Navigating the Cosmopolitan City
Emirati Women and Ambivalent Forms of Belonging in Dubai

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Raisa, a twenty-two-year-old Emirati woman, was standing with her husband and friends at the valet of a popular five-star hotel in Jumeirah. It was 11 p.m., and they were waiting for their cars after having had dinner at one of the hotel's restaurants. The hotel was frequented both by Emiratis and wealthy residents and tourists, but today—only in the valet area—it was different. Raisa noticed that they were surrounded by Westerners dressed in their evening wear, while she and her friends stood out in their abayas. Raisa said it was the first time she had felt odd in her own country.

Raisa and her friends were no strangers to socializing in spaces where they encountered people of different nationalities. Their favorite restaurants were at Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), where a minority of Emiratis and a much larger group of Westerners, Arabs, South Asians, and other elites went to socialize, dine, and/or drink at upscale places such as Zuma or BOCA. The restaurants in posh hotels and DIFC differed from the ones found in shopping malls or on the city's streets because they served alcohol, had a larger Western clientele, and were significantly more exclusive. Many of these restaurants became like lounges in the evening, playing the loud music one might find at a bar or nightclub. Because DIFC is known for its nightlife, some women also go there in evening wear, as they would to the hotel in Jumeirah where Raisa found them. In these spaces, Raisa and

her friends may have been minorities, as Emiratis usually are—considering they constitute only 8 percent of Dubai's population (Dubai Statistics Center 2020)—but they were still there. Raisa felt comfortable there.

Places such as DIFC may be considered cosmopolitan enclaves wherein practices of consumption allow their users to engage with limited forms of difference—what one might refer to as a homogeneous form of cosmopolitanism (Raco 2003; Binnie et al. 2006: 25). One can find people of different ethnicities and nationalities in places such as DIFC, but those without sufficient economic (and cultural) capital are directly or indirectly excluded from such spaces. Raisa and her friends generally feel comfortable in places such as DIFC because they have the economic and cultural capital that allows them to enjoy these places. At different times, however, they feel that this upscale cosmopolitanism becomes too foreign.

Various scholars have described how Dubai's middle-class and upscale cosmopolitan spaces specifically cater to Western lifestyles and tastes, thereby excluding those without affinity to Western cultural norms (Ali 2010; Vora 2013; Kanna and Hourani 2016; Kathiravelu 2016). Indeed, these spaces promote exclusions, not only for low-income residents but even for my (Emirati) upper-middle-class interlocutors. However, I argue that some inclusions and exclusions are temporal and situational (Yuval-Davis 2007). Raisa and my other interlocutors feel excluded in the city's upscale developments at times, but they also make meanings and experience belonging in them during other times. This ambivalent experience is shared by the middle-aged Emirati women to whom I spoke as well.

Understanding these complex negotiations of space allows us to also move beyond some academic narratives that implicitly or explicitly depict the cosmopolitanism in the new parts of the city as entirely segregated and impenetrable, a narrative that results in binaries of Western/Emirati or foreign/local spaces (Acuto 2010; Bayat 2013; Cooke 2014; AlShehabi 2019; Elsheshtawy 2019, 2020). For instance, AlShehabi (2019) describes the newly built parts of Gulf cities as follows: "a society is created out of separate 'cantons,' in which each group lives in complete isolation from the rest of the parties, and where none of them are connected through national, cultural or political affiliations." Meanwhile, in some narratives, Dubai's inhabitants are portrayed as invisible in a city built for outsiders: "The built-in user . . . is more and more the anonymous corporate elitist or the opulent transient tourist . . . rather than [Dubai's] mostly invisible inhabitants" (Acuto 2010: 282).

While recognizing the limitations and exclusivity of these classed spaces is indeed essential, this discourse fails to acknowledge the social and cultural negotiations that take place in these settings, ones which allow us a better understanding of segregation and exclusion, but also of the forms

of interaction that take place there. Furthermore, as I have argued elsewhere, the dominant discourses about urbanity in the Gulf also propagate a problematic binary discourse of supposedly "authentic, local" spaces (or, at times, authentically cosmopolitan spaces) contrasted with alienating, "tourist" spaces (AlMutawa 2019; 2020).[1] Discourses of authenticity that delineate some spaces as fake and others as authentic severely constrain our understanding of how inhabitants make meanings in them (AlMutawa 2019; 2020). These discourses are also often normative, used to depict the development of newly built cities, such as in the Gulf, as just a façade "covering up a lack of modernity underneath" (Koch 2012: 2,446; Smith 2016).

