public dress on expatriate women, the expectation is that expatriates present a modest image by covering knees, upper arms, and chest (Hess & Linderman, 2007). Doha's newly shared spaces create tenuous

relationships as unexpected conservativeness or lack of modesty, visible in the form of dress, contradict the expectations of a cosmopolitan image for both the expat and the local (Torstrick & Faier, 2009). The result is friction over what is considered “appropriate” dress for expatriate women.

The discussion of dress in Qatar and the Arab Gulf is not impervious to the polarizing narrative of the West and “other,” as women’s clothing is often pitted as a site of comparison in the dichotomous relationship of Western or “global” fashion and Middle Eastern or “traditional” fashion (Akou, 2007; Gorkariks & Secor, 2009; Hansen, 2004). Recent explorations of dress in the region focus on changes to the *abaya* (traditional long black robe) as a symbol of how locals negotiate Islamic values of modesty with Western values of consumerism in the face of globalization, the rise of capitalism, the influx of western media, and the large population of foreign workers (Al-Qasmi, 2010; Balasescu, 2007; Lindholm, 2013, 2014; Sobh, Belk, & Gressel, 2008, 2012, 2014). To many locals, Western dress represents immoral, superficial, and individualistic qualities, or the antithesis of local values (Mishra, 2007). Thus, instances of expatriate women not adhering to expected standards of modesty are often cited as creating a tenuous relationship with locals (Torstrick & Faier 2009). What expatriate women wear can often have a negative impact on relationships, local dress, and their moral image; however, little research has been done to examine dress from the perspective of expatriate women.

To address the gap in the literature, my research explores the following question: how is appropriate dress defined and negotiated by expatriate women living in Qatar’s capital city of Doha? The purpose of this visual ethnographic research (Pink, 2007) is to explore the

image of expatriate women. My focus is on how they negotiate the high level of ambiguity surrounding appropriate dress in the face of loosely-defined guidelines and conflicting values and tensions with locals, all within the changing landscape of a newly emerging global city, Doha. I seek to expand the body of knowledge on women's dress in Qatar (Lindholm, 2013, 2014; Sobh et al. 2008, 2013, 2014) to include images of expatriates that contribute to the images and narratives of emplacement of expatriates within global cities (Coles & Walsh, 2010; Farrer, 2010; Fechter, 2010; Leonard, 2010). Basing my analysis on a social semiotic approach (Leeuwen, 2009; Owyong, 2009; Vannini, 2007), I focus on ideas of intercultural encounter and integration (Bennett, 2006; Kim, 2009; Rathje, 2007; Shome, 2012), and draw upon post-colonial theory and scholarship (Hall, 1996; Hedge & Shome, 2010; Said, 1978; Shome, 2012) to carry out my research.

By exploring the image of expatriate women I hope to provide a space or open a dialogue to challenge stereotypes, barriers, dominant discourses, and ideas held both about and by expatriate women. The image collection accompanying this paper is intended to be a resource for women to draw on to add to their repertoire of expectations or imaginings of life in Doha to help make informed decisions about a move to Qatar, and to enhance their experience and adjustment upon arrival. To achieve my objective and goal I engaged in visual ethnography and collected participant-driven visual representations/visual stories from eighteen expatriate women living in Doha using photovoice and photo elicitation activities. These included the creation of a collaborative dress resource map and comparative analysis of one of Qatar's appropriate dress campaigns. My written work is accompanied by a

website with the intent to access a wider audience (Burawoy, 2005) and transport them through a visual experience. It is viewable at: <http://bit.ly/29qPvAw>

### **Doha in context: Putting itself on the world map**

In the last two decades, Qatar has been trying to put itself on the world map and assert its image as a global city through intense architectural projects and by attracting high profile sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup in 2022. According to Avraham (2013), hosting a global event like the World Cup in the Middle Eastern context can be considered both a touristic marketing tool with the purpose of altering the place image of Qatar and a challenge to prevailing negative Western media representations of the region. Using a different method of analysis, Jansson and Lagerkizt (2009) demonstrate how the theatrical façade of a city can be a powerful force of modern urbanism. Their research into Montreal's and Shanghai's world exhibitions shows that a city's skyline is a form of emotive geography that can stir up the spirit of a future gaze with an audience. They argue that despite the apparent positive implications of such events, large scale projects encapsulating a long range master plan that "scripts" movements through the city bring forth potential for the re-scripting or negotiation of norms. Through the process of trying to put itself on the global map, Qatar has exposed itself to a continual re-negotiation of space and cultural practices performed within that space—practices such as appropriate dressing.

To capture images of expatriate women's dress and understand their negotiations one must take into careful consideration the fact that Qatar's capital, Doha, is itself in the midst of an intense process of renegotiating its image. The capitalist diaspora of globalization is bringing forth peoples often feeling "lost in translation," struggling with the process of

negotiating their personal expressions and coming to terms with a new social identity (Prentice, Devadas, & Johnson, 2010).

