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Cosmopolitanism and Urban Space in Doha, Qatar

ANDREW GARDNER 

Abstract: This essay commences with an ethnographic sojourn through the Industrial Area, a peripheral zone of the urban landscape in Doha, Qatar that is densely inhabited by low wage migrant laborers. In this segregated urban enclave, I ascertain the openness to alterity and the interactions with difference that connect their experiences to the conceptual legacy of cosmopolitanism. Via a discussion of the segregated experiences of transnational migrants in Doha’s urban landscape, I then stake out a speculative argument for the connection between that segregation and the resulting cosmopolitan conditions. Together, these two assertions explore manifestations of cosmopolitan urbanism in non-Western and non-democratic cities. In the conclusion to this essay, I suggest that we might usefully disentangle our assessment of these cosmopolitan conditions from our sustained critiques of the global landscape of inequality, and turn my attention briefly to the western ethnocentricities that suffuse the analytic lens by which we gauge cosmopolitanism and the city.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, migration, Qatar, Doha, urbanism, segregation, inequality

1 Migrant life in Doha’s industrial area

This paper grapples with manifestations of cosmopolitan urbanism found in non-Western contexts, and does so via the pragmatic, empirical approach that seeks a “grounded cosmopolitanism”. I pursue this objective through an analysis of foreign workers and their experiences in the urban landscape of Doha, Qatar. The analytic waypoints I visit are twofold. First, I contend that we should understand the experiences of the legion of low wage migrants in Doha as cosmopolitan in nature. Second, I assert that the enclaving and segregation of this class of migrants in the urban landscape, as problematic as it may be from other angles, is simultaneously an integral feature in the production of the cosmopolitan urbanism observed there. Finally, in the concluding section I suggest that we might conceptually distinguish our critiques of inequality from our estimation of the cosmopolitan ethos. Along the way, I join Pagès-El Karoui in framing the city not as the backdrop for cosmopolitanism, but instead as a vital spatial feature in the production of cosmopolitan conditions.¹

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¹ Pagès-El Karoui, “Cosmopolitan Cities”, in Cicchelli and Mesure (eds), *Cosmopolitanism in Hard Times* (2020), p. 195.

Doha is the capital city and the singular urban agglomeration of note in Qatar, the small peninsular nation on the western shores of the Persian Gulf. Of the nearly 3,000,000 residents tabulated in 2019, almost all dwell in Doha itself, and although smaller numbers reside in a handful of smaller satellite towns, the peninsula's population is almost entirely urban. Only a small portion — some 12% — of the peninsula's total population are Qatari citizens. Of the non-citizen majority, there were 94 different nationalities living in Qatar at last count.² The largest contingents of foreign workers arrive from South Asia, although Southeast Asian and African nations also contribute migrants to Qatar. Most arrivals are part of the laboring class, a transnational proletariat that I'll here refer to as *low wage migrants*.³ Their presence has much to do with Qatar's vast hydrocarbon resources, and of the millions of migrants present in the Doha, most are there to help construct and service the city itself. On a per capita basis that includes the vast foreign presence, some calculations suggest Qatar is the wealthiest nation on the planet. Much of that wealth is plowed back into the city, illuminating David Harvey's notion of the city as a repository for surplus capital.⁴ With Qatar's vast reservoirs of capital, the city grows by leaps and bounds: stadia sprout from the desert, new skyscrapers crowd the horizon of the city center, suburbs spill into the empty desert at the fringes of the urban landscape, and offshore residential developments rise from the sea.

In the closing decades of the 20th century, Qatari citizens steadily abandoned the neighborhoods of the city center. The citizenry's migration to suburban villas left the aging modernist neighborhoods of the central city to the growing population of foreigners at work on the peninsula, including the low wage migrants whose circumstances are described at length elsewhere.⁵ Although citizens had mostly abandoned the aging urban core by the close of the 20th century, in recent decades one can perceive a reversal in the steady revitalization of the city center — perhaps the initial signs of what Fishman calls the “fifth migration”.⁶ Aging neighborhoods in the city center took on the glow of heritage, and the citizenry began to perceive these modest neighborhoods with nostalgia. State-based investment followed suit. In 2020, the vestiges of the former migrant presence in the city center are still visible in the remnant mid-century neighborhoods at Doha's urban core.⁷ But most of the burgeoning population of low wage migrants have been relocated to the distant periphery of the city — initially to the Industrial Area, and more recently to expansive planned communities like Barwa Village, Asian Town, and Labour City.

