Urban Citizenship and Spatiality:
The Perceptions of Space and Belonging of
Expatriate Women in Dubai

A thesis submitted by
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Abstract

This paper is based on my thesis research, which explores how expatriate women in Dubai perceive the spaces that surround them. The built environment (physical spaces large and small) can shape notions of identity and belonging, but not divorced from the social context of place. In a country where discrimination abounds, foreign women in Dubai must confront social stigmas and tensions very much connected to their own nationality, race, and socioeconomic status. Their divergent experiences of space and belonging in the same city are determined by those personal attributes. Through qualitative data gathered from 20 phone interviews, I examine some of the ways in which expatriate women navigate urban borders of old and new, foreign and local, rich and poor, culture and consumption, and other aspects of a city known for its iconic hyper development. This research also presents to planners a framework to scrutinize neoliberal development in other cities around the world.
Acknowledgements

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Introduction

As an urban planning student with a budding interest in how urban planning measures and policies affect residents at the everyday level, Dubai’s highly-planned landscape and development pattern piqued my interest and led me to wonder about the ways in which the urban environment shapes how people behave and conceive of particular places and also their identities in place. In particular, this thesis is an exploration of how expatriate women in Dubai perceive the spaces that surround them, and how they understand belonging and identity in response to the physical and social dynamics of their residence. In a country where discrimination abounds, foreign women in Dubai must navigate social stigmas and tensions very much connected to their own nationality, race, and socioeconomic status.

Dubai is an especially interesting case to look at because it is a city of extremes, having a highly planned and regime-controlled, hyper-built physical landscape, a restrictive political environment that curbs who can permanently reside, and a hierarchical social structure that values people based on their ethnicity and income. Looking at how expatriate women use and perceive spaces in this controlled environment might allow us to tease some important themes for the 21st century neoliberal global city. Brand Dubai provides a useful backdrop for looking at how neoliberal mechanisms play out in the daily lives of its residents. Though Dubai is perceived as a successful story in many ways (politically and socially as a mix between Middle East and West, and
economically as the biggest financial center and tourist hub in the region), we rarely hear from people on the ground, caught in the midst of fast-paced change and development.

In my research, I try to unearth how the built environment shapes notions of belonging, recognizing that such an inquiry about personal abstractions cannot be divorced from the social context of a particular place. Grounding research in the everyday experiences of these women can illuminate the ways in which the built environment and social milieu influence sense of belonging, and help us foster a more informed dialogue on the issues of transnationalism, migration, and gender and as they intersect with urban planning and development. As Lamb (2002: 232) mentions, “Grounding research on transnationalism is about recognizing that it is locally lived and produced, with particular people ‘making their daily lives across worlds’ ” (as cited in Walsh, 2006: 270). Learning how these women navigate the urban borders presented in social and physical spaces will shed light on the ways in which such spaces play a role in the evolution of their identities and lived experiences. What are the everyday actions that are embedded in specific power contexts (Ong, 1999) and how are they reinforced by the built environment and social milieu?

Through 20 interviews, I attempt to discover some of the similarities and incongruities among these diverse expatriate women (in terms of nationality, ethnicity, income, and professions) and how they experience belonging in the same city. I dare not say that I found complete pictures of their stories through one phone conversation, but I hope that my investigation, consisting of phone
interviews, a look at published media, photographic references, and a personal visit to Dubai, will present a thought-provoking account of what personal notions of identity and belonging have to do with one’s physical and social environment.
Urban Citizenship and Spatiality:
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Expatriate Women in Dubai
Chapter 1: Literature Review

There are already many existing, informative scholarly works on Dubai and the United Arab Emirates as a region and on topics related to space and belonging. In this chapter, I introduce Dubai’s development context, the emirate’s regime of citizenship and theoretical urban citizenship configurations, the relationship between notions of belonging and the built and social landscape, and gender roles and spatial practices in Dubai.

1.1 Dubai Context

1.1.1 A ‘global city’ of foreigners

Dubai, a recently developed ‘global city,’ has landed on the world stage with its rapid construction and spectacular architecture as well as its newly achieved status as a global center of financial market activities (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Rapid economic growth occurred in the 1990s and 2000s before coming to a halt during the 2009 global economic crisis. This rapid growth\(^1\) was facilitated through the state’s visioning and implementation of the city as a central business hub, characterized by a tolerant social climate\(^2\) and laissez-faire business rules.

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\(^1\) Growth was also expedited by Dubai’s discovery of oil in the 1960s. Dubai currently has low oil reserves but has used its earnings from oil to develop other sectors of the economy, such as finance, high technology, and construction.

\(^2\) Dubai is attractive to both foreigners and Muslims alike – it has created a form of capitalized Islam, enabling foreigners to be based in a region that typically does not embrace Western values, whilst still allowing Muslims in the region to live in Dubai under the tenants of Islam.
through free-trade zones and tax benefits to stimulate foreign corporate investment (James, 2010: 11).

![Figure 1](Image 110x473 to 412x700)

**Figure 1** Assembly of high rises in Dubai Marina that serve as 'symbolic voices,' 2010 (photo by author)

Dubai’s new status as a global or international city and the proliferation in infrastructure, business activities and tourism have attracted people from around the world as a place to migrate to and work (Ali, 2011: 562), resulting in a massive upsurge in population (see **Table 1**). To emphasize the significance of
this imported labor, as of 2006, foreigners constituted 95% of the workforce\(^3\) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – 99% and 91% of all employees in the private and public sectors, respectively (Human Rights Watch, 2006: 6; Ali, 2011: 555). Most jobs in the UAE are in banking and finance, technology, service and construction. The construction sector has attracted an influx of mostly low-income migrant laborers from South Asia, and the finance and business sector have brought in Western expatriates as well as professionals from the Middle East, South Asia and other parts of the world. The boom in certain industries and jobs required mostly male migrants and has lead to a male to female ratio of 3:1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Female</th>
<th>% Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>183,187</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>370,788</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>689,420</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1,321,453</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2,003,170</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.1.2 Planning and development

The structure of Dubai’s political system and its physical *tabula rasa* (blank slate) form (see Figure 3 and Figure 4) allow its rulers, the Maktoum family, to freely dispose of most lands to their liking, since the regime holds central control over the pattern of urban development and master planning for the whole emirate

\(^3\)Foreigners constitute 95% of the total workforce, not of the total population in the UAE.
(Pacione, 2005: 260). Far from the organic growth of other cities in rapidly urbanizing regions, Dubai’s physical growth has been consciously planned and regulated by the government. Besides partaking in customary operations (e.g. public services, legislation, regulation and infrastructure), the government is also in charge of development strategy and projects (e.g. tourism ventures, the Dubai International Finance Centre, specialized zones, and other mega projects). Property development is one of the more active reaches of the state, with Emaar being the largest government-controlled property development firm. In terms of city planning, decision-making is highly centralized in Dubai, allowing for quick and coordinated efforts of development activities and investment (Hvidt, 2009).

**Figure 3** Sheikh Zayed Road in the 1980s (FlashyDubai, 2013)
Although the government determines high-level decisions on planning and development, officials also collaborate with private sector companies and have hired internationally renowned architects and consultants to construct iconic mega projects to distinguish Dubai as a modern metropolis. The state’s dreams of becoming a ‘global city’ – a neoliberal urban center attracting investment capital and tourism and competing with other global cities like New York, London, and Shanghai – has arguably come to fruition. Dubai’s development ethos seems to be based on a desire to be bigger, better and brasher than the rest of the world, with a fundamental though implicit objective to build a financial and tourist center to rival those of the West. The city itself projects a science fiction fantasy and has produced a range of home-grown brands such as the world’s largest shopping mall (Dubai Mall), first (informally recognized) “seven-star” hotel (Burj Al Arab), world’s tallest building (Burj Kalifa) and the world’s tallest hotel (Rotana Rose Tower) (see Figure 5). The process of constructing tall buildings has been

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4 Dubai has looked to the West in adopting the lifestyle and consumption habits of its transnational counterparts but at the same time competes against Western cities’ traditionally dominant positions in commercial and international relevance.
described as a ‘sign of power and progress’ by Elsheshtawy (2010), who also noted that the “spectacularising” role of architecture contributes to a “hegemonic Dubai,” further elevating its regional and global status (as cited in Stephenson and Ali-Knight, 2010: 281). Shopping malls are also ubiquitous. As of 2008, 35 shopping centers covered over 14 million square meters, and in 2009 retail activities in those shopping centers contributed to 50% of Dubai’s GDP (Elsheshtawy, 2008a: 167-168). Another feature of Dubai’s development is “theming,” a popular strategy where developers offer a user experience based on a certain theme, such as Mercato Mall known for its Italian/Renaissance streetscape or residential developments like Dubai Motor City and Dubai International City.

![Figure 5 Heading to Downtown Dubai commercial center with the prominent Burj Khalifa reigning over the skyline, 2010 (photo by author)](image)

As a matter of course, the type of aesthetics and services offered can alienate the less privileged. Urban space is dedicated and conceptualized and furthermore commercialized for a global capitalist elite. As Elsheshtawy (2008a) posits, if the prevailing image of the urban environment is based on “spectacle and fakeness”
and development is geared solely for consumption and profit and excludes the poor, possible problems of social and political stability might arise (164).

In line with its high-end brand image, Dubai prides itself in being a regulated and orderly place. Poverty is hidden and order is prioritized and maintained on the streets by a strong security presence. It is not surprising that the Municipality has tried to demolish the streets and buildings in areas that are most indicative of poverty and often labeled as “slum.” Where the new districts consist of high rises and suburban landscapes containing luxury villas and modern apartments, rented or owned by mostly rich and middle-class expatriates (Masad, 2008), the old districts are conspicuous deviations. Demolition of the older areas of the district demonstrates the state’s priorities on iconographic hyperrealism as opposed to heritage conservation or social-spatial justice.

Despite the city’s strict enforcement of control and order and its luxury, mega development image, the districts of Bur Dubai, Deira, Karama, and Satwa are distinct areas that tell a different story. Informal activities are more likely to take place in those districts perhaps because of their make-up of social and spatial order: residents consisting of low-income expatriates forming significant South Asian and Arab communities, and urban space characterized by narrow streets, shabbier low-rise buildings and cheap retail options. Mahdavi (2010) has noted, “When making the drive from south to north on Sheikh Zayed Road, drivers can witness the spaces between the buildings narrow incrementally the further north one moves” (944). The districts’ organic development, as compared to the hyper-

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5 Limited demolition took place in the district of Satwa, but redevelopment efforts temporarily halted during the 2008 economic crisis.
planned developments of the rest of the city, are pedestrian friendly and reminiscent of bustling historic cities in Third World countries. In a way, they challenge Dubai’s hegemonic narrative of modernity and luxury.

1.1.3 “Monopoly Rent”

Dubai’s urban space and architectural symbols are effectively used as a tool through which the city is claiming global status. Its economic motives can be seen as unique cultural conurbations for purposes of extracting “monopoly rent” based on claims to uniqueness and authenticity, as Harvey (2002: 94) coined the term:

Monopoly rent arises because social actors can realize an enhanced income stream over an extended time by virtue of their exclusive control over some directly or indirectly tradable item which is in some crucial respects unique and non-replicable.

Economic incentives justify iconic mega development. There is no other place like this place, no other tallest building in the world or man-made islands in the shapes of palm trees. Dubai’s special environmental characteristics, including the built, social and cultural environments, can be traded upon through the marketing practices of the tourist industry. The official Dubai tourism website tells visitors exactly “Why Dubai?”

Just when you think you’ve seen it all, a new project is announced, whether it is the launch of a sports stadium, a mega commercial tower, a residential enclave or yet another shopping mall! Dubai is constantly on the move, striving for greater heights and more facilities and comfort for its residents and visitors. Dubai is without a doubt a destination of the 21st century. Read any article about the fastest growing city in the region and it’s almost guaranteed you’ll see the words ‘ambitious’, ‘record-breaking’ and ‘staggering’. This meteoric growth has not gone unnoticed, and each year thousands of expats arrive to claim a slice of the action. (Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, 2012)

The monopoly on its unique cultural claims drives commercial activity, allowing Dubai to charge more for those desiring to develop, live and do business there.
Paradoxically, the more marketable or more “Disneyfied” Dubai gets, the less unique and special it becomes. Numerous cities in the developing world are building “unique” skylines to compete with other global cities, and a continuously increasing amount of downtown centers are filled with shopping malls of the same multinational brands. That is why Dubai must emphasize its cultural distinctiveness. Definitely Dubai (its tourism slogan) can offer everything, from impressive shopping malls and distinctive high rises to traditional souks and the allure of the desert (see Figure 6). Even “local cultural developments and traditions get absorbed within the calculi of political economy through attempts to garner monopoly rents” (Harvey, 2002: 101), which may explain why historical areas of Dubai, like Deira and Bur Dubai, have been so far mostly preserved even though they do not fit with Dubai’s hegemonic brand image – they are another avenue for monopoly rent in the form of tourism dollars.

Figure 6 Homepage of Dubai’s official tourism website (Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, 2012)
1.2 Citizenship and Hierarchies of Power

1.2.1 “Official” and “unofficial” citizens

Foreigners can only come to Dubai based on their productive value – their ability to work. The UAE’s policy on immigration is implemented on a rotation principle, where employment of foreign workers is contractual and after the contract expires, new migrant workers substitute the former. Gesemann (2003) suggested that this is done in order to avoid the consolidation and most likely, the fortification, of migrant communities (as cited in Christ, 2012: 681). Foreigners constitute about 90% of Dubai’s total population and Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi migrants, many unskilled and low-income laborers, make up 76% of the foreign-born population (Elsheshtawy, 2008b: 971). As native Emiratis are significantly outnumbered, establishing political capacity and opportunity for foreign migrants to advocate for better rights is prohibited. Migrants are perceived as a possible threat to domestic security and potential for political uprisings by the foreign majority are considered a serious threat (Janardhan, 2007, as cited in Christ, 2012: 682).

The sponsorship (kafala) system regulates all foreigners’ legal presence in the UAE. All foreign workers depend on a sponsor, who is generally a national. A sponsor is needed to issue a visa and without agreement of the sponsor, the ability of workers to change employers is limited, even in the case of abuse. The kafala system reproduces the existing social structure (Gesemann 2003: 360 in Christ, 2012: 682). Moreover, the title ‘citizen’ and its accompanying welfare benefits are almost strictly limited to UAE natives. It is extremely difficult, or rather just
about impossible, for migrants to naturalize. Requirements for citizenship consideration are not formalized and it is up to the government’s discretion to grant citizenship. Prerequisites are often thought to include at least thirty years of residence, being Muslim, being Arab, being an Arabic speaker, having a clean police record, having “proper” academic qualifications, having a “healthy” bank balance, and having personal influence, known in Arabic as *wasta* (Ali, 2011: 559). Thus, foreign workers are ‘perpetual visitors’ (Elsheshtawy, 2008b: 985).

Foreigners’ ability to live and work in Dubai is dependent on a work visa. Even if one is born in Dubai, one does not have the security of belonging in the emirate as a true citizen. Therefore, fear of losing permission to stay in Dubai is significant (Haines, 2011: 175). Knowing that being in Dubai will be temporary and gaining official citizenship is near impossible, expatriates can live with a sense of limbo or transience in a place that is inherently temporary (Walsh, 2012: 52-55). Dubai’s citizenship and immigration policies reify the space of the city as a controlled space, creating a permanent “Other.” Consequentially, expatriates can have conflicted notions of belonging in a country they can never truly belong to (officially).

1.2.2 “*Expat*” versus “*migrant*”

Foreigners can experience life in Dubai very differently, as nationality and ethnicity determine job opportunities and class membership, resulting in socially hierarchical attributions that influence how foreigners conceive of their own positions in society, how they perceive each other, and how they live and interact with the state. ‘Expatriate’ is formally defined as a person who lives outside his or
her native country. However, the term ‘expat’ is colloquially used for skilled workers, mostly of Western origin. For low-skilled and low-waged foreigners, ‘migrant workers’ is a term that informally differentiates them from high-skilled expats.  

While both sets of foreigners come for economic opportunity, affluent expats also enjoy generous compensation packages and tax-free incentives, upscale consumption options, and comfortable living arrangements. Outdoor recreational opportunities (from playing polo to sand dune bashing) and live-in housekeeping/nanny services are accessible and affordable. In Dubai, they can afford ‘the good life’ that is not as easily attainable in their home countries.