Qatar, not officially a former colony, was a “protected state” under British India, and literature on narratives of expatriates in global cities has brought to light useful comparisons between the experiences of modern day expatriates and colonials (Coles & Walsh; Farrer, 2010; Fecther, 2010; Leonard 2010). Nagy (2006) indicates that history and economics make Doha’s urban landscape comparable to “highly transnational cities” (p. 121). Such environments, according to Fecther (2010), provide observers with a powerful comparative view that can allow us to broaden concepts of intercultural interaction while providing us with useful tools for the analysis of contemporary expatriates’ experiences negotiating flexible spaces of host societies.

Research on highly transnational cities has been growing steadily as of late. In the city of Shanghai, Farrer (2010) conducted interviews with over 150 long-term (five years or more) expats, while Leonard (2010) focused on narratives of contemporary British expats in Hong Kong, and Coles and Walsh (2010) and Fecther (2010) focused on Dubai. All of these studies account for the noticeable decrease in colonial narratives of living separately from locals in expat villages and highlight the increase in intercultural interaction in shared public spaces. Although integration was sought after in Hong Kong (Leonard, 2010), it was discouraged in Dubai (Coles & Walsh, 2010). As a result, the creation of desirable shared space in Dubai, such as shopping promenades or cafés, has become a site of tension rather than meaningful interaction (Coles & Walsh, 2010). Echoing this sentiment, Nagy (2006) indicates that Doha’s affluence sets up economic, rather than social, interactions with “few

expectations of shared culture” (p.121). He also notes Qatari nationals prefer spatial division to non-Qataris, exemplified in selection of residential location, strict immigration practices, residential policies, and building grants.

Comparisons of narratives and images of expatriates and locals on appropriate dress in Doha and Dubai portray a relationship of distancing intensified by globalization, modernization, and the influx of capital (Coles & Walsh, 2010; Sobh et al., 2012). Interviews of 24 Emirati and Qatari students conducted by Sobh, Belk and Gressel (2012) explore the tensions Western and global influences have on the changing discourse on beauty and the ability of young women to balance traditional modesty with modern vanity. The changing *abaya*, the traditional black robe of Qatari women, evokes a discussion of Islamic values, national identity, purity, changing consumption patterns, and fear of interaction and influence of Western immorality (2012). In comparison, Coles and Walsh (2010) inspect comparative discourses of British expatriates in Dubai surrounding space and dress in the colonial and post-colonial era. Their results indicate continuity between the two time periods and, similar to Sobh et al. (2012), were contextualized in relation and opposition to Emirati women’s dress practices. The British expatriates acknowledged conservative dressing practices, but cited making “generous concessions,” positioning their dress practices as superior and the symbol of modernism while the veiling practices of locals were seen as backward (Coles & Walsh, 2010). These studies exemplify the polarization of narratives of local versus expatriate dress under the influence of modern capitalism and globalization within the Arab Gulf.

## **Research Project and Method**

### **Research Strategy**

To explore the image of expatriate women in Qatar, my research strategy centered on visual ethnography (Pink, 2007) and visual analysis using social semiotics (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2004; Van Leeuwen, 2005; Vannini, 2012). According to Pink (2007), “rather than a method for the collection of data, ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge” (p. 22). The incorporation of visuals in ethnographic research is not new but has been gaining ground in recent years (Bryman, 2012, p. 455). Recently, more researchers have encouraged the active collaboration of participants. Through collaborative projects the researcher and participants become enmeshed in a cyclical sharing and in the creation of an information feedback loop (e.g. see Caulkins, 2014). Such was my intent for this research project.

“Clothes,” writes Owyong (2009, p. 195), “have such immense potential to convey a message” and whether we do it consciously or unconsciously what we wear is a sign with a deeper meaning. From a socio-semiotic perspective we can understand clothes as semiotic “resources.” Van Leeuwen (2005) defines semiotic resources as “the actions and artifacts we use to communicate” (p. 3). Resources are imbued with actual and theoretical potential to make meaning, and the role of social semiotics is then to analyze such resources within a context and explore the meaning from theoretical frameworks (Van Leeuwen, 2005). In my research I used visual ethnography to explore what women were wearing and social semiotics to analyze how meaning was generated.

My research sample focused on expatriates who are considered to be from Western countries and part of the highly skilled capitalist diaspora. In my five years in Doha, it has

been my experience that word of mouth and networking is the most efficient way to drum up interest and get information in Qatar. Therefore, snowball sampling and advertising within established networks was used for participant selection. My sample included eighteen women who currently reside in Doha, the capital of Qatar. Their ages ranged from late twenties to mid-forties with the average age hovering in the mid-thirties. Their length of time in Doha ranged from seven months to thirteen years, with the average being four years. All women were presently working professionals, except for one who is completing a Master's degree. The majority were affiliated or presently working at educational institutions in Qatar. There was an even split between women living in Doha with their families or their spouse, and those living alone. The majority of participants were Canadian, with the others from the United Kingdom (originally Columbian) and New Zealand. For a third of the group, Qatar was their first expatriate experience. The majority of those who have not been expats had previous long term travel experiences that extended beyond a few months. Only one participant had previous expat experience in the region.