Many of these newer accommodations planned for the migrant working class were built on land near or adjacent to the Industrial Area. The Industrial Area is the English translation for Sanaya, a sprawling grid of streets near the outer fringes of Doha. Sanaya grew from the

² Snoj, “Population of Qatar by Nationality – 2019 Report”, *Priya Dsouza Communications* 15 August 2019.

³ I have elsewhere used the term *transnational proletariat* to describe the population of working class labor migrants who, collectively, make up the largest segment of the foreign workforce in Qatar and in the neighboring GCC states. This transnational proletariat can be contrasted with the *diasporic elite*. See Gardner, “Strategic Transnationalism: The Indian Diasporic Elite in Contemporary Bahrain”, *City and Society* 20.1 (June 2008), pp. 54–78.

⁴ Harvey, “The Right to the City”, *New Left Review* 53 (September/October 2008), pp. 23–25.

⁵ Bruslé, “Nepalese Migrations: Introduction”, *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 35–36 (2009–2010); Gardner et al., “A Portrait of Low-Income Migrants in Contemporary Qatar”, *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3.1 (June 2013).

⁶ Fishman, “Longer View: The Fifth Migration”, *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71.4 (2004).

⁷ Mohammad and Sidaway, “Shards and Stages: Migrant Lives, Power, and Space Viewed from Doha, Qatar”, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106.6 (2016).



Figure 1: Street scene from the parking lot of Al-Attiya Market in Doha’s Industrial Area (2018) [photograph by the author].

hardpan desert in the first decade of the 21st century. Today it remains a vast grid of heavy and light industry intermingled with a plethora of dormitory-style labor camps and a scattering of commercial enterprises that serve the resident population of low wage migrants. No Qatari citizens dwell in the Industrial Area, and few of its residents would count themselves as members of the diasporic elites at work in Arabia. Rather, the Industrial Area is Qatar’s prototypical “bachelor city” — the commonplace name for the locations in the urban landscape delineated as convenient, ideal, or de facto residential repositories for the vast transnational proletariat present on the peninsula. Today, the Industrial Area is one of the oldest remaining examples of the enclaves constructed to accommodate migrants in Qatar.

Notably, migrants’ residence during their time in Qatar is almost always assigned by their employers under the norms of the *kafala* — the sponsorship system that has orchestrated migration to the region for much of the past century. Moreover, in the urban landscape of Doha, the Industrial Area is undoubtedly one of the densest agglomerations of this migrant class. At the center of the Industrial Area is the Al-Attiya Market, a commercial plaza surrounded by a parking lot. For most low wage migrants, Fridays are their single day free of work obligations, and on that day the market plaza and the surrounding asphalt moat fill with foreign workers (see Figure 1). For more than a decade, this market has functioned as both a commercial destination and as a vibrant social space — a destination where transnational migrants can find others from a nearby village, where they can encounter compatriots who speak in their same tongue, and where they might encounter migrants from places foreign to them. The diversity of this de facto “bachelor city” is noteworthy: in a large survey focused solely on low wage migrants in Qatar, respondents reported twenty five different nationalities.⁸ With the passage of time since that survey was administered, the national diversity of this migrant working class has most certainly increased.

In 2008, I began conducting a series of ethnographic projects focused on the population of transnational labor migrants who reside in Qatar. That work frequently carried me to the

⁸ Gardner et al., “A Portrait of Low-Income Migrants in Contemporary Qatar”, p. 4.

Industrial Area, and it was there that I first met Sam.⁹ We became friends over the span of a few months, but he concluded his work contract and departed Qatar shortly thereafter. We crossed paths in Nepal the next year, solidifying our friendship, and subsequently kept in sporadic touch via email. On a recent return trip to Qatar, I was happily surprised to discover that Sam had also returned to Doha, and we made plans to meet in person. A colleague and I met Sam at his flat, located above a nondescript section of commercial junkspace lining one of Doha's major boulevards. It had been almost eight years since we had last seen each other. Then, he was a first time migrant to Qatar, just concluding his two-year contract for what had proved a very problematic employer-sponsor. At that time, he and his fellow migrant/employees resided in a camp deep in the Industrial Area. We spent many evenings together there. Like most others, that camp was a dormitory-style configuration: six men bunked in each room, with shared bathrooms and kitchen spaces located down an external hall.

