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Setting the conditions for going global: Dubai's transformations and the Emirati women

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Abstract This study investigated how the rapid transformation of Dubai has affected the forms and shape of Emiratis' consumption. Analysis of participant observations, projective techniques and existential phenomenological interviews with Emirati women living in Dubai uncovered ambivalence about economic power and loss of traditions and strategies for going global including embracing local capital, brand selection and spatiotemporal restrictions. The discussion notes that the global is something that is locally constructed whereby the locals play a key role in developing global structures of common difference.

Keywords Dubai; glurbanisation; glocalisation; global consumer culture; identity; globalisation; instant city

Introduction

The question of identity – of who we are and how we define ourselves as opposed to others – plays a crucial role in our interconnected world (Friedman, 1990; Hall, 1994; Wilk, 1997). It is important to the globalisation process that identity is neither fixed nor a given but is now understood to be constructed through the interplay between institutionalised models of identity and localised articulations (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). Although extensive literature discusses the relationships between globalisation, consumption and identity, empirical studies of the meanings people ascribe to consumption in the context of 'instant cities' (Davis, 2007; Junemo, 2004) remain particularly scarce. Unlike cities such as New York, London or Paris that have gradually been shaped, instant cities such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates (UAE)), the island state of Bahrain and Doha (Qatar) are the result of extraordinarily fast urbanism and global flows (Acuto, 2010; Bagaeen, 2007; Elsheshtawy, 2008, 2009). The paucity of consumer research addressing consumers' materialisation of cultural identity in instant cities is surprising, given that a city such as Dubai with a population of 2.1 million in 2013 is a vital powerhouse in the global economy and is expected to attract 15 million visitors per year by 2020 (Bagaeen, 2007; Balakrishnan, 2008; Elsheshtawy, 2008, 2009).

This article considers the rapid transformations that have occurred in Dubai and questions how these changes have manifested in the Emiratis' consumption practices.

Thanks to surging income from oil, economic restructuring and intensive development, Dubai has rapidly transformed itself into a dreamworld of conspicuous consumption (Acuto, 2010; Bagaeen, 2007; Balakrishnan, 2008; Cherrier 2012; Davis, 2007; Elsheshtawy, 2008, 2009; Gottdiener, 2011; Hirst, 2001). In 2007, Bagaeen (2007) describes Dubai as the third largest re-export centre after Hong Kong and Singapore. In the context of an instant city like Dubai, what are the forms and shapes of consumption as experienced by the locals? How are the locals adapting to their new urban global environment in which hyper-consumerism is emphasised? As a minority in a country of expatriates, guest workers and tourists, how do forces of Arab Bedouin identity, post-911 Islam, wealth and Western modernity combine to affect these consumption practices? Based on participant observations, projective techniques and existential phenomenological interviews conducted with Emiratis living in Dubai, this study uncovers the perspectives, meanings and behaviours brought to bear when expressing the Emirati identity. Particular attention is paid to how Emiratis consume and how they materially express their identity in response to Dubai's rapid economic, cultural, spatial and social transformations. The following section reviews the literature on the triad of globalisation, glocalisation and glurbanisation. Next, the methodology and findings are explained. The discussion concentrates on the construction of Emirati women as actors who help to form the conditions for going global by embracing local capital, selecting brands and setting spatiotemporal restrictions. These conditions set at the local level permit the construction of a particular version of the global, one that responds to the desires of these Emirati women to participate in the global within their unique cultural and economic environment.

Globalisation, glocalisation and glurbanisation

Globalisation draws attention to the flux, flows, mobility and movements of people, ideas and commodities across the globe. Appadurai (1996) popularised the notion of global flows by describing globalisation as a series of flows: people, finance, ideas, technology and the media. It is clear in Appadurai's thesis that global flows dispel the idea that cultures are fixed, definite and geographically bounded. The past offered place and locality, but the present is marked by placelessness and flows, resulting in contemporary cultural and social spaces that are radically different from those of the past. As such, Appadurai frames globalisation around notions of disjuncture, fracture and deterritorialisation. Focusing on flows across national boundaries, Appadurai contends that the 'cultural shape will have to alter, as configurations of people, places, and heritages lose all semblance of isomorphism' (p. 46). The meanings of *local, home, community* and *identity* are thus inevitably transformed.

In line with Lyotard's (1984) incredulity about metanarratives, theorists seize upon the term glocalisation to highlight how global flows are experienced and negotiated in day-to-day lives at the microlevel (Durrschmidt, 1997; Friedman, 1990, 1992; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006; Robertson, 1994, 1995; Salamandra, 2002; Thompson & Arsel, 2004). Sustained in the catchphrase 'think globally, act locally', examples of glocal articulations are common in the marketing literature. Business managers develop brands that emphasise a regional experience of globalisation (Cayla & Eckhart, 2008). Travellers from the West seek 'exotic' experiences and local authenticity as a commodity of global tourism, even as many locals seek global

modernity (Friedman, 1990). Starbucks' globalisation of coffee houses gives rise to personalised meanings combined with hostile resistance against big businesses (Thompson & Arsel, 2004). Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) note the glocalisation of a youth culture shaped by young consumers rearticulating global youth into local versions. The glocalisation perspective thus enables us to understand how consumers can receive the benefit of global goods whilst perceiving that they are upholding local traditions and values (Eckhardt & Mahi, 2004; Wilk, 1995).