### **Design and Data Collection**

Participants were engaged as collaborators in three phases of my research process, the first two in data collection and last in analysis; with each phase centered on participant-driven visual creations as a means of expression, comparison, representation, and elicitation of deeper meanings (Collier, 2004; Harper, 2002; Pink, 2007). The first phase spanned two months, late January to early March 2016, and included a three-week photovoice exploration, whereby women were asked to take self-shot photographs, or selfies, of what they were wearing in various places as they went about their daily lives. Women were asked to provide

the location, time, and a brief narrative to contextualize the photos such as the activity they were engaged in, a short reflection on clothing choice, their perceived reactions of others to clothing choices, or their feelings of dis/comfort. Participant-driven visual creations, such as photovoice, can enhance accessibility, trust, engagement, and capture what may be beyond the researcher's subjective lens (Pink, 2007). According to Collier (2004), rather than analyzing an image in isolation, it should be considered within a larger collection to provide context, which was generated through the selfie photovoice project. I then used the selfie collections as the basis for the further exploration in the second phase of data collection and the third phase of analysis.

The second phase of data collection consisted of three focus groups where the women participated in the following activities: 1) selection of group's top five factors influencing dress, 2) discussion of areas of Doha, 3) a comparative exploration of Qatar's Appropriate Dress Campaigns (QADC) targeted at expatriates, and ultimately, 4) the creation of a Dress Resource Map (DRM). Photo elicitation (Harper, 2002), the technique of inserting the selfie photos from phase one as the basis for the line of questioning throughout each activity, was used to engage participants in a unique process of reflection. Photo elicitation is encouraged as an effective method for teasing out unexpected, yet important contextual information (Collier, 2004; Harper, 2002; Pink, 2007) that breathes life into the images as they evoke rich descriptions from participants (Samuels, 2004; Slutskaya & Simpson, 2012). The creation of photo maps is considered an important multisensory research method that facilitates spatial positioning of image and text to further enhance the exploration of spatial relationships (Collier, 2004; Collins, 2011; Powell, 2011). According to Hjorth and Pink (2014),

smartphone technology that easily captures photos and location is a useful tool in the exploration of narratives of emplacement. The collaborative element of phase two “combines the intentions of both ethnographer/photographer and informant and represents the outcome of their negotiations” (Pink, 2007, p.76), affording emergent potential for a multisensory insight into the layers of meaning of appropriate dress.

### **Analysis**

Collier (2004) emphasizes the importance of comparative analysis of large collections through techniques such as team analysis that allow for multiple perspectives and the “rapid analysis of large quantities of images” (p.54). Drawing from Collier, I used the activities in phase two as a means of engaging participants in a collaborative analysis in phase three. I requested participants, both individually and as a group, to sort and categorize their selfies as a part of the focus group activities. For example, after the top five factors influencing dress had been established, they were assigned a colour, which was then used by each woman to code their photo collections. Participants also placed symbols on their own and other women’s photos to mark them as inappropriate, blurred boundaries, or appropriate according to their interpretation of the Qatar Appropriate Dress Campaign (QADC). The photo collections, complete with their influential factor colour codes and QADC comparison symbols, were situated on the areas of Doha to create the Dress Resource Map (DRM) used as a visual tool for further analysis.

According to Pink (2007), visual ethnographic research needs to consider that “material objects are unavoidably visual, but visual images are not, by definition material” (p. 32). With this in mind, I took the themes that emerged in the collaborative and individual

analyses to delve further into the layered meanings of appropriate dress using social semiotics. According to Vannini (2007), the researcher can “locate origins of meaning within the field of semiosis, or in other words, within the process of context-bound and conflict-laden interpersonal interaction” (p.115). Expatriates are an interesting group to look at because they are all entering a new context where expectations prior to and experiences upon arrival intermingle in an exquisite tension of social interactions rich with negotiated meaning. The relevance of social semiotics is that it focuses on specific contexts in which to drill down into, but in the same breath draws on multiple theoretical frameworks (Vannini, 2007) to explore emergent themes, such as post-colonialism (Hall, 1996; Hedge & Shome, 2010, Said, 1978; Shome, 2012) and intercultural encounter (Bennett, 2006; Kim, 2009; Rathje, 2007; Shome, 2012).

### **Uncovered: What are expatriate women wearing?**

The focus group’s activities using the women’s photo collections culminated in the creation of a Dress Resource Map (DRM). My analysis of the DRM centered on the potential of clothing as a semiotic resource within the context of Doha. After in-depth exploration into the maps and focus group conversations, it was evident women were negotiating dress based on many interconnected factors that shift across space and time, and were influenced by relationships, power dynamics, expectations or preconceived ideas, and a plethora of explicit and implicit guidelines.

### **Factors Influencing Dress**

The women were asked to discuss the factors that influence what they wear when they go out the front door each morning, and then narrow it down to their top five factors. Several groups

found it difficult, and they selected six. The most salient factors were location, people present, temperature or bodily comfort, personal perceptions or “barometer,” and activity. Other factors included their workplace, local and personal culture, length of time in Doha, and time of day or year, which could be considered sub-factors within the top five. For example, workplace was highlighted in both location and people present, culture and length of time in Doha fit into personal perceptions, and time of day or year was highlighted in activity, people present, and bodily comfort or temperature.