Utilizing fieldnotes from 2008 and a follow-up interview conducted more recently, I have stitched together this synopsis of Sam's life thus far: Sam was born in the Uttar Pradesh state in India. His mother was Indian, his father Nepali, and he completed school at the age of 17 in Nepal. He returned to India for additional education, and after completing some higher education he moved to Mumbai, where he worked at a call center for six months. He then returned to the Terai — the low agricultural plain along Nepal's southern border with India, and one of the places he thinks of as home. There he opened a computer training center with a partner. For two years he attempted to wring a profit from the fledgling business, but the itinerant supply of electricity provided by the state meant the computers were inoperable for much of the day, and the business eventually failed. Around that time, friends and acquaintances in both Nepal and India were increasingly finding remunerative work in Qatar. Indeed, word of Arabia and the possibilities there was spreading through Nepal like wildfire in those years, and after talking with a labor recruiter, Sam secured a position as an office clerk for an engineering company busy with various construction projects in the booming city of Doha. Like all transnational migrants near the bottom of the occupational hierarchy in Qatar, his family would remain at home while he worked abroad.

He arrived in Qatar several weeks later and was ushered by his employer to the unfinished labor camp where he would now reside. His employers were Palestinian; his roommates were Nepalese, but the labor camp also housed coworkers from India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Egypt. Nearby camps included migrants from a constellation of other sending nations. With no electricity, he and the other men in his camp slept on the roof for the first two weeks. The plumbing for the whole building was never right — the toilets had continuing problems, and potable water arrived only sporadically by truck. Oftentimes, the company bus driver failed to arrive at camp because of traffic congestion, and as a result, the men frequently commenced their workday with a two kilometer walk in the hot sun. After completing the two difficult years of his contract — years peppered with the nonpayment of promised wages, ceaselessly difficult living conditions in the labor camp, combative frictions between different ethnic components of the company's workforce, no overtime pay, and difficulty extricating himself from the job — Sam finally returned to Nepal. Reenergized by the possibilities and with a small savings of three lakh rupees (\$2,700) from his years abroad, he opened a digital photography lab in a small city on Nepal's southern lowlands. He struggled with this business for five years, but Madheshi unrest on the Terai and the unreliable supply of electricity again torpedoed his efforts. With little opportunity for remunerative work at home, Sam again looked outward for opportunity. This time he sought his fortunes in New Delhi, but the low salary failed to sustain him and his

⁹ A pseudonym chosen by him.

family. He enquired again about work in Qatar, and shortly thereafter Sam found office work in a reputable sales company in Doha. He departed for Qatar a second time in 2017.

In the eight years since we last encountered each other, Sam and his wife had another child. Although his return to Qatar again left his family in South Asia, his placement was much better this time. He now works in a well-appointed office, and like many other middle class migrants, he daily encounters a diverse array of people. At work he interacts with other Nepalis, Sri Lankans, Indians, Filipinos, Egyptians and, occasionally, Qataris. Beyond the office he encounters a broader spectrum of difference. His flat is a relatively new three bedroom apartment, and he shares his bedroom with an Indian migrant employed at the same company. Although his accommodations were vastly improved in comparison with the labor camp where we first met so many years ago, he was excited about my request to return to the Industrial Area. After calling a friend with a small truck, we drove another twenty minutes to the fringe of the city, plunged into the heart of the Industrial Area, and parked near the Al-Attiya Market. There, as we strolled through the buzz of activity on a Friday afternoon, we reminisced about our times together a decade ago, how our families have grown, and how happy we were to see each other again.

This synopsis — a field note of sorts, about both a person and a place — provides a springboard for the points I wish to make about cosmopolitanism and the urban milieux of Arabia and beyond.

