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THE RELATION BETWEEN SPACES AND CULTURAL CHANGE: SUPERMALLS AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN QATARI SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This study is the first attempt to ethnographically assess the influences of supermalls on cultural change. It takes a first step toward enhancing our understanding of the influences of globalization and consumer culture as drivers of the social and cultural changes to Qatar's traditional society, to similar cultural configurations in the Middle East, and to global cultural diversity. This study found that there are changes in the patterns of behavior and the daily lives of the two studied groups, which were particularly evident for those living proximate to the supermall. For example, living near Villaggio changed family eating habits because many families preferred easily cooked or fast food at the supermall to cooking at home. Changes to relationships within and among households were observed. For example, with the advent of the Villaggio, visits between families in their homes became less frequent, and individuals now stroll through the supermall, watch movies at the cinema, and engage in Western activities, such as ice skating. In sum, Villaggio has helped to bring significant changes to the ways that families entertain themselves and spend their leisure time.

The findings of this study reveal the depth of the social and cultural changes experienced by members of traditional Doha society because of the influence of globalization. supermalls have become a sensation in their effects on the lifestyles of Qataris, particularly with respect to shopping and socializing practices. We conclude that many aspects of cultural diversity and cultural identity are threatened by supermalls because they could gradually eclipse the symbols and values by which Qataris understand their culture and tradition. The analysis found specific themes regarding cultural and social change regarding national identity, social status, social practices, family life, and the social geography of the city.

KEYWORDS: Shopping supermall, Doha, Qatar, cultural change, consumerism, consumer culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Qatar's economic growth is largely due to its oil and natural gas industry. One result of this peninsula nation's extraordinary wealth has been commercial urban development. In the context of globalization, this has led to an obvious transformation of Doha's marketplace, with hydrocarbon wealth fueling infrastructural modernization, economic growth, and industrial expansion. Therefore, Qatar, along with its neighbour states of the Arabian Peninsula, has emerged as an important geographic and significant symbolic location for grappling with the social and cultural effects of globalization (Al-Buainain, 1999).

From the perspective of many Qatari citizens, wealth and the immersion in the global economy led to widespread adoption of Western cultural practices and orientation toward acquiring material goods through consumerism (Fromherz, 2012). Yet, the cultural, demographic, and social setting in which Qataris have encountered this consumer model are unique and merit special attention. About 74% of Qatar's population lives in Doha (Population Census, 2010), and it is a highly heterogeneous urban population. Because of transnational mobility and migrants' place in the Qatari labour market, the urban population comprises a wide diversity of cultural, national, and class backgrounds. This suggests that multiculturalism will be the central feature of Qatari culture in the coming decades.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In some ways, a shopping supermall is an "indoor version of the traditional marketplace, where people would go to buy goods from local farmers and craftsmen." (Abaza, 2001). The term "supermall" refers to the huge size of contemporary consumer agglomerations (supermalls) with its roots in the beginning of the 20th century. In 1916, the first shopping supermall was built in the United States. During the 1950s, large indoor shopping supermalls began to spring up in major cities around the world, famously in Paris and London (Goss, 1999; Underhill, 2004). The shopping supermall model became almost formulaic in the 1980s, whereby an appropriate proportional mix of anchoring department stores and smaller specialized shops was guaranteed to generate lucrative revenues for developers and supermall operators. Supermalls played an important part as semi-public spaces and places where a consumption-oriented global middle class was acculturated (Khalaf, 2006).

In short, supermalls are one or more buildings comprising multifaceted consumer spaces serving numerous purposes, such as shopping, cinema, re-

laxing, and socializing. Supermalls generally have overlapping pedestrian pathways that allow visitors to walk from unit to unit and attached parking areas. Joseph (1996) focused his definition of supermalls on their role as public spaces where people can communicate and meet with each other. Miller *et al.* (1998) studied British shopping supermalls and suggested that the supermall "provides an active and independent component of identity construction [that] highlights the importance of space and place for consumer identities as well as the cultural practices of shopping" [1]. Other scholars have pointed out that these consumer spaces are locations that offer protection from pollution and nature (Freitas, 1996).

Shopping supermalls and the consumer culture are also tied to the growth of a global and cosmopolitan middle class (Bloch *et al.*, 1994; Mowen and Minor, 1995; Vadakepat, 2013). Scholars have paid attention to the dynamics and constitution of this middle class since Max Weber presented his social class theory. Today, much of the scholarly effort is directed at unraveling the complexities of the emergence of middle class culture in less developed and/or non-Western contexts (Blanc, 1997; Liechty, 2003; Mankekar, 1999).

Scholarly investigation of the middle class culture and its proliferation around the world generally assumes that its package of practices and meanings originally developed in Western Europe and the United States (Robbins, 2005). However, there is less agreement about its proliferation, particularly in non-Western societies. One strand of scholarship considers consumerism and middle class society through the neo-Marxist and colonial lens, envisioning consumer culture as a thoroughly Western lifestyle that has been exported to other parts of the world and is, inevitably, reworking those traditional societies into its own image (Browsimmer, 2002; Lundgren, 1988; Ritzer, 2008). In contrast, some scholars take nuanced perspectives on the proliferation of consumer society, particularly focusing on the syncretic and hybrid nature of the global/local interaction. These scholars suggest that the global and cosmopolitan consumer culture is untethered from its Western roots and that the ways that people relate to global consumerism vary from region to region (Mazzarella, 2003).