However, things are not that simple. As Friedman (1990) notes, ethnic and cultural fragmentation on the one hand and modernist homogenisation on the other are not opposing forces today as much as simultaneous realities. Different cultures embrace one or both identity-constitutive realities to different degrees. He finds, for example, that fashion-sensitive Congolese men consume the fashions of former colonialist Parisians in order to strengthen their identities as modern global consumers, whilst the Ainu minority in Japan reinvent their traditions in order to strengthen local identities that cater to attracting tourists. And native Hawaiians seek to retain their traditions in the face of overwhelming populations of neo-colonialist locals and global tourists. In other words, different environmental forces lead to different mixes of global and local, different patterns of 'traditional' and 'modern' consumption and different understandings of what is global and what is local. Thus, for example, Coca-Cola appears widely around the world, but takes on different local meanings in the Congo (Friedman, 1990), Trinidad (Miller, 1998) and Papua New Guinea (Foster, 2008).

But the fact that there is no global homogeneity of meanings does not mean that there is no global hegemony. Friedman and Friedman (1995) point to the production of regionally targeted 'African cloth' in Germany and the Netherlands as suggesting the 'production of local difference on a global scale' (p. 135). Wilk (1995) analyses the phenomenon of beauty pageants in Belize as illustrative of 'global structures of common difference'. Here, the contestants and criteria differ from elsewhere in the world generating national pride as well as feelings of participation on the national stage by adopting the beauty pageant competition just as other countries do. Thus, the form rather than the content of the event is the hegemonic influence. Difference in content and meaning is sought as distinguishing factor at the same time that global conformity is embraced in the broader forms. Wilk (1997), for example, finds that different ethnic groups within Belize distinguish themselves by insisting that 'they like red beans, we like black beans'. Again, the form is constant, but the content differs and signals local identity.

Recent work on processes of urban development under conditions of globalisation argues that locals not only localise the global but also are active participants in the construction of the global. Jessop and Sum (2000) developed the term *glurbanisation*, a term combining *global* and *urbanisation*, to capture how cities in a globalising world undergo urban transformation and play a role in globalisation (Matusitz, 2010a, 2010b). According to the theory of glurbanisation, globalisation is not imposed from above but rather happens from both above (by nations, multinational corporations) and below (by locals), thus taking place within local traditions (Matusitz, 2010a, 2010b; Stock, 2011). For instance in Dubai, the rise of mega-malls with Western shops is organised by rulers, investors and global companies, but the survival of the malls and their various shops is determined largely by locals. Jessop and Sum distinguish glurbanisation from glocalisation, describing the latter as

a strategy that exploits local differences in order to enhance global participation, whilst glurbanisation is a strategy pursued by cities (enactors of globalisation) to valorise and/or fix their local capital. Glurbanisation collapses the global and the local as it emphasises how cities and their urban transformations are actors or agents of globalisation with robust local identity that other cities may adopt:

> The Glurbanization model emerged from the fact that cities are increasingly exposed to global competition; now, they aspire to develop their place-based dynamic competitive advantages. (Matusitz, 2010a, p. 8)

From a glurbanisation perspective, the locals, that is, 'groups or communities such as neighbourhoods, municipalities, suburbs, regions, and urban zones' (Matusitz 2010b, p. 10), can fix local capital and, in the process, steer their locality towards becoming global and influence process of globalisation. Once again we see the differentiation of global structures of common difference but at the level of localities rather than ethnicities or nations.

Studying the Emirati women in Dubai

This study, which took place in Dubai, analysed the consumption practices of Emirati women, the particular meanings of objects and consumption practices affiliated with being an Emirati woman, and their perceptions of the past, present and future of Dubai. Importantly, and in contrast to Ger and Belk's (1996) study on the impact of global consumer culture on the consumption patterns of the 'less affluent world', this study focused on the consumption of Emirati women, one of the wealthiest groups in the world. The choice of Dubai responded to the need to consider the effect that almost-instantaneous environmental, economic, demographic and cultural transformations have on local consumers' consumption behaviours.

Since the discovery of offshore oil in 1966, Dubai has evolved from a small fishing village to a city of 'immigrant population, which, proportionate to the natives, is the highest in the world' (Hirst, 2001). In 2008, the local population was estimated at 10%, whilst the majority of the Dubai residents consisted of Asians (66%), followed by Arab expatriates (16%) and Westerners (8%) (Elsheshtawy, 2009). In an article published in *Le Monde Diplomatique* in February 2001, Hirst (2001) profiled Dubai as 'a global city, yes, but definitely not a melting-pot, more a new polyglot'. Along with the predominant foreign-born population, the thousands of international companies in technology, banking, fashion, construction and media (amongst others) that move to Dubai every year, the impressive large-scale air-conditioned shopping malls, theme restaurants, world-class retailers and luxury hotels offering bars and nightclubs (Elsheshtawy, 2008, 2009) ensure Dubai's unlimited access to global consumer culture (Balakrishnan, 2008; Gottdiener, 2011). With its 'cathedrals of consumption' (Ritzer, 1999) and unique constructions – such as the world's largest shopping mall, the Dubai Mall, which features an ice-skating rink and a shark-filled aquarium; the iconic Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest hotel; the Palm Jumeirah, the world's largest man-made island; and the Mall of the Emirates, which features an indoor ski facility accommodating up to 1500 customers – Dubai has rapidly developed an identity that is distinctive in a saturated destination tourist market. Following Baudrillard, these Disneyfied sites and spectacles are not presented as instances of historical realism; they instead represent new public spaces based on

artificially manufactured experiences and global commodities (Balakrishnan, 2008; Baudrillard, 1994; Cherrier & Murray, 2004; Elsheshtawy, 2008). They are instead hyperreal and are welcomed in that spirit. Having achieved recognition as a world-class tourist destination, a hub for commerce and a shopping mecca after only 20 years of rapid development, Dubai has recently been classified as an instant city (Bagaeen, 2007).