2 Reading for a cosmopolitanism from below

Cosmopolitanism has long evaded the precise definition that many seem to desire. Discussions of this imprecision commence many contributions to this enduring scholarly conversation. But through the Wittgensteinian lens — a lens unconcerned with precision, and instead focused on the common ground shared by various definitions — discussions of cosmopolitanism's meaning(s) orbit around a set of recurring features. Hannerz portrayed this gravitational core as “an intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences”.¹⁰ Zubaida similarly described a cosmopolitan as the sort of person, “at home in different milieus and who has wide interests across cultural and national boundaries”.¹¹ More recently, Wessendorf articulated the concept with greater brevity as an “ethos of mixing”.¹² In various definitions and usages, then, one foundational feature of cosmopolitanism is this attitudinal compass — the openness to encountering alterity and difference that might yield what Appiah usefully termed a *spiritual confraternity*.¹³

Perhaps it is the curse of this Wittgensteinian embrace of definitional imprecision that allows previously discarded connotations to linger in the ambit of the concept's contemporary meaning. Of cosmopolitanism's various lingering connotations, certainly the most significant is the concept's longstanding association with mobile, Western elites. Craig Calhoun famously termed this take on cosmopolitanism the “class consciousness of frequent travelers”.¹⁴ Counterarguments have been sustained and multifaceted, but the image of cosmopolitanism as the privileged cultural emanation of a Western elite continues to resonate in scholarship, and also in the

¹⁰ Hannerz, “Two Faces of Cosmopolitanism: Culture and Politics”, *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 107.3 (2005), p. 200.

¹¹ Zubaida, “Cosmopolitanism in the Middle East”, in Meijer (ed), *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East* (1999), p. 15.

¹² Wessendorf, “Commonplace Diversity and the ‘Ethos of Mixing’: Perceptions of Difference in a London Neighborhood”, *Identities* 20.4 (September 2013).

¹³ Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (2005), p. 18.

¹⁴ Calhoun, “The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Towards and Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism”, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.4 (Fall 2002).

branding strategies pursued by cities and other entities in the neoliberal era (see Pagès-El Karoui, this issue). The analysis provided in this paper rejects this simplification of cosmopolitanism, and instead portrays its manifestations in other contexts, geographies, and social classes. Before continuing, those counterarguments might be usefully disentangled into three overlapping sets of assertions, all of which pertain to the cosmopolitan urbanism observed in this essay.

First, scholars have untethered cosmopolitanism from its Western moorings, and furthermore, from its longstanding association with Immanuel Kant and the Enlightenment.¹⁵ In his consideration of urban life in the Ottoman Empire of the 19th century, for example, Eldem discerns a “Levantine cosmopolitanism” in the relations found in the Ottoman Empire’s cities.¹⁶ Gupta, meanwhile, perceives cosmopolitan relations in the port cities comprising the Indian Ocean World — that vast regional theater of interaction that not only predated the Enlightenment by many centuries, but that also incorporated the Qatari peninsula and the entire Arabian littoral.¹⁷ Gilroy is similarly attentive to the mobilities fostered by the sea: through the life experiences of Olaudah Equiano, Phillis Wheatley, Bob Marley, and others, Gilroy envisions the “rootless cosmopolitanism” that emerged in the transnational space of the black Atlantic.¹⁸ This essay joins this longer tradition envisioning cosmopolitan conditions in diverse historical and geographical settings.

Secondly, numerous scholars have tussled with the class boundaries delineating who might count as cosmopolitan. Breckenridge and her coauthors, for example, claimed that at the turn of the millennium, “[r]efugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community”.¹⁹ From that same vantage point, Hannerz urged us to look “more closely for the small signs of banal, or quotidian, or vernacular, or low-intensity cosmopolitanism” in more varied dimensions.²⁰ Attention to the diversity of people engaged in cosmopolitan-style encounters and relations, all amidst expanding transnational mobilities and our collective suffusion in a globalizing mediasphere, has bequeathed an array of terms and concepts that together signal a collective attempt to grapple with the diversity of cosmopolitan actors: discrepant cosmopolitanism, everyday cosmopolitanism, banal cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitanism from below all come to mind.²¹ Indeed, Karen Exell’s more recent (and insightful) work continues to tussle with these class sensitivities by conceptually bifurcating cosmopolitanism into “elite” and “everyday” forms.²²

All of this work suggests that the preconditions for a cosmopolitan ethos no longer follow the boundaries and limitations of class, race, gender, religion, or geography, if they ever did. Rather, in the post-Fordist landscape of flexible accumulation, the transnational mobilities that allow the

¹⁵ Meijer (ed.), *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East* (1999); Breckenridge et al. (eds), *Cosmopolitanism* (2002).