My interlocutors' attitudes toward the city's upscale cosmopolitan spaces—and the top-down developmental model—cannot be understood through a binary that sees them as either supportive of or opposing these developments. Rather, they have ambivalent, complex, and contradictory relationships toward the city's spectacles. While they feel alienated and marginalized in some settings, they also experience belonging, have cherished memories, and engage in cultural contestations within the spectacular urban landscapes.

This chapter highlights these points by first exploring the cosmopolitan subjectivities of my interlocutors. Second, I show that while upper-middle-class Emirati women feel comfortable in the city's middle-class and upscale developments, they also feel out of place in them when they embody a more homogeneous (and in this case Western) cosmopolitanism. However, these discomforts are also experienced temporally and situationally, deconstructing a binary of Western/non-Western or Emirati/non-Emirati spaces. In the final section, the binary gets further blurred, as I show how some of the Emirati women who describe feeling alienated in spaces associated with Westerners specifically seek them out when they want to get away from their community and experience a sense of anonymity. Meanwhile, Emiratis' increasing use of some of these locations shows how they reappropriate them over time, marking them as spaces where they go to see each other and be seen.

With this aim, I draw on ethnographic research that took place between 2017 and 2019. My ethnography includes interviews with over one hundred citizens and noncitizens, men and women of different age groups, most of whom can be considered as upper middle class. However, for this chapter, I focus on thirty-two interviews with Emirati women, mainly in their twenties and thirties (although some are over forty), who also belong to the upper middle class. Despite feeling marginalized at times in these upscale cosmopolitan spaces, their class background colors their experiences and allows them to create a sense of belonging in them in ways that low-income inhabitants cannot.

The majority of my interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. When interviewees did not want to be recorded, I wrote notes by hand during the interview and typed them up at home. The average length of interviews was about two-and-a-half hours, with the shortest interview being one hour and the longest being five hours. I also employed social media, particularly Instagram and Twitter, for this research. I used these two social media platforms because they are popular among Gulf citizens (although not necessarily with the same audiences, as Twitter is considered more "serious"); they are used both by men and women; and they are used both by the younger and older generations (from teenagers to adults in their sixties).

As an Emirati woman who grew up in Dubai, I had no difficulty finding interviewees and being connected through a snowball effect. Accompanied by my interviews were observations and walks I took to different parts of the city—mostly they were in middle-class and upscale developments—shopping malls, the beach and public parks, and new mixed-use spaces (such as City Walk, the Canal, Jumeirah Beach Residence, the Marina). Some of those were Emirati-dominated spaces, others were mixed in terms of ethnic (and at times class) background, and others were spaces often associated with Westerners (such as the Marina area).

Cosmopolitan Subjectivities

Understanding the subjectivities of my interlocutors allows better insight into their attitudes toward Dubai's development trajectory, including the ritzy projects that are aimed at attracting foreigners and tourists. Raisa, who worked at a multinational company, spoke positively about the "Year of Tolerance," and expressed a belief in Dubai as an inclusive place for all. In many ways, she appeared to fit the characteristic of a "flexible citizen," which Kanna defines as Emiratis who "engage in an active, often creative alignment of Emirati and neoliberal values" (2010: 135). As supporters of Dubai's neoliberal vision and development trajectory, flexible citizens "constitute a committed cadre of the city-corporation state and Sheikh Muhammad's future vision for a polity in which capital is dominant" (Kanna 2010: 143). While Kanna argues that flexible citizens are cosmopolitan and endorse neoliberal ideas, he explains that they also embrace some "traditional" aspects of their Emirati identity to varying degrees.

Kanna also depicts citizens with "neo-orthodox" tendencies, those who are critical of the city's rapid development and the influx of foreigners. However, he finds that flexible citizens generally reject neo-orthodox voices, which they regard as "stifling and rigid": "It is not uncommon for younger Emiratis, especially from among the neoliberal managerial class,

to orient themselves towards a perceived multinational modernity beyond the confines staked out by these voices" (2010: 135). Kanna contends that a neo-orthodox criticism, such as of the demographic imbalance, also represents veiled criticism of Dubai's developmental model.

Kanna provides nuance by showing varieties within the group he labels "flexible citizens," such as in how they differ in their attachment to "traditional" values. While some individuals may indeed easily fit the characteristics of a flexible citizen, this term (including his contrasting of it with neo-orthodox voices) inadvertently glosses over various nuances. In such depictions, flexible citizens generally appear to endorse and support the state's development projects (with some reservations), while neo-orthodox voices produce veiled critiques of it. Applying this method, one might therefore expect a flexible citizen to be generally comfortable in Dubai's new cosmopolitan spaces and those with neo-orthodox tendencies to be alienated by them. The reality is often more complex.