The social structure in Dubai is characterized by the following:

At the very top of the social hierarchy are Sheikhs and their families, followed by other Emirati nationals (of Arab or Persian origin), and then wealthy migrants from Iraq, Palestine and Egypt, some of whom have been given Emirati national citizenship. A wealthy and professional elite form the next tier, including upper and middle-class Indian, Lebanese, Iranian, Russian, Chinese, and European migrants. An even larger migrant population of various skills levels from South and South-East Asia, predominantly India and Pakistan, but also Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the Philippines, forms the lowest social tier in this hierarchy. While the diverse range of skill levels and incomes in evidence among Filipino migrants exemplifies the reduction of complexity inherent in such a simplistic and brief description, it is nevertheless the case that Britons [and other Western or white expatriates], irrespective of education, skill or salary, are relatively advantaged in this post-imperial urban space. (Walsh, 2011: 519)
1.2.3 Theories of citizenship and implications on belonging

Since expatriates do not have access to official citizenship in Dubai, there are other theories of citizenships that can help us better understand their migration experiences. These theories examine what a less concrete or formalized notion of citizenship might mean for Dubai’s unofficial citizens. Suad Joseph (1999: 162) asserts, “Citizenship defines identity – who you are, where you belong, where you come from, and how you understand yourself in the world” (as cited in Parreñas, 2001: 1130). With this in mind, I use the term ‘urban citizenship’ as a type of citizenship that represents residents’ relationship with the city framed by their access to amenities and their claims to belonging. How citizenship plays out in urban space requires an exploration of (urban) citizen identity and rights to the city that are to a great extent determined by class, country of origin, and ethnic associations. The following theories, ‘flexible citizenship’ and ‘cultural citizenship,’ are probed to illustrate the type of identity-based rights Dubai’s unofficial citizens possess.

‘Flexible Citizenship’ sanctioned by the state

The expatriate community consists of a transnational set of people who frequently relocate to different places, often facilitated by jobs at transnational corporations. This type of movement contributes to global market processes. Aihwa Ong’s (1993) conception of ‘flexible citizen’ refers to the mobile flows of people and their transnational practices. The flexible subject “displays an élan for thriving in turbulent conditions of political and economic insecurity” (Ong, 2009), and is able to move around ambitiously in search for opportunities outside of his or her
home and comfort zone. This flexibility requires a certain savvy and sense of self. By exercising their social and economic capital for transnational mobility, flexible citizens utilize their self-positioning and social agency in a cosmopolitan context (Ong, 1993: 752-55).

Flexible citizens benefit from Dubai’s predisposition towards neoliberalism. In order to attract global market growth and investors from abroad, the state institutes flexible practices towards citizenship (Ong, 2009). The idea of the “neoliberal as exception” enables the state to form certain areas of ‘exception’ from usual norms based on the perceived economic worth of the ‘exceptional’ entity (Ong, 2006). The state caters to the “highly-mobile, highly-paid and highly-skilled” expatriates (Beaverstock, 2005: 249, as cited in Walsh, 2012: 46). This is demonstrated by the fact that not only does Dubai have an excess of luxury entertainment options to cater to the privileged group, but the state also grants expats foreign ownership rights within free-trade zones, a type of “zoning technology” that carves special spaces in order “to achieve strategic goals of regulating groups in relation to market forces” (Ong, 2006: 6); condones traditionally inappropriate behavior by allowing alcohol and liberal dress practices, and bestows preferential treatment by establishing policies that require less bureaucratic hassle for expats as compared to labor migrants (Laber, 2012).

‘Cultural Citizenship’ and its limitations

All expatriates in Dubai must negotiate racial and cultural boundaries, but the inequities of racial discrimination fall mostly upon South and Southeast Asian migrants (non-Western, non-Arab). Aihwa Ong (1996) uses the term ‘cultural
citizenship’ to describe how immigrants of color negotiate racial and cultural boundaries in the United States. ‘Cultural citizenship’ refers to:

The cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory. Cultural citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society. (Ong, 1996: 738)

Ong emphasizes that global citizenship confers citizenship privileges in Western democracies in ways that may allow immigrants to scale racial and cultural heights but not to circumvent rooted status hierarchies based on racial difference. This can be said of the social stratification system in Dubai. Dubai’s complex hierarchical system of racial and class stigmas assign value to one’s race and one’s income. Depending on their perceived worth in social and economic capital, some expatriates have greater access than others to key institutions in state and civil society. However, expatriates of color still confront racial discrimination and its associated class biases, often perceived as having lesser worth.

Take Filipino migrants in Dubai as an example. Natives of the Philippines form the fifth largest group of foreigners in Dubai. Workers from Asia tend to be ascribed with certain characteristics: efficient, obedient, and easier to control. “Essentializing processes of ethnization and culturalization lead to stereotyping of migrants. In these essentialized definitions, culture and ethnicity are the most crucial factors for social status in the society” (Christ, 2012: 683). These perceptions of culture and ethnicity determine material opportunities, especially in terms of employment. Dubai’s laws prescribe that only women from India, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Indonesia can be sponsored as domestic help, which reinforces the binding between race and an occupation
socially considered inferior. Though a large number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are college graduates, most of them do not find work that is appropriate to their qualifications but rather based on what is perceived and assumed about them. For instance, within the low-wage sector, Filipinos get higher salaries than other nationalities like Sri Lankans since Filipinos are associated with “modernity and fluency in English;” however Filipinos receive lower salaries than their Arab colleagues for the same work even if those colleagues have less educational training (Christ, 2012: 683).

‘Neoliberal’ or ‘Consumer Citizenship’ practices
Flexible citizens can also be described as neoliberal participants that partake in the market economy through their professional jobs while exercising their urban citizenship through consumption. When Neha Vora (2008b) investigated citizenship in its extra-legal function, in how it allows people to claim to belong to a place, she found that Indian middle-class migrants enact a sense of belonging through “consumer citizenship” (Neha Vora, 2008b: 397-8). Against the backdrop of racial discrimination (effects of cultural citizenship), middle-class Indians associate consumption with “freedom,” establishing territorial belonging and participating in the national identity of a place full of malls and consumption options. They tend to see Dubai as a “neoliberal, market polity” where economic merit results in material rewards (Kanna, 2011: 36). They also participate in legitimizing and benefitting from the inequitable state system (Ticku, 2009: 86).
1.3 Narrative of Belonging Shaped by Physical Landscape

‘Landscape’ is multi-layered and can take on various meanings or uses. In this paper, I use landscape in two ways: first is the physical space that describes a “material presence” with a pictorial association, which could refer to framed views ranging from specific sites to the scenic character of neighborhoods and regions. The second meaning of landscape is less concrete and more of a cultural construct, a “blend of land and life” or a function of physical and social determinants (Cosgrove, 2006). Urban symbols in the physical landscape, or ‘symbolic voices’ as Henri Lefebvre denominated, are tools that provide context and indicate social values (Lefebvre, 1991, as cited in Acuto, 2010: 274).

Having said that, landscape should be recognized not only for its symbolic use, but that it can do many, even contradictory things, on “embodied, ethical and/or emotional grounds” (Smith 2010: 265). Landscape does not only reflect social values or social division, but it also produces meaning, emotion, and the appearance or the reinforcement of social division. Oney-Yazici et al. (2011) found that architectural characteristics of residential complexes and neighborhoods impacted household satisfaction and the forming of social contacts within the neighborhood, based on their study of the Greens residential area in Dubai. Hayden (1999) identified public space as a component of landscape that can nurture a profound, subtle and inclusive sense of what it means to be a resident of a state. She states that identity is intimately tied to memory, and urban landscapes are storehouses for social memories. Landscapes hold memories of histories with families, neighbors, colleagues, and strangers – and frame the lives
of those people. Memories of time spent in particular spaces in the city work to define personal relations to people and place. This is an crucial idea that is central to my research, as I aim to show in my findings how the physical landscape can produce or inform an intangible sense of space and belonging for residents within its environs.

The term ‘space’ is also ambiguous and can have a tangible/intangible suggestion, similar to ‘landscape.’ Lefebvre’s (1992) original analysis of the production of space gives us a very relevant concept in exploring social and physical spatial relations – that the public space of a city is where the reproduction of social relations takes place (as cited in Hayden, 1999: 19). The physical environment in itself cannot resolve social problems but it “can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom” (Foucault, 2001). But in Dubai’s case, where development and design is tightly controlled by the state, what effects are produced when the architect has no “liberating intentions?”

The emotional and psychological effects of the physical environment cannot be disentangled from the larger social context of the region; they are perplexingly intertwined. Architecture or urban design created with certain intentions do not fundamentally control what happens in those spaces or exert power over people (Foucault, 2001.). Space is still socially and personally constructed, the social milieu has much influence on what is said and believed, and can rework what is perceived of the physical. To ground research in everyday experiences is to analyze what people say and do in regards to the physical, while scrutinizing the
social reasons and implications for their responses. Aihwa Ong implores us to inquire: what are the everyday actions that are embedded in specific power contexts (Ong, 1999), and how are those reinforced by the built environment and social milieu? These everyday actions and perceptions, as they pertain to space and belonging, are enmeshed with the power dynamics held up by society and state policy. Thus, we must look into the social and political power structures that inform residents of their place in space.

1.3.1 Belonging and transnationality

This research not only looks at the implications of landscape and formation of space on residents, but specifically, on foreign, female, residents. A question about expatriate women’s perceptions is a question about transnationality, the “condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space” (Ong, 1999) enabled by global processes. Where Ong traces transnationalism associated with the practices and imagination of mobile elite Chinese men and women, I follow the practices and sentiments of belonging of expatriate women in Dubai, who are without a doubt shaped by the social, political, economic, and physical attributes of the city and also their personal, rooted notions of place. Because these expatriate women have another base (experiences derived from their home country or other migration experiences) to compare Dubai’s physical and social landscape against, they are better prepared to question and valorize different environments. The configuration of identity and belonging rely on the ways in which expatriate women navigate the various barriers and possibilities of their home away from home. Living within transient temporality also has
complications on how attached expatriate women can become to the city, and how much they feel they belong.

1.4 Notions of Belonging for Women in Dubai

1.4.1 Being “foreign and female”

Institutionalized gender discrimination and patriarchal attitudes and practices in Arab and Middle Eastern countries have been studied and affirmed by academics and non-academics alike. Metcalfe (2008) suggests, “the specificities of inequalities are contextually embedded in gender regimes at the cultural and ideological, structural, organizational and individual level” (as cited in Stalker and Mavin, 2011: 275). In the UAE, a woman’s primary role is still seen as homemaker and mother, although there has been a significant rise in female employment of 584% between 1960 and 2000 as more women joined the public sector in health, education and social care. Still, gendered social-spatial segregation continues to limit aspects of women’s daily lives in the UAE (including expatriates) in various ways, from career choices and training opportunities to typical activities such as setting up bank accounts and obtaining drivers licenses, which require documentation and permission from the spouse (or company in the absence of a spouse). It is also considered a sin for Emirati women to interact with men other than close relatives (Metcalf, 2008, as cited in Stalker and Mavin, 2011: 275; Harrison and Snejina, 2011: 635).

Expatriate women face a different but still prevalent level of gender discrimination compared to their local counterparts. In their study of expatriate
female professionals living in Dubai, Stalker and Mavin (2011) found that their subjects’ identity of “being female and foreign” constituted a distinct set of social expectations and sense of place in society. Some of their informants were able to occupy places and positions or interact with male strangers, which would not have been “respectable” for Emirati women. However, their subjects faced gendered discriminatory values and practices such as fewer benefits and financial packages, less job security, and “body management practices” including dress code and demeanor, compared to their male colleagues. They also received less favorable work terms than what Emirati women (and of course, men) receive. This discriminatory context and patriarchal culture frames expatriate women’s experiences and everyday interaction in and outside of the workplace.

As a matter of fact, the majority of women in Dubai are not employed. Only 36.8% of expatriate women in Dubai are economically active, and a similarly low percentage (31.4%) of Emirati women are employed (Dubai Statistics Center, 2011a). Dubai’s Western expatriate population consists of many ‘trailing spouses’ that follow their husbands and withdraw from the labor market. Meanwhile, lower-skilled, less-desired domestic work is done by South and Southeast Asian women.

In addition, in a city that is so visibly and actually male-dominated (about 75% of the population), women may feel acutely that the public space is a gendered space (see Figure 7). In their study of Western women working in Dubai, Harrison and Snejina (2011: 635) mentioned that many of their participants noted that the large number of men in the city caused occasional
discomfort due to them staring at foreign women on public beaches or on the streets even when there were no incidents of harassment. Interestingly, unlike other Middle Eastern states where the authority places the responsibility of not attracting unwanted attraction on the women (they “should” dress piously), Dubai enforces a decency policy on men, usually South Asian ‘bachelors,’ to prevent them from harassing women in public. This allows non-national women to dress liberally and/or comfortably. The Al-Ameen Service⁸ is an anonymous telephone line to report public disturbance, and is primarily advertised for women to call in case they are being harassed. In general, the government’s strict enforcement of propriety and good behavior, substantiated by harsh criminal penalties, makes safety not a concern for women in Dubai.

Figure 7 South Asian men on open streets in ethnic neighborhood (Renfro, n.d.)

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⁸ *Al Ameen* means guardian or protector.
Expatriate women are influenced by their previous cultural and gendered perceptions, and must navigate the new social and cultural context of the UAE. They must negotiate their expatriate status with a gendered reality in Dubai that can be quite different from the more liberal societies they originate from. In her research, Walsh (2006) speaks about Jane, a British expatriate in Dubai, and her decision to dress more conservatively in long sleeves for formal/professional occasions while dressing more liberally in sleeveless tops and knee-length skirts for casual occasions,

… On leaving the private space of her home, Jane is watched by several sets of eyes, in different ways, prompting her to feel uncomfortable as she imagines disapproval in the gaze of the elderly woman and becomes concerned with the sexual attention she attracts from the young men… She attempts to reinforce her identity as a (non-Muslim) British woman, associating her nationalized sense of belonging with being ‘civilized’, ‘liberated’ and ‘equal’ with men, a widespread, persistent and political comparison. (275)

Expat women are compelled to confront mixed feelings of adopting Western versus Dubayyan/Islamic values. Non-Muslim women negotiate public space in Muslim societies, where the female body and costume become cultural and political symbols. “Embodied foreignness in everyday space” is vital in exploring expatriate belonging (Walsh, 2006: 275). Despite this, the overall environment in Dubai is not extremely restrictive for women as it is still one of, if not the most liberal of places in the Middle East. Harrison and Snejina (2011: 635) concluded that Western expatriate females do not experience great adjustment difficulties when conducting their assignments in the UAE, demonstrated by the fact that over 80% of their respondents either returned to work in the country or extended their time beyond their initial commitment in the UAE, indicating that living and
working in the UAE was desirable and satisfactory, or at least adequate salaries and tax benefits made it appealing enough to stay.

1.4.2 Domestic helpers

Women who come to work in domestic service make up close to 10% of the UAE population (Ali, 2011: 561). The significant presence of Filipina maids might be on account of the Philippines being the largest exporter of workers in the Asia-Pacific region. Filipina domestic workers are a valuable source of foreign capital due to the significant amount of remittances they send back to the Philippines. The relatively poor country has set up an Overseas Employment Administration to relieve high domestic unemployment and gain foreign capital. The Administration also works with hiring agencies in the Philippines that recruit workers for domestic service positions around the world, from the UAE to Hong Kong to various countries in Europe (Constable, 1997: 21). The UAE’s high demand for foreign labor makes Dubai a prime location for Filipina domestic workers to earn higher wages than they can earn at home.

Besides facing occupational and gender stereotypes and attitudes about ethnic, racial, and cultural differences, live-in domestic workers but must cope with a distinct experience where she both lives and works in her employer’s house. Live-in domestic workers are both socially isolated and in someone else’s territory, surrounded by someone else’s things; essentially their space and time belongs to another. This has major implications on how a live-in domestic’s sense of place

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9 Without labor migration, the unemployment rate of the Philippines would increase by 40 percent (Castles and Miller, 1998, as cited in Parreñas, 2001).
and belonging is shaped, when she is constantly with a family she does not belong to, living in a home that is not hers.

As Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007) observed in her fieldwork with Latina live-in nanny/housekeepers in Los Angeles, “the boundaries that we might normally take for granted disappear in live-in jobs… as the line between job space and private space is blurred” (32). Being in physical proximity to their employers at all times, there is almost no time off from the job and they commonly feel trapped and confined. Domestics’ sense of belonging is very linked to how they are treated within the household. If a domestic worker lives in the worse quarters of the house, either with the child where she gets no privacy and little time off, or tucked away in a laundry room (which is not uncommon in Dubai); if her eating is controlled so that she cannot grab food from the refrigerator at any time, or eat with the family during meal times; if she does not have a quality relationship with her employer, a relationship where the employer and employee have mutual respect and the latter can talk and be listened to about personal concerns and aspirations (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007)… all of these scenarios contribute to an environment that “requires the performance of invisibility” and can deepen the sense of non-belonging (Palmer, 2010: 6).

Instead of having a sponsorship-based relationship with employers, domestic workers in Dubai enter a guardianship relationship in which the family has authority over activities and responsibilities (Kanna, 2011: 203). Thus, it is quite easy, and not uncommon, for guardians to restrict their maids’ rights; giving little to no time off is considered standard practice. If a domestic worker is unhappy
with her job, she cannot easily switch employers or quit and find a new job because she would lose her right to stay in the country, as her employer is also her visa sponsor. This makes it very challenging for a domestic worker to get out of a bad work situation and gives her little flexibility to bargain for better treatment or pay, since the employer must give her his permission to switch to another employer. Much like Hondagneu-Sotelo’s Latina domestic worker interviewees, Filipina maids in Dubai are “subordinated not only by race and socioeconomic class but also by nationality and immigration status” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007: 138).

1.4.3 Networks of care

Social ties and support clearly shape one’s sense of belonging in place. Though nationality and ethnicity are used by people to differentiate and discriminate, they also work as common threads to link people together and create affinity, fellowship, and a sense of community. In his research, Kathiravelu (2012) demonstrated that informal social networks of care cross but also rely on social stratifications based on ethnicity, nationality, gender and class. These are essential as Dubai lacks government policy for creating community or inclusive social organizations. Kathiravelu (2012: 107) states:

Acts of care practiced across and within ethnic and national divisions indicate that racialised forms of exclusion as well as inclusion can exist simultaneously in this city… Social networks in the city thus both simultaneously reify and overcome existing structural differentiations and hierarchies.

Christ (2012: 678) discovered that most aspects of everyday knowledge are shared and transferred exclusively within the Filipino community. Thus, the strength of the community and the willingness of Filipinos to help out other
Filipinos, even if they are strangers, give members a sense of security (and even belonging to a community that is reliably always there) dictated by informal cultural rules of conduct. Generalized reciprocity\(^\text{10}\) is a norm and shared ideal of the Filipino expatriate community, and in this case positive discrimination based on race can help Filipinas to adjust and belong to this ethnic community. Thus, while migrant Filipina domestic workers consider the Philippines as “home” and reinforce their nationalist identity through in-group practices, their sense of place and sense of community extends across a transnational landscape (Parreñas, 2001: 1130).

Palmer (2010) studied Filipina domestic workers in Toronto who congregated together in public spaces and co-rented weekender apartments, describing those practices as efforts to create communities of care and belonging in their everyday spaces. The Filipinas’ ethnic-specific networks created a sense of community within shared spaces, where they could chat about similar experiences with issues related to employment and separation from their children and families in the Philippines. One of Palmer’s informants, Theresa, describes the personal importance of their shared time in shared space for cultivating feelings of care and belonging: “It’s helpful to feel like a community. It helps get rid of homesickness. We are busy working five days, but at the same time, interaction helps you feel more at home. It feels better. Helps get used to being without a family” (Palmer, 2010: 69).

\(^{10}\) The norm of generalized reciprocity mandates Filipinos to correspond with other Filipinos regardless whether they know each other or are strangers. It is not the recipient of support who is expected to return support to the giver. Though a return of help is expected, the return can be delivered to any member of the Filipino community at any time (Christ, 2012: 691).
Professional expats (flexible, neoliberal citizens) also create communities of care through networking. Female expats have a ready supply of social support through businesswomen networks and other expatriate associations such as the Australia–New Zealand Association and the International Businesswomen’s Group in Dubai, among others. There are also plenty of online forums established by expats that offer extensive information regarding all manner of practical matters (Harrison and Snejina, 2011: 639).

1.5. Spatial Practices and Spatial Mobility

Many scholars have identified the pivotal interconnection between spatiality and the social milieu. Michel de Certeau aptly wrote, “Spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life” (1985: 161). Ali Madanipour has said “... exclusion should be regarded as a socio-spatial phenomenon” (1998: 188) and Henri Lefebvre has given us a more confrontational reading: “Today more than ever, the class struggle is inscribed in space” (1974/1991: 55, as cited in Kanna, 2011: 20). Dubai’s ‘starchitect’ towers, ubiquitous shopping malls and vast highways (‘symbolic voices’) employ a “psychology of exclusion,” built with cues and measures that communicate who are not welcome (Elsheshtawy, 2008b: 969-973). Thus, spatial boundaries in the built environment can concretize social boundaries (Lan, 2006: 12)

Though providing public space is challenging and must be centrally planned and addressed, doing so allows different segments of the population to mix and interact. If public space is an integral component of landscape that nurtures a
profound, subtle and inclusive sense of belonging (Hayden, 1999), then a dearth of public space can result in social estrangement; memories of time spent in the urban landscape focuses on the individual with less connection to the community. This social disconnect is exacerbated when the built environment allows certain groups (flexible citizens) to be more mobile than others.

1.5.1 Spatial practices in public space

Dubai’s fragmented social groups, distinguished by income, ethnicity, and social class, rarely mix. The city’s spatial layout and social stigmas contribute to limited social interaction and integration. The spatial configuration of the physical landscape is fundamental in influencing interaction, and in Dubai’s case, discouraging interaction. The urban fabric of the city is composed of isolated communities that are relatively far from one another and separated by highways; one cannot traverse from one district to another on foot (Elsheshtawy, 2011: 226). Dubai has little functional public space – places that are free and open and support gathering or social exchange.  

Outside the home, social gathering takes place largely within indoor, air-conditioned consumer environments.

The difficulty of outdoor public space being utilized must be recognized. The coldest period of the year is from December to March, when mild weather of 20º to 23º Celsius (68º to 73º F) is common. The warm period between November and April have an average temperature of 25º C (77º F), while the hottest summer months of May to October have mean daily temperatures of 29º to 34º C (84º to

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11 Traditional Arabic-Islamic cultural norms encourage families to associate in private and forbid women and girls from socializing with unrelated men.
93° F). Outdoor spaces can be pleasantly comfortable during the half of the year that is not hot. During the hot season, a strong sun plus high humidity make it less appealing for outdoor public spaces to be utilized, although evening temperature are somewhat cooler and winds stronger (Thapar & Yannas, 2008: 2-3).

Perhaps the most highly trafficked of places are indoor shopping malls. Malls are not only sites of consumption but they also include plazas and courtyards within them, which are well used as public spaces or meeting spaces. Elsheshtawy (2008a: 171) found that many users of the Ibn Batuta Mall do not use the mall for retail consumption but instead go to the courtyards for reading, meeting friends, etc. He notes that the mall becomes a sort of community center with public spaces for people to sit around and surf the Internet with their laptops using free WIFI. Nonetheless, malls may not be the ideal public space – although one is not forced to spend money in malls, the financial inability to purchase items can discourage lower-income expatriates from frequenting them.

Officially sanctioned outdoor public spaces include public beaches and parks, outdoor cafes, and the upscale Jumeirah Beach pedestrian mall. But as Elsheshtawy (2011) noted, “various factors come into play to ensure that only certain groups do actually see these places, including the distance from work and accommodation, the presence of security guards, and charging for entry” (226). If these public spaces are only accessible by car, if their entry fees are unaffordable, and if they are so upscale that they are not perceived as being shared spaces for everyone, then they do not truly serve as “public” spaces.
**Insurgency**

In his fieldwork, Elsheshtawy (2008b) identified vibrant, incidental gathering spaces – in empty parking lots, street corners, green lawns, near shops, traffic lights or bus stops even where there are no loitering signs present – where members from the city’s multiethnic communities interact. Kendall (2012: 54) has also seen male migrant workers play informal cricket games on vacant and underdeveloped construction sites left deserted by the decline in the property market. These types of activity can be seen as migrant workers’ attempt at claiming their rights to the city – by changing the intended use of physical space to fit appropriately to their needs and desires. This spatial activity of ‘taking over’ can also be labeled as ‘insurgent.’ Insurgency, as defined in this situation, is the act of staking claim to public space. Jeffrey Hou (2010: 9-12) describes it as such:

> Insurgency arises when citizen initiatives and informal activities create new uses and forms of public space, which can include spontaneous events, unintended uses, and various activities that defy or escape existing rules and regulations, bringing about alternative social and spatial relationships. Insurgency has also been described as an assertive space in the public realm that anchors group solidarity in the urban landscape, transforming spaces to assert cultural identity (Rios, 2010: 103).

These insurgent practices can be seen as a claim to space, a claim to identity and belonging. However, as one can see from Figure 8, these spaces are on the whole spaces for men. Large congregations of men on the streets may have implications of creating fear or being threatening to women. The men who assert their right to public space can paradoxically take away that right from women, who are already outnumbered in terms of population. Though many sociologists have documented the similar phenomena of large gatherings of Filipina maids
who take over or ‘appropriate’ public spaces in Hong Kong (for example, Constable, 1997 and Tillu, 2011), it does not seem that Dubai is a place where insurgent acts by women are taking place. I could not find details of insurgent practices by Filipina domestic workers in Dubai, or any other group of expatriate females, from reviewing the existing research.

Figure 8 The Ghubeiba bus stop, a major gathering node (Yasser Elsheshtawy, 2008b)

1.5.2 Spatial mobility

Since urban citizenship corresponds with residents’ access to resources, a lack of citizenship rights can result from “a combination of distance, inadequate transport and limited ways of communicating” (Creswell, 2006: 190, as cited in Elsheshtawy, 2011: 221). Dubai’s landscape is divisive in mobility and access, characterized by sprawl and the domination of the automobile. The city encapsulates Futurama’s\(^\text{12}\) main design by being a city of multiple, disconnected centers, separated by multi-lane highways. Built at the automobile instead of the pedestrian level, mobility is restricted to vehicles being the primary mode of

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\(^{12}\) Sponsored by General Motors Corporation, Futurama was an exhibit at the 1939 New York World’s Fair that envisioned what the world could look like 20 years into the future. Futurama was a utopian vision characterized by high-speed cars, vast networks of highways, boasting of modernity and efficiency.
transportation (see Figure 9), and access is limited to those who can own and afford driving or riding in a car, giving others little spatial determination. Luxurious developments, such as shopping malls, entertainment centers and luxury residences are designed to be primarily accessible by car (Elsheshtawy, 2008a). Prior to 2009, public bus facilities and routes were limited and faced under-investment. Madanipour (1998) states, “There is a direct relationship between our general sense of freedom and well-being with the choices open to us in our spatial practices” (191). Dubai lacks open, accessible, and integrative physical spaces and transportation systems, hindering mobility for those not moving by car.

![Figure 9: Dubai’s highway landscape, 2009/10 (David Kendall, 2012)](image)

In the past three years the city has made significant efforts to expand its public transit infrastructure, expanding and improving bus, metro and marine transport. The Road and Transport Authority hopes to ease mobility, improve safety, reduce reliance on private vehicles and make public transport the mode of choice in the Emirate (Al Tayer, 2010a). However, the challenge is whether expanded public
transit infrastructure will relieve immobility for Dubai’s marginalized population. RTA’s advertisement that claims, “Everyone’s city. Everyone’s Metro.” (see Figure 10) and the organization’s slogan of “Safe and smooth transport for all” seem to hint at a social and spatial justice opportunity where all inhabitants have the right to mobility in the city. However, in interviews, RTA promotes the metro as an essential resource for tourists and a source for economic development without addressing the metro’s significance to low-income riders (Al Tayer, 2010b). The completed Dubai Metro Red and Green Line stations serve the airport and mostly strategic commercial areas, such as business hubs and malls (see Figure 11). Only 5% of Dubai’s residents live within the Red Line metro stations catchment areas, and less than 10% of Dubai’s workforce works within those areas (PTV, 2008). Research is needed to study whether current metro lines actually improve residents’ mobility and access by providing sufficient stops to get people to the places they need to be, and if fares are affordable for low-income residents without cars, like domestic helpers.
Figure 10 Dubai Metro advertisement by the RTA (Al Tayer, 2010a)

Figure 11 Dubai Metro: Red and Green Line stops and planned future lines (James, 2010)
1.6 Remaining Questions

In this literature review, I have addressed various characteristics of Dubai’s urban space, including both physical and social institutions that influence expatriate women’s perceptions of space and belonging. Elements that shape belonging include:

- The potentiality of physical landscapes, along with social forces, to provide context and produce meaning, emotions, memories and sense of belonging
- The city’s physical planning and infrastructure development and corresponding conditions of mobility and access
- Lack of official citizenship and alignment with certain urban citizenships demonstrate inequitable power dynamics within the socio-economic structure of Dubai
- Gender implications in a male-dominated, moderately conservative Islamic metropole
- Strength of social support and community
- Openness of public spaces and whether they are inviting to all (accessible and affordable versus giving off an impression of exclusivity)
- How mobility is encouraged or deterred by the built landscape and transportation infrastructure

In my own qualitative research efforts, I was keen to ascertain whether these elements mattered to expatriate women in Dubai, and if so in what ways. There
are still many questions left after sifting through existing research. Some remaining questions include:

- How does the physical landscape and social milieu influence sense of belonging for diverse expatriate women? How do notions differ across nationalities, ethnicities, and professions?
- Do expatriate women perceive Dubai as ‘exclusive’ and how do they respond to the city’s “gated and secure” nature?
- How do expatriate women feel about public space in Dubai and what role does public space play in belonging? Are there acts of insurgency by expatriate women taking place?
- How do expatriate women perceive and experience the space of home, space of occupation, and space of recreation and what implications do those perceptions and experiences have on belonging?
- How mobile are diverse expatriate women? To what extent does public transportation facilitate access?

Citizenship and belonging are closely intertwined. My questions are the same as Parreñas (2001): “If citizenship in a nation-state defines one’s sense of belonging in globalization, how do those who are denied full citizenship imagine a community to which they belong? How do migrants whose experiences speak of exclusion develop a sense of place in globalization?” (1131) To add to that, I also wonder how does the physical landscape lend itself to being “exclusive” and how do women of varying socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds experience exclusivity/inclusivity?
Through my thesis research I am able to directly ask select expatriate women about what it is like to live and work in Dubai, their thoughts of the city and the places they go to, and what their notions of belonging actually are. My efforts are early attempts at creating more everyday and on-the-ground research. In Dubai, the planners and developers are creating a highly controlled environment where they also control the profits (“monopoly rent”) that come from neoliberal, mega development. This is an opportunity to explore how this type of global development impacts not the people who visit and provide tourism cash, but the longer term residents who move in and out of the ultra planned spaces in the city.
Chapter 2: Research Design

2.1 Research Rationale

The review of Dubai’s context, citizenship and hierarchy, notions of belonging, spatial practices in public space and how they connect to the female expatriate experience provides a foundation for understanding the identity and social dynamics of diverse Dubayyans. However, the relationship between space and belonging, urban citizenship and expatriate identity, and the physical and social milieu in Dubai is more difficult to ascertain from existing research. Therefore, in my own research, I desired to ask residents as explicitly as possible about their sense of belonging and how various aspects of the built and social environment influence that general sense. The concept of belonging elicits emotions about our identities and our environment. Tapping into emotions can be useful, as Walsh (2012) mentions, "For a long time emotions have been present in studies of migration, not least inherently in the language of belonging, homeliness, and displacement." (43)

I wanted to learn how expatriate women feel about space and belonging in a city they will never officially belong to, in a space that is dominated by men. My interviewees are expatriate women currently living in Dubai of the following demographics: those coming from different regions (Europe, U.S., Middle East, South or Southeast Asia); of different socioeconomic standing (income, education, etc.); and with various types of jobs (professional/business, domestic, service, freelance). Getting clarity on how and why these women relate to spaces...
in similar and different ways will shed light on how they perceive their own sense of belonging or alienation, and could help us further illuminate the lived experiences of residents in a mega built environment.

My research explores how “spaces,” both the tangible and intangible kind, are conceived as part of the built environment and urban milieu and effectually influence residents’ sense of belonging in Dubai. The spaces of interest for my research include:

i. Public space and the general layout of infrastructure and land development of the city: streets, squares, shopping malls, skyscrapers

ii. The geographic and social positions of where residents live, work, and play: space of the home, space of occupation, and space of recreation

iii. Mobile space: use of transportation modes such as private automobiles, metro, bus, walking, and perceptions of highways, streets, sidewalks, etc.