Methodology

The first part of the data collection consisted of participant observation (Hirschman, 1986). As a participant observer, the first author resided for 22 months on a university campus in Dubai, lecturing to Emirati and non-Emirati students. This long-term immersion enabled to establish relationships of trust and to observe the behaviours and actions of young Emirati women living in Dubai (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). The focus on Emirati women was aided by the researcher's gender. Men would have had a difficult time interviewing, much less gaining candour amongst these women. As a woman, the researcher developed stronger connections with the Emirati women than with the men. Whilst taking notes, the researcher periodically observed Emirati women interacting in the university cafeteria, library, gymnasium, swimming pool and classrooms. In following Hirschman's (1986) suggestion for humanistic inquiry in this research, the researcher aimed for empathy and intuitive observations. The strong relationships established with the Emirati women enabled to observe the informants during shopping trips, in beauty salons and at their personal residences. The researcher was also invited to participate in the Islamic festival Eid al-Fitr with one of the informants and her relatives.

Along with ethnographic observations and interviews, a projective technique was used. The use of the projective technique enabled informants to discuss identity without concerns about the social desirability of their responses (Lindzey, 1961). As part of their university course, 122 students were asked to construct collages depicting 'the life of a student in Dubai'. The students were instructed to use materials of their own choosing and to include any information they deemed relevant to the assignment. The respondents wrote a report of two to five pages in length giving their reasons for including each image and explaining the relative importance of their presented images. Of the 122 students, 12 were local Emirati women.

The aim in the first stage of the analysis was to identify general points of difference between the Emirati women and the non-Emirati women. In the second stage, general themes were identified by specifically exploring the issue of local versus global in terms of products/brands and traditions/customs. Special attention was paid to the placement of the images within the collage and the corresponding discussion of the images in their accounts. The third stage of the study consisted of existential phenomenological interviews with 15 women who were Emirati nationals and who had lived in Dubai all their life. Based on the findings from the analysis of the collages, the focus of the interviews evolved around the notion of beauty, the female role in society, hobbies and daily consumption practices.

Existential phenomenological interviewing as a means to understand consumption behaviour and the role it plays in the identity position exists in narrative psychology

(Crossley, 2000; McAdams, 1997; Plummer, 1995) and consumer behaviour studies (Cherrier & Murray, 2007; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). Thompson et al. (1989) were the first to introduce existential phenomenology interviewing within interpretive consumer research, emphasising that narratives reflect an individual's lived experience and that each narrative story is intertwined with a specific context. This methodology involves three central concepts: intentionality, emergent dialogue and hermeneutic endeavour (Thompson et al., 1989).

For this study, the participants were considered the experts and questions beginning with 'why' were avoided. Indeed, the focus was on the Emirati participants' biographies and experiences, not in reasons, rationality or objectivity. The dialogue started by asking grand-tour questions: 'What is your experience as a consumer living in Dubai?' 'How would you describe your lifestyle?' 'What does it mean to be an Emirati woman in Dubai?' When conducting the interviews, probes, without being too directive, were used to keep the informants on topic, focusing on their experience of living in the global emirate of Dubai. Although informants were allocated a pseudonym and assured of anonymity and confidentiality, some were reluctant to have the interview recorded on audiotape. An attempt to use videotaped interviews would have encountered even greater resistance because of long-held taboos on visual images in Islamic culture and because of fear that the images might be shown to men outside of the woman's *mahram* (close male relatives). This fear is also seen in the mandatory checking of cameras and cell phones at wedding receptions in Dubai. On occasions where recording permission was denied, the researcher took notes during the interview and wrote as many details as possible about the interview after meeting with the informant. The duration of each interview was between one and three hours.

The analysis of the verbatim text followed a hermeneutic endeavour, emphasising part-to-whole relationships (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997; Thompson, 1997). The text was analysed from the perspective of identity positions. In considering informants' identity positions, identity is understood as multiple, shifting and relational, rather than static and unitary. The aim with the analysis was to unravel these identity positions by considering the ways in which the informants ascribe meanings to their consumption experiences in a global environment and form a sense of self through interactions with others.

The analytical process began by reading the transcript of the interviews one time through. This gave a sense of the entire text as it relates to identity. After this initial reading, intratextual analyses began (Thompson, 1997). At this stage, the focus was on interpreting the plot of each story. Plot involves narrative movement and narrative framing (Thompson, 1997). Narrative movement gives a story a sense of temporal sequence – like chapters in a book – or of processes leading to a destination (McAdams, 1997). For each informant, there was a sense that their story was going somewhere; there was a sense of past, present and future – that their story was building towards a finale. Narrative framing is the process of selecting and highlighting certain details out of the field of experience (Polkinghorne, 1988; Thompson, 1997). For this stage of the analysis, each informant's story was interpreted and written in the researcher's own words.