Mizna, a middle-aged Emirati woman, exhibited neo-orthodox tendencies, arguing that Dubai's developments were being built for Westerners and foreigners while citizens were being sidelined and alienated in their own land. However, Mizna also enjoyed going to the "Western" areas in the city, saying she thoroughly enjoyed these places because she felt as if "she wasn't in Dubai anymore." A similar sentiment was shared by other middle-aged Emirati women regarding Western-dominated spaces. While they heavily criticized women in skimpy outfits or the presence of alcohol in these places, they frequented these places that they considered "higher-class" or that made them feel as if "they're in Europe," highlighting their aspirations—like flexible citizens—to be part of a global and cosmopolitan (and elite) world.

Meanwhile, although she did not fit many characteristics of a "flexible citizen," Mizna wholeheartedly accepted some of the neoliberal values that Kanna describes this group to endorse, such as the importance of being entrepreneurial and "open-minded" or the positive association of studying and traveling abroad with self-discovery and self-sufficiency. Similarly, many of my interlocutors did not fit into either category—that of flexible citizen nor the neo-orthodox. There were Emiratis who did not have the "entrepreneurial spirit" that flexible citizens are supposed to have, who worked in "typical" government jobs and refused to adapt to the changing neoliberal market, but who enjoyed the city's changes and the "Western" spaces of consumption such as those at DIFC. Are they considered flexible citizens? There were Emirati parents with neo-orthodox tendencies who complained about the loss of Arab and Muslim values but sent their children to schools with weak (or nonexistent) Arabic and Islamic Education classes because they believed these schools otherwise provided outstanding education and

cultivated better cultural experiences. While some may have more neo-orthodox tendencies than others, and Kanna's category of flexible citizens certainly applies to some of them, the categories did not sufficiently depict the subjectivities of my interlocutors or their positionalities toward the city's development trajectory.

At a more mundane level, when I asked Muna, a thirty-one-year-old Emirati researcher, how she and the women she knew felt about going to the beach, her answer illuminated attitudes toward modesty and women's dress that made it difficult to entertain categorizations (among Emiratis and even non-Emiratis). Rather, individuals had layered and complex attitudes that exhibited different subjectivities at once that cannot be categorized by resorting to binaries such as "traditional" and "liberal." Talking about the beach and how Emirati women use it, Muna said:

> I think because there are options that are ladies-only—like for example Wild Wadi Ladies' night and Dubai Ladies' Club [private beaches]—if they [Emirati women] really care about modesty, they would go to these places. There are some people, they don't care about modesty, but they care about reputation, so for them, they would hide under the cloak of anonymity, and they would go to places that are more Western-oriented and where they won't see anyone they know; and yes, of course, some of them wear bikinis and some of them wear slightly more conservative [swimsuits]. . . . But by the way, the Ladies' Club nowadays, it's not really so private anymore; there are so many projects around it that directly look over it, so I think most of the people now who go there, honestly, they're not so bothered with no one seeing them; they just don't want to be around men. It's just a more conservative option. There are so many jet skis and there are so many boats nearby that people can really see your figure and what you're wearing from a distance. But I see a lot of Emiratis there, and a lot of Arabs there [wearing swimsuits], and also a lot of people who . . . prefer staying in their hijab and long clothes.

The variety of preferences that Muna recounted demonstrates that these women experience the city in different ways. Those who choose not to wear swimsuits at Dubai Ladies' Club (DLC) because of the lack of privacy, and those who cannot afford to go to private clubs, for instance, may find that the city does not cater to them as much as it does to Western forms of cosmopolitanism. They may feel more excluded in the city than the other women. But in which category do we place women who go to DLC knowing they might be seen? The quote exemplifies the complexity of Emirati (and non-Emirati) women's attitudes toward the city's urban spaces, even among women who may otherwise be considered cosmopolitan "flexible citizens" or more "traditional" individuals with neo-orthodox tendencies. It

also demonstrates that inhabitants do not necessarily experience different parts of the city through binaries such as Western/non-Western, as I show in the next sections.

Varieties of Cosmopolitanism

Many academics have depicted the ways in which Dubai's upscale developments target Westerners. They argue that the imagined consumer of the city's new developments "is a wealthy white European or American" (Vora 2013: 49), and that the target "for high-end properties [in Dubai] is largely Westerners" (Ali 2020: 40–41). It is this catering to Western lifestyles and social norms that attract some of them to the city. "British citizens felt welcome in Dubai because of a collective, active effort to carve out zones of British cultural comfort" (Kanna and Hourani 2016: 616). While recognizing the ways the new parts of the city cater to Westerners (and the marginalization of those without economic and Western cultural capital) is vital, my interlocutors do not necessarily experience the spaces catering to Western tastes simply as Western spaces. Rather, the types of cosmopolitanism found in upscale Dubai vary temporally and situationally. Indeed, the politics of belonging—and therefore the carving of who belongs and who does not—is situated temporally, intersectionally, and spatially (Yuval-Davis 2007).