Shopping supermalls and the consumer culture they drive are also perceived as components of contemporary urban structures. Analyses are tied to the theoretical development of urban studies and to the anthropology and sociology of the city. The directions taken by scholarly research in this regard are disparate, but they include scholarship that points to the proliferation of non-places junk-spaces, and oth-

er modern spaces that are disconnected from their settings, but constitute a seamless global network (Auge,2009; Koolhaas, 2001).

These spatial forms, in airports, supermalls, as quasi- spaces, are believed to be an erasure of the local and a material form of expansion of placeless cosmopolitan modernity associated with the global middle class. Theoretically, these beliefs are inspired by perspectives that conceptualize globalization as a Western phenomenon because of the homogenous qualities of these spaces and places and their disconnect from that which is local. Beyond that basic premise, the scholarly literature concerning urban space and globalization clearly indicates that supermalls are important spatial and symbolic locations in cities around the world, including the Middle East (Abaza, 2001; Khalaf, 1992).

3. HISTORY OF SUPERMALLS IN QATAR

Supermall culture in Doha has grown at an incredible pace. Doha’s supermalls’ international attractiveness is self-identified as cultural places where people of all ages can interact and socialize (Bansal, 2012). Figure 1 and 2 show the locations of supermalls in Doha.

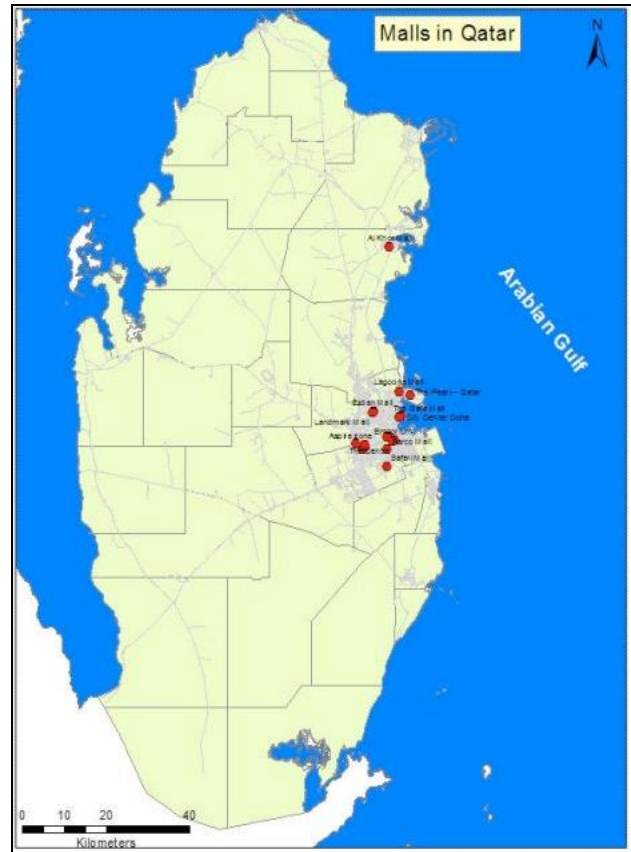


Figure 2. Locations for Malls in Qatar

Doha’s first shopping supermall was “the Center.” Inaugurated during the mid-1980s, the Center provided an unparalleled shopping experience in Doha for the first time. Since then, its success has led to more shopping supermalls in Qatar, such as the Supermall [2], City Center Doha [3], and Landmark Supermall [4]. Other well-known supermalls are Hayyat Supermall, Royal Plaza, Centrepoint (Al Asmakh Supermall), The Gate Supermall, Lagoon Supermall, Al Khor Supermall, Hyatt Plaza, and Ezzan Supermall [5]. This study uses the Villaggio Supermall (Villaggio) [6] as a case study.

The Villaggio opened in 2006 in the Aspire Zone located in Doha’s west end. It comprises a total surface area of 120,000 m2 and includes about 220 retail stores, a large food court, numerous restaurants and cafés serving diverse cuisine, and a special section for luxury brands. The supermall is designed in a Venetian theme, with a 150 m canal that boasts a gondola boat ride to transport and tour visitors through its fascinating atmosphere. The supermall has a 13-screen IMAX cineplex that can screen 3-D (and 4-D) films. It includes Gondolania, which is an indoor amusement park with rides and games for children of all ages, and an ice rink. Villaggio hosts an average of 42,000 visitors daily. Villaggio Supermall has become a place where Doha residents interact for shopping, sports, and entertainment and,