¹⁶ Eldem, “Istanbul as a Cosmopolitan City: Myths and Realities”, in Quayson and Daswani (eds), *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism* (2013); Meijer (ed.) *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East* (1999).

¹⁷ Gupta, “Globalisation and Difference: Cosmopolitanism Before the Nation-State”, *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3.2 (November 2008).

¹⁸ Gilroy, *Against Race* (2002), p. 115.

¹⁹ Breckenridge et al. (eds), *Cosmopolitanism* (2002), p. 6.

²⁰ Hannerz, “Two Faces of Cosmopolitanism”, p. 212.

²¹ Clifford, “Traveling Cultures”, in Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies* (1992), pp. 96–112; Beck, “Cosmopolitical Realism: On the Distinction between Cosmopolitanism in Philosophy and the Social Sciences”, *Global Networks: A Journal of Transnational Affairs* 4.2 (March 2004); Kurasawa, “A Cosmopolitanism from Below: Alternative Globalization and the Creation of a Solidarity Without Bounds”, *European Journal of Sociology* 45.2 (August 2004).

²² Exell, *Modernity and the Museum in the Arabian Peninsula* (2016).

quotidian encounters with difference are less an elitist privilege, and more commonly a basic requirement of employment for many. Indeed, for some they are simply a condition of survival. Both of these contentions about the nature of cosmopolitanism — that its geography and its historical footprint have been highly variable, and that the conditions undergirding cosmopolitanism are not limited to a particular class — obtain for the tens of millions of transnational migrants at work on the Arabian Peninsula. But the post-Fordist landscapes also point to a third and final assertion concerning cosmopolitanism, for they suggest that in the contemporary global mediasphere, encounters with difference seem a feature of everyday life, even for those not on the move. In some sense, the preconditions of cosmopolitanism are now indistinguishable from mobility itself.

In summary, research concerned with transnational migrants and non-Western urbanism increasingly deploys this view from below to point to the cosmopolitan ethos that percolates in those contexts.²³ Doha's Industrial Area is another example of this grounded, quotidian cosmopolitanism, envisioned as a basic social and cultural praxis for these migrants. For Americans perhaps more than others, these cosmopolitan encounters and interactions are harder than ever to see. Tainted by its contemporary emphasis on race and racial difference, the American social prism sees homogeneity in a scene like the one presented here (see [Figure 1](#)) — a legion of South Asian men defined primarily by their race and by their oppression. But the simplification inherent to that ethnocentric social prism eclipses the conditions of cosmopolitan diversity therein: Chetris encountering Tharus far from home; Malayalee encounters with Pashtun northerners; Indians gauging Pakistanis in the flesh for the first time; Indian Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims together in a labor camp; Bangladeshis assessing new contingents of Vietnamese labor migrant arrivals; Nepali and Egyptian migrants navigating life in a friction-filled set of dormitories; and so on. Even if the endpoint of a cosmopolitan ethos and the openness to difference it entails — that attitudinal compass — does not result for every transnational migrant, the preconditions are certainly evident in this place, in these photos, and in Sam's multiple experiences in Doha.