The top five factors are as follows: 1) *Location* was conceptualized in terms of binaries, such as wet versus dry (alcohol consumption), public versus private, local versus expat, and free versus restricted. It also highlighted liminal or in-transit spaces like roads, and the impact of dress policies in the workplace, government institutions, hotels, and shopping centers; 2) *People present* focused on nationality, time of day, clientele in hotels, events, and how one’s role within the community or workplace impacted their prominence, status, and interactions with locals; 3) *Bodily comfort and temperature* was concerned mainly with management of indoor and outdoor temperature extremes, but also took into consideration how they felt in their clothes in terms of body image or mood; 4) *Personal perceptions* focused on length of time in Doha and intended length of stay, cultural background or nationality, ideas of conservative and modesty, preconceived ideas of the Middle East and Arab Gulf, previous travel and expat experiences, gender, marital status, influence of other expats, role within the community, and perceptions of fear, repercussions, and safety; and, 5) *Activity* highlighted the gym or physical fitness and events such as expat balls, concerts, and festivals.

Location and people present were the most salient factors in the women's photo collections, with bodily comfort and temperature slightly more subtle, yet continuously present; these were often attributed in addition to the other two. Women cited the necessity of an "office blanket," shawl, or sweater as both a tool to both cover up in the presence of certain company and cope with the extremes of temperature, both inside and out. Activity was the least prevalent reason, and it was often reserved for physical fitness or special events. It was evident that each outfit considered multiple factors which raised the question as to whether it was possible to separate factors, further emphasizing their interconnectedness.

### **Doha divided: Spatial organization of the city's areas**

Women were also asked to discuss the areas of Doha as a place to begin creation of the Dress Resource Map (DRM). Narratives brought forth in this discussion made it clear that women were highly conscious of where they were going when making clothing choices, enticing exploration into how women organize and understand locations in the Doha context.

Location was described as both a physical and conceptual space, and spoken of in terms of binaries. When reflected upon it was not a simple binary but a spectrum of zones between and within locations that were highly variable, open to interpretation, and contingent on multiple factors. For example, "home" could be divided into sub-locations: stand-alone villa, compound, apartment, or hotel, and further divided by neighbourhoods of Doha; Al Sadd, West Bay, the Pearl, or Al Rayyan. A key organizing concept was that of ownership of space as expat, local, or mixed, which was largely dependent on personal perceptions or "barometer" in regards to relationships, either power or personal, and this was highlighted by the length of time a respondent had spent in Doha.

The idea of spatial ownership highly influencing dress is evidenced by baggier clothing, use of scarves, and longer sleeves in places considered local like the Souq, Museum of Islamic Art, and Katara. These areas and dress styles stand out when compared to the bikinis, shorter skirts, plunging necklines, and bare shoulders seen in expat places like hotels and private beaches. These spaces were defined as distinct from each other based mainly on the notion of public versus private and wet versus dry. A private beach, event, or home signalled freedom of dress, as did locations where alcohol was served. Even though locals frequented hotels, most nightclubs within them had clothing policies that excluded national dress. These policies further solidified ideas of expat ownership and semi-private space, whereas a shift from wet to dry, as seen in the Pearl over the last five years, served to alter ownership from expat to local and created confusion in the process. In areas of extreme discomfort where altering of dress was not enough, avoidance was used; hence the lack of photos in the Industrial and Al Sadd areas where women cited a high concentration of male workers who leer intensely or use “heavy eyes.”

Locations that sparked the most ambiguity over appropriate dress were shared spaces with no clear ownership by the expat or local community, often reflecting a sort of spectrum of mixed spaces. These areas include parks, the Pearl, beaches, the Corniche, roads, shopping centres, and grocery stores. The women agreed that you learn to dress accordingly overtime. Grocery stores are an excellent example of locations with unclear and unspoken spectra of ownership learned over time. For example, one participant said “You wouldn’t walk into an Al Meera grocery store (local) in shorts and tank top on your way home from the gym but Monoprix (expat) is fair game.” Another participant stated, “The X in Monoprix is for

Expat.” The category of expat or local is not solely based on the store itself but the people present in the vicinity where a women’s professional role within the community and perceptions of power of locals factor in. For example, the Carrefour grocery store has locations in Lagoona mall and City Centre. The women agreed that the City Center location was local, however Lagoona received mixed reviews. The Lagoona location is frequented by expats, but the neighbouring café is a popular local hangout and some women felt a greater risk that someone of “importance” or perceived power would see or report them.

Adherence to dress policies or guidelines across Doha was contextualized in terms of power relationships, enforcement, clarity of regulations, and severity of repercussions. In areas with clear, diligently enforced policies, such as government buildings or workplaces, women covered more and understood if asked to leave. If they were asked to leave they altered their dress and cited no further attempt to “push the boundaries.” In locations such as malls or shopping centers, where guidelines were ambiguous and enforcement less strict, women showed annoyance if asked to leave, seldom altered dress, and based clothing choice on bodily comfort and personal perceptions.