This research project is an exploratory attempt at finding descriptive, qualitative data about Dubai’s expatriate female residents. It is not meant to be scientifically sound, e.g. the research participants do not come from a random sample. I hope to provide some qualitative analysis to draw informative observations and conclusions, but recognize that this project will provide a basis for further study. Results from this project will be revealing and useful for those interested in exploring issues of place-making, belonging, urban citizenship and identity, as shaped by implications of gender, class and race; who want to learn how to build

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13 Home here refers to the living quarters where expatriate women live in Dubai, and not in their native countries.
more integrated community spaces and structures for diverse residents; and/or who are specifically interested in the expatriate experience of life in the urbanizing Gulf region. Findings will provide both local and broad-reaching insight, especially as cities across the world face large migration movements inward, and seek to build a unified identity and understanding of citizenship. Lessons drawn can inform planners on how the physical and social environment impacts residents at the everyday level and contribute to their understanding of identity in a strange ‘home’ away from home.

2.2 Methodologies

2.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Data gathered from 20 interviews is the key source of information for this research.\textsuperscript{14} The participants were chosen based on snowball sampling and chain referral, beginning from three personal contacts. I also reached two female expatriates from the web forum \textit{Expat Blog}. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in English, lasting between 45 and 75 minutes, and took place between the months of December 2012 and March 2013. Interviews were conducted via Skype-to-Skype (voice, not video calls) or Skype-to-phone. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and pseudonyms used.

I selected research subjects based on variations in nationality and occupation in order to interview a group as heterogeneous as possible (see \textbf{Table 2} in

\textsuperscript{14} Though 20 is considered a small qualitative sample, Akerlind (2008) has argued 10–15 to be appropriate given that they are selected for variation and reflect the range rather than the frequency of ways of understanding phenomena within the population (as cited in Stalker & Mavin, 2011: 278).
Chapter 3: Participant Background). I methodologically looked for trends and outlier comments in interviewee responses. After organizing the data under dominant and subsidiary themes, I chose exemplary quotes to clarify points and facilitate better understanding of participants’ views. Questions directed to participants focused on their thoughts and experiences in regards to the spaces of their homes, jobs, recreational activities, public space, and mobility. (See Appendix 1 for a list of interview questions.)

2.2.2 Photographs

Photographs can better acquaint us with the urban landscape that interviewees speak about, and give color and form to their narratives. I requested certain interviewees to take pictures of “spaces” they consider welcoming or not welcoming. These photographs are supplementary and serve an illustrative purpose. Unfortunately only a few participants were able to partake in this activity, and some found pictures online because they did not have the time to go out and personally take pictures.

2.2.3 Exploration of issues through published media

Primary research evidence such as newspapers and social columns can be enlightening in the ways everyday people “engage and imagine more abstract, diffuse realities, such as the state and the community” (Anderson 1991; Gupta 2006, as cited in Kanna 2011: 14). Published online stories in magazines, forums, blogs, and travel guides give me an understanding of what issues are brought up by the target population in order to get context and open up avenues of
exploration. This methodology is not used as hard evidence or reasons to make generalizing statements about the target population. Instead, interesting themes or points I noticed in these blogs, forums and city guides informed my background knowledge so I could ask interviewees questions related to those topics. In the following chapters, I do not reference specific published mediums unless I include a direct quote or table from that source.

2.2.4 Limitations

I would have liked to interview more lower-middle and low-income residents, and more women of South Asian descent or from other regions of the world, but could not due to constraints in resources and time. The two Indian women I interviewed are professional white-collar workers but many work in the service industry as well. Also, it matters that I am a female, Asian American researcher, as this influenced the type of answers and emotions my interviewees thought appropriate to share with me. Lastly, relying on phone conversations is very limiting. Further research on this topic should be conducted in person and in Dubai if possible.
Chapter 3: Participant Background

The 20 female participants of this research project come from diverse backgrounds of varying nationalities, ethnicities, marital statuses, family sizes, personal histories and experiences. In this chapter, I explore some of the similarities and differences between the participants. While most participants are employed and of working age, living standards are unequal and are based on one’s social and economic standings. Urban citizenship status concedes more privilege and power to one group over another. Because of this, privileged ‘flexible citizens’ and less privileged ‘flexible non-citizens’ live, work, play and move in very different ways and inhabit very different spaces.

3.1 Major Characteristics of Participant Group

Table 2 represents the range in nationality, time spent in Dubai, and industries of the 20 expatriate women I interviewed.

- Seven are Western and upper-middle class, working in mostly professional occupations and considered upper middle-income
- Seven are Southeast Asian, and specifically, Filipina; five of which are low-income, working either as domestic helpers or beauticians for spa and beauty services; one can be considered lower middle-income working as an administrator and Public Relations Officer; and one can be considered upper middle-income working as an architect
- Four are Middle Eastern with upper middle-income backgrounds
• Two are South Asian, specifically Indian, and also upper middle-income

Table 2 Biographical backgrounds of interviewees (source by author)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name 15</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Duration of Stay</th>
<th>Employment in Dubai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>&lt; 2 y</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yara</td>
<td>Jordanian</td>
<td>&lt; 2 y</td>
<td>Unemployed (searching)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Meryl</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>2 - 5 y</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>2 - 5 y</td>
<td>Freelance writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Alma</td>
<td>Filipina</td>
<td>2 - 5 y</td>
<td>Domestic service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>Belgian</td>
<td>2 - 5 y</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Marissa</td>
<td>Filipina</td>
<td>&lt; 2 y</td>
<td>Domestic service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>5 - 10 y</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Padma</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>5 - 10 y</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Evie</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>5 - 10 y</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Farrin</td>
<td>Iranian</td>
<td>5 - 10 y</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Noor</td>
<td>Iranian</td>
<td>10 - 20 y</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Marilou</td>
<td>Filipina</td>
<td>2 - 5 y</td>
<td>Spa &amp; beauty services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>2 - 5 y</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Imelda</td>
<td>Filipina</td>
<td>5 - 10 y</td>
<td>Administration and PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Reem</td>
<td>Lebanese</td>
<td>5 - 10 y</td>
<td>Urban planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Rowena</td>
<td>Filipina</td>
<td>5 - 10 y</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Filipina</td>
<td>&lt; 2 y</td>
<td>Domestic service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Maricel</td>
<td>Filipina</td>
<td>2 - 5 y</td>
<td>Spa &amp; beauty services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Binti</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>25+ y</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Historical, geographical, and personal context cannot be divorced from expatriate migration experiences in Dubai. Their feelings, judgments, and spatial activities in the city are very much informed by their life prior to residing in Dubai,16 from cultivated understandings, personal upbringing, education, general outlook on the world, and an inventory of additional life experiences. For instance, seven of the twenty participants have previous migration experiences, having worked or

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15 All names used are pseudonyms.

16 Binti was my only interviewee born in Dubai. She holds Indian nationality and considers herself an “expatriate” because she does not have national UAE citizenship nor any more advantageous residence rights compared to short-term expats.
studied in other countries besides Dubai and their home country. Their experiences abroad have also informed their values and perceptions of the landscape and lifestyle in Dubai.

I consider the majority (70%) of my interviewees, those who are upper middle-income, as ‘flexible citizens.’ This group includes all the Western, Middle Eastern, and Indian women I spoke to, as well as one out of seven Filipino women. ‘Flexible citizens’ have a status that is citizen-like and can negotiate with the state their proper conditions of living. Ong (2006) describes flexible citizenship as such: “Citizenship elements such as entitlements and benefits are increasingly associated with neoliberal criteria, so that mobile individuals who possess human capital or expertise are highly valued and can exercise citizenship-like claims in diverse locations” (6-7).

Meanwhile, people who are low-income ‘migrant workers’ with much less social and economic power, who are “judged not to have such tradable competence or potential, become devalued and thus vulnerable to exclusionary practices” (Ong, 2006: 6-7). While these migrants are ‘flexible’ in their movements and capacity for uncertainty, willing to take whatever job they can get in a foreign country, they are essentially non-citizens with little rights or political protection. For the remainder of this paper, I will use the term ‘flexible non-citizen’ to characterize the low- and lower middle-income female expatriates of my participant group. They are the domestic workers, spa and beauty service workers, and administrator/Public Relations Officer. They do not fit into the
category of upper class ‘flexible citizens’ or “desirable citizens” (Ong, 2009) that the state caters to.

Living standards vary immensely between those who are ‘flexible citizens’ and those who are not. Flexible citizens form a “highly mobile, highly paid, and highly skilled” labor force. They can live “the good life” while ‘flexible non-citizens’ cannot. Notably, flexible citizens can raise their children (if they have any) in Dubai while flexible non-citizens cannot afford to, leaving their children behind in their home countries. Thus the implication on belonging is greatly affected as Filipinas who cannot have their families in Dubai thus have a constrained sense of home. While most of the female participants moved to Dubai for work, those that moved for personal reasons were usually following their husbands, and could afford being unemployed for a period of time prior to finding work. On the other hand, all flexible non-citizens came to Dubai strictly for work opportunities. Although all expatriate women are voluntary migrants and have the flexibility to live in limbo and move to the other side of the world, agency is experienced differently as evident in their lived experiences within the daily affirmations of a socially hierarchical environment that is very much classed and racialized. In the subsequent sections, I detail how class and race impact female expatriates’ opportunities to live, work, play and move in Dubai.

3.2 Perception of Space: ‘Old Dubai’ vs. ‘New Dubai’

One common phenomenon throughout my interviews was how participants perceived the spaces of Dubai as a dichotomy between ‘Old Dubai’ and ‘New
Dubai.’ As Casey observed, “You have the Old Dubai and the New Dubai and they’re completely different. The rhythms of the communities, the cultures, the restaurants, the languages, are completely different.” New Dubai is made up of new developments built during the growth period of the 1990s and 2000s, which are now the majority of urban areas. Moreover, New Dubai promotes Dubai’s tourist image of a modern, global city of high-rise grandeur. Old Dubai consists of older areas that have not been upgraded to modern aesthetics – the districts of Satwa, Deira, Karama, and Bur Dubai. Old Dubai is understood and perceived as consisting of low-income areas populated with mostly South Asian and Arab residents. Old Dubai has narrow, less regulated streets with sometimes dilapidated low-rise buildings, where earlier in the literature review I mentioned that informal activities and acts of insurgency can take place.

3.3 Live, Work, Play, and Move

3.3.1 Space of home

My interviewees live in the following areas of Dubai: Arabian Ranches; Badaa; Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) (2); Discovery Gardens; Downtown Dubai near Burj Khalifa (3); Dubai Marina (3); Dubai Outsource Zone; The Greens; Jumeirah Lake Towers (2); Jumeirah Walk; The Lakes; Satwa; Umm Suqeim; Uptown MotorCity.17 All of these areas are generally a part of ‘New Dubai,’ except for Dubai Outsource Zone and Satwa, which are more working

17 Numbers in parentheses after residence areas indicate number of interviewees living in the respective area. All other areas have only one interviewee residing in said area.
class neighborhoods. See Appendix 2 for real estate listings with pictures and rental prices of various districts. See Appendix 3 for a city map of where most of the residential communities are located.¹⁸

Flexible citizens are very comfortable with their ‘space of home.’ Many mentioned that they live in nice homes (apartments or villas) with good facilities and amenities close by, such as grocery stores, community parks, playgrounds for children, proximity to the metro, beach, etc. Dubai developers (an arm of the government) have built many villas that look like suburban residential communities mimicking American neighborhoods and quaint pedestrian friendly communities resembling European neighborhoods – these are efforts at “working the landscape” (Smith, 2010: 278) that demonstrate once again expats’ flexible citizenship and influence.

The Filipina domestic workers tended to live in smaller rooms in their employer’s house, and the Filipino spa and beauty workers shared one room between a few women. Though the flexible non-citizens had much smaller spaces compared to their counterparts, none of them complained about their limited ‘space of home’ and mentioned that they were “nice enough.” One domestic worker stated that she would prefer to live outside of her employer’s home because she feels neither comfortable nor independent there, but believed moving out was fiscally imprudent.

Neighborhood diversity exists in terms of nationality but not in terms of income or class. Satwa, as an affordable area where one can find relatively cheap

¹⁸ Both items were found from Better Homes Dubai, a monthly property and homes lifestyle magazine.
rent and cheap Filipino food, largely attracts a low-income Indian, Pakistani, and Filipino community. The residential area of Dubai Outsource Zone is characterized as a locale where workers can be Indian, Arab, Russian, or Chinese, but the majority of them are middle or lower middle-income employees working in the outsourcing industry. As for the locations of residence of various flexible citizens, it was often mentioned that local Emiratis\(^\text{19}\) and South Asians are significantly underrepresented or non-existent in their multicultural communities. Most of the Southeast Asians (usually Filipinos) they see are domestic helpers who live in the apartments of wealthy Caucasian or Arab residents. One interviewee was pointedly happy about her residential community being a family-exclusive community that does not allow South Asian ‘bachelors.’ Another interviewee mentioned that though her neighborhood, the Marina, is ethnically diverse, her building surprisingly is not. She exclaimed,

I don’t know why… my husband and I expected a lot of diversity when we moved here because it’s slightly more affordable than where we used to live so that brings along more diversity, that’s a bit how it works here. But there seems to be a policy at the door of the building before you get the key to an apartment that you have to be white. Something like that, some type of filtering it’s quite clear. It can’t happen to be that it is just Westerners that choose to be here – it doesn’t make sense.”

This situation demonstrates that the residential space is also a controlled space. In this example, non-market mechanisms are taking place (discrimination based on race) that contribute to further spatial-social segregation.

\(^{19}\)The majority of locals are reputed to live in and own villas in Emirati-only neighborhoods of the city.
Community cohesion is lacking.\textsuperscript{20} The majority of my interviewees mentioned that they have very little personal contact with their neighbors. Although they feel comfortable (safe) and value privacy in their neighborhood, they expressed that a sense of belonging in the community is lacking. Some participants mentioned that perhaps this is due to the international nature of the community, believing that people reach out to each other less because they are very different from each other. Only two participants said they knew their neighbors very well. One of them, Marie, attributes it to the car-free set-up of her residential community. Because it is car-free, the neighborhood has much more pedestrian friendly and open public spaces, which are the places where she often meets other people from the neighborhood.

3.3.2 Space of occupation

Job satisfaction is high among flexible citizens, but not so much among flexible non-citizens. Various reasons for this job satisfaction among flexible citizens include good pay, good relationships with colleagues and management, challenging projects, and room for growth. Job satisfaction was lower for the Filipina domestic helpers and beauticians, especially in regards to salary and time off. Some domestic workers expressed discontent about the difficulty and stress of attending to young children while being responsible for keeping a large house clean. Marissa, an underemployed domestic worker who had worked in the Philippines as an insurance agent, was quite unsatisfied with her nanny and

\textsuperscript{20} This might not apply to Satwa, which has vibrant ethnic (including Filipino) communities.
housekeeper duties in Dubai. Her salary was higher at her former job where she utilized her skills as a college graduate, in contrast to her current occupation as a domestic helper. However, when the insurance agency in the Philippines became insolvent, Marissa needed to find a job quickly to support her children and came upon the domestic service opportunity in Dubai.

Salaries are based on where you come from. Professional (white-collar) women earn far more money than service laborer such as domestic workers or shop assistants (see Table 3). In addition to base salaries, expat packages can also include accommodation, transport allowance, utilities, furniture allowance, and bonuses (Grapeshisha, n.d.).

Table 3 Sample monthly salaries of various low skilled to high skilled jobs provided by online information guide called DubaiFAQs (Salaries and wages in Dubai, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Monthly Salary (AED)</th>
<th>Most Recent Year Posted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>10,000 - 50,000</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>5,000 - 40,000</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager, mid-level</td>
<td>5,000 - 30,000</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Desk Staff (hotels)</td>
<td>5,000 - 15,000</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations Officer</td>
<td>2,000 - 10,000</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>2,500 - 8,000</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop Assistant</td>
<td>1,000 - 4,000</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maid, Nanny</td>
<td>700 - 2,000</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Worker</td>
<td>500 - 1,500</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 As of 18 March 2013, 1 US dollar is equivalent to 3.7 AED
22 Professional means a profession for which a higher-level qualification is required, e.g. lawyer, architect, engineer, etc.
*Expatwoman* is a popular website with resources and forums discussing expat life in the UAE. It addresses expat questions about anything from relocation, housing, and recreation to topics such as “How to... employ a live in maid.” One conspicuous detail in the article on said topic is the sizable range between minimum salaries set by different embassies of countries that provide domestic helpers.