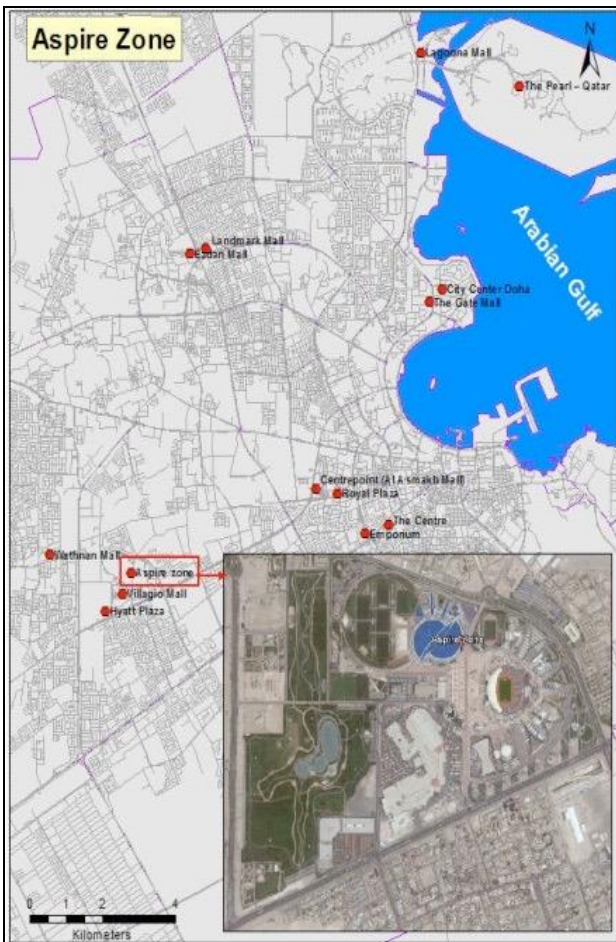


Figure 1. Aspire zone for Malls in Qatar

as such, it is an exciting cultural center. Thus, it is an important phenomenon to understand, particularly in the conservative society of Qatar, which is dealing with the cultural changes prompted by the influences of globalization.

4. METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This project took an ethnographic approach as an ideal investigative strategy. Drawing on ethnography's multifaceted and holistic perspective, this study aimed to understand the functions and meanings that the Villaggio supermall holds for Qatari citizens.

Numerous ethnographic research techniques were employed to produce a broad set of visual, qualitative, and quantitative data. First, a survey questionnaire was designed and pretested on 10 Qatar University students, followed by broad administration on Qatar University students to assess young adults' attitudes, opinions, and perspectives on shopping supermalls in Qatar, on consumer culture, and on contemporary Qatari identity.

Second, an interview schedule was created for semi-structured ethnographic interviews. These interviews were conducted with two groups of participants: (1) students at a Qatar University campus and (2) householders of families living in the neighbourhoods proximate to Villaggio. The participants of both groups were chosen using a convenience snowball sampling strategy. For the student participants, the interviews were conducted at Qatar University. For the neighbourhood residents, the interviewers visited the participants' homes and interviewed the homeowners. To obtain participants, the interviewers requested introductions to other proximate families as potential participants. The interviews provided a unique perspective on Villaggio and consumer culture in Qatar.

In addition, the research team visited Villaggio several times (after obtaining official consent from Villaggio administrators) to document the supermall with photographs. The team photographed the supermall's layout, the stores, and people in the supermall. All of the photographed subjects who were clearly identifiable provided their consent. All of the images were coded and classified by topic, such as consumer behaviour, entertainment, food, relationships between people apparently from different generations, family relationships, and gender relationships. The team conducted a content analysis of these images and they were linked to direct observations that focused on the same topics (as well as other phenomena related to shoppers' behaviours). The ethnographies and content analysis strategies helped illuminate the relationships among the sets of data across all of the components of the study.

Last, direct observational techniques were employed, which yielded another unique data set for analysis. The investigators observed shoppers, shops, and ongoing activities to capture aspects of behaviour that reflected social change to the traditions and customs of the Doha community. Particular attention was paid to the variation in gender relations expressed in the supermall.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. *Qatari Experiences with Villaggio Supermall*

Portions of the overall data set were analyzed with attention to the nature of the Qataris experiences with the shopping supermall and its place in the rapidly evolving social context of contemporary Qatar. The results of this varied data set are described here. We commence with a description of the data gathered by the project's survey, and then turn to a combined presentation of the observational and photographic data collected by the research team.

The average age of the survey respondent was 20 years, largely as a result of the project's sampling frame (college students) and their familiarity with the technology of the internet-based survey. Respondents were screened to ensure they were Qatari citizens, thereby enabling the project to directly explore the role of the supermall amongst the Qatari citizenry. Approximately 75% of the survey respondents were male, and most self-identified as members of the middle class. More specifically, 37.5% of the respondents reported monthly incomes above qar 15,000 (usd 4109) [7].

When asked the frequency of their visits to Qatar's array of supermalls, the overall pattern was one of frequent visits. Almost all of the respondents (86.4%) reported visiting shopping supermalls two or three times per week as part of their regular social activities. Similarly, precisely two-thirds of the respondents (66.7%) reported spending an average of two to three hours at the supermall per visit. Approximately half of those visits reportedly occur in the evening, with smaller percentages of those visits reported in the afternoon (24%) or at other times (26%). Villaggio supermall, the case study selected from the broader constellation of shopping supermalls in contemporary doha, was noteworthy in other ways. When respondents were asked about their supermall preferences, 66.7% reported a preference for Villaggio. This should be compared with the 16.7% who reported a preference for landmark supermall, and another 16.7% who reported a preference for city center supermall.

Survey respondents also noted that they typically visited shopping supermalls with their families. While at the supermall, the primary activities in which they were engaged were diverse, and no clear patterns emerged from the responses. In the survey results, responses were somewhat evenly divided between activities such as purchasing clothing, visiting restaurants, viewing films, and sitting at indoor coffee shops. Finally, almost all respondents were asked to identify their preferred attire at the supermall. Almost all reported wearing traditional Qatari attire for these visits.