3 A logic for segregated cosmopolitanism

The city commonly serves as the backdrop for analyses of cosmopolitanism — as a place where cosmopolitanism might be observed, where it might grow, or where it might perhaps even flourish. But in the broader legacy of cosmopolitan theorizing, the spatial infrastructure necessary to foster the cosmopolitan ethos is often elided. There are, of course, notable exceptions. Anderson, for example, identifies particular spaces in central Philadelphia, contact zones he terms cosmopolitan canopies — spaces that “provide an opportunity for diverse strangers to become better acquainted with people they otherwise seldom observe up close”.²⁴ Still others have extended these spatially-grounded analyses into history. The Levantine cosmopolitanism Eldem discerns arose amidst the *millet* system, the Ottoman arrangement that, “allowed for the coexistence of

²³ Tarrus, “Europe without Borders: Migration Networks, Transnational Territories and Informal Activities”, in Drieskens, Mermier, and Wimmen (eds), *Cities of the South: Citizenship and Exclusion in the 21st Century* (2007); Scharrer, “‘Ethnic Neighborhoods’ and/or Cosmopolitanism? The Art of Living Together”, in Wacker, Beck, and Crepez (eds), *Refugees and Forced Migrants in Africa and the EU* (2018); Marfaing, “Living Together and Living Apart in Nouakchott”, in McDougall and Scheele (eds), *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa* (2012).

²⁴ Anderson, *The Cosmopolitan Canopy: Race and Civility in Everyday Life* (2011), p. 276; also see Thiollet and Assaf, “Cosmopolitanism in Exclusionary Contexts”, *Population, Space and Place* 27.1 (June 2021) for an insightful discussion of Anderson's assertions.

different religious and ethnic communities” while ensuring the boundaries and distinctions between them were maintained.²⁵ In contemporary research concerned with migrants in the city, scholars are increasingly focused on those migrants’ location in the city and relations between various urban communities therein.²⁶ Many of these topics coalesce in Helene Thiollet and Laure Assaf’s recent article and in their insightful discussion of *segregated cosmopolitanism*.²⁷ Like much of this work, my analysis explores how migration, difference, and segregation in urban space interact in the production of the cosmopolitan ethos.

Undoubtedly, the socio-spatial segregation of foreign residents is a definite and recurring feature in all of urban Arabia. Qatar’s Industrial Area can be conceptualized as a space of segregation, as with the other “bachelor cities” and foreign residential zones that pepper the suburban fringes of the metropolitan area. These spaces are exclusionary, they are integral to the maintenance of the hierarchies of difference that characterize diversity on the peninsula, and they are key factors in the non-integration of foreign workers in Qatar. When peering into the logic that results in migrants’ spatial segregation, one can readily perceive how some of the forces at work are intentional in nature: members of the migrant working class are, for the most part, assigned their residences by their employer-sponsors, and the locations of those residences are the subject of top-down policy-making and urban planning in the city.

But those purposeful forces coalesce with other segregatory forces that also merit our attention. A brief consideration of these other forces will help better conceptualize the relationship between cosmopolitanism and migrants’ segregation in the space of the city, and leads to an iconoclastic reversal: in his seminal analysis of Dubai, Davidson suggested that while the city might be conceived as a multicultural space, segregation and enclaving disallow the cultivation of a cosmopolitan ethos.²⁸ I suggest the opposite here. In the contemporary era of unprecedented mobility, only through enclaving, segregation, and the spatialization of foreign matter in urban landscapes of Arabia can the diversity of cultures present in the city be territorialized enough to flourish.²⁹ For labor migrants shuttling back and forth across transnational divides, these cultural enclaves facilitate their mobility, and as urban spaces, they help *maintain* the differences that are the premise of cosmopolitan encounters.

Because low wage migrants in Doha are most commonly assigned accommodations by their employers, their segregation in urban space is often a condition imposed upon them. However, in other migrant destinations (such as the United States), the free real estate market built around individual “choice” produces a similar demographic topography: migrants and other marginalized components of society are invisibly guided to the very same spatial results. Less desirable locations are, by market logic, the most affordable locations to rent. In Doha, market and non-market conditions coexist: while most labor migrants’ accommodations are assigned by their employer, some middle class migrants (and a small assortment of the migrant working class) are left to obtain their own accommodation (see [Figure 2](#)). In short, while segregation in the landscape of the city may be imposed, the invisible hand of the

²⁵ Eldem, “Istanbul as a Cosmopolitan City”, p. 217.

²⁶ Tarrus, “Europe without Borders” (2007); Scharrer, “‘Ethnic Neighborhoods’ and/or Cosmopolitanism? The Art of Living Together” (2018); Marfaing, “Living Together and Living Apart in Nouakchott”, in McDougall and Scheele (eds), *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa* (2012).