- Bangladeshi: 750 AED
- Indonesian: 800 AED
- Sri Lankan: 825 AED
- Indian: 1,100 AED
- Filipina: 1,400 AED

These labor polices encourage different pay based on nationality, where a Bangladeshi domestic worker can be expected to earn almost half the salary of a Filipina domestic worker. The fact that this scale was posted on an expat resource website means it is presumptively not uncommon that employers take advantage of those policies and enforce discriminatory salary practices. The website also discloses that 2,000 AED (approx. $545 USD) per month is the average monthly pay for maids, not including extra allowances for food, toiletries, phone credit, etc. (ExpatWoman, 2011).

Since Dubai’s labor policy allows only a handful of developing countries to provide domestic labor, the label of ‘domestic helpers,’ ‘nanny/housekeepers’ and ‘maids’ become synonymously (if incorrectly) attached to specific races. Service industry jobs that command lower wages, such as being a shopkeeper or spa and beauty worker, are also primarily given to specific nationalities. Consequently, Filipino and Sri Lankan women are often assumed to be low-skilled, service workers and more likely encounter mistreatment from people with racist and/or
classist attitudes. Rowena, a Filipino architect, expressed her frustration with this:

“I’ve experienced racism – since I am Filipino, they think that all Filipinos are domestic helpers, and they were shocked that I am in the architecture field.”

Additionally, the impacts of cultural citizenship, which allows people to be “valued” and perceived differently based on race, is evident in employer policies allowing ethnically different employees doing the same job to receive different salaries. Flexible citizens have noticed this:

Your salary depends on your race, more or less. You are paid depending on who you are and not what you will be doing, and that is very surprising... and absolutely not fair. (Marie, French business professional)

Over here, a person who is carrying a British passport has more weight than for example an Indian who studied at the same university, is just as qualified, and has come back looking for a job. The Indian would not get as much salary as the British guy. (Binti, Indian business professional)

Many Western countries have strict non-discrimination policies in the workplace, so Marie was surprised that employees who have similar education backgrounds and skills can be paid unequal and unfair wages. This situation in Dubai has serious consequences on expatriate lives. Salaries not only impact where you live, but what you can do, where you can go, and how you perceive exclusive or inclusive spaces in the city, as we will see in later sections.

3.3.3 Space of recreation

Dubai’s extreme weather conditions determine time spent outdoors versus indoors. Renee, a Belgian expat, echoed many of the other interviewees, “When it’s really hot in the summer the malls of Dubai become the streets of Dubai. That’s where you walk around; you don’t have to spend money.” It was mentioned in almost every conversation that the hot months of summer prevent
people from going and enjoying outdoor spaces. Perhaps that is why the most popular activities outside the home take place indoors – in malls, private houses of friends, and restaurants and bars. Two Filipino interviewees identified Karama and Bur Dubai (Old Dubai) as good places for bars, while most well off Westerners, Arabs and South Asians go to venues in New Dubai.

Public spaces are valued as important places for recreation by all income groups. When the weather is more moderate, a majority of the participants enjoy going to public spaces such as parks and beaches. Some public parks charge a nominal fee of 3 AED ($0.82 USD), which is considered affordable for even the domestic workers. Residents who have a community park within their neighborhood value the open space as an asset in the community. Runners mentioned they enjoyed running outdoors in parks or on Jumeirah Beach Residence (JBR) Walk. Several interviewees expressed a desire for more public spaces and walkable or runnable streets in the city.

Flexible citizens enjoy a large assortment of opportunities for recreation but find cultural activities to be lacking. While a handful of participants said they do not feel that there is anything missing in Dubai with regards to recreation (“You could do almost anything” and “if I wanted to jump off the plane or play polo, they can offer that”), many also admitted that “authentic” cultural spaces and activities are found to be wanting (“You miss a bit of culture sometimes… there's not much original entertainment, good theatre, interesting music, I guess it's a bit of a cultural wasteland” and “There aren’t enough places where you can learn a bit about everything. Culture is not really the priority I guess”). Noor, an Iranian
student with a limited budget, cited the importance of having more accessible cultural activities in Dubai – places that do not require spending money, such as national art galleries where you can meander around instead of the currently existing small commercial art galleries whose objective is to sell art.

Low and lower middle-income Filipinas do not enjoy the many opportunities for recreation due to the limitations of money and time. Staying home and saving money is a practical alternative as they have less discretionary income and less time off to spend on leisure activities. Going out or taking trips to the mall requires or at least invites spending. The majority of the Filipino interviewees prefer to do less of those activities in order to save more money to send home to their families in the Philippines. On this topic, Marissa makes a poignant point, “I want to explore each and every part of Dubai but it’s hard. The time is not enough, and the money is not enough to explore. There are things that are affordable but I have to budget my money wisely.”

Actual time off is a big restraint. Whereas the employed flexible citizens have two days off per week, the domestic workers and beauticians only had up to one day off per week. Not having the customary two days is a restriction both on mobility and freedom, as demonstrated by this statement from Maricel, a Filipino beautician:

I work 12 hours [per day], I have one day off but it’s for my laundry. I don’t spend too much time outside. There are some nice places but because of my work I cannot go there. And it can be quite far so sometimes I think it’s not enough time for one day. Like the Water Park, and places I see in the magazine or hear from my colleagues but I haven’t had a chance to go there. Maybe if I have two or three days off I can enjoy some nice places.
Some service workers have even less time off. Grace, a Filipina domestic worker who works in a large villa for a family with two kids, is granted only one day off per month. This is an illegal but reputedly not uncommon practice by employers, and shows how domestic workers’ personal rights are infringed upon.

3.3.4 Mobile space

Flexible citizens rely on driving to get around and rarely take the bus or metro. They find public transit to be inconvenient because stations or stops are often long walks away from their departure and/or destination points. Only a couple of the interviewees believed the transit system to be very expansive. Moreover, having an expat salary package means they can afford cars. Driving is a comfortable means of transportation as the roads are new and wide, traffic is usually low, gas is cheap, and cars are relatively inexpensive. For those that drive, public transportation options are seen as good resources for low-income users but transit does not really affect their lives (other than reduce traffic).

As mentioned in the literature review, Dubai is divisive in mobility and access. Low density and the spread-out design of the city make public transit less efficient and practical and thus less used, except for by those who have no other choice. Low-income migrants end up taking a combination of the metro and the bus. Riding buses are not only less convenient, but also stigmatized (see Figure 12). All of my interviewees who have access to personal cars rarely choose to take the metro, and all but one (the professional Filipina in my sample) have

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23 All but one of the flexible citizens (upper-income expats) I interviewed drove a personal car. The one that didn’t own a car lived close enough to her job so she took the taxi to work, and the Metro to other places in the city.
never taken the bus during their entire time in Dubai. The occurrence of the bus being relegated to the poor and the car to the wealthy mimics similar mobility trends of cities with visible inequality, like Los Angeles and suburban towns across America. The metro, as a relatively new transit system in implementation for three years now, has only really benefited the Filipino participants in my research group. They mentioned that the metro is cheaper and faster than the bus, but unfortunately it is closed on Friday mornings, which is their usual day off during the week. As a result, they must resort to taking an expensive taxi ride or taking a combination of the taxi and bus during those mornings.

![Figure 12 South Asian residents boarding public bus (photo source: Gulf News Archive, 2010)](image)

Taxis are also seen as a form of public transit because they are relatively cheap and the taxi system is operated by the Roads and Transit Authority. Taxis are highly used because they are both affordable and practical; fares start at 10 dirhams (AED) and taxis are preferred when parking at the destination is scarce or when expats want to go out at night. Most of the Filipino participants also said
they take taxis, but only for short distances since riding for longer distances is less affordable. The metro and buses are significantly more affordable and cost less than five dirhams, depending on the distance. One domestic worker mentioned that when she takes the taxi, her and her friends make sure to occupy all of the seats within one vehicle so that they can divide up the costs.

At the end of the day, it seems that everyone is able to get to the places they need to or want to go, but without a car, one must use a combination of taxi, metro and bus services which can be quite inconvenient. Not only does the cost of transportation reduce the mobility of flexible non-citizens, but because public transportation is less time efficient, they are able to do even less with the little amount of free time they have. The opposite is true for flexible citizens, which further widens the divide of access between the two groups. As an aside, I would like to note that I did not hear of any informal bus systems or microbuses in Dubai, which is unsurprising due to the controlled and regulated nature of the city.

Gauging from my conversation with the expatriate women, there is demand for more non-motorized transportation (biking and walking). Currently in Dubai biking is not something you do to get from point A to B, and the streets are not safe for bicycle riders. There are limited bike paths; the ones that exist are mostly within private residential communities and those in public spaces, like the park or beach, are not very long. Some of the interviewees, especially the ones that grew up in bicycle-friendly European cities, expressed interest in having better bicycle
infrastructure in Dubai. To an even greater extent, the interviewees desired more pedestrian-friendly areas better suited for outdoor walking experiences.

For those who drive cars, the highways are wide and relatively easy to drive through, but better transportation planning is requested. Most flexible citizens did not have great difficulties with getting around in the city. However, many critiqued the roads to be not well organized. Complaints were made about heavy traffic jams at certain times and intersections, not being able to take left U turns, constant changes and construction of roads, and poor planning. One exasperated critique echoed by three interviewees was that “they build these amazing communities, and then they put the infrastructure afterwards, resulting in traffic jams, frustration, chaos, and more.”
Chapter 4: Perceptions of the Built Environment

While some participants expressed positive impressions of Dubai’s built environment and others did not, all participants divided the city spatially into old versus new territories. How residents perceive and emotionally connect to these territories depends on their sense of place within society and within physical space. Residents’ fragmented spatial relationship is captured by their urban citizenship status and the differing formal and informal social and economic rights those residents have. Dubai’s public space may hold the potential for social inclusion and integration, if those spaces are not deemed exclusive or uninviting. In this chapter, I explore participants’ general perceptions of the built environment, Old and New Dubai as flipped spaces of exclusion, inclusion, and belonging, public spaces’ potential for inclusivity, and whether Dubai on the whole is considered exclusive.

4.1 General Perceptions of Dubai’s Physicality

Dubai’s built environment has elicited varying responses from the expatriate female participants. Some are fond of Dubai’s unique skyline and mega projects, and feel proud to be living in a fast-paced, quickly changing city of buildings that break world records (tallest building in the world, first seven star hotel in the world, man-made Palm island, etc.) – symbols of modernity that they can claim by affiliation. Five interviewees have a liking for the city’s modern landscape and
urban design. Three of them specifically mentioned the Burj Khalifa as an impressive structure, one that “welcomes you to the city.”

After our conversation, Rowena, a Filipino architect, out of her own initiative emailed me a picture of Burj Khalifa, in an effort to invite and persuade me to visit Dubai (I had not told her I have visited Dubai before). She warmly offered to be my tour guide to show me the city’s iconic treasures (see Figure 13).

![Figure 13 A picture of Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world, emailed to the author by Rowena (photographer unknown)](image)

She marveled at how quickly Dubai has quickly turned from a *tabula rasa* to a world-renowned city:

> People who have lived here for 30 years, they say it’s like a dream. They were sleeping and they woke up and it’s a totally different world, because the development is so fast.

Rowena is proud to be a resident of Dubai, and eager to share her city with me. Though as an architect she might have more direct personal links to Dubai’s built achievements than the average resident, which can serve as validation of her
work, some of the other interviewees outside of the architecture field were equally enthusiastic. When asked about their opinions on the built landscape, some responses were:

The first thing you would notice is tall buildings – towers everywhere. The tallest towers are here. It’s a very modern city. It’s all about high tech. I do like it, it’s kind of like a small New York I guess, very busy. (Noor, Iranian student)

Buildings are nice. They’re not ordinary box buildings, buildings are done very nice and unique. We have a twisted building, round coin building, pyramid building. It kind of makes you proud, especially as we have the Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world right now. (Imelda, Filipina in administration)

I do like to visit them because it is something people from [all over] the world would like to see and it is easy for us to go and see since we are living here. (Padma, Indian businesswoman)

Others respondents, however, did not appreciate the skyscrapers and hypermodernism, the highways and large scale in which the city has been built.

Farrin, an Iranian architect, characterized Dubai as very man-made:

They don’t consider or even care that there’s no balance for where we go. It’s all record towers. Everything is a bit fake and that’s what I don’t like about Dubai. You don’t feel like it’s grown naturally, everything’s planned and forced.

Farrin’s statement expresses a sentiment that brings us again to the question, for whom is the city built? She suggests that the skyscrapers are not built for the residents. Mega building attracts tourism and investment that may generate positive economic activity benefitting residents, but iconic buildings are not actually useful for the average resident in her daily, lived experience. Evie, the British business professional, expressed similar concerns about the city being artificial:

People say there’s a lack of culture so they try to replicate an Arabic feel, [there are] a lot of buildings in Old Dubai where they try to take wind turbines and optimize them for the old architectural feel. But because things are so new and sparkling it loses the cultural essence. The greenery is all fake… I feel like I live in a concrete jungle. All the greenery is planted, there’s nothing natural about it
because you’re building on a desert. It’s all hugely manicured and money has been pumped into beautiful flower arrangements and displays that are well thought out and perfect.

It took Evie a while to adapt to the artificial nature of Dubai’s physical landscape.

Renee, the Belgian business professional, also talked about her initial difficulty orienting herself in the city:

When you walk, you feel completely lost because the buildings are 2,000 – 3,000 feet high and massive and it’s not built for walking. Unless you’re going by car, it’s not easy to get around.

Renee’s comments demonstrate that building at such a large scale, with highways and towers, does not equal a people-friendly scale. When the built environment is not built at the pedestrian level, people are made to feel small and insignificant (see Figure 14).

Figure 14 “Feeling dwarfed by the skyscrapers at Sheikh Zayed Road.” Picture chosen and caption provided by Renee (photo by Mandar Marathe, 2006)

With pedestrian amenities lacking in Dubai, it was not surprising to hear three of the European interviewees making comparisons between Dubai’s landscape and
the more pedestrian-friendly environments back home. Linda, a Dutch woman, misses walking and cycling everywhere:

The streets, the way it's set up isn't very welcoming - the wide highways, skyscrapers, construction sites, it's not really inviting to stroll around. It not being accessible being on foot as it would be in Europe… That I suppose would limit me from spending time outside.

When asked about public spaces in Dubai, 60% of interviewees pointed out that there are only pockets of pedestrian-friendly public spaces amid urban sprawl and highways. The most popular public spaces mentioned by interviewees were parks, malls, and beaches, in that order. Besides parks, it was said that Dubai has few traditional outdoor public spaces; much of public life is enjoyed inside malls. The dearth of public spaces insufficiently addresses the high demand for them. Almost all of my interviewees enjoy being outside when the weather is nice, especially in the few places that are nicely designed for walking. Besides those limited spaces, they declared it mostly unfeasible to move around as a pedestrian and access places by foot. To even get to places that are nice to walk around, they must drive there first.

There are islands of heaven for pedestrians where you can walk continuously and it's nice and safe, and then there's a cut off where you cannot really walk anymore because of the highways. (Yara, Jordanian woman)

There is a big ring road around Burj Khalifa; the road is so wide. When there is no connection, you feel discouraged. The fountain area is really nice [for pedestrians] but right when you step out, the surrounding is totally different. (Farrin, Iranian architect)

Even if you want to go to the other side of the road you might have to take the car and wait in traffic for 20 minutes because there is no pass to go to the other side, unless there’s a metro station which has an overpass. (Farrin)

There are very few places where you can walk. Otherwise it’s like the US where there are big highways everywhere so if you go from A to B you have to take a car. For instance, Palm Jumeirah is an artificial area that is nice to walk [around],
but if I want to walk there I have to drive there – I can’t walk to it. They’re isolated areas. (Natasha, Russian businesswoman)

Where am I going to walk? I can’t get anywhere walking – things are so spread out. It’s very clear that the RTA is a very powerful authority here. It’s probably the most powerful public authority in Dubai and I think it’s reflected in the way the city has been planned. There are so many highways and so many roads. The solution to so many traffic problems is to build another highway or road, open five or six lanes. The road network dominates the city, that’s how I feel. (Reem, Lebanese urban planner)

Reem, as an insightful urban planner, has noticed the highly controlled nature of the government. The state’s past and current choices and actions of investing in highways and building a Futurama-like city has resulted in its residents being trapped in cars.