### **Bits and Parts: The Dohtruvius woman**

The Qatar Appropriate Dress Campaign (QADC) targeted expatriate women in public spaces to encourage conservative, respectful, and modest dress. The QADC was used as a visual tool to dissect clothing (grammar rules of social semiotics) in a physical sense to understand what defines “appropriate” or conservative. Clothing was used mainly to cover or hide reproductive areas, shape, and “womanliness,” with dual goals of camouflaging and making women invisible as not to draw attention. Coverage was considered first, shape second, and

camouflage last. Even self-proclaimed “flat-chested” women were more mindful of hiding the skin of their upper chest and cleavage rather than their shape. The aspects of clothing considered were length, tightness, cut, fabric, print, and colour.

The core areas of the female body, including the stomach, reproductive organs, and breasts were deemed the most important to cover. As distance from the core increased, ambiguity and questions followed suit, as women debated the difference a few centimeters of fabric could make. The women self-identified as not being part of the “midriff-showing generation,” thus discussion centered on necklines, sleeve lengths, and hemlines. Sleeve length considered the coverage of shoulders, upper arms, elbows, or full arm. Opinion varied on the appropriate length, with a cap sleeve or three quarter length shirt cited as equally appropriate depending on external factors such as activity and location, with strap thickness creating the most debate. Necklines took into consideration breasts, cleavage, upper chest, collarbones, neck, and back. The women mentioned that they often buttoned shirts up higher, wore shirts or tank tops under clothes with plunging necklines, and even got special v-shaped inserts that attach to the bra straps called “Clevas” for certain occasions. Hemlines focused on buttocks, groin area, upper thigh, knee, calf, and ankle. The appropriateness of hemlines was often influenced by framing with footwear, body position, hair and makeup, accompaniment by a husband or children, or whether they were paired with leggings, jeans, pantyhose or tights. For example, a skirt to the knee appeared more appropriate with a pair of ballet flats rather than heels, pantyhose rather than bare skin, standing as opposed to sitting, with a family rather than alone, or with hair and makeup undone instead of done-up.

Tightness, cut, and fabric was used to hide womanliness and shape. Women used extra fabric such as a scarf to layer over a tight shirt to cover their chest, or a long loose top to cover their buttocks when wearing tight jeans or leggings. One participant joked, “No camel toe!” There was heated debate on the topic of “leggings are not pants” which expanded to include various form-fitting fabrics including jeans, jeggings, leggings, workout pants, and pantyhose. Also in question were see-through tops or dresses that displayed shoulders, knees, or bras. In addition, clothing was used to hide the women by avoiding loud prints, bright colours, and exposing tattoos. Averting attention was highlighted in narratives of extreme discomfort from unexpected negative male attention drawn from a certain blue tank top, pink scrubs, fuchsia pants, or a printed dress.

The QADC highlighted coverage of knees to shoulders as the general rule in public places but was not representative of more conservative locations such as government institutions and some workplaces. These locations require coverage of elbows and ankles. In addition there are a multitude of unspoken rules in public or semi-private spaces that suggest looser guidelines for clothing such as hotels where most bars, pools, beaches, gyms, and expat events are located. It was also clear that assessing an outfit’s appropriateness solely on the QADC was not sufficient because appropriateness could be justified by a multiplicity of factors. For example, according to the QADC, a thin strap tank-top was inappropriate, but to most women it was appropriate at the gym, a party, a hotel, or at home. Women noted the campaign’s ambiguity and perceived lack of influence, and some even questioned if the intent was educational or public shaming.

**Dress Resource Map: Bringing it all together**

When the women were asked to locate their photos within the areas of Doha to create the Dress Resource Map (DRM) it was evident there existed patterns of dress- altering within and between locations, as the same woman could be seen in a scarf at a local area like the Souq, a sweater as they shifted spaces, a short skirt in an expat hotel, and a long dress at work. Further discussion teased out narratives to support clothing choices that displayed a deep awareness of surroundings, a high level of planning, and multiple justifications. It was clear that one could not separate ideas of appropriateness and inappropriateness from the top five factors, with location and people present as key influences.

Photos considered inappropriate according to the QADC concentrated on hotels and home; locations considered expat, free, or where alcohol was served. The remaining photos were in areas with unclear rules, a lack of rule enforcement or monitoring, in-transit spaces, or places with no clear or shifting ownership by expat or local. There was also a high concentration near or on the water including the Gulf, the Corniche, the Pearl, and beaches, with the remaining photos smattered across roads, parks, and shopping centres or grocery stores. These photos showed locations with no clear ownership by local or expat. These included places where women were engaging in physical activities, such as paddle-boarding at the Pearl, running at Aspire Park or on the Corniche, where women were in-transit or where time played a role such as roads, or popping in to the grocery store on the way to the gym. Photos at workplaces were sparse and there was a lack or absence of photos in the Al Sadd and Industrial area due to the discomfort created by male leering.