Overall, these descriptive data convey some of the limitations of these data: young men comprised the majority of respondents, and all respondents were young adults. However, these data also reveal some basic aspects of how shopping supermalls fit in Qatari society. Typical young Qataris visit these supermalls frequently, to the point where they appear to be a quotidian aspect of Qatari youth's lives. In contemporary doha, these shopping supermalls are the site of significant leisure time, socialization, and consumer practices.

In supermall conjunction with the survey, the research team frequently visited Villaggio supermall at various times of the day to gather a variety of observational and photographic data. These data included observations about visitors' behaviors, and photographs of a constellation of visible aspects of the supermall space. From these data, and using the methods of content analysis, the research team identified a set of key themes that resonate with existing social and cultural analysis of shopping supermalls in other settings around the world. Those four themes are presented and described here.

The first theme identified by the research team concerned the linguistic and cultural norms of global consumer culture. As a whole, the Villaggio supermall addresses a diverse set of cultural expectations and needs, an aspect of the supermall and its cultural representation that clearly reflects the diverse demography of contemporary Qatar. These diverse cultural messages are set amongst an variety of spectacular activities and attractions that push beyond the contextual norms of Qatar. For example, the ice skating rink in the supermall hosts an activity with which Qataris have no indigenous or traditional knowledge or experience in the hot, arid environment of the peninsula. Indeed the temperature itself is the essential novelty of this attraction. Similarly, the canals and gondolas, which seek to echo iconic aspects of Venice, again provide a spectacular diversion that has no place or referent in traditional Qatari culture.

As the photographic data and other observations reveal, the diverse cultural space of Villaggio

supermall articulates no particular cultural moorings: American, Lebanese, or European cultural fragments are visible, but none are hegemonic. The names of the various shops in the supermall are posted in both English and in Arabic, which serves not only for purposes of recognition but should also be recognized as the supermall's function of translating brands and brand culture between cultural and linguistic frameworks. This bilingual semiotic practice is a ubiquitous form of cultural integration that appears to be an integral aspect of Villaggio and other Qatari supermalls. This semiotic translation serves to project these brands and the meanings that surround them into the diverse cultural frameworks that the variety of Qatari residents bring to the supermall.

The second theme identified by the research team from these data concerned the specific social function and place of Villaggio's cinema. Although modern cinema has been an available option in Qatar since the 1970s, the country's first cinemas were not broadly popular in Qatari society, as women were largely prohibited from pursuing leisure activities outside the house. With the proliferation of cinemas, most of which are anchoring features of shopping supermalls in contemporary doha, and with the coinciding shifts and evolutions of Qatari women's place and comfort in the public sphere, supermalls, cinemas have emerged as central features of quotidian Qatari life in doha. As the research team observed, cinemas often serve as activities for entire Qatari families, and are often coupled with other consumer activities – buying foodstuffs and other household goods, patronizing restaurants, or mingling with acquaintances and friends. These ancillary activities reflect the anchoring role that these cinemas serve for the shopping supermall, and are a central feature of the encompassing, total consumerist experience Villaggio and other shopping supermalls seek to achieve. Shopping supermalls, with a variety of spaces and consumerist activities available to visitors, can accommodate both the individual-as-consumer, as well as the variety of other social configurations that visitors bring to the supermall. The cinema and the supermall's capacity to facilitate and host this broader array of social configurations and groupings is a noteworthy feature of these modern spaces of consumption. Supermall

Villaggio's role in providing alternative options and contexts for new forms of Qatari socialization was particularly apparent in these data. The third theme identified by the research team centered on the social function of Villaggio's abundant restaurants and coffee shops. Most of these cafes and restaurants are franchise outposts, and multiple

forms of the project's data revealed these locations' frequent use by Qatari family units of various configuration (see figure 3). In the broader context of Qatari tradition and the persevering social norms, Villaggio and other shopping supermall's restaurants and coffee shops have allowed Qatari men and women to interact and spend time together in public space. In this sense, these commercial spaces in the quasi-public space of Villaggio provide a liminal zone whereby Qatari men and women are free of the shame, embarrassment, and critical glances that would accompany such social behaviors in Qatar's previous eras.



Figure 3. Qatari families socializing in a coffee shops in Villaggio supermall

In short, these eating and drinking spaces function to free visitors from the norms of social constraints that are observable in other public spaces in contemporary Qatar. In many of the images collected for this study, there is evidence that the Qatari community generally accepts this new phenomenon. In a sense, these social behaviours and spaces replace the traditional customs in which men met in the majlis (a private space for receiving guests, usually male, and for conversation) for debate (Obydan and Al-Mohanadi, 2012), talking with each other, while women stayed inside the private portions of the house. The gendered spatial segregation typical of Qatari social tradition is not observable or practices in the quasi-public space of Villaggio.

The final and fourth theme identified from these data sources concerned foreign customs and attire. Similar to the spread of international and cosmopolitan restaurants and coffee shops, Villaggio has also been a central location for the introduction and proliferation of foreign fashion trends. The shops broadcast a new set of norms to the Qatari citizenry by introducing western and cosmopolitan fashions. These fashion norms are primarily projected in window displays.