While Raisa and my other interlocutors have the cosmopolitan cultural capital that allows them to feel at home in these upscale restaurants and hotels, even they may sometimes feel excluded when the cosmopolitanism that takes place there becomes too "Western." Speaking of the gated communities in Dubai, Kathiravelu says that while these middle-class developments are used by residents of various ethnicities and nationalities, "the homogenizing effects of gated communities thus embed migrants in a space that is discursively and culturally white, but which passes as neutral" (2016: 144). This depiction applies to many of Dubai's upscale developments beyond gated communities.

Many of the Emirati women I spoke to enjoy the city's upscale cosmopolitan spaces, yet their occasional discomfort also stems from their feeling that Western social norms are overwhelmingly dominant there. I should specify that many of these practices that I refer to here as Western forms of cosmopolitanism, such as drinking alcohol or forms of dress considered revealing for women, are certainly not only practiced in the West. However, I refer to them in that way because they reflect contemporary practices associated with Western social norms, and because my interlocutors described them as such. The dominance of these social norms in some parts of the

city does not necessarily mean that non-Westerners are more comfortable in "non-Western" spaces, but rather that there are temporal and situational dimensions to the Western forms of cosmopolitanism in many parts of the city. For example, Raisa felt comfortable in the hotel in Jumeirah she frequented, except on that evening when she saw that she and her friends were the only Emiratis (and Arabs or Muslims) among Westerners. In some lounges and restaurants, such as Caramel lounge at DIFC, there is a temporal difference in terms of the clientele during the daytime and the evening, wherein there are more Emirati attendees during the day than in the late evening. Such realities highlight the need to deconstruct binaries of Western/non-Western or foreign/local spaces while still recognizing that Western forms of cosmopolitanisms do get privileged in some of these environments (Ali 2010; Vora 2013; Kanna and Hourani 2016; Kathiravelu 2016).

Raisa's story of feeling out of place wearing the abaya among women dressed in more revealing outfits was shared by many of my other interlocutors. Muna gave a similar example—not about an upscale development but about the public beach: "Sometimes I get a little bit shocked when I see butts, and stuff like that, in front of me, like when people are wearing very small swimsuits," she said. However, she clarified that it was not necessarily their swimsuits that made her uncomfortable, but rather seeing them in contradistinction with her wearing her abaya: "I feel uncomfortable when I'm wearing my abaya around all of these people that are super, super naked."

Other Emiratis I spoke to recounted similar experiences of their discomfort in a place where they felt they stood out while wearing the national dress. On one end, the national dress cements the difference between citizens and noncitizens (Khalaf 2005; Kanna 2010; AlMutawa 2016; Akinci 2020). Because of its visibility, non-Emiratis clearly notice who is Emirati or not, and vice versa, leading my interlocutors to occasionally feel out of place when they find that they are the only ones wearing it. This may imply exclusion based on a citizen/noncitizen binary, wherein my interlocutors feel marginalized in spaces where they are clearly the only Emiratis there. While this sort of anxiety does exist, my interlocutors are also very comfortable in cosmopolitan spaces in other circumstances. For instance, Assaf (2020) highlights the shared urban cosmopolitanism between Emiratis and Arab noncitizens in Abu Dhabi. Similarly, many of my interlocutors feel at ease with the cosmopolitanism in places such as Dubai Mall, which includes a mix of Arabs, South Asians, East Asians, Westerners, and Emiratis.

What becomes clear in these examples is that my interlocutors feel discomfort in places that are dominated by a certain group and their social norms (whether this group be Westerners, South Asians, or another group

that they feel is different from them). This indicates that it is also the cultural homogeneity of a space (e.g., its Western-ness or its South Asian-ness rather than its cosmopolitanism) that makes them feel out of place. When Emirati women compare themselves to a majority of women in more revealing outfits, they are pointing out the dominance of Western forms of cosmopolitanism. In these cases, they are not feeling excluded (just) because they are minority citizens, but rather because of the homogeneous forms of (non)cosmopolitanism that make them feel as if they stand out as marginal. Therefore, the presence of non-Emirati women in hijabs or women dressed modestly ameliorates this discomfort and makes them feel less out of place.

These scenarios are akin to those of South Asian British Muslims in the UK who moved from Asian-dominated spaces in England to white suburban spaces, and for whom "the presence of 'any Asian face' (irrespective of origin or religion) was often deemed to be a comfort" (Phillips 2006: 33). For my interlocutors, seeing other (non-Emirati) women dressed more modestly puts them more at ease. This demonstrates that their experiences of marginalization are not necessarily based on citizen/noncitizen dynamics (although they very well may be at other times), but about what forms of cosmopolitanism (or lack of) they are interacting with.