The next stage in the analysis involved reading across the stories to search for common story lines. The purpose of intertextual analysis is to move up a level in abstraction and to begin to interpret themes. The triangulation technique combining ethnographic observations, projective techniques and existential interviews confirmed and enriched the themes discussed in the following.

Findings

Ambivalence about economic power and loss of local traditions

All informants were reflexive about Dubai's rapid transformations. On the one hand, Dubai is one of the seven UAEs, its national language is Arabic and its foundations are based on Islam. On the other hand, the rapid transformation of Dubai has marked the city as a world-class tourist destination where individuals can benefit from services provided in English and from goods, brands and consumption experiences similar to those in Western countries (Balakrishnan, 2008; Elsheshtawy, 2008). The ethnographic work confirms that Emiratis living in Dubai are exposed to other consumers, marketers and products no longer representative of one nation, one ethnicity or one cultural domain.

In the informants' narratives, the economic, cultural, spatial and social transformation of Dubai creates mixed feelings. Reflecting on consumption practices and the construction of the 'spectacular' Dubai (Elsheshtawy, 2008, 2009), most of the informants associated the economic benefits of Dubai's expansion with an uncertain future. For some, such as Maitha, the instant transformation of Dubai is *sad for our culture*:

> Dubai is not what it used to be. Before, we had calm streets and less people. I used to know most of the people, like we should. Now, all the people and the cars are making our city too crowded. All the pictures in the malls have bad influence on our children. I see my daughter wearing too much make-up and high heels, and I feel sad, sad for our culture, sad for our people.

Similar to Appadurai's (1996) notion of disjuncture, Maitha discusses a disconnection from the past, a once-familiar Dubai now *too crowded*. The past–present disconnection offered by Maitha is rooted in a complex set of factors that included observing her relatives speaking and integrating English at home, congested traffic and the commercialisation of traditions and rituals, such as the celebration of Eid al-Fitr (the Islamic fast-breaking festival). When discussing the Islamic festive season, Maitha expresses a strong scepticism about global consumer goods available in Dubai and explains that the multiple cartoons, movies, dolls and new creative abaya (gown) designs available during Eid al-Fitr are *a little too much*. She remembers celebrating Eid al-Fitr around the importance of Sadaqah al-Fitr (donations to charity), prayer and gifts – mostly for children.

The pace of change is rapid. Suaad is concerned that although young Emirati are no longer wearing the abaya for religious reasons:

> It's really good [the abaya] because it is something that is in the Islam and something that lets the people to, like, especially the girls these days they don't use it usefully; they just put it for design and that's a bad thing because they are ruining the original religion of Islam; people should start wearing abaya or else they are gonna regret it in the future.

Suaad expresses an apparent suspicion about the urbanisation and modernisation of Dubai. In fact, the abaya is an invented tradition and the 'traditional' covering for Muslim women varies widely from country to country (e.g. Tarlo, 2010). But as a highly visible part of culture, especially since the '911' attacks in 2001 and the backlash against Muslims that has spawned a revival of covering, the abaya and the

shayla (head covering) have become key symbols of Islamic culture in the Middle East even as they evolve their own fashion trends.

For many informants, the facts that foreign-born populations now outnumber the local-born and the availability of Western goods is increasing raise concerns about the preservation of local traditions. Laila speaks about the local contextual difficulties of preserving her community's culture in the economically powerful city of Dubai:

> Our Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum has done great things for Dubai. Fifty years ago, nobody would have heard of Dubai and now everyone knows about Dubai and its economic power. We are very strong and powerful, but I feel that our culture sometimes is not respected. For example, when I go with my friends to the walk at Jumeirah Beach Residence, it is not my culture anymore. There all so many expatriates, I am sorry to say, who do not wear enough clothes and I feel ashamed. … and you know, our Sheikh is all about donation, which is part of our culture, but I do not think all these big companies coming to Dubai give to donation. During the Ramadan, I see food places that are open and some people eating, even when it is forbidden to eat in public. Dubai is giving so much, but maybe people do not respect our culture. Now there are clear signs in the malls to stop the tourists wearing shorts and small t-shirts, but still, even last week at the Emirates Mall, I saw so many girls wearing things that are inappropriate, too revealing for our culture.

Importantly, although Laila is concerned that her traditions and culture are changing, she welcomes Dubai's economic growth. The collages constructed by the Emirati women also represented this juxtaposition of a traditional Islamic emirate culture with an economically powerful city. In one collage, the Burj Khalifa and the Dubai Mall are placed together with the old Dubai fishing port. In other collages, Western products, such as jeans and high-heeled shoes, along with the representations of Western brands, including Gucci, Louis Vuitton, McDonalds and Armani, are positioned alongside images of traditional forms of UAE dress (the black abaya) and of the Jumeirah Mosque. Pictures of family and friends are combined with the pictures of international celebrities, including Oprah Winfrey and Angelina Jolie.

This first theme – 'ambivalence about economic power and loss of local traditions' – shows that the instant transformations of Dubai, whilst economically beneficial, are also discussed as potential threats to the local heritage, traditions and culture. However, findings also suggest that the locals are not simple spectators of globalising processes; rather these locals are actors in the construction of a particular version of globalisation. Informants actively developed specific 'strategies for going global' that lead to the making of a particular version of globalisation, one that builds on local heritage and traditions.