Concurrent with the projection of these fashion norms, however, the data confirmed that Qatari citizens maintain their traditional, national attire in the new spaces provided by Villaggio and in other

shopping supermalls (see figure 4). This was observed for young and old alike. Occasionally, alternative attire was observed; for example, some young male Qataris arrived at the Villaggio wore western-styled pants, and it is widely understood in Qatar that many women who consume these fashions display them beneath customary *abayas*. In fashion, in particular, there is strong evidence of the ways that tradition and a cosmopolitan rendition of modernity have blended in contemporary Qatar.



Figure 4. Illustrates Qatari wearing traditional attire; woman wear abaya and men wear thub and kutra

5.2. Semi-structured interview results (results with young adults about the past)

We were interested in the interviewees' perspectives on how the supermall had changed their lives. We asked them what social life in Qatar was like before the construction of the supermalls and how they spent their leisure time before the supermall. Here are two responses to these questions:

In the past and before the construction of supermalls, we used to spend leisure time at the gardens or by Doha corniche, or at homes of the parents and relatives, to socialize with members of the family.

I used to spend my time playing football, swimming and visiting relatives [and the interviewee recognized Villaggio and the other supermalls as places where] youth would leave behind their past traditions in spending leisure time and which is contrasted with the complexities of the modern era.

The interviews with students revealed a variety of opinions on the background of Qatar before the supermall. Many of the respondents suggested that Qatar was simpler then. They stated that Qatar was a place where young adults spent their leisure time outside playing football, and they pointed to the cohesion of families and relatives in the past. They generally noted that leisure time in the past included more time with parents and other kin. The young adults stated that they are attracted to supermalls more than family now because supermalls provide numerous social activities, such as eating, entertainment, browsing, and relaxing. As a result, the supermalls seem to be quite influential to changing

young adults' leisure activities. Before the construction of Villaggio and the other supermalls, Qatari people spent their leisure time in cultural, sport, and scientific clubs, visiting relatives, or walking along the corniche. These traditional activities grew less common with the advent of supermalls like Villaggio.

5.2.1. Impressions of Villaggio

We asked the interviewees for their impressions of Villaggio and they replied that Villaggio did not come as a surprise because of the existence of shopping supermalls before Villaggio. However, going to Villaggio was special because visitors can go to aspire park and shop at the same location. They also pointed out that Villaggio is different from the other supermalls. An interviewee stated,

"Villaggio supermall is my favourite, and everyone is content there, because all the needs of the family are there – thus, there is no need to waste time looking at other places, because everything is combined together in one place at Villaggio [so] it stays busy seven days a week!"

The same interviewee also told us how she felt about the space of the supermall, stating,

"i am impressed by the architectural design and general atmosphere of the supermall complex in general, which is characterized by efficiency and vitality [and] while it is true that there were other supermalls, Villaggio alone has the magnitude, excellency and determination of the internal and external as well." (interviewee)

The connections between the supermall's physical space and the psychology of individual experience were stated in several interviews. For example, another interviewee noted,

"Villaggio was a fundamental change in the nature of complexes and method of construction, for it showed progress in the state and the beginning of change in the Qatari social on a psychological level through entertainment and allowing time to break the routine of the day. At the social level, wives now accompany their husbands and children to the supermall, and eating out in front of people without any concerns about this being wrong". (interviewee)

Our interviews also covered topics on the presence of shops, brands, and comprehensive consumerism at Villaggio. Many interviewees noted that Villaggio has a so-called foreign character. This foreign quality was described in numerous ways, but they all included the idea of an ongoing presence of new commodities, the presence of large specialized stores (like virgin), and an orientation toward a cosmopolitan youth culture. An interviewee told us that Villaggio:

"brings together a large number of shops, and can satisfy all tastes, both young and adult besides providing a suitable atmosphere for buying and selling. ... further-

more, Villaggio would be a possible new destination for tourists, because of its architecture and it provides everything in one place – to eat with the family, to escort the children, to go with friends to the cinema, and to eat dinner away from the hot weather".

However, many of the interviewees pointed out negative aspects of Villaggio. An interviewee noted that,

"it seems that young people are going to Villaggio as a habit without a specific goal – not for shopping or even for recreation, just to waste their time! ... Villaggio does not reflect the traditions of Qatari culture; therefore, tourists would not view evidence of the Arab Islamic culture and its traditions in this compound. Its nature is purely westernized".

Another interviewee noted that, *"Villaggio composes global companies as there is no local shop or even a bazaar to sell Qatari antiquities or souvenirs for tourist and visitors."*

5.2.2. Villaggio and expenditures

An interviewee noted,

"I think Villaggio will affect the level of expenses because young Qatari people are buying many things they may not need, objectively speaking. One may go for coffee and find himself buying something he doesn't need only because he saw his friend or another costumer doing so!"

Although Villaggio serves people at many different income levels, there are special seasonal prices and sales when the prices are lowered to cater to lower-income people in Qatar. For example, an interviewee praised Villaggio for *"offering cheap prices that serve all classes -- it is therefore not differentiating between levels of income."*

5.2.3. Cultural contradictions and Villaggio

The interviewees also pointed to many cultural contradictions produced by the presence of Villaggio, which may best be represented by the foreign fashions in Villaggio's shops. Qatari people might not inherently feel drawn to these fashions, but when they become available in the shops, they buy them and then dress accordingly. Many of the interviewees stated that the images and advertisements on the shops' facades contradicted Qatari traditional culture.