Workplace attire made up the majority of both the appropriate photos and the photo collection in general emphasizing the huge role it plays in dress within the Doha context. In Qatar, employers exercise a high level of control over a worker's personal life. They sponsor residency permits, and therefore non-compliance with workplace dress policies could mean termination, loss of a worker's home, and deportation. Women indicated clear guidelines, awareness of when they flirted with boundaries, and habitual dress patterns or "work uniforms" which demonstrated their negotiating dress over time. In addition to being hyper-aware of workplace dress policies, women took cues from leadership and coworkers, considered the nationality of coworkers, and preferred to ask locals they respected for opinions on the appropriateness of their outfits.

Dress was largely defined by the women's surroundings in terms of clarity of guidelines, enforcement, repercussions, and ownership of space. This is highly linked to personal interpretation of consequences if caught wearing inappropriate clothing, such as fears of being fined, arrested, asked to leave, spat at, leered at, or approached. Many women feared the loss of personal freedoms with increased volumes of expats dressing inappropriately and attempted to reverse potential negative backlash by covering more to signal compliance. A smaller group of women cited concern for encroachment of *abaya*-clad women at the Pearl, on private beaches, or at Friday brunches and uncovered to demonstrate ownership of expat spaces. In these cases women believed clothing sent a message exerting their personal views of ownership of space, fear of consequences, and power relationships.

There was a parallel between power relations and altering of dress patterns, reactions to being asked to alter dress, and patterns of movement. In addition, personal "barometers"

and how someone felt “that day” were reflected in the mood of the participants. As well, bodily comfort, marital status, gender, activity, and time played key roles in dress choices in these locations. The time of day and the length of time spent at a location were used to justify dress choices often associated with the idea of being in-transit. One woman cited, “it is okay to pop in to the Hyatt Mall wearing shorts early Friday morning because it is only for a minute and no locals are out and about yet.” Narratives indicated women consistently anticipate and prepare for location hopping, citing numerous in-transit or location hopping tricks that become second nature over time. These include keeping a sweater or shawl in every purse or car to throw on to suit the temperature or people present. Clothing in cars presented a great example of how personal perceptions are used to justify dress in liminal spaces. For example, some women justified uncovering in cars because they considered it a private bubble, it was simply too hot, it was only for a short time, they were on their way to an expat zone, or they couldn’t be bothered that day. Others cited justification for covering in the car based on who they might see, if they were on their way to a local zone, or saying “the entire country is a construction zone and they could feel men’s eyes on them.” Even in extreme heat they hiked up skirts but they left their cardigans on.

Time was also extended to length of time in or intended to be in, Doha. Some women on short-term contracts saw Qatar itself as an in-transit space and expressed less desire to alter their dress because they intended to wear out whatever was in their suitcases even if it didn’t reflect the realities of Doha. In general, new arrivals to Doha wore overly conservative clothing out of concern to follow rules and not to offend locals. Long-term expats also displayed less dress altering because their personal style is more conservative even outside of

Doha and reported retirement of shorts and “slutty” tops. Long-term expats also acknowledged when they deliberately dressed inappropriately, and had days where they said “screw it!” and wore shorts home from the gym and stopped for groceries. Long-term expats reflected that the ups and downs of expat life and their feeling towards Doha in general also affected their dress choices.

Time clearly impacts dress often altering a woman’s personal style and leaning towards a more conservative genre. This also represents a highly personal spectrum of choices. The genre of clothing considered conservative, respectful or modest does more than cover skin, but serves to hide a woman’s shape or womanliness, and simultaneously allows her to attain a level of invisibility. This genre of dress was a way for women to send the message that they wanted to avert attention, to be acknowledged as rule followers, and seen as respectful of power and local culture. Clothing was used mainly to avoid negative consequences, attain personal comfort, and ensure comfort levels of those around them. Women who cited their personal style as conservative expressed more surprise at unwanted attention and were less inclined to alter dress patterns, whereas women who made no claims to conservative style demonstrated more excitement at the prospect of changing into a “scandalously short skirt” for happy hour after work and delight in removing their sweater at the Pearl because they saw another expat in short shorts.

The women in the study were continually making mental calculations of their environments based on experiences, stories, and personal ideas that turned into clothing adjustments. The women indicated that in situations of discomfort or tensions with locals it was common to first try to alter clothing and if that was not an option or did not work, they

would alter behaviours. For example, one woman was asked to wear longer shorts on her run at Aspire Park, however she felt her shorts were fine and decided to change the time she ran to avoid further altercations. Another woman told us she wore a dress above her knees to a hotel restaurant with bare legs when with her husband, but tights when she was alone to avoid leering from other men. Another woman described that while living in the Al Sadd area she would go out in something more conservative every day to avert male attention until she realized it would not matter what she wore. It was common for women to avoid the Al Sadd and Industrial area, specifically when they were alone, as a woman alone is different from a woman with her husband and children.