Despite this, the government is starting to address its prior lack of attention paid to pedestrian access. Five of the interviewees mentioned they have noticed and appreciated, starting just a few years ago, the municipality building more public spaces for walking. One woman believed that the government is trying to actively promote its limited public spaces. She uses the example of Emaar, the government-controlled property developer, setting out stalls of souvenirs every winter to create a street market environment. These stalls are found at various public spaces such as the Marina, Jumeirah Beach Residence (JBR) Walk and Burj Khalifa. Although the government’s viewpoint on public street life may be slowly changing, as Reem aptly says: “They are thinking differently, but with building cities you can’t undo what has been done,” at least not quickly or completely.

Lastly, one common concern expressed by a few interviewees was their aversion to construction areas of Dubai. Construction is a regular feature of
Dubai’s landscape. Construction areas and empty lots are considered eyesores that give the city a sense of being unfinished or in limbo (see Figure 15).

Interviewees also identified industrial areas as places that cause them great discomfort because of their proximity to worker camps, the residence of male migrant workers. About one-third of the city’s male migrant workers live in worker camps, also known as labor camps, (see Figure 16) and two-thirds in substandard apartments, portions of flats, and rented rooms in the poorer neighborhoods of Satwa and Deira or in isolated industrial zones (Elsheshtawy, 2008b: 973; Haines, 2011: 177; Kendall, 2012: 49). They are usually forced to accept unsanitary, overcrowded conditions and detrimental living arrangements (Ticku, 2009: 85). The female respondents found worker camp areas to be very unappealing, uninviting parts of Dubai.

There’s an industrial area where a lot of laborers live close to, it’s called Al Quoz, an industrial area with a lot of warehouses but still very central to the city.
Laborers make nothing in Dubai, they are so poor, and they’re working under the harshest conditions. They look poor and depressed, it’s difficult to be there and seeing these people walking around, especially as a blonde female. Yeah I would not want to go there [referring to Al Quoz]. If I drive through by car, I’m always happy I’m out. They live in that area and work at construction sites. The area also has some low-end restaurants and stores but it’s not really for anyone to go and live. (Renee, Belgian business professional)

There are certain places that I don't need to be or I don't wish to be, like the areas of migrant workers. They live in overcrowded living conditions. I don't think I'd be comfortable there. (Yara, Jordanian woman)

Figure 16 Labor-camp housing for low-income construction workers (photo source: HRW, 2006)

Dubai’s social hierarchy and income polarization makes Renee uncomfortable. She sympathizes with the South Asian migrant laborers but at the same time identifies those areas as uninviting and perhaps threatening to her as a white female. The majority of worker camps are far away from Dubai’s downtown areas, but Al Quoz serves as a daily reminder of the inequitable social and economic conditions of life in Dubai. Even though migrant men make up the majority of Dubai, they are usually made invisible, residing in concentrated poor areas. Seeing throngs of poor migrant laborers in Al Quoz is an exception to the expat female experience, especially since most expat women live in highly secured gated communities. (A lengthier discussion of social-spatial segregation
is discussed in the next section, *Divisive Space – Flipped Spaces of Exclusion, Inclusion and Belonging.*

Dubai’s gated nature was discussed by Padma, an Indian mother of two, and Marissa, a Filipina domestic worker, in different angles. Padma appreciated high security measures, though unfriendly and not welcoming, to be necessary hassles to avoid “strangers from walking into your apartment or office.” Marissa thinks that gated private communities contribute to a sense of exclusiveness:

> Sometimes you cannot go in unless you have a pass to go in. It's okay for me if those privacy policies are for security reasons, I don't mind. But if it's discrimination because you are a domestic helper and you cannot go to places that other people can go, I don't like that.

Many of the luxury residential developments come with their own private policing mechanisms and high fences. This is reminiscent of Caldeira’s (1996) ‘fortified enclaves,’ except in this case, physical barriers and security facilities serve more for psychological assurance than for a real necessity against criminal threats, as many of these gated communities are in the middle of the desert, miles away from other places where people live, and accessible only by pedestrian-unfriendly highways (Kanna, 2011: 189).

### 4.2 Divisive Space: Flipped Spaces of Exclusion, Inclusion and Belonging

#### 4.2.1 Income and racial inequality results in spatial segregation

Rowena, the Filipino architect, told me that there are two ways to live in Dubai – you are either enjoying life or you are just trying to survive. In fact, at some point
during each interview, all of my interviewees had referred to the extreme income inequality that exists in Dubai - inequality that falls along racial and ethnic lines, that is an unmissable, perceptible fact of life in Dubai.

What is also intriguing is how the division in class manifests itself in the physical environment; residents inhabit different spaces of the city, based on their race and income. New Dubai is perceived as inclusive and inviting for flexible citizens, while exclusive and uninviting to flexible non-citizens. Concurrently, Old Dubai is inclusive and inviting for flexible non-citizens, but uninviting and indirectly exclusive to flexible citizens.

It seems that both populations, the flexible citizens and the non-citizens, are aware of who implicitly belongs where. The flexible citizens do see low-income residents in New Dubai, but as a much smaller presence compared to the majority of wealthier people in those areas who can participate in consumption. Social exclusion in New Dubai consequentially deters the vast majority of the population, who are ‘non-citizen.’24 The phenomenon also applies the other way around. Many of my flexible non-citizen interviewees mentioned that the spaces they inhabit are much less accessible to Westerners.

Dubai’s population is really sorted by their income. Depending on their income, they really don’t go to the same places in Dubai. There are restaurants and nightclubs, places that you hang out at night, when you see the entrance tickets it’s obvious that it’s not made for people with low-income. There are some Filipinos who have a lot of money who of course go to nice restaurants but it’s rare and doesn’t really happen that often. It’s because your salary depends on your race, more or less. (Marie, French business professional)

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24 Foreigners make up about 90% of Dubai’s total population and Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi migrants, many unskilled and low-income laborers, make up 76% of the foreign-born population (Elsheshtawy, 2008: 971).
There’s the extremely rich local Emiratis and then there are the laborers who are responsible for building the city, they’re transported in buses, it’s very sad. They live in labor camps, like 8 laborers in a room. Sometimes you’ll see them at the mall en masse and not in small groups. They probably make the effort to go to a mall in Deira, Karama, or Bur Dubai so it’s not saying that it’s not allowed, but in terms of where they would go and ability they usually migrate away from New Dubai. It’s probably off limits to them for other reasons, not like they’re not allowed. My standard of living and my lifestyle compared to the guys who work 7 days a week, it’s totally polarizing, different ends of the spectrum. (Evie, British business professional)

You have labor camps, residential areas where they live. They don’t live in my area, which is an expat area. And there are parts of the city, which are for laborers. In every big city, you have people that live in big houses and people in small apartments. (Casey, American freelancer)

**4.2.2 Contradictory perceptions of New Dubai**

Spaces of luxury are both welcoming and accessible to flexible citizens. Traditionally exclusive places (in other parts of the world) such as five star hotels and restaurants or bars within hotels are perceived inclusive and welcoming for upper middle-class residents. Only a couple of very selective hotels are uninviting and unaffordable to flexible citizens.

If you fall into the category of Western Expat, or even like, wealthy Indian expat, basically if you're not one of the poor, laboring immigrant communities, then you quite easily find yourself in the sort of environment or circle where attending more exclusive places is normal. So it's easier to gain access here I find. (Linda, Dutch consultant)

It’s top end and luxurious because a lot of people can participate in that top end idea. What is considered luxurious in other parts of the world is pretty normal here. There are big differences in income, and based on that, you can or cannot afford to go to top end places in Dubai, and there are many of those. There is a huge divide between people who can afford it and people who cannot. I don’t feel excluded of anything. It’s part of the lifestyle here, if you’re part of the people that make good money in Dubai then you can pretty much afford everything that’s being offered. (Renee, Belgian business professional)

Extremely exclusive places like Burj Al Arab… maybe that’s the only place that I can’t go in. (Reem, Lebanese urban planner)

You get accustomed to a certain style of living. So you get used to rocking out at 5 star hotels and the expensive restaurants. That’s kind of how we roll here. (Evie, British business professional)
For those who cannot “rock out” at luxury hotels, restaurants and entertainment facilities, those that do not receive expat salary packages and are not flexible citizens, exclusion is plainly obvious and internally experienced.

A lot of things depend on if you can afford it. They’re all for VIPs and they’re not for only normal people. They make up about 50% of [the places in] Dubai. (Marissa, Filipina domestic worker)

You know, I couldn’t say that it’s really exclusive – if we want to go we can. It’s just that, being Filipino, there’s always a feeling that there will be racism because you don’t earn as much as the British or Americans. They earn so much that they hang out at the 7 star hotel or expensive bars in hotels. You will feel intimidated to go. You can go, but once you enter inside you yourself will feel like you don’t fit in there, it’s too posh of a place with posh people. This is only what I feel as a Filipina. (Imelda, Filipino administrator and public relations officer)

Thus, New Dubai, built for high-end consumption, is perceived as inviting and accessible only by those who can afford it, or those who are expected to be able to afford it.

4.2.3 Contradictory perceptions of Old Dubai

Only one of my interviewees live in an area considered to be part of Old Dubai. A Filipino herself, she enjoys living in Satwa because there is plenty of cheap Filipino food and her rent is affordable. She said, “Satwa feels welcoming because there are more people from home.” Other Filipino interviewees also pointed to Satwa as an inviting area where the streets hum of Filipino people and culture. One Indian interviewee mentioned the connection she feels to the conspicuous South Asian culture and community in Deira, even though she does not live there.

Flexible citizens, on the other hand, spend the majority of their time in New Dubai; they feel more comfortable in areas that are more Western or modern and
hardly frequent the areas of Old Dubai. One reason, suggested by two interviewees, for the perception of Old Dubai as uninviting is the existence of Muslim areas where men and women do not eat together in a common room. At certain restaurants, women are often expected to eat in a separate room such as the back courtyard or upstairs dining area.

The old town is not really welcoming. It’s really Arabic or people from the subcontinent that live there. It’s very different the way the lifestyles are there, compared to the New Dubai. Places where Muslim people go are quite restricted to non-Muslims. (Natasha, Russian businesswoman)

Many of the flexible citizens see the old areas as allocated for lower-income South Asians. The older, cheaper stores, bars, and restaurants are less appealing to the upper middle-income class.

Unfortunately Dubai is very segregated, in terms of income, ethnicity, and the older parts of Dubai are more South Asian and workers/laborers so we just don’t go there. (Reem, Lebanese urban planner)

The Asian population frequent Old Dubai because they generally make less money. (Evie, British business professional)

Still, Old Dubai has become a sensational tourist attraction for expat residents to take their visiting friends and family.

Westerners only go to the eastern side of town as an exotic trip they undertake, like an excursion. People come back and they call it an adventure and they speak about it with friends. They spend a day there or half a day, and then everyone is happy to go back to their own neighborhoods. It’s really seen as a day trip within the city, to the other side, to “soak up some culture” that’s lacking in Dubai, as a tourist. I have a feeling that a lot of Western people go to that side of town when they have friends and family over and they’re showing the city, [who have] read in their guidebooks that there are abras on the water and there’s the gold souk. That’s oftentimes the first time people go there – when their visitors ask them to take them there. Rarely [do] people visit before that time or just because they’re interested.” (Renee, Belgian business professional)

Ironically, right after the conversation I had with Renee, my next interview demonstrated the accuracy of her words:
The old city is walkable too but I don’t go there much unless I have tourists visiting me and they want to see the Old Dubai, or if I want to buy electronics or spices or gold. It is made for walking, small roads with congested traffic. But it’s not very nice for walking because the areas are quite dirty and small. (Evie, British business professional)

Even though Old Dubai is fitted at a walkable scale, something that the Western interviewees articulate they miss in their daily lives in Dubai, they still rarely venture into the old areas of the city. Only three of the ‘flexible’ women say that they visit Old Dubai frequently. One clear deterrent is the self-consciousness that women sometimes feel on the streets of Old Dubai, especially where there are large groups of South Asian men who give stares perceived as intimidating or uncomfortable (see Figure 17).25

Old Dubai has lively [and nice] streets, but not where there is an overwhelming number of men. (Reem, Lebanese urban planner)

There are some areas with lower class people (lots of bachelors, not with families). Yes, it makes me feel awkward to walk in such an area. But it’s fine because there are government-restricted areas for families and [the] labor class doesn’t always come to town. You won’t find them unless it’s the weekend and they come downtown. Otherwise wherever bachelors are it’s quite difficult for women to walk around. (Padma, Indian businesswomen)

25 Most of these South Asian men leave their wives and families back home, are deprived of interaction with women in Dubai, and might stare at any women whether she dresses provocatively or not.
Besides being a woman, being a *blonde, white* woman in Old Dubai is easily perceived as being “out of place” and “different.”

There is unease because people are different. You feel like that’s not your place and that you shouldn’t be there. It’s not forbidden to go there but definitely you don’t want to stay there because you feel like a tourist. (Marie, French business professional)

Karama [is a place] where you can get good bargains for bags and fantastic Pakistani and Indian restaurants. I’m not saying it prohibits access but you know…it’s where the dynamic shifts. The residents and business and shop owners in Karama are all Indian, so it’s like walking into Little India. They are welcoming but you walk around and it’s like being a fish in a fish bowl. So that may be felt when they come over to this side... I like to go to Karama and I frequent there with visitors. But it’s not a place that I go to on a regular basis unless there’s a reason to go there. (Evie, British business professional)

There are places that Filipinos and Indians go to, but the Westerners cannot or do not go to: low-class bars, disco houses, etc. Same thing, people might feel uncomfortable... it’s a feeling that you don’t fit. Maybe they feel the same thing in the bars we visit. (Imelda, Filipino administrator and PRO)

I was even told by a Filipino interviewee that I, because of my assumed white skin color, would not belong in Old Dubai. She had heard that I was an “American” researcher and did not expect me to be Asian American.

Dubai is open, so you can come and things like that. But for example, if you come... for example here in Satwa, of course you’re so different. You are of different nationality so you look different because the people here are only
Indian, Pakistan, Filipino, like that. But of course you need to take care of yourself because no one can tell if someone will do something or whatever. Not only here in Satwa, but in other places like Deira. But for example in the Marina, if you go there, that is a nice place [for you] or the IFC area. In Satwa, people will treat you differently because you don’t look the same. (Marilou, Filipino beautician)

The message that clearly surfaces in all these comments is that the well off, and especially Caucasian, do not belong in the South Asian dominated areas of Old Dubai. Flexible citizens belong in New Dubai, in spaces like the Marina or the IFC where people are of the same class and skin color. South and Southeast Asians belong in Old Dubai, and cannot meet the consumption demands of New Dubai. In each area there is a minority “Other,” people who do not fit or belong into the social restraints of the physical place. The New Dubai/Old Dubai dichotomy demonstrates an “embodied foreignness in everyday space” (Walsh, 2006: 275). The social-spatial divide dissects and allocates real portions of the city to groups of people based on what they look like and how much money they make. This phenomenon has not only been recognized, but ingrained into my interviewees’ minds, impacting, constraining and limiting their movement in the city.

4.3 Public Space – Shared Spaces of Inclusion

Participants named the following places as Dubai’s most common public spaces: large public municipal parks; small residential parks and playgrounds; beaches;
malls; the old souks and creek area; streets of Old Dubai; and the relatively new promenades of Burj Khalifa, JBR Walk, and Dubai Marina.\textsuperscript{26}

4.3.1 The value of inclusive spaces

\textit{It is our public spaces that communicate a city's attitude towards its citizens. The presence of well-designed infrastructure and inviting places are a measure of its inclusiveness. Can we design urban spaces that are sensitive to everybody? (Shrivastava, 2013)}

Public spaces, especially public parks\textsuperscript{27} and beaches, were overwhelmingly identified as the least exclusive of all places in Dubai (see Figure 18 and Figure 19). Public parks and beaches are characterized as inclusive spaces that allow for a social mixing between different class and ethnic groups. Everyone “belongs” in these public spaces. Rowena, the Filipino architect, said, “For ordinary people with low-budget income, parks are number one.” Imelda, the Filipino administrator, observed, “At the beach you’ll find every nationality, no feeling of insecurity.”

\textsuperscript{26} This does not include other public spaces sparsely mentioned, such as libraries, metro station areas, specific souks, etc.