²⁷ Thiollet and Assaf, “Cosmopolitanism in Exclusionary Contexts” (2021).

²⁸ Davidson, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success* (2008), p. 192.

²⁹ Dresch, “The Place of Strangers in Gulf Society”, in Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and al-Mutawa (eds), *Globalization and the Gulf* (2006), pp. 200–222.



Figure 2: Advertisements for roommates pepper exterior walls in some parts of Doha (2018) [photograph by the author].

market is another contributing force to the socio-spatial segregation of migrants in the city, including Doha.

The spatial sorting of the free market oftentimes interacts with migrants’ self-segregation in the city. This self-segregation is observable on a variety of different scales — much of this process is practical and commonplace in nature, and it resembles the ephemeral place-making with which is Alsayer concerned.³⁰ In labor camps, for example, migrants working under the same employer typically have the freedom to arrange themselves by room, and thereby congeal around similarities such as language, culture, and religion.³¹ Similarly, in the real estate market for rentals, advertisements explicitly establish national, religious, or ethnic exclusions (see Figure 2). This same impulse for self-segregation is visible on Fridays in the parking lot around Al-Attiya Market, where sidewalks and corners are commandeered in the micro-geography of migrants’ homelands: migrants hailing from near Lumbini gather on one particular corner, Tamil men from Vizag gather on another, Sri Lankans from the northern province on the next, and so forth (see Figure 1). Indeed, the social scene that blooms every Friday on this asphalt moat resembles the ethnic footprints we see in the social landscapes of global cities, where those intrepid first migrants, a migrant business or two, perhaps a few restaurants, the subsequent chain migration that sometimes follows, and the passage of time together yield neighborhoods that “belong” to particular migrant communities. These diasporic nodes in the fabric of the city provide new migrant arrivals with a linguistically and culturally familiar waypoint and an array of social resources that oftentimes prove vital in navigating an unfamiliar city and society. Diasporic cultures territorialize portions of the urban landscape.

³⁰ Alsayer, “The ‘Right to the City’ in the Landscapes of Servitude and Migration, from the Philippines to the Arabian Gulf, and Back”, in Linhard and Parsons (eds), *Mapping, Migration, Identity and Space* (2019), p. 301.

³¹ Hosada’s detailed and insightful analysis of the Filipino community in the UAE capably portrays this self-segregation, and emphasizes the role of religion in that process. See Hosada, “Survival Strategies and Migrant Communities in the Arab Gulf States: A Case of Filipino Workers in the UAE”, in Ishii, Hosada, and Horinuki (eds), *Asian Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf States* (2020), pp. 172–193.

integrity. The spatial segregation of migrants and citizens in the social landscape of the city helps maintain the cultural assemblages that compose the palette of cultural diversity. Through this logic, we can envision how the socio-spatial segregation of diverse migrants in the global city actually fosters the conditions of cosmopolitanism.

4 Concluding thoughts

In this ethnographically-informed journey through peripheral Doha, I've sought to connect low wage migrants' quotidian experiences and everyday lives with the conceptual legacy of cosmopolitanism. From some angles, the migrant working class's lived experience resembles what I have sometimes termed a "cosmopolitanism from below", thereby linking my observations to a longer thread in the scholarly extrapolation of cosmopolitanism. But the presence of those cosmopolitan conditions in an array of historical contexts, as well as the proliferation of terms that seems to have accompanied the discernment of cosmopolitanism in non-Western contexts, suggests that perhaps no modifiers are needed at all. The experiences of this transnational proletariat are, simply, cosmopolitan in nature. Indeed, one outcome of this line of analysis is fairly clear: we might productively separate the global landscape of inequality and our pressing, manifold critiques of it from our assessment of the cosmopolitan ethos. This seems the most straightforward and digestible portion of the argument presented here.