### **Discussion and Reflections**

Dress communicates a message to the world, so we place value on what we wear as a part of appropriate interactions (Ashman & Gökmen, 2006). Throughout my research it was evident that women intended to send a message through their dress. They were also aware it was not always under their control how that message was received. Messages are not produced or received in isolation; they are part of a wider context of prevailing discourses, images, and experience of intercultural encounters. Negotiation and definition of what is appropriate dress within the Doha context today must take interrelated and multidimensional factors at global, local, and personal levels into consideration.

The women in my study referred to themselves as guests in Doha, and for the most part considered covering as an act of respect for rules and local values, even if it was not in line with their personal values. The Dress Resource Map (DRM) displayed these expatriate women's understanding of the relational quality of dress to location and people present. The

women knew dress had the potential to relay a message of disrespect or pose a threat to local culture, which manifested in distancing and dress-altering, as seen in liminal/in-transit spaces or “expat” spaces such as on the way to or at the beach. All women engaged in distancing and dress altering, with some adopting the conservative genre of dress as their personal style, while others altered their behaviors or mobility patterns to find ways to appropriately express non-conservative personal styles. The women did not wish for their dress to be a threat to local culture or as a commentary on their moral character – in fact it was often used as a tool to remain unnoticed.

Control over expatriate women’s fashion through dress policies, guidelines, and modesty campaigns reflects a concern over threats to local culture with the influx of Western fashion, globalization, and capitalism (Al-Qasmi, 2010; Balasescu, 2007; Lindholm, 2013, 2014; Sobh, Belk, & Gressel, 2008, 2012, 2014). However, my study revealed that the threat an expatriate woman poses is not always clear or reasonable to them. For example, women questioned how a hemline slightly above the knee is considered immodest next to a local with perfectly coiffed hair, excessive make-up, *abaya* cinched at the waist, six-inch heels, and a Gucci handbag. The definition of modesty is considered variable and diverse (Lewis, 2013) and the underlying reason for this variability in Doha compels a look into power dynamics and prevailing discourses.

#### *Dueling Discourses: Orientalism and Occidentalism*

The DRM is intended as a resource for expats to navigate appropriate dress in Doha, however it cannot be separated from the wider social context upon which it is created. Maps simultaneously create and reflect representations of the world providing valuable insight to

their social context (Propen, 2007) and are a reminder that “the world is constituted by spatial relationships, not natural givens” (Barney, 2014, p.123). Like all documents of history, maps are mutable, relational, social constructions of their time and linked to prevailing discourses of power (Foucault, 1970) like that of Orientalism (Hall, 1996; Said, 1979) and Occidentalism (Buruma & Margalit, 2004).

The original “other” to the West, as described by the post-colonial theorist Said (1978), was the East or the Orient. According to Hall (1996), the concept of “the West” is given meaning through its relation to the “non-West” resulting in a system of representing human difference (p.186). The relational quality of this dichotomy reinforces language constructing a normative standard with “the West” as the model to aspire (1996). Conversely to the ideology of Orientalism, Occidentalism is the lens from which the East views the West, as it seeks to protect local culture from the threats of globalization by “strip[ping] human targets of their humanity” (Buruma & Margalit, 2004, p.10). The “targets” are modernity or the West. In essence, Occidentalism and Orientalism are in a reciprocal discursive relationship, with the East mirroring back the West’s objectifying discourse. It is within these opposing discourses that expatriate women negotiate their image.

Drawing on ideas from Foucault, Hall (1996) describes the power of language to create knowledge through discursive practices or meaning-making activities such as taking photos or making maps. The knowledge created by discursive practices of those in power forms a discourse used to exert dominance, maintain control over, and fortify hierarchies (1996). Those in power create the language used to define women’s dress. For example, the definition of modesty allows for simultaneous devaluation of an expat woman’s worth based

on her hemline length while exalting a local's position based on her hemline's designer label. According to Sobh et al. (2014) "couture" *abayas* worn by Qatari and Emirati women challenge the idea of loss of traditional culture with influx of modern capitalism, as traditional garments become exclusive high fashion items. This compels us to look at clothing as a form of hybridity and mimetic excess used to provoke envy and position their dress over their expat contemporaries of lesser means (2014).

In Doha, Occidental discourse is actively invoked. Prior to arrival in Doha many women in my study admitted to being exposed to Orientalist discourse of veiling practices as oppressive and backward. But it was not they arrived in Doha that they experienced similar judgements of dress mirrored back at them through Occidentalism, as they were educated on the immorality of a bare shoulder. Clothing has the potential to alter a woman's worth because it is made of fabric woven from a long history of powerful discourses. Discourse is an active system that seeks to survive and develop over time allowing it to manifest as sites of tension and struggle on expatriate women's bodies.

*A re-negotiation of image: Lost in spaces of translation*

In my research study the women expressed their experience of Doha as an in-transit liminal space in constant flux where they felt separate from locals and in a continual cycle of negotiating power relations, regulations, and consequences. New spaces that reflected ambiguity over local or expat ownership were often sites of tension rather than integration. The DRM demonstrated appropriate dress was most contested in places with ambiguous or shifting ownership of space, lack of power to enforce rules, and no clear guidelines. The conceptualization of space in terms of the local/expat binary in my research acknowledges a

discourse of distancing within Doha. In spite of this it is evident that expats and locals are being drawn together in the process of globalization and influx of modern capitalism as Doha reaches towards a future vision as a global cosmopolitan city. As my research, and research on other global cities (Coles & Walsh, 2010; Farrer, 2010; Fechter, 2010; Leonard, 2010) shows, gone are the colonial era days of expats being quartered off in walled compounds and cities being divided into culturally and spatially distinct places to separate expats and locals.