Strategies for going global

Embracing local capital

Although the Emirati people are highly exposed to global flows, the ethnographic work shows clear evidence of practices of delimitation and active engagement in maintaining and embracing local capital. Whilst observing university students, I noted the abaya as a visible distinction between the Emirati women and the 'others'. In Wilk's (1997) terms, it demarcates tastes from distastes: 'we' wear abayas; 'they' do

not. The interviews confirm the abaya as symbolic demarcation and marker of local heritage, traditions and religious affiliation: 'In Dubai, women Emirati wear the abaya on top of normal clothing when leaving home' (Suaad); 'Everyone wears it and because of religion, our country and tradition, my mom has been wearing it for so long, I wear it' (Jamal). Sara explains that the abaya is worn for cultural and religious reasons:

> It's much about the culture and the reason for wearing the abaya – the main reason for wearing the abaya is to protect the women from others' eyes, basically men and foreign men. Umm, by foreign of course I mean men from outside the family. I mean that men who don't belong to the family. As you know the religion Islam, it guides us to protect women in many ways. And one of the main ways is, you know, women – a female is known to be beautiful and attractive so our religion has guided us to protect that female – protect a female and hide her beauty and only display her beauty to her man or to the family only.

It is clear from each interview that the abaya is a readable code of difference that is seen to carry with it the traditions of the Emirati community and its way of life, and that it creates a separation from other ethnic groups, such as those from South Asia (including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) which in 2005 accounted for 76% of the total population (Dubai Ministry of Labour Statistics 2005 cited in Elsheshtawy, 2008) and other Arabs like the Farsi-speaking Iranians. As Mariam explains, 'in the Arabian Gulf, abaya means something black' and they vary depending on the country:

> There are some Saudi abayas, some Qatari abayas and Bahraini as well. It depends on the design. It differs from region to region in the Arabian Peninsula. Like what differentiates the Saudi abaya is that it is loose and wide. But the Bahrainis, on the other hand, have belt like on the waist and there are some designs that are tight on the hands. It depends. The Qatari abaya is very close to the Saudi abaya. They make new cuts, but at the end of the day the abaya still maintains its loose features. And with regards to here in UAE, our original abaya is very close to the 'besht'. You know it? It's put on the head and the fabric is very light. It covers but it's not totally closed; it's opened, you put your head and you cover yourself with it.

The anthropologist Papanek (1982) describes the burka as 'portable seclusion', and Abu-Lughod (2002) associates the hijab with a 'mobile home'. However, this study notes that the abaya is not only a symbolic code of delineation but is also used to encrypt the local in the global scene. In Dubai, Emiratis can purchase abayas in small local boutiques as well as at shopping malls, through direct home selling and website-based businesses often owned by foreign designers. Although the design of the abaya incorporates elements from the past, contemporary designers have changed the shape and the fabric. An example of a successful foreign designer selling abayas in the UAE is the French designer Judith Duriez, with her abaya fashion line (http://www.arabesque-hc.com).

When explaining her reasons for wearing an abaya to a beauty salon, Reem says, 'I am Muslim, I am local, I believe in covering up, and I want self respect'. Later in the discussion, Reem explains that wearing the abaya symbolises her affiliation with the Emirati culture but also demonstrates her participation in the youth culture: loving fashion and luxury:

> [W]earing a plain, wide and long abaya with little or almost no colour or embroidery is mostly for the oldest here. For me, I am young and I love fashion and luxury, so I wear colourful abayas or abayas with style and design.

In 2009, Reem attended the fashion show 'Ramadan and the 60s' in Dubai. When discussing the experience, she recalls:

> [T]he designers were young ladies of the Gulf like Lamya Abedin, Feryal Al Bastaki and Wafa Kardalawi. In the abaya section of the fashion show, the designs were Saudi Arabian with very loose and flowing cuts and had contemporary art designs mingled with abaya fashion through retro patterns and 60s style cloths on the back and sleeves with lace, polka dots, leopard prints. I love it. [The] designs were so unique and modern.

The abaya is clearly an articulation of Islamic values, but it is also *contemporary* and *modern*. As Aysha explains, Emiratis wear stylish and sophisticated designs to follow fashion – 'I like to be aligned with fashion and I will buy fashionable abaya. It's just like a girl would get the new dress with the right colour, I do the same with abayas'. Hyfa also discussed her love for fashion and confesses changing some aspects of the Abaya to incorporate designs she likes from other countries:

> We have many nationalities that entered the country and affected the abaya design. For example, here in Dubai, I might see a dress I like [that] a Turkish lady is wearing or a Syrian and so on. So, as I like what she is wearing, I can change it in a way that fits our tradition and culture.

The Emirati women are participating in the construction of a particular version of the global by embracing their local capital, a process explicit in Lara for whom wearing the abaya brings a sense of mystery to a woman's body and beautifies women:

> Well, it's a garment. It beautifies a woman's body and beautifies the way a woman looks, and as well it kind of hides her beauty. Yeah, it beautifies in a way, in a conservative way, and it hides the beauty – by that I mean it hides, for example, the size of the waist or like, you know, the body size, and the other, like her measures. So along the basic religious reason, people started wearing it for other reasons. Like, as I said, it beautifies some women. It looks good on some women; it makes them look mysterious.