\textsuperscript{27} Public parks have recreational areas well equipped for kids and family activities. They also have programs for women only or families only on specific days and times. They are located throughout the city, though a bit more concentrated around the creek area. Large public parks include Jumeirah Beach Park, Al Safa Park, Creek Park, Mushrif Park, and more.
Figure 18 A public space called Miracle Garden, considered as very welcoming (photo by Imelda)

Figure 19 Filipinas sharing food and picnicking at a public park (photo by Marissa)

Having few truly public spaces is unfortunate since public spaces are the places where existing social-economic disparities and barriers can be subtly crossed or renegotiated. Public spaces may offer possible cross-racial or cross-cultural understanding based on a shared sense of space – memories of a shared experience, even if it is shallow interaction. As mentioned earlier, public spaces can nurture a profound, inclusive and subtle sense of what it means to a resident, producing opportunities for social interaction and empathy, which is especially
important in a multicultural but segregated city like Dubai. Outdoor public spaces create social possibilities – intimate connections that contribute to a sense of emplacement. Public spaces were identified by many of the interviewees as places where they can meet new people unlike themselves.

In the Marina there are a lot of people from different countries. I don’t talk to them because they are so busy but when we see each other on the road we give a smile to each other. (Alma, Filipina domestic worker)

There are a lot of parks that are open to everyone and we can definitely meet Indians and Filipinos at the park – that’s the place where we are really melting with other countries. (Marie, French business professional)

I would say that the places where I meet the most people of different backgrounds would be parks and beaches because that’s sort of the place where everyone comes to enjoy the same thing, it doesn’t matter how much you earn or where you’re from. Everyone goes to enjoy, especially people with kids, and it’s often through kids that you start talking to other people. (Renee, Belgian business professional)

I like public places because you can do anything. You can enter into conversations with other people; you can do whatever you want as long as it’s not something forbidden. (Marissa, Filipina domestic worker)

Marissa’s statement reminds us again that Dubai is a highly controlled place. This regulation, in fact, promotes the use of public space due to the very safe nature of those spaces. Women can feel secure and safe without fearing street crime, violence, or harassment. Over half of the interviewees mentioned that public streets and spaces on the whole are very safe, well regulated, and clean.

People are very disciplined. It’s safe and quiet. (Alma, Filipina domestic servant)

It’s one of the safest bubbles that I have ever lived in. The majority of what the police force deals with here is driving offenses and bounced checks, or drunken behavior in public or insulting a local. Stealing and attacks happen a lot less, I guess people are scared of what they hear the sentences are. (Evie, British business professional)

Strong police presence, low crime rate, and perception of safety make those spaces very welcoming to women. Shrivastava (2013) has asserted that the lack of
access for women to be in public spaces due to physical threat not only denies women their rights to participate in space, but it also curbs their participation in shaping the future of the city they hope to live in. Shrivastava hopes for a day in the future when “citizens of all genders can all go out and claim the city with their actual physical self by walking, running, jogging, encountering, strolling, lying on the beach, and soaking up the sun” in India.

In Dubai, physical threat is not the problem; the problem is not having enough open and integrated public spaces in the first place. What is needed are more public spaces that can “make the city unequivocally a place of belonging, exploration and enjoyment” (Shrivastava, 2013).

4.3.2 In-between spaces: Upscale public spaces in New Dubai

Some public spaces serve the public function of allowing community members to loiter and enjoy amenities, but are located within exclusive settings. The first type of “in-between” space is beaches and parks (remember, the least exclusive spaces as perceived by interviewees) that have turned private. Though most expatriate women enjoy the open nature of the public beaches and parks, some also frequent exclusive, private forms of these originally public spaces. For example, some Westerners mentioned going to five-star hotels to enjoy the hotels’ private beach and amenities (e.g. towels, chairs, pool access, soda bars, water sports, etc.), where their consumption power brings them privacy and convenience. Private parks exist within residential communities that are often gated and not accessible to non-residents. These “community parks” with valuable amenities for children
and pedestrians are open to only to a small subset of people in the neighborhood, and not to the wider community of Dubai residents.

The second example of “in-between” space would be malls, which are commonly viewed as good public spaces for residents to stroll around casually with friends during hot summer days.

I see the mall as public space because it replaces the city center. A lot of them have benches and sofas and things. (Meryl, British consultant)

You don’t see people of downtown old areas, the low-income, go to luxurious places. Unless it’s the malls, everyone goes to the malls. (Noor, Iranian student)

Though anyone can go to the mall, not everyone can participate in the same way. The physicality of the mall is not impartial to class and consumption power. The main purpose of malls, encouraging monetary transactions and exchange of goods, is still commercial in nature. Though Marissa, a Filipina domestic helper, assured me that there are many shopping malls that have affordably priced items, she admits that she experiences discrimination during some of her shopping trips at malls. Even though Filipinas and other low-income migrants are not technically excluded, an environment that values users on their consumption potential can generate subtle feelings of non-belonging.

The last type of “in-between” public spaces are the recently installed, well-designed outdoor pedestrian spaces in New Dubai, such as the Dubai Marina, the Jumeirah Beach Residence Walk, and the promenade next to Burj Khalifa (see Figure 20 and Figure 21). These spaces are characterized as being planned top-down in a non-organic manner. Though they are public spaces they are neither created nor owned by the public. Strict monitoring and control discourages public ownership of these spaces.
Here everything is owned by one organization and is maintained to a high standard. There is more community and collective ownership of public spaces in the UK. Here it’s all well planned, new and shiny. (Meryl, British consultant)

In addition, The Marina and the Walk can still be places considered exclusive due to their modern, Western, and high-priced attributes.

Some of the pedestrian areas like the Walk in Jumeirah or the beach have upscale restaurants. (Yara, Jordanian woman)

The Marina is a good place because the white people are staying there. I cannot afford it there, too expensive. (Marilou, Filipino beautician)

Interestingly, both Marilou and Maricel, who had mentioned that “the DIFC is very nice because there are mostly white people so you can wear shorter skirts or fitted dresses,” have a preference for “white” spaces in spite of the fact that they are not white themselves. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address why non-whites characterize a white space to be “a good place,” but one reason I would conjecture is that Maricel feels more comfortable dressing liberally because Dubai’s white spaces discourage large groups of South Asian men from being there. Thus, these “in-between” spaces are at the same time both open and closed to low-income Filipino expatriate women. They might feel safer and more comfortable in white public spaces, even if they are out of place in terms of their skin color and income level.
Figure 20 Dubai Marina, perceived as an inviting public space by Linda, Marilou, and others (photo by Linda)

Figure 21 JBR Walk, picture chosen by Renee as a welcoming space (photo by Ahmed Ramzan)

4.4 Is Dubai Exclusive?

When asked whether they perceive Dubai to be exclusive, 50% of interviewees responded with a decisive “Yes.” Another 20% answered, “Yes, but not to me.” echoing earlier comments that many high end features of the city exclude low-
income but do not exclude flexible citizens. The final 30% of interviewees responded with a “No.” often citing the presence of foreigners from all over the world as an indicator of non-exclusivity: “I don’t think Dubai is exclusive because there are a lot of foreigners from a lot of countries,” says Alma, a Filipina domestic helper. Be that as it may, respondents that said Dubai accepts everyone to live and work would later admit that many facets of the city are exclusive to certain people. Once I inquired further, they would contradict their statements that Dubai is for “everyone.” Though the city is multicultural, not all cultures are valued or treated the same.

No it’s not exclusive, actually I think Dubai is very diverse. Here you can have access to everything unlike in Europe where you cannot go to certain hotels. But it’s as far as you can spend money. Either you can spend a lot of money and you can have fun, otherwise no, you don’t have access. (Farrin, Iranian architect)

Not exclusive, it’s open to everyone, anyone. Places are open to whoever that wants to go, but it depends if they are comfortable at that place. (Marilou, Filipino beautician)

Not really, because you can do whatever you can do. You can go anywhere. But a lot of things depend on if you can afford it. (Maricel, Filipino beautician)

When I first came to Dubai, I thought it was so global and multinational and all these nationalities happen to live here. But actually it’s a very strict hierarchy in ethnicity. (Renee, Belgian business professional)

People who cannot afford specific places tend to find them unwelcoming and exclusive because they are excluded from participating. Few places, like the Burj Al Arab seven star hotel, actually exclude upper middle-income residents; most just exclude the working class (see Figure 22).
“If you look at Dubai as a whole, they have something for everyone because it’s a melting pot of nationalities” (Evie, the British business professional). The “something for everyone” alludes to areas of New Dubai for upper middle-income residents (flexible citizens), and areas of Old Dubai for the lower income (flexible non-citizen). Nevertheless, the majority of the housing and commercial developments currently being built are of the decadent nature dedicated for the flexible citizen group. There are only a handful of areas left that are considered Old Dubai, and those areas have been threatened with elimination under the guise of urban renewal or “upgrading.”

And when everything new contributes to sprawl and enforces the domination of the highway, the flexible non-citizens who take public transit face more difficulty in access. Yara, the Jordanian woman, told me that she did not believe Dubai to be exclusive because “having a very affordable public transit makes the city open to all by default.” However, affordability is not the only factor that
prescribes use. Though low-income expatriates agree that public transit is affordable, they also mentioned that metro stations are often not close to where they live, and buses are often slow, have circuitous routes, and are inconvenient.
Chapter 5: Implications of Gender, Networks of Care, Discrimination and Other Influences

The notion of whether one belongs is complicated and can be internally accredited to many things. In this chapter, I identify various themes and general trends that contribute to belonging and non-belonging, including implications of gender; family and personal networks; experience of being the foreign majority or being itinerant; exclusion/inclusion; personal and professional validation; discriminatory practices; precarious residency rights; and critical perceptions of the urban environment, both the physical and the social.

Urban citizenship and cultural citizenship play important roles in affecting residents’ sense of belonging. Though urban citizenship determines one’s rights based on income and class (the ‘flexible citizen’ is rich and educated and entitled to New Dubai amenities while the ‘flexible non-citizen’ is treated as insignificant and peripheral), cultural citizenship means whites and Arab locals are valorized based on assumptions and perceptions of race and identity (while South Asian flexible citizens, and of course flexible non-citizens, are more negatively judged and regarded).

5.1 Conditions of being a woman in Dubai

The conditions of being a woman in the UAE are utterly different from such conditions in other Gulf or Middle Eastern countries. All of the women I interviewed believe Dubai to be socially and religiously much more open and
tolerant than neighboring countries. Expatriate women do not feel very restricted in dress and in everyday affairs. They are not required to wear the black *abaya* that covers a woman from head to toe and lets only the face, feet and hands be displayed. Many respondents said they did not feel a big difference being a woman in Dubai compared to being a woman in their home country; they still very much feel free and independent. Two small differences mentioned were: the workplace is male-dominated; and women cannot do certain things without a “no objection” letter from their husband or employer (e.g. getting a driver’s license, starting a job, opening a bank account or telephone account, etc.). Working among mostly men causes a small amount of discomfort, but most interviewees nevertheless believe that they can succeed professionally without bias to their gender. The rule about providing “no objection” paperwork is viewed as a nuisance rather than a major restriction.

In fact, the Islamic value of respecting women creates favorable conditions for expatriate women. Females are granted special privileges, such as having female-only cars on the metro or dedicated lines for women at government agencies. Most of the interviewees have not encountered negative gender discrimination.

It’s good for women actually to be here. Arab countries respect women, there’s always deference given. (Padma, Indian businesswoman)

In general being a woman in Dubai is as easy as being a man. I’ve never encountered any discrimination; discrimination is maybe on money not gender. (Marie, French business professional)

One of the best things in Dubai is: we get preference anywhere we go as women. At the banks and hospitals, there are specific lines for women. So I am happy to live in Dubai as a woman. There isn't anywhere [in Dubai] that I'm underprivileged as a woman. (Binti, Indian business professional)
These findings contrast with earlier conclusions made in the literature review. My participants did not view gender as an issue that negatively affects their sense of identity and belonging. Though Dubai on the whole has a male to female ratio of 3:1, interestingly most interviewees have not noticed an overwhelming presence of men in the city. Since the majority of them live in New Dubai, where there are few ‘bachelors,’ several participants believed the male to female ratio to be relatively equal. The communities where flexible citizens inhabit, and the places where they frequent for work or social activities, are not where the majority of men, the labor workers, live.

In Dubai, public policy people will do their best to make sure the laborers are as invisible as they can be. You hardly ever see them, you see them being driven around in buses without windows even in the summer. There are a lot of labor camps pretty far outside of the city. (Renee, Belgian business professional)

An exception to this lack of awareness applied to one interviewee who lives in Satwa, a South Asian-dominated area where male laborers do live. This Filipino participant has noticed that there are a lot of men in her neighborhood, and she is often afraid to talk to them. She confided in me, “I don’t like to talk to different nationalities if I don’t know them. Especially the men, they might think they like you if you talk to them.” Because she personally sees her neighborhood streets filled with men, she feels greater discomfort with the gender imbalance than other women not living in Satwa or areas of Old Dubai. Some flexible interviewees also mentioned that they did not feel comfortable in male-dominated areas, but they are rarely physically in those areas.
5.2 Networks of care

An expatriate’s circle of close friends, family and community can certainly influence her sense of belonging. Social ties and support seem to be more emphasized in responses by Filipino interviewees than by others. This is not surprising considering that the friends of the Filipinas are essentially their family, as their true family members live far away in the Philippines.

We just want to see each other and have fun – to release our stress and feelings that we want to get rid of…and to eat Filipino food together and laugh together.
(Marissa, Filipina domestic helper)

Only one out of the five Filipino participants who have children is living with her child in Dubai. Unsurprisingly, the Filipino woman raising her daughter in Dubai is a flexible citizen, an upper middle-income architect. The other Filipino respondents yearn to see and to raise their children in Dubai, but cannot afford to.

Thus, their sense of belonging and home are complicated and constrained, living away from their loved ones for years.

It would really make me feel more like I belong if I could take my family [here]. You can host your family depending on your salary. It’s just that if I have my family here I have to take a nanny as well. It’s expensive to have a family here.
(Imelda, Filipino administrator)

Western women and other flexible citizens mentioned friends and family to be an important part of their ‘networks of care.’

I belong because I don’t have a home anymore in France; my home is here. Even though I’m renting it feels like home. I have two kids born in Dubai and we have our friends in Dubai so definitely we belong here.
(Marie, French business professional)

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28 To get a Dubai residency visa for a family member, the current resident’s monthly salary cannot be less than 4,000 AED ($1,089 USD) or 3,000 AED ($817 USD) plus accommodation. Besides, a low-waged flexible non-citizen could not possibly afford paying a domestic helper to take care of her child while she works (Government of Dubai, 2011).
Others mentioned that attending social clubs or associations, such as the American Association for Women or the Dubai Literary Circle, creates opportunities for bonding with other similar women and helps with adjusting to life in Dubai as a foreigner.

**Insurgency**

After being made aware of insurgent claims to public space by Filipino women in Hong Kong (see Constable, 1997; Tillu, 2011) and South Asian men in Old Dubai (see Elsheshtawy, 2008b), I was keen to learn whether similar acts of insurgency were carried out by Filipino women in Dubai. I had hoped that Satwa would be a place with the potential for large gatherings of Filipinas due to its centrality as a hub of Filipino restaurants and residents. However, as three of my interviewees informed me, there are no large congregations of Filipinas socializing in specific plazas or streets (that they are aware of). Still, Dubayyan Filipinas do meet together in small groups in public spaces, much like the Filipina nannies in Palmer’s (2010) Toronto study. The Filipina domestic helpers that I spoke to mentioned going to the park or public squares with several fellow Filipino friends. Usually these groups went in numbers of less than ten.

Perhaps one reason for the lack of insurgency can be the fact that Filipino migrant workers, as a group, do not have consistently shared time off. Although the day of rest takes places usually on Fridays, some employees have Saturdays or weekdays off, and some are granted a free day only once a month. What’s more, Filipino women might be deterred from loitering around outside because of the
large presence of South Asian men that are already staking claim to streets and sidewalks in Satwa and other old areas of Dubai. Large congregations of men on the streets are perceived as intimidating for women (as we have seen in the section on *Conditions of being a woman in Dubai*).

### 5.3 Discrimination

Race and income are salient elements in how different women are treated by others in society, which affects how they understand their identity in place. Ethnic discrimination, both positive and negative, affect female expatriates’ agency and sense of worth, with ramifications on their perceptions of space and belonging. Prejudice gives disproportionate access to physical, social and economic institutions and benefits, encouraging some residents to stay in Dubai and claim belonging, while marginalizing others. A Caucasian woman experiences Dubai quite differently from a Filipino woman. Casey, the American freelancer, states that she uses “being blonde and white” to her advantage. She has noticed that people in Dubai are particularly respectful to Western women, and has used this expedient circumstance in difficult situations, (e.g. talking herself out of a bureaucratic problem). Unfortunately, the tolerance for certain behavior by flexible citizens, especially white Westerners, is not applied to South or Southeast Asians. Cultural citizenship accounts for women of color being limited by entrenched status hierarchies based on racial difference.