With the entire country under construction in preparation for FIFA 2022, billboards line the roads as reminders of the future Qatar is building towards and shout “Qatar Deserves the Best” or “Accomplishing a Vision.” It is clear Doha is undergoing re-scripting (Jansson & Lagerkizt, 2009) and place image renegotiating (Avraham, 2013) towards a future vision. Doha wants to be seen as a cosmopolitan city, however it is difficult to control how this is envisioned. Doha is negotiating how to be open and closed, or global and local, resulting in rapidly changing rules that are unclear and hard to make sense of.

The image Qatar wants to send to the world lacks clarity. Scouring your wardrobe for an outfit reflecting an image that is blurry and in translation is taxing. Your outfit will no doubt create friction with something or someone. Examples of this from my research surface in complaints over coverage centering on narratives where women felt they were presenting a conservative or modest image in comparison to a local, when a Qatari friend was approving of their outfit and another scolding, or when experiencing conflicting treatment when alone or with a spouse. In Doha today expat women are left caught between contradictory definitions, discourses, images, values, and ideals of locals.

### Conclusion

According to Hedge and Shome (2010) post-colonial scholarship “provides a historical and international depth to the understanding of cultural power” (p.91) and overlaps with communication scholarship in areas of representation, identity, agency, and hybridity. A look at everyday lives and personal expressions such as the dress of expatriate women can therefore be used as a visual communication tool and vantage point from which to view how expatriate women are reinventing, acting on, and being acted upon in the new and rapidly shifting cultural space of Doha. Expatriate women’s negotiation of dress is linked to the idea of intercultural encounters and integration.

Spaces of cultural interaction, referred to by Rathje (2007) as third culture spaces, tend to focus on difference and often set up threatening relationships or collision models that he believed should be replaced by cohesion models to emphasize positivity. Western-centric and binary approaches to engagements with cultural differences are challenged in the discussion on multiculturalism (Shome, 2012) and post-colonial scholarship (Hedge & Shome, 2010). According to Shome, “the notion of integration, however, assumes that there already exists a neat and stable order into which one can and should integrate” (2012, p.157). Based on the narratives of expatriate women, Doha is a city in flux with conscious tendencies towards segregation reminiscent of a collision rather than a cohesion model of integration.

In the absence of a stable environment in which to integrate, expatriates ideally need to attain a level of intercultural competence that “is applicable to all encounters between individuals of differing cultural (or ethnic) backgrounds, regardless of the particularities of the cultural backgrounds and the social situations involved” (Kim, 2009, p.54). Integration

requires a high level of comfort with ambiguity and an unconscious ability to shift in and out of cultural worldviews (Pusch, 2009). According to Kim (2009), the keys to successful intercultural communication are security and inclusivity of identity that allow for cognitive shifts that transcend ingroup/outgroup identity as a result of time, exposure, and prolonged experience. Ideally, individuals approach intercultural relationships “not as an act of ‘surrendering’ their own personal or cultural integrity, but out of genuine respect for cultural differences that leaves neither the lender nor the borrower deprived” (2009, p.62). The women in my study often cited avoidance and fear when experiencing intense leering from men; if our moral code, safety, or identity are threatened, we can choose not to integrate regardless of skill and ability (Bennett, 2009). Doha is in the “process of becoming” (Pusch, 2009, p. 77) where “identities blur, overlap, and are contested within spaces that are neither coterminous nor coeval” (Hedge & Shome, 2010, p.102) leaving them highly susceptible to power relationships.

The women in my study demonstrated awareness that they live within a system where rules are not applied or enforced unilaterally, they are ambiguous, malleable, and context specific. A car accident and hemline mishap work within the same system. Treatment is dependent on who and where you are, more than what the rule is. Women often acknowledged their adherence to rules was largely based on the power of the enforcer. For example, the QADC in malls had a lesser effect on dress in comparison to government or workplace policies because being deported is a stronger pull than being kicked out of the mall. Power relationships take time to understand as evidenced by the women’s personal “barometer” and how their length of time in Doha factored heavily into their negotiation of

dress. If one is unfamiliar with a hierarchical culture such as Arabic culture (Al-Kandari & Gaither, 2011) this can feel frustrating or disrespectful. As one woman in my study pointed out, the QADC's motto is "reflect your respect," but respect is about reciprocity and the respect you show through dress is an extension of how respected you feel. As Doha's spaces consistently shift so do power relations, perceptions, and ultimately clothing choices. The DRM provides a glimpse into the variable, diverse, and shifting visual narratives of eighteen expatriate women's approaches to negotiating and defining what is appropriate clothing in Doha's changing cityscape.

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