Similarly, Hyfa explains, 'Abaya for me, it has to be beautifying', and Marha discusses how particular abaya designs can suit certain body shapes – 'There are designs that do not look good on tall or thin people. It might look good on fat people and so on. So it depends on the design and on the abaya cut'. For Marha, wearing the abaya enables personal expression and allows for individual style whilst acting as a purifying filter, fixing the Emiratis' local capital.

Embracing fashion also means purchasing designer jewellery, handbags and shoes that are of *correct* (Mariam) style, colour and design as well as visiting beauty salons and wear nail polish. It is not unusual for young women to wear skinny jeans and red high heels beneath their abayas, thus incorporating dual fashion systems that doubly encode global structures of common difference (Wilk, 1995). Rana describes in the following how the abaya enables the wearer to express personal style whilst symbolising the wearer's traditional heritage and culture:

> I know for Emirati women it's extremely important how you look like. The abaya makes every woman look the same, and Emirati especially use shoes, jewellery and handbags to stand out from the crowd. I know some girls who spend hours putting [on] make-up and deciding which shoes to wear, just to go to the mall! All these expensive things they have are just a way for them to express themselves. Some women just buy the most expensive handbags or jewellery! This creates a lot of competition amongst Emirati women as to what they wear. You see them wearing six-inch heels in the mall, which is so uncomfortable, but they are doing it to look good and get attention from men and other women. Some abayas they wear cost something like 2000 AED, studded with diamonds even though a 200 AED one is just as good, so that people know that her family is rich. Some of those wearing these expensive abayas are wearing only pyjamas inside because they are only interested in exterior appearances. Also, it's not only about price but looking different and having the most expensive thing.

This theme of embracing local capital shows that Emirati women actively maintain and embrace a field of their own. On the one hand, the practice of differentiation through consumption practices produces the effect of boundaries and fixity of the local against rapid transformation, whilst on the other hand, it consolidates the conditions for going global. Notably, traditional goods such as the UAE abaya are not a simple expression of traditions but also serve as constructive elements for the globalisation of Dubai, which steer a particular version of globalisation. The following theme, 'brand selection', shows that the Emirati women also adapt to the rapid transformations of Dubai. They select what, based on their local capital and perception of the future of Dubai, is global and as such shape a particular version of the global.

Selective brand selection

As global consumer culture has come to the emirate of Dubai, global goods, services and brands have become common purchases amongst Emiratis. For instance, the collages depict brands such as Louis Vuitton, Juicy Couture and Starbucks. In the reports, informants note the prominence of these brands in their personal lives. Zhara explains the picture of a Starbucks coffee shop and two cups of iced Starbucks cappuccinos:

> Starbucks is very important to me and my friends. It is like our local tradition, we always meet at Starbucks coffee shop, in the Mall of the Emirates, at the Dubai Mall or in Jumeirah; it is always Starbucks. And I love their iced mocha.

Importantly, Zhara selects and defines the brand as 'like our local tradition'. In defining and selecting Starbucks, Zhara is constructing a realistic and meaningful version of global Dubai – a version that is consistent with her local Emirati history. The ethnographic work supports Zhara's observations:

> The Emirates Mall, mostly locals are in the Starbucks and close to it, the Costa is only serving expatriates. At Starbucks, it is mostly men Emirati but a few women Emirati are sitting together, all [women] wearing the abaya and drinking coffees. They are all wearing the same bright-red lipstick; the Blackberry phones are in their hands. They do not watch most [of] their surroundings but talk lively, laughing, having a pleasant time.

The choice of coffee shop at the university is also Starbucks. During a discussion with one female Emirati student, she reveals:

> Starbucks was here the first. Since then, all these coffee shops, like Costa and Cafe Nero and Caribou, they all arrived after Starbucks. It is like Starbucks trusted Dubai in becoming a great and powerful city. I feel Starbucks is part of our growth; it is part of our culture now. (Lara)

The case of Starbucks suggests that Emirati consumers do not simply consume foreign products or localise the global. Rather, they carefully select and learn to consume one particular brand from amongst the others. These in-group ownership strategies influence and permit the globalisation of Dubai. Here too, we see more of the tastes and distastes differentiation that Wilk (1997) identifies. The Emirati women actively engage in the availability of global goods and brands but select chosen elements of globalisation to be part of their tradition and Emirati culture, as Lara says, Starbucks 'is now part of our culture'. The magnitude of the Emiratis' selection of meaningful brands is most obvious in specific luxury brands that portray privileged economic status: 'classic and timeless' (Aini) that 'fits in with my culture' (Nafia). For example, Fatima prefers 'Louis Vuitton or Fendi', and Aini says, 'I am a fan of Louis Vuitton, Yves Saint Laurent, and of course Chanel. I feel that they are classic and timeless. Almost everything they make is amazing!' Nafia confirms, 'I would buy something that fits my personality which is beautiful, girly but still fits in with my culture. I think *Yves Saint Laurent*, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Hermes are good brands for me'. Of course what is seen to 'fit' local culture is largely, although not entirely, arbitrary. What fits is socially constructed. These brands are all quite high end and conspicuous, but notably there is no mention of more 'irreverent' brands like Dolce&Gabbana nor less conspicuous brands like Shang Xia.