The presence of particular foreign elements at and near the supermall seemed to be culturally troubling for many of the interviewees. For example, Ahmed Salem stated that, *"the noticeable large number of Asian labor[ers] causing family harassment in a way, that is why we may consider allocating days for singles and other days for families."*

Similarly, an interviewee told us,

"no one denies that cultural conflict exists, like language, as we find that most of the banners and ads feature

foreign language, and the staff who are working there are foreigners. Even on entertainment level, there is a cultural conflict -- the skating game is unrelated to the Arab world and thus was not known to us".

Another interviewee noted that, "the storefronts and advertisements never include women wearing an abaya or a gown: if a woman followed the fashion modelled in these advertisements, people would look at her as an alien in her own motherland" and an interviewee, for example, commented that, "Qatari girls are influenced by western fashion."

When asked about the future, the interviewees had much to say. One interviewee noted that Qataris had come to "expect new forms of leisure activities to be introduced through the supermall space." Another interviewee regarded Villaggio as an "emblem of the nation's modernity."

An interviewee recognized this and stated that, "i feel disappointed when "Villaggio is referred to as a symbol of Qatar, however, i would feel proud when people say that Al-Zubara and/or souk waqif are the symbols of Qatar interfacing to the outside world."

Another interviewee told us that,

Villaggio has a strategic location, it is a psychological comfort for all residents of nearby areas, especially Rayyan, Maither, Aziziyah, as it provides quick and easy access to groceries and other amenities to nearby members of the Qatari community

5.3. Semi-structured interview results (results with families proximate to Villaggio)

Nine family householders living near Villaggio were interviewed. Four families lived in Bossedra (the family of Umm Hamad 1, Umm Jassim, Umm Hamad 1, Umm Saud), three families lived in Ein Khalid (Umm Ghanim, Umm Abdullah, Umm Hamad 2), and two families lived in Aziziyah (Umm Mohammed 3 and Umm Jassim). All of the family residences were adjacent or proximate to Villaggio and all the families have lived there for between 14 and 30 years. The families ranged in size from seven to 15 people. We learned in the interviews that these families experienced a constellation of social and cultural changes resulting from living near Villaggio. Although the interview data were varied, below we present some of the major patterns that recurred during the interviews.

5.3.1. Thinking about the past

The interviewed householders were asked about their customs and social habits to better understand changes that they may have experienced upon the establishment of Villaggio near their homes. The extended family was the foundation of Qatar's social organization in the past. That family form persists today, although much of the new housing construc-

tion is aimed at the housing needs of the nuclear family. Even so, the new types of houses are combined with each other to suit traditions. One respondent, noting that her house is close to her husband's family's houses, observed, "my neighbours are my husband's family." Although clustered in single-family homes, the proximity of residence reinforces many families' traditional residency patterns, even in the areas near Villaggio.

In the past, the mothers in these families carried out the home responsibilities. For example, Umm Ghanim's daughter said, "we are depending on the mother at home." Furthermore, Umm Mohammed 1 said, "there is no maid in our house." However, Umm Abdullallah showed us her housemaid and noted that "a reliance on domestic servants in some of the responsibilities is normal here."

Neighbourhood relations are important to Qatari families, as reported by Umm Ghanim, who noted that today, as in the past, "the neighbour [comes] before the house." Umm Jassim echoed this sentiment stating, "to cooperate with neighbours and share with each other in joy and sorrow" is virtuous. The women of these households still use the daily rhythm of prayers to measure time and pace their daily activities. We observed this when we asked the interviewees about the times of waking, sleeping, and visiting. Umm Abdullah, for example, indicated the time of a recent visit as occurring "after the alar prayer."

All of the women we interviewed reported wearing abayas when in public, and the men reported wearing thub and kutra with alakal in public. Umm Abdullah told us that, "inside the house, women wear jalabiyas, but outside the house it is abaya [and] underneath the [abaya a] skirt and shirt." Umm Hamad noted, "our dress is the same inside the house or outside, but the difference is wearing the abaya for going outside". Umm Hamad stated, "dress is customary – abayas" when outside the house. Although the families in these neighbourhoods were from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, their attitudes toward traditions and appropriate behaviour regarding attire and social norms were homogenous.

5.3.2. Life after Villaggio

The interviews with the families living near Villaggio clearly suggested that there were substantial social and cultural effects of Villaggio. The interviews' contents demonstrate the ways that daily life has changed. When asked to explain the meaning of these changes, however, the families seemed to be ambivalent and, although they reported some concerns about the presence of Villaggio, they noted that the supermall has benefitted aspects of their lives.