The public beach provides various examples of my Emirati interlocutors' experiences of exclusion through the dominance of "Western" social norms. The majority of Emirati women use the public beach as a space for leisure—but not for swimming. I realized it was not always this way: Maysoon, an Emirati friend, surprised me by saying that her female relatives used to go to the beach and enter the sea in their clothes (the *jallabiyya*, essentially a long, traditional dress), something they would not do today when most of the women surrounding them are dressed in swimsuits. I had never experienced swimming at the public beach, nor did I remember seeing women from my social circles doing so. Maysoon's comment made me realize there was a lifestyle I had missed out on. Some non-Emiratis also noticed a difference. Shireena, a Filipina-Pakistani woman, similarly mentioned the transformations she felt took place on the public beach:

> I remember the wave of Russians that came through that changed Dubai overnight. . . . I remember: I was fifteen; we went to the beach. It's now La Mer—before it was just an open beach. [laughing] . . . And you know, back then, like, we didn't go to the beach in swimming costumes, right? Like, we would wear like tights, a shirt or whatever, you know. I mean, I make fun of these people now. [laughing] . . . I don't make fun of them. . . . It's just, it's funny, but this was us back then. . . . I remember, you know, the waves of Russians coming in, and they'd be in the shower, and they'd be topless taking a shower.

Whether it was really Russian women who contributed to the change in the beach scene is not something I can comment on. However, Shireena's quote points to the "Westernization" of the beach through the changing social norms there.[2] The beach scene Shireena describes prior to the influx of Russians and/or Westerners was still cosmopolitan. There were not only Emiratis there, but other non-Westerners such as Shireena and her friends, who were South Asian and Arab. While these individuals did not wear the same types of dress as Emiratis did, they did share the similarity of dressing more modestly. Maysoon said that the women in her family went to the beach and swam with their clothes on, which did not seem out of place among other (non-Emirati) women entering the water also fully clothed. The beach was a cosmopolitan space at that time, but it represented a different type of cosmopolitanism. As a larger number of Westerners came to Dubai, the type of cosmopolitanism in that place changed, and with it the social norms of that place. Like many other Emirati women, the women in Maysoon's family now felt they would stand out if they went swimming in their clothes.

Some women, Shireena being an example, appear to have with time altered their own dress codes to adjust to the city's changing social scene. Others may continue to go to the beach and enjoy swimming there in modest dress. But for many Emiratis, these options are not socially acceptable, and their use of the public beach is often limited to walking or exercising there (but not swimming). Because some of them felt they stood out wearing the abaya on the beach (in addition to its being less convenient to exercise in), they sometimes go instead wearing hoodies. "Even when the weather is hot . . . [the hoodie] is like the negotiated outfit that's not an abaya but not unconservative, so you'd see a lot of teenagers and young women . . . maybe twenties and thirties, wearing hoodies even if the weather is hot because it gives them more mobility," Muna said. She contrasted the walking path on the beach to the walking path in Khawaneej, the latter being a place where many Emiratis live and where women rarely wear a hoodie even when engaging in the same activities they would on the beach. Wearing a hoodie to feel less out of place, however, is not necessarily something they are "pressured" to do to fit in. Many simply find that the hoodie is the appropriate thing to wear at the beach, just as getting dressed up and wearing the abaya is seen as the appropriate form of dress for the mall. Meanwhile, many women still do go to the beach and walk there wearing the abaya. This is very common, especially with the opening of upscale food trucks on the beach, some of which are very popular with Emiratis.

What this indicates is that the changing population dynamics in the city also lead to changing social norms among Emiratis, even those that appear minuscule: Emirati women who used to go swimming in their

clothes stopped feeling comfortable doing so as the dynamics of the beach changed. Meanwhile, it became more socially acceptable for young Emirati women to wear something other than the national (or traditional) dress at the beach, a practice that may otherwise be considered taboo. I elaborate on these changing social norms later in this chapter. These changes result in a sense of alienation and loss for some of my interlocutors, but they also indicate that cultural negotiations are taking place.