The projective technique, ethnography and interview data reveal that Emiratis carefully select a few global and luxurious brands that fit their vision of Dubai's culture and, likewise, reject brands that do not respond to their desired global story. For example, Aini describes rejecting brands that are too revealing and colourful:

> Well, the abaya is a part of our culture, so we should wear it. I mostly buy handbags, jewellery, watches and shoes in which I have no limit in which I could buy. When it comes to clothes, it's true there are some designer brands I don't wear just because they show off too much skin or they are just too different for my culture. Like, there are some brands like Miu Miu, I can't describe them but their clothes are just too out there and have weird colours and designs. It's definitely not for an Emirati like me.

The importance of luxury is explicit in the Emiratis' car consumption. For example, three of the Emirati women interviewed own a Hummer and five possess at least one Mercedes-Benz. When explaining the purchase of a Mercedes-Benz, Marian says,

> It is just classy, and my sister has one, my mother has one, I have one – it is sort of a family thing. Well, my friends also bought Mercedes; it is just a great brand that we like for us.

When prompted further, Marian explains the meaning of 'us': 'my friends, my family, we have lived here all of our life. It is funny now, I just realise, most of us have a Mercedes'. Whilst Marian's friends and family endorse the Mercedes-Benz brand,

Sara drives a Porsche Cayenne because 'my Dad bought it for me when I was 18! I guess I bought it because it's so cute and all my friends have it!'

The ethnographic work confirms Emirati women driving Porsches or being driven in Mercedes and Hummers. The ethnography also reveals the type of mobile phone used by Emiratis. Rather than an Apple or a Nokia, most of the observed Emirati women own a Blackberry. As Nafia explains:

> It's like every one of my Emirati friends has it and my family insisted I buy it. I also like the features, like BBM, internet browsing that does not require a Wi-Fi access point. And of course I value the feedback I get from my family and friends. Either they will criticise or accept. It really matters to me, and so we all have a Blackberry.

This theme of selective brand selection shows that in selecting particular brands, the local Emirati women are constructing a particular version of globalisation that responds to their culture, traditions and economic power. It also demarcates 'us' and 'them'. The making of the global is also explicit in Dubai's architecture, where the construction of unique buildings, such as the iconic Burj Khalifa as the world's tallest building or the creation of the Palm Jumeirah as the world's largest man-made island, distinguishes the city as a place where everything is the biggest, tallest and unique (see Junemo, 2004).

Setting spatiotemporal restrictions

As discussed, the Emirati women are conscious of the fact that the globalisation of Dubai offers opportunities for personal progress, but they also express a strong interest in their traditions and an awareness of preservation and responsibility. Their ambivalence about the growth of economic power and simultaneously the loss of traditions results in a particular version of globalisation – one that is experienced mostly in the private sphere. For instance, Hyfa reflects on the abaya as a religious symbol when she is at university interacting with foreign-born individuals, but refers to it as a fashion statement when she interacts with her friends or attends traditional celebrations. She says that wearing the abaya is 'religious at university but outside when I go with friends and weddings I think it's more about the designs'. In the following, Hyfa explains three reasons for wearing an abaya whilst I was interviewing her at university:

> I have to wear the abaya for three reasons. First, because it is the tradition and culture that forces us to wear the abaya. The second thing is that it represents modesty because the feminine features started to appear, so there should be something that covers it and keeps all people's eyes away from you, you get me? And thirdly, I mean it is a sign that shows that this girl has reached 'maturity', ready to get married and construct a family all, I mean, how to explain, I mean she has reached the marriage age. And really the way you should wear it is, it must be loose, this is the first thing. The abaya should not show the body features, alright, it should not be transparent. The fabric should be somewhat thick and it must, ah, the original form of abaya is to be put on the head. Nowadays, because of the fashion and it is easier for working ladies to go out and it is more convenient for her, the design can be on the shoulders. And it

> is black; it is supposed to be black because other colours usually attract people's attention. But the black is not as attractive as the other colours.

Later in the interview, Hyfa explains her reasons for purchasing new abayas:

> As I wanna replace my old ones, and every while there are new designs and I, especially now girls are following fashion and new trends, and ok, I want something new that is aligned with the fashion. At the same time I want something new. For instance, when a fabric stays for some time it becomes old and you wanna buy new abaya with new fabric. Really, there is not much difference between buying an abaya and buying clothes; you have to buy new ones the same way you buy new clothes.

Throughout the interview, it became evident that Hyfa enjoys fashion as a social practice amongst local Emirati women. She discussed purchasing a new abaya prior to going out with her local friends and prior to family events. The design and cut of the abaya only become important when discussing events with friends and family members. That is, the abaya takes on different meanings depending on whether Hyfa is in the presence of other locals or whether she is interacting with foreign-born populations.

An important social change in Dubai is the increase in Emirati women's exposure to the 'others'. With the development of subway public transportation and shopping malls, Emirati women are now far more exposed to the eyes of others. In areas of high public exposure, such as shopping malls or the university, the informants show explicit reverence to traditional and religious values. As Reem explains, when 'in the mall, I am fully covered and I wear the veil so I am untouchable, I am protected by Allah'. Yet in private gatherings, with friends and family members, Reem prefers wearing fashionable modern designs.