Many of the interviewed families' concerns were practical. For example, living near Villaggio was a significant hardship in terms of traffic and crowds. Some of the interviewees told us that the pace of daily life had changed because they were going to the supermall before going home to their families. Umm Ghanim stated, "*we now delay returning home to visit this supermall near our house!*" Other interviewees told us that they were eating many more meals out. Um Hamad noted, "*after the construction of Villaggio, we eat in restaurants more often – especially dinner!*" Umm Mohammed 2 and Umm Jassim confirmed this trend, stating that, "*we eat in restaurants now instead of at home.*"

The changes to the pace of daily life produced by Villaggio were portrayed as changes to neighbourly relations. As one interviewee noted "*there are no longer strong relationships among neighbours*". However, the link between this change and the presence of Villaggio was not clear to them, as one interviewee noted, "*it is possible that this change has shifted our commitment to our house and neighbourhood, in that many of the neighbours are now strangers.*" Another interviewee explained that, "*visiting neighbours require making a date – no longer do families just stop by at their convenience.*" Moreover, whereas many of the interviewees told us that they were surprised and concerned about the construction of two large shopping supermalls in their neighbourhoods (Villaggio and Hyatt supermalls), many stated that they were pleased by that development.

Regarding attire, some of the families were allowing their daughters to wear pants and jeans, which had not been permitted in earlier times. Umm Abdullah told us that her children must wear pants – jeans and a shirt, long to the knee, and they must wear the *abaya* on top when we go outside. [she explained that] "*[[]adies pants were rarely displayed in shops until mid-nineties. However, after opening such supermalls most of the stores are exhibiting various kinds of pants and jeans, where girls began to wear them as a result of their continued display, this was a fundamental change in women's dress, although they carried on wearing the abaya over the trousers*". (Umm Abdullah, interviewee)

We observed this practice and combination of clothing to be a normative contemporary expectation of young adults, although some interviewees stated that some families do not allow their daughters to follow this standard. Some families reported that their customs regarding attire have not changed and that they do not allow their daughters to wear trousers.

We asked about the number of times that the families visit Villaggio each week. Many interviewees reported once a week, which seemed to be a general

pattern of behaviour. Umm Jassim said that the reason for regularly visiting Villaggio was "*to find entertainment at coffee shops, restaurants, and markets.*" Umm Hamad explained that visiting the supermall varied among family members, which is a change to the cultural norm in which family members were together in the evenings. She stated, "*these visits change the time at which they return home: families may go to the supermall from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm, while others may not return to the home until 11:00 pm.*"

Villaggio played an important part in the lives of the children in the area. Traditionally, children played in the interior courtyards of their houses; since Villaggio and the other supermalls arrived, they play in the child-designated areas and spend leisure time watching movies at the cinemas. This was a widespread perception shared during the interviews.

Although Villaggio offers many optional activities, it also serves as a necessary location for shopping. Families purchase many of their groceries from Carrefour (the large, international grocery store at Villaggio), and they use the pharmacies in the supermall for regular purchases. They told us that they shop there for clothing, footwear, and games, as well as spending recreational time in the coffee shops and cinema. These families confirmed that they need these complexes, particularly Villaggio, because of proximity to their homes, the amenities for their family members, and the ability to meet many other family needs.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Shopping supermalls and national identity

Monumental architecture, in the form of hotels, universities, museums, mosques, and other grand infrastructural projects, has been recognized for its provision of key symbols through which national identity is constructed (Khalaf, 2006). From this perspective, Villaggio and other supermalls can be understood not as contested spaces or sites of new social practices, but as emblems of cosmopolitan modernity functioning on the global stage. The commodities that are displayed and sold in these supermalls and the supermalls themselves, are the seamless non-places described by Auge (2009) that unify the region through a global and cosmopolitan index of modernity. The shopping supermall therefore functions in the collective national identities being constructed and re-imagined around the Gulf (Auge, 2009).

These themes were reinforced by the results of this study because it was evident that Villaggio (and, by extension, the other supermalls) represent important beacons of cosmopolitan modernity and, in

that sense, they represent Qatar to the many visitors and temporary residents who arrive daily on the peninsula. Therefore, Villaggio's symbolic role in Doha is entwined with the national identity of the Qatari people, an identity that has been re-imagined in relation to the cosmopolitan spaces and places described by Auge (2009) and Koolhaas (2001).

6.2 Shopping supermalls and social status

Although we interpret the influences of Villaggio and, by extension, the other Doha supermalls as intricately entwined with the collective identity of the Qatari people, our results also suggest that these supermalls are central sites for the production of new individual identities. The scholarly literature suggests that supermalls and the commodities purveyed within them provide some sort of method by which they convey meaning to identity that can be recognized across cultures. In other words, purchasing particular brands of goods, such as handbags, watches, clothing, jewellery, and the like, allow individuals to construct new identities that can reinforce existing class distinctions and divisions in a traditional society. Social status is then partially represented by displays of consumer taste (Bourdieu, 1987). The ability to navigate the complex and globally produced meanings of these commodities is a marker of social class.

The results of this study reinforce this theme and suggest additional conclusions that extend the notion. Although the qualitative research components of this study point to complex and intricate meanings associated with particular products and brands, it also suggests that these new meanings have not replaced traditional relationships in Qatar; rather, these two ways of thinking and behaving coexist, perhaps uneasily, with each other. Our interviewees overwhelmingly recognized the meanings of these products and their implications for daily life, and they clearly articulated the ways that these meanings and products are used to represent social status in Qatar. However, many interviewees portrayed this system as a complement to the pre-existing and traditional system by which social status was derived, based on family name, tribal affiliation, and achieved statuses.