In this section, I have demonstrated that my Emirati interlocutors' experiences in the city's upscale developments are tied to the types of cosmopolitanisms found there. Many of my interlocutors generally felt comfortable in middle-class and upscale cosmopolitan spaces. When they experienced discomfort there, it was usually because they felt that a certain group and their social norms were dominating a place, creating a homogeneous (rather than cosmopolitan) space and making Emiratis stand out. In the cases I have explored, it is Western forms of cosmopolitanism that are dominating, resulting in Emiratis feeling out of place. However, the types of cosmopolitanism in upscale Dubai vary temporally and situationally. This reality allows us to move beyond depictions of Dubai's cosmopolitan enclaves as entirely impenetrable, and which elide the negotiations that take place in these settings. As I show in the next section, my Emirati interlocutors use these "Western" spaces to gain a sense of anonymity, while others increasingly use them and reappropriate them as "local" spaces, changing the dynamics that take place there and further blurring the binary of Western/local spaces.

Making Belonging in "Western" and "Tourist" Places

> Depending on my mood, sometimes I get this feeling that I really don't want to go to Dubai Mall because I will see everyone [Emiratis]. I always comment on my sister because she says, "Ewww, I don't want to go there, it's all locals [Emiratis]"; and I say, "Why—then what are you?" . . . But I get what she means, you want to escape. . . . I think I've never been to [Galleria Mall] in my life without saying hello to people [Emiratis]. And it's fine, we don't mind it. But there are days where I'm not in the mood. . . . Because when I go there, I need to make sure I'm dressed up; I need to make sure that I look presentable. Other times, I'm not in the mood. I remember once going to Marina in a hoodie and sneakers, and I'm enjoying myself. That's something I wouldn't be able to do here [City Walk]. . . . I remember I went ziplining once. . . . You know the Dubai Mall zipline . . . it ends in Dubai Mall. I was wearing my shayla [headscarf], but I was wearing jeans [without an abaya]. So, when I got out at Dubai Mall, I was really uncomfortable. I mean, per-

> sonally I'm fine with it, I'm not even *mit-hajba* [wearing a hair veil]. . . .
> But me being in Dubai Mall and not dressed, I thought a lot, maybe
> someone will see me, maybe someone will say something, maybe, you
> know. So, I've done also the same zipline in Marina [an area associated
> with Westerners]. Here is when I was in my hoodie and I don't care,
> and I was comfortable, and I enjoyed that ten times more. . . . [But] in
> Dubai Mall we immediately got our abayas.

Raisa, who earlier commented about feeling excluded in a Western-dom-
inated space in Dubai, expressed her preference for them at other times
when she did not want to encounter members of her community. The com-
ment her sister made about not wanting to go somewhere because "it's all
locals" is not uncommon. Like Raisa, some of the other Emiratis I spoke
to wanted to go to spaces they associated with Westerners, such as the
Marina area, to get a sense of anonymity and comfort. This was a way for
them to go out without feeling the need to dress up or behave in a certain
way—particularly as they felt scrutinized in Emirati-dominated spaces—and
without bumping into people they know and having to constantly say hello.
Wilson (1992) argues that one of the attractions of the modern city, for
women as much as anyone, is the possibility for people to lose themselves
in the crowd. While modern cities can be solitary, they provide anonymity
for inhabitants (Tonkiss 2005). Yet Dubai does not provide anonymity for
my Emirati interlocutors (or noncitizen interlocutors who have extended
family in the UAE). Rather, it is certain spaces in Dubai—such as Western-
dominated spaces—that provide them this anonymity.

For those who did not want to wear the shayla and abaya but knew
they would be criticized either (or both) by family or by society, going to
Western-dominated spaces allowed them to do so without fear of being
seen by members of their community. It permitted them a sense of freedom
because in those places you "don't feel like you're in Dubai anymore," and
therefore are unburdened by the social norms you must abide by elsewhere
in the city. Similarly, Emirati women who do not feel comfortable smoking
sheesha in Emirati-dominated spaces choose to go to certain hotels or to
areas of the city where many the people there are Westerners and/or tour-
ists, and where they feel that no one knows who they are.

Parallels are found in other settings as well. Nonheterosexual Bangla-
deshi-British men in London frequent some of the coffee shops dominated
by white cosmopolitans in their gentrifying neighborhood in Spitalfields,
as the atmosphere there lends itself to providing "cover for men from less
privileged social groups" from their own communities (Brown 2006: 141).
Meanwhile, young British Muslim women from South Asian backgrounds
tend to want to move to the middle-class and white suburbs of the city
because it allows them to "occupy social, cultural, and spatial position on

the margins of the community, which affords some freedom from perceived social strictures and conventions" (Philips 2006: 35). These British-South Asian men and women are also marginalized in these white spaces. White middle-class cosmopolitans have gentrified the areas that the Bangladeshi diaspora live in, while the South Asian-British women faced racism in predominantly white spaces. In fact, racism was one reason that many of these individuals preferred to remain in their own communities. Yet some of them found pleasures outside of it for various reasons. Exclusionary spaces, therefore, may be used in various ways for different purposes, and inhabitants create ambivalent forms of belonging within them.