More challenging, I think, is the additional contention at the foundation of this analysis: that migrants' segregation in Doha sustains cosmopolitan conditions. With this assertion, the analysis presented here joins a handful of other scholars concerned with mobility, migrants, and non-western cities.³⁴ In Nouakchott, for example, Marfaing observes that "the heterogeneity and complementarity of different groups create a way of living together, side by side, coexisting".³⁵ Amidst an era of heightened mobility fueled in part by the very resource that underpins the Arabian Peninsula's extraordinary wealth, I have tried here to focus attention not on the forces by which these foreigners are consigned to particular locations in the city, but rather to the gravity by which similar people congeal in the urban landscape, and sometimes cling together. At various scales and at various times, many migrants choose to be with their own kind. Moreover, culture is not simply an individual's attribute, nor merely a feature of one's identity that's carried across borders. Rather, culture is a *collective* project whose integrity is greatly enhanced by spatial coherence, and is perhaps even dependent on it.

In my estimation, this line of analysis points to several significant ethnocentricities deeply woven into our estimation of the cosmopolitan ethos. Foremost amongst them is the centrality of integration to the conceptualization of cosmopolitanism. In this essay and the other contributions in this issue, cosmopolitan interactions proliferate in urban cities where integration is discouraged. The enduring centrality of integration in our thinking about cosmopolitanism speaks to the intellectual hegemony of Western renditions of the concept, and the ongoing reliance on empirical contributions from Western cities. Another form of ethnocentricity might be recognized in the sorts of difference to which the moniker of diversity is attuned. The concept of diversity is particularly hegemonic in the West, but seems to connote different notions in various contexts. In portions of Europe, the concept of diversity often emphasizes religious difference;

³⁴ E.g. Tarrus, "Europe without Borders" (2007); Scharrer, "'Ethnic Neighborhoods' and/or Cosmopolitanism? The Art of Living Together", in Wacker, Beck, and Crepaz (eds), *Refugees and Forced Migrants in Africa and the EU* (2018); Marfaing, "Living Together and Living Apart in Nouakchott", in McDougall and Scheele (eds), *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa* (2012); Gupta, "Globalisation and Difference" (2008).

³⁵ Marfaing, "Living Together and Living Apart in Nouakchott", p. 195

in North America, the social prism through which diversity is grasped emphasizes race. Other vectors of difference — nationality, ethnicity, tribe, caste, and even class — are muted or otherwise disregarded by these ethnocentric emphases.

This line of analysis also suggests that our long and sustained discussion of cosmopolitanism remains bound to the spatial infrastructure of a previous era. In that previous era, the mobilities that brought differences together were noteworthy exceptions to the more fixed landscape of culture and place. Behind those cosmopolitan interactions that initially garnered scholarly attention (and oftentimes solidified a class-specific understanding of cosmopolitanism) were places, sometimes distant, that were spatially integral to the cultivation of cultural difference. But considering the mobilities and movements characteristic of our time, the spatial infrastructure integral to the cultivation of cultural difference can no longer remain an unexamined premise in our conceptualization of cosmopolitanism. Rather, by turning the ethnographic lens upon the quotidian experiences of migrants in Qatar, one can perceive the centripetal forces by which migrants, visitors, travelers, and others coagulate in the urban landscape of the city. For some of these migrants, the majority of their lives are spent on the move, away from home. From their vantage point, the archipelago of sometimes-familiar culture encountered far from home — in enclaves, segregated spaces, and other such forms — is welcome and valued amidst the mobilities characteristic of the contemporary era.

Finally, the global pandemic arrived in Doha just before the final revisions were made to this essay. A handful of reflections bear mention. First, and perhaps obviously, COVID-19's rapid ascendance to pandemic status was borne on the same mobilities and conduits that shuttle transnational migrants, tourists and travelers to places like Doha. Second, in the analysis provided here, the enclaving and residential segregation of various groups in the urban landscape is already a complicated social fact: that segregation both reflects and reaffirms the hierarchies and differences in Qatar, while simultaneously undergirding the maintenance of cultures in diaspora, thereby preserving the differences that cosmopolites might encounter. But those segregated urban spaces have also been a tool that Qatar (and numerous other states around the globe) have used in combating the pandemic. The majority of Qatar's first wave of infections were in the densely inhabited Industrial Area, and between March and August of 2020, migrant residents there were cordoned off from the rest of the city. This illuminates another mercurial aspect of the socio-spatial segregation discussed in this analysis, and affirms that foreign workers' segregation in the urban landscape is a complicated and multifaceted social fact.

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