6.3 Shopping supermalls and social practices

Another theme emerged from the analysis of interview content and observation. This theme suggests that large shopping supermalls in the region function as spaces for new social practices. As quasi-public spaces, shopping supermalls provide for interactions between groups of people that otherwise might not interact. In the longstanding scholarly discussions concerning the significant differences be-

tween private and public space in Middle Eastern societies, shopping supermalls represent a liminal, or in-between, space that allows groups of people to observe and interact with each another in ways that were previously not part of daily life in traditional Arab society. Considering the contemporary demographic complexity of Qatar and the Gulf States, the changing dynamics of social practices produced by these new quasi-public spaces is even more pronounced.

The study's results highlighted new social practices. First, shopping supermalls provide quasi-public spaces in which Qataris and middle class foreigners mix and interact. These interactions can be specifically understood as comprising interactions among ethnic groups, national groups, and religious groups. Our results also point to increased interaction and mixing of groups from different nationalities, a process that is occurring in schools, universities, and workplaces throughout Qatar. Finally, shopping supermalls provide spaces in which the traditional normative gender relations in Middle Eastern society are being challenged and reformed.

6.4 Shopping supermalls and the social geography of the city

In her seminal article on Doha and residential space, Nagy (2004) explained the connection between familial and tribal membership with the social geography of the modern city. Although Nagy's (2004) description is one of a handful of scholarly studies on this socio-spatial phenomenon, the social geography of the Gulf city is a widely recognized and public topic among citizens throughout the Khaleej (Gulf). Generally, many tribes and families maintain their associations with particular neighbourhoods in the city. This spatial sense of belonging traces its roots to traditional urban life in the region, to land grants over the previous century, and to the ongoing desire to maintain spatial proximity of the extended family (Nagy, 2004).

The traditional urban spatial geography of Khaleeji (Gulf) residential patterns was in flux for much of the 20th century. However, the vast infrastructural modernization plans and urban development schemes characteristic of the last decade in Doha dramatically and significantly reconfigured the social geography of urban life in the city. This study's qualitative aspect included interviews with householders residing in the neighbourhoods proximate to Villaggio and revealed the symbolic influences of the supermall through its disruption of traditional residential patterns, congestion, and crowding, and, surprisingly, the convenience it provides for shopping and access to amenities. The results found that Villaggio is famous for expanding peo-

ple's spatial range of activities in Doha and it has established itself as a favourite destination for families. Many of the interviewees who were proximate residents perceived the supermall as an entertainment destination and a testament to the achievements of Qatar and its people.

7. CONCLUSION

Supermalls like Villaggio provide windows through which we might better see the consumer and cultural phenomena that result from people's exposure to the existence and extension of new consumer practices and, more broadly, the influences of cultural globalization [8] (Jamala et al., 2006; Menon, 2009). This study found that there are changes in the patterns of behaviour and the daily lives of the two studied groups, which were particularly evident for those living proximate to the supermall. For example, living near Villaggio changed family eating habits because many families preferred easily cooked or fast food at the supermall to cooking at home. Changes to relationships within and among households were observed. For example, with the advent of the Villaggio, visits between families in their homes became less frequent, and individuals now stroll through the supermall, watch movies at the cinema, and engage in Western activities, such as ice skating.

In sum, Villaggio has helped to bring significant changes to the ways that families entertain themselves and spend their leisure time. The study results imply that young and older adults perceive these changes from the ways that they conceptualized their experiences and from their behaviours regarding women's attire and family eating habits.

NOTES

[1] see works of the French sociologist Freitas (1996) comparing shopping malls in Brazil.

[2] see <http://www.themalldoha.com/en/sections/overview/overview>

[3] see <http://www.citycenterdoha.com/shopping-e>

[4] see <http://www.landmarkdoha.com/aboutus>

[5] see <http://www.qatartourism.gov.qa/en-us/thingstodo/shopping/shoppingmall.aspx>

[6] see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/villaggio_mall

[7] see (household expenditure and income survey, 2014) for more detail about Qatari household income.

[8] to understand the effect of multi-cultural consumer behaviour in Gulf markets cf. Uae market (Menon, 2009).

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Regarding communities and social relations, older adults tend to be more aware than younger adults of the consequences of rapid change, and younger adults are generally impressed with the shifts in types of daily activities, consumer behaviours, and new forms of entertainment.

Members of Qatari society tend to cling to symbols of cultural identity, such as attire, language, and gender norms. However, the presence of supermalls like Villaggio and the sociocultural changes associated with their presence will most certainly continue to play a strong part in shaping the future of Qatari society. It is likely that members of Qatari society will continue to navigate their traditions through the cosmopolitan modernity presented to them in supermalls like Villaggio and, therefore, the supermalls will continue to play a central and iconic part in the construction of contemporary Qatari identity. The findings of this study reveal the depth of the social and cultural changes experienced by members of traditional Doha society because of the influence of globalization. Supermalls have become a sensation in their effects on the lifestyles of Qataris, particularly with respect to shopping and socializing practices. We conclude that many aspects of cultural diversity and cultural identity are threatened by supermalls because they could gradually eclipse the symbols and values by which Qataris understand their culture and tradition. This study takes a first step toward enhancing our understanding of the influences of globalization and consumer culture as drivers of the social and cultural changes to Qatar's traditional society, to similar cultural configurations in the Middle East, and to global cultural diversity.

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