Similarly, upscale coffee shops play important roles for upper-middle-class women in Cairo because these women can use them to engage in behavior they are otherwise not able to participate in elsewhere in the city: this includes the way they dress and their socializing in mixed-gender settings (de Koning 2009; Peterson 2011). The exclusion of others (low-income Egyptians) marks these coffee shops as "decent" places to engage in performances that are otherwise deemed "inappropriate." In Chennai, young women go to "afternoon clubs" where they can similarly socialize among peers and engage in activities that would be considered improper in other settings (Krishnan 2018). Comparably, Emirati women from Dubai find that the city's spaces they associate with Westerners provide them a sense of anonymity that is liberating in some ways.

Not all those who reject Emirati-dominated spaces do so to transgress social norms. Many simply seek a place where they do not feel constantly under watch. Cafés dominated by Emirati men were particularly uncomfortable for some Emirati women. Alia, an Emirati woman in her late twenties, talked about how anxious she was when she passed a coffee shop in which all she "could see was white" (men wearing the "national dress"), saying that she probably would have not felt this way if these men were of different nationalities. This is a very common reaction among Emirati women to spaces dominated specifically by Emirati men.

Similarly, when I asked Bayan, my ex-colleague and friend, about her trip to Kuwait, one of the things she commented on was the high ratio of Kuwaitis to non-Kuwaitis. On one hand, she viewed this positively, saying that it was nice to go out and see so many citizens. This contrasts with many places in Dubai. On that day, for instance, we were sitting in Dubai Mall, where Emiratis are a (visible but small) minority. When I asked her to compare her experiences in both cities, however, Bayan said that she could not imagine living in a place where there were so many Emiratis. Bayan went to an Emirati-only university for her undergraduate degree and was not necessarily uncomfortable in such settings, but she found herself to be more at ease in leisure spaces where there were many non-Emiratis, and where

she felt less watched. While some citizens prefer going to places where they can see other Emiratis, others may opt for more "cosmopolitan" spaces to which they have become accustomed through schools, universities, workplaces, or other institutions.

Like Raisa, who enjoyed being in Marina Mall with her hoodie, these spaces associated with Westerners can sometimes give Emiratis an ability to get away from environments they find suffocating. Some Emiratis avoid Emirati-dominated spaces because they feel they are centered on *khaga* (showing off) and appearances. In places like Marina Mall, however, they feel that no one knows who they are, and no one cares either. Indeed, the possibility of going somewhere and not constantly bumping into people they know and stopping to say hello is reason enough for some of them to enjoy these places.

Just as some Emirati women go to these Western places without abayas, it has become increasingly common to see women wearing abayas in spaces normally considered "Western." Kanna and Hourani (2016) describe how Dubai's forms of bourgeois gratification, which they said includes malls, gated communities, resorts, and bars, are created to please Western tastes. They qualify this by adding that Emiratis do use some of these spaces as well, although they refer to their usage of these spaces as "ironic" (Kanna and Hourani 2016: 615). They are correct to note that what makes these spaces popular among both Westerners and Emiratis is that they are sanitized spaces that exclude "unwanted others" (such as the working-classes). However, by describing them solely as Western spaces that "carve out zones of British cultural comfort" based on an imperial legacy (Kanna and Hourani 2016: 616), we also miss out on their meanings among other groups, including Emiratis. Changing Emirati socializing patterns and social norms are also elided in these narratives. Muna recalled a time when she became aware of these changing social dynamics: "I remember the first time I was [in Caramel lounge] with my sister, I saw the bar, that it was exposed, and that there were a lot of drinks in the area, and I was telling Sumaya [her sister], 'Oh, is it *'ady*, [normal]? Like, people [Emiratis] are okay with it now?'"

Muna expected Emiratis not to go to places where alcohol was so visibly displayed. Indeed, even some of those who socialize in such places may still be critical of the exhibition of alcohol and women dressing in revealing outfits (particularly parents, for instance, who may be dragged there by younger family members). This was even more so the case when types of establishments were still new. With time, however, things changed. "There were all sorts of people, including Emiratis, wearing abaya and shayla [at Caramel]. And I think with Zuma and Petite Maison, and Caramel, they [have] become 'it spots' and somehow that makes it okay for anyone to

go there; like it's not *'ayb* [shameful] anymore for some people because it's an 'it spot,'" Muna said. She not only saw younger Emiratis in these establishments but families as well, although the latter tended not to go to the lounges such as Caramel, but rather to the upscale restaurants in hotels: "It's not just couples or a group of girls or a group of guys [who go there]. It's like a whole family with an older dad and traditional looking mom going there with their children," she said. Despite this, these places are characterized by their exclusivity, and it is their segregation from most of society that gives them their appeal to many of those who use them.