The use of traditional consumer goods to differentiate themselves from the 'others' in public places changes to the use of Western consumer goods when in private places. For example, Aysha describes Western goods as integral to in-home gatherings. She explains:

> [M]e and my friends were all at my home; my mother had cooked and we all started trying on clothes from my sisters. We had a good time; it was nice to be all together, and my sisters were fine with it. I have five sisters. One, my oldest, always wears red; she loves red and she ended up giving me her Gucci dress that I like so much.

Aysha's engagement with the playfulness of consumer culture gives the impression of privatising the global when she explains that 'we were just all like the actresses in a show, changing clothes and, like, laughing' in the safety of a private setting and same-sex interactions.

This theme – spatiotemporal restrictions – shows how Emirati women experience and construct a particular version of the global, a version that is restricted to the private sphere. Creating 'the global' as a restricted form of globalisation that occurs only in the private space seems to respond to Emirati women's degrees of public exposure

Discussion

The dramatic makeover of Dubai combined with the construction of globalised spectacular public places does not obliterate the idea of tradition in Dubai; in fact, it contributes to the construction of a global Dubai embedded in traditions and cultural heritage. For the Emirati women who participated in this study, the instant transformation of Dubai was seen as both fascinating and frightening. Their ambivalence about economic power and loss of traditions leads them not only to maintain boundaries but to also develop strategies for going global, which assert their local capital, traditions and cultural continuity. On the one hand, Emirati women actively maintain a field of their own that is not accessible to the 'others'. As such, they create a certain fixity of culture and establish boundaries between themselves and others. On the other hand, their practice of differentiation through consumption practices consolidates the conditions of globalisation, which enables the emergence of a particular version of globalisation – one that is anchored to the Emiratis' invented traditions and culture. The construction of a particular version of globalisation occurs via employing local capital, brand selection and spatiotemporal restrictions.

The findings highlight that local Emiratis creatively participate in the 'Dubai-isation' of the global Dubai and, in the process, dynamically engage in the making of a global story. As such, and along with the process of glocalisation that 'both highlights how local cultures may critically adapt or resist "global" phenomena and reveals the way in which the very creation of localities is a standard component of globalisation' (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007, p. 134), the informants describe strategies for going global during which they capitalise on their local capital and critically select elements of imported global culture to actively construct their (globalising) localities. Here, globalisation is a component of local participation. At the same time, these practices can be seen as part of global structures of common difference. For example, local fashions in abayas differentiate them from non-Emirates, but also adapt to global consumer fashion ideologies.

The findings support that consumers are active in the globalisation process (Eckhardt & Mahi, 2004) and allow for a conception of globalisation as constructed selectively by Emiratis. Understanding the locals as participants in the production of global stories does not negate the possibility of glocalised individuals, whereby individuals can combine both global and local forms of identity. However, this study emphasises that the global represents an amalgam of global stories that are by no means a Western affair or a single unified globalisation narrative. To the contrary, globalisation, or rather versions of globalisation, flourishes from local practices of embracing, nurturing and somewhat fixing local capital. This view aligns with Dong and Tian's (2009) study of Chinese consumers' use of Western brands as a form a political action tied to different imaginings of the future of China in the global economy.

The narratives in this study inform us that financially empowered locals living in instant cities of the Arab Gulf develop strategies that regulate the rapid transformation of their environment and global flows (Cherrier, 2012). Understanding these strategies has important implications. First, Simadi's (2006) research shows that the economic, political and social development in the UAE contributes to the reshaping of UAE consumer values, independent of their national origin. In contrast, this study of affluent Emirati women living in Dubai shows their

local participation in the construction of a global Dubai. Second, researchers often discuss the proliferation of global consumer culture either as a liberating force, albeit still unrealised, that potentially frees consumers from conformity and enables them to become co-producers fragmented postmodernity (e.g. Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) or as an abolition of individuality and erosion of autonomy (e.g. Agger, 1992). This study notes the roles that consumers play in enabling a particular version of globalisation and global consumer culture. Thus, along with Cherrier and Murray's (2004) discussion of the virtue of marketing, this study shifts from questioning the virtue of global consumer culture to questioning the virtue of the consumers in granting conditions for globalisation. That is, when we reconsider the global as something that is locally constructed, it is no longer the virtuous local versus the villainous global, but rather a case of a complicit local abetting global consumer culture in embracing global structures of common difference. We thus concur with Cherrier and Murray (2004, p. 523) that in questions of the processes of globalisation and global consumer culture, 'consumers should not be left out of the question'. Finally, the global is often described as consisting of powerful flows forcing us to 'live local versions of the world and in so doing we have to locate ourselves within the wider global context' (Voisey & O'Riordan, 2001, p. 37). This study, however, notes that globalisation is itself a process that operates through the reiterations and reinventions of cultural norms and traditions. Globalisation should therefore not be seen as a single, united, powerful and somewhat uncontrollable flow affiliated to the economic-political order produced by Western modernity; rather, it should be understood as comprised of diverse global stories shaped by human beings who are touched by and thus influence these stories. These findings align with Gandhi's admonition: 'be yourself the changes you want to see the world' and call for further empirical research on the possibility for the less affluent to construct their particular versions of the global and perhaps embrace resistant identities (Cherrier, 2009). Existing work (e.g. Üstüner & Holt, 2007) suggests that this may be more difficult than with the present economically privileged consumers, but perhaps not impossible.

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