These exclusive places also become sites for the negotiation of social norms—albeit among a restricted group—as can be seen from Muna's reaction to seeing other Emiratis there (AlMutawa 2020). As opposed to other places such as Marina, where some Emiratis go to avoid being seen by other members of the Emirati community, places such as Caramel or Zuma that were once associated with Westerners or cosmopolitan elites become locations where some Emiratis also go to see and be seen: they are not spaces to hide but rather to display oneself to other Emiratis. They come to have different meanings among citizens over time.

The fact that some Emirati women, including those wearing the shayla and abaya, go to places like hotel lobbies and restaurants is a more recent development. In her book about women in Abu-Dhabi, Bristol-Rhys (2010) claims that the spaces catering to Westerners and tourists such as hotel restaurants were not acceptable spaces for Emirati women. Perhaps this is reflective of the attitudes from over a decade ago, as well as possibly reflecting different attitudes and behaviors in different emirates. To be sure, these spaces are certainly not enjoyed or even visited by all Emiratis. Some women may face repercussions from their families for going there, and there are Emiratis who cannot afford them. Others may not face these restrictions but feel uncomfortable in such places, nonetheless.

However, because these are not bars or nightclubs (although some of them may have similar atmospheres in the evening with loud music and dim lighting), they are regarded as more respectable. While Emiratis who attend nightclubs or bars normally attempt to keep this socializing practice private, attending restaurants such as the one Muna described is not necessarily something Emiratis are secretive about. Many of them post photos of these places on Instagram and Snapchat, indicating that these are places they want to be seen in or associated with. They are no longer taboo for some segments of Emirati society, but rather spaces in which to perform social distinction. This is not to say that many people, including those who go to these restaurants and lounges, do not complain that the city is too "Westernized." Rather, it demonstrates that these places become embedded with new or different meanings over time.

This chapter has demonstrated that upscale cosmopolitan spaces in Dubai are exclusive and inclusive in various ways. It is not uncommon to hear many Emiratis (and non-Emiratis) referring to these places as "built for Westerners." Such comments are made both by those who may feel uncomfortable in such spaces, but more importantly, they are also made by some Emiratis who do use and enjoy them. In fact, it is their association with "Westerners" that attracts some non-Western residents (even including older and more "traditional" Emiratis) who view these places as high end or who use them to obtain a degree of anonymity. Over time, Emirati social norms and attitudes towards these places also change. Some "Western" spaces become used more and more by Emiratis, rendering them no longer spaces of anonymity but spaces where Emiratis go to see and be seen. These changing dynamics highlight the need to go beyond common dichotomies, such as Western/local spaces, that omit the negotiations and cross-interactions that take place there.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the cosmopolitan subjectivities of my female Emirati interlocutors, arguing that going beyond common categorizations allows us better insight into Emirati women's complex relationships to the city. I have demonstrated that my interlocutors' ambivalent experiences toward high-end developments are tied to the types of cosmopolitanisms found there. Upper-middle-class Emirati women generally feel comfortable in middle-class and elite cosmopolitan spaces (AlMutawa 2020). However, the types of cosmopolitanism in upscale Dubai vary temporally and situationally. When my interlocutors feel uncomfortable, it is usually because they find that a certain group and their social norms are dominating a place, creating a homogeneous (rather than cosmopolitan) environment. In the cases I explored, my interlocutors felt that Western forms of cosmopolitanism are dominant, leading them to visibly stand out. Yet many Emirati women feel both belonging and exclusion in such places. This is evident in the way some of them use parts of the city that they associate with "Westerners" to get a sense of anonymity, which allows them to enjoy the city both in transgressive ways (such as smoking sheesha or engaging in activities otherwise deemed inappropriate) and nontransgressive ways (such as enjoying the comfort of not having to bump into people they know and say hello). Furthermore, some of these "Western" spaces are being increasingly used by Emiratis. Rather than being spaces of anonymity, they become ones where citizens go to see and be seen by members of their community (AlMutawa 2020). This changes the dynamics of these spaces and further

blurs the binary of Western/local spaces. Moving beyond common narratives about Dubai's cosmopolitan enclaves allows us to better understand the exclusions that manifest there, as well as the forms of belonging and negotiations that take place.

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NOTES

1. For example, Elsheshtawy (2020) contrasts two less-regulated low-income areas in the UAE as an example of "true urbanity" and cosmopolitanism against middle-class areas of "bland cosmopolitanism" (813–14).
2. While Russians may be regarded as part of the East by Europeans and US Americans, for my non-Western interlocutors they are regarded as Western in their appearance, culture, and behavior.

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