While some interviewees stated they make efforts to respect the local culture by dressing modestly (covering the shoulders and knees), it is not an uncommon
sight to see Western women wear more revealing clothing in areas that are predominantly Western. One of the Caucasian interviewees asserted that there is “no enforced dress code” in Dubai, but others have noticed that the lack of enforcement is not applied across the board.

In Dubai Marina, you will see women walking around in very skimpy clothing. In Old Dubai, you wouldn’t see that, you would get arrested. (Casey, American freelancer)

I hope they will change being so strict to the Filipinas. They are strict because the Filipinas are not totally following the rules, especially how they dress when they go outside, they’re not totally covered. So then they catch them! But also, sometimes they are not fair. Other nationalities also can’t wear shorts like that, because of course this is a Muslim country. But they don’t catch other nationalities, only the Filipinas. That’s unfair; I hope they will be fair to all of the people. (Marilou, Filipino beautician)

Selective tolerance is an entitlement based on race, class and appointed value. As Ong (2006) recognized in other countries that make neoliberal decisions, new forms of inclusion have been created, “setting apart some citizen-subjects, and creating new spaces that enjoy extraordinary political benefits and economic gain” (5). Residents that do not have the same social and cultural capital face negative discriminatory practices. These practices, especially those promoted by public officials, impact how Filipinas experience their identity, their worth, and their place in society.  

Walsh (2006: 274) declared, “The racialization of everyday space is critical in the experience of British expatriate belonging.” I would agree but also contend that it applies to all foreign expatriate belonging. All of my interviewees seemed cognizant of the city’s social, economic and racial hierarchy. Professional flexible

29 Four Filipino and one Indian interviewee affirmed experiencing negative racial (and/or class) discrimination at least once.
citizens are a different type of “foreign” – they are ‘expats,’ not ‘migrant workers.’ Their lived experiences are resourced with power and privilege due to income and class status. White women are perceived and treated as a distinct entity from non-white women of Asian descent. Occupational terms are loaded with assumptions and meaning: “domestic helpers” or “migrant laborers” are Asian and poor. “Professionals” are white, well educated, and well off.

You know who the laborers are, you can tell. (Casey, American freelancer)

Over here, people treat you based on your color, based on the clothes that you wear, or on the physical appearance. Even I have made mistakes about [the occupation of] people from other nationalities, like for example, Filipino or even a British. (Binti, Indian business professional)

Because we are Filipinos there is discrimination. Work depends on nationality. Those who are not Filipino are earning more and are treated well when they have problems. If you are Filipino they will look at you badly. (Maricel, Filipino beautician)

Notwithstanding, Asian professionals in Dubai complicate the society’s ethnicized stereotypes; on the one hand they have consumption power and relatively high socio-economic status (they are flexible citizens as well as consumer/neoliberal citizens). On the other hand they still face racial discrimination and the effects of cultural citizenship. For example, Binti is welcomed to certain high-end places because she may dress professionally and is assumed to have the economic capital to spend. Meanwhile, she is unwelcomed in other places because of her skin color:

There are places on the new side [of Dubai], for example if you enter into a restaurant, as an Indian or an Asian, you actually don’t get good service because for example it’s an Australian owned restaurant. If it’s a packed restaurant we would have to wait because they prefer to give tables to people who are [like

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Arab expatriate women are also treated distinctly. As the next group with the most social power after local Emiratis, expat Arab women are relatively privileged and do not face as much discrimination as their Asian counterparts.
them or are] Westerners or something. There are places that we don't go back to again because of the kind of treatment we get. But there are many other places where we are welcomed. (Binti, Indian business professional)

Through my conversations with diverse expatriate women, cultural citizenship, based on the “Foucauldian sense of self-making and being made by the power relations that produce consent through schemes of surveillance, discipline, control and administration,” (Ong et al., 1996) does not only have a presence in Dubai but its repercussions are omnipresent. Official and unofficial policies that encourage discrimination are cues that dictate an expatriate’s “place” in society, and inevitably, her sense of belonging.

5.4 “Do you belong?”

5.4.1 “I do belong.”

I asked all twenty interviewees, “Do you feel you belong in Dubai?” Half of the expatriate women said yes. Their affirmations hinged on a few reasons: that being foreign is normal in Dubai; that they are used to being transient “global citizens,” that they are living in an environment that supports their personal and professional development; and lastly, that they are treated with respect and regarded as people who do belong.

1. Being foreign is the norm

Various interviewees said their sense of belonging was reinforced by the reality that almost everyone in Dubai is foreign. As Vora (2008a: 161) gleaned from her research on forms of belonging for Dubai’s Indian middle class, Dubai’s tight
control of national Emirati identity (native as a distinct identity from foreigners, little social mixing between locals and foreigners, etc.) results in little interference with foreigners’ cultural and social practices. Essentially, there is no pressure to assimilate – a common immigration priority and policy for foreign residents in other countries (e.g. in Western Europe). In most other countries in the world, countries whose entire economic system does not depend on imported labor, expatriates are normally seen as “alien” or “Other.” The fact that over 90% of the population is foreign in Dubai complicates this trend, and so the sense of otherness is diminished. In the UAE, foreigners have no opportunity to become national citizens or gain permanent residency, and thus are not placed in the position where they should make great efforts to adapt to Emirati culture, outside of respecting Emirati and Islamic norms.

One of the most appealing things is that everyone here is foreign so you don't really feel like an outsider… here, everyone is basically 'imported' for a short amount of time. (Linda, Dutch consultant)

I feel like I belong here because everyone is from some place else. I’m not 10% of the population, I’m 80% of the population. You never come here expecting to be an Emirati. The culture is so different. Not fitting in is the norm. (Casey, American freelancer)

I feel like I belong here with other expats and other Filipinos around me. (Marissa, Filipina domestic helper)

2. **Global citizenship**

Some expat women are very comfortable with transnational movement and are accustomed to staying or working in different places for short periods of time. They do not mind not getting citizenship, and feel that being in Dubai now is what makes them belong.
We're not citizens, only residents. I consider myself a global citizen; I'm comfortable with living in many different places as long as the places are convenient and welcoming. I do belong here for the time I'm here - it's not an issue, the sense of ownership. We feel that we've been served and we serve and it's just fine. (Yara, Jordanian woman)

Dubai is always going to be a city where people like me stay for a while but don't really get rooted. (Linda, Dutch consultant)

3. **Personal and professional development validates belonging**

Others feel comfortable with the culture and lifestyle in Dubai, and believe that living there has been personally and professionally enriching.

Yes [I belong] because I like to be here. I’m earning my daily bread here. I feel like I belong. (Padma, Indian businesswoman)

I don’t mind modern or not modern or old, as long as I’m safe, comfortable, and I can live the way I want. (Marissa, Filipina domestic helper)

4. **Respectful treatment as a fellow inhabitant who belongs**

A few women indicated their feelings of belonging are highly influenced by the way they are treated by their employers and other people. Being regarded respectfully by others as someone who belongs as much as anyone else in the city enhances personal assessment of belonging.

I belong here because I like it. I stay because I have work. I think people treat me well, if you’re good, they’re also good. (Marilou, Filipino beautician)

You can talk to neighbors here without thinking that you’re just a domestic helper. (Marissa, Filipina domestic helper)

I think I can say I belong. People are friendly and there’s not much discrimination [towards me]. People make you feel welcomed, they help you, so you don’t feel left out. (Noor, Iranian student)

Especially for domestic helpers, who spend their days and nights with one particular family, being treated poorly causes frustration and dissatisfaction with life lived in Dubai. Grace, the Filipina domestic helper that only receives one day off per month, has mixed feelings of being in Dubai and wants to leave her
employer and/or leave the city. Alma, another Filipina domestic helper, did not feel a sense of belonging in the city when she worked for her former employers who treated her poorly. Alma’s relationship with her current employer is much better, causing her to feel that she belongs in Dubai as a worker that is valued and treated with courtesy.

Before I didn’t feel like I belonged in this country when I was with my Lebanese family. I didn't have a good relationship with them. When I was with them, I wanted to go home. It wasn't very nice so I didn't feel like I belonged. My problem with them is very common with other housemaids. They treat their maids like garbage, something like that. (Alma, Filipina domestic helper)

5.4.2 “I don’t belong.”

Fifty percent of interviewees declared that they do not belong in Dubai. In addition to rampant discrimination and not having their families with them, other reasons cited by participants as contributing to their sense of non-belonging include: ambiguous temporality due to lack of permanent residency rights; local Emirati privilege and exclusion; other restrictive state policies; discontent with superficiality and social hierarchy, and critical impressions of the built environment.

1. Ambiguous temporality due to lack of permanent residency rights

Half of the 20 participants said they did not know for how much longer they would stay in Dubai, that length of future residence is very difficult to ascertain.

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31 Grace has already asked for her contract to not be renewed. Her employer promises to release her from employment only when their work contract terminates at the end of the year. If Grace stays until then, the employer will give her a recommendation for employment elsewhere in Dubai. Grace cannot legally find work elsewhere without this official release and recommendation.
No matter how many years an expatriate lives in Dubai, or even if she was born in Dubai, she cannot get formal citizenship or even a right to permanent residence.\(^{32}\)

Even though I was born here, I am still considered an expat; it's only local Dubai Arabs that are born here that are called local people. Anybody else, no… unless you're married to an Arab. If I were married to an Arab, I could get an Emirati passport if and when I have children. (Binti, Indian business professional)

One quarter of the participants desire to stay at least another five years or so, and the other quarter want to leave in the next two years. The uncertain, transitory nature of expatriate residence impacts belonging negatively; residents cannot plan for the long-term, and friends are often coming and leaving.

It's very hard to build up anything permanent, be it a house or friendships or a relationship. It's hard to build things that are long term. You always live with the sense that it's not really forever. (Linda, Dutch consultant)

No I don’t belong because you never know how long you’re going to stay here. I love Dubai, but it’s unfortunate that I might stay 20 years here while worrying those 20 years that it may be my last year. So it creates anxiety, I never feel relaxed that this is my home. (Reem, Lebanese urban planner)

There’s no stable situation, business goes up and down, if you lose your work you have to leave the country within one month. You don’t feel like you’re working to make this your home, and unless you have a family you don’t commit here. (Farrin, Iranian architect)

2. Local privilege and exclusion

One form of exclusion mentioned was “Emirati versus everyone else.” Emiratis are known for being privileged; they get better treatment from the government, can purchase property in many areas of Dubai where foreigners cannot (even if they have the money to), and have the legal right to stay in Dubai as formal citizens.

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\(^{32}\) The only exception applies to well-connected, wealthy, and usually male expatriates from other Arab countries
Locals are very well taken care of by the rulers: free education, healthcare, housing. You’ve got Emirati and you’ve got everybody else... You cannot get citizenship here; you must be pure blood to be a citizen. (Casey, American freelancer)

I would feel more like I belong if they could give Emiratization for us – people who have stayed for more than 10 or 15 years. We would get citizen benefits as well, [like the] locals: financial benefits, medical benefits, property rights.

Emiratis are also perceived as exclusive since very few foreigners personally know or are on friendly terms with Emiratis, creating little opportunity for integration or better understanding of local culture. The majority of the interviewees did not have personal relationships with locals, which some viewed as an issue. They also mentioned that locals are very difficult to chat with or reach out to, and that foreigners and Emirati nationals generally live in different neighborhoods. Interaction between individuals from the two groups is mostly limited to seeing each other in shopping malls and governmental offices where locals work. Natasha, a Russian businesswomen, was the only Western participant who stated she had local friends. She also confirmed her belief that Emiratis do not like to mingle with expats and usually stick with their own community. When I asked Casey, the American freelancer, what could be changed to make her feel more like she belongs in Dubai, Casey answered:

Knowing more local people, interacting more with them on a day-to-day basis. You almost never see them work, it’s very difficult to get in touch with them, they’re not outgoing. The local culture seems still quite alien and remote to me.

To mitigate those uneasy feelings of not knowing enough about Emiratis or Emirati culture, Casey enjoys attending classes on the Koran and going to the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding. She views the Sheikh
Mohammed Centre as an welcoming space for foreigners to appreciate and better understand their country of residence (see Figure 23).

Figure 23 The Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding, an inviting space for conversation and cultural exchange (photo by Casey)

3. **Other restrictive state policies**

   a. Right to a pension is not granted to foreigners

   b. Right to own property or businesses is not granted to foreigners

   Though they have free zones where expats can own, those areas are very expensive so if you want to build a small business you cannot do it there; you usually have to be more corporate. (Padma, Indian businesswoman)

   c. Punishments for small misdemeanors e.g. insulting a local

   d. Illegality of living with an unmarried partner

   It’s my home but at the same time, I’m living with my partner illegally because I’m not married. There’s always that risk of “what if” for whatever reason, though very unlikely. If I really pissed off a local, they will have the authority to send me to jail. There’s always that in the back of your mind that there’s laws, rules, that we’re not abiding by. I know there’s a huge number of people living together and are not married for whatever reason. (anonymous)
4. **Superficiality and social hierarchy**

Several interviewees were discontent with the superficiality of social relations, the inequitable social hierarchy, and the lack of culture they perceived existent in Dubai:

I think sometimes here everything is so show-off. You have a table or you dress nicely at the bars and clubs. At the end of the day you don’t get to know people or talk to people. To get to really know a person is hard. People are very busy and there’s no feeling of community here. (Farrin, Iranian architect)

Many aspects of Dubai’s society and politics do not feel natural to me: the strong class divisions, lack of democracy and debate, lack of more cerebral forms of culture and entertainment, limited visibility of women, etc. In the long term I don't feel that at home in a place that is quite transitory and shallow. (Linda, Dutch consultant)

It’s a very artificial city and I feel almost no emotional connection to it. I’m also uncomfortable with the way that there’s a social hierarchy in the city, and even though I don’t have to participate in that, and I don’t myself, I mean by saying mean things or having an attitude towards people, you are confronted with it everyday so you’ll see a lot of that in the streets and I don’t like it at all. (Renee, Belgian business professional)

5. **Critical impressions of the built environment**

As mentioned earlier, many interviewees are dissatisfied with Dubai’s high towers, non-pedestrian friendly streetscape, and perception of exclusiveness. A few interviewees mentioned that these elements in Dubai’s landscape do contribute to non-belonging, and demonstrates that to a certain degree, built spaces can influence sense of belonging.

5.5 **Summary of Findings**

In brief summary, I have demonstrated that urban citizenship, through the framing of flexible citizenship and cultural citizenship, affirms inequitable power dynamics. Flexible citizens and non-citizens live, work, play and move in very
different ways and inhabit very different spaces. Flexible citizens enjoy a high quality standard of living while flexible non-citizens less so. I have learned that Dubai’s physical planning and infrastructure development benefits the mobility of flexible citizens over flexible non-citizens, though improved public transit has facilitated access for the latter; that there are few gender implications on belonging, especially for flexible citizens who do not inhabit male-dominated spaces and do not have to abide by Islamic laws; and that strength of social support and community can shape feelings of emplacement.

I have also learned that the physical landscape can influence identity and sense of place, but not divorced from the social context in which an expatriate operates. That is why perceptions of space and belonging differ across nationalities, ethnicities and professions – people experience the same places in different ways, based on whether they seemingly “fit in” or have consumption power. Female expatriates find places exclusive when they are directly excluded from participating (e.g. gated communities and high end restaurants) or at the very least they consider certain places as being not inclusive (i.e. Old Dubai does not exclude flexible citizens but it is neither inclusive nor inviting to them).

Regarding public space, it is still not clear whether and in what ways different public spaces are exclusive. We have seen public spaces that encourage interaction versus private public spaces that do not. Do popular in-between spaces qualify as being truly public? Do they promote the interaction of people from diverse backgrounds, without making flexible non-citizens feel insecure about not being able to participate in consumption? I found out that the expatriate female
population, as far as I can tell from my limited interviews, has not enacted insurgency in public spaces.

Lastly, discrimination pervades the lives of Dubai residents. White skin or Middle Eastern/Arab heritage is valorized while being South or Southeast Asian is not – a racial hierarchy produced by cultural citizenship. Women with darker skin colors are often treated unfairly or with less respect because they are perceived to be making less money (which is often true, another indicator of unfairness). This has had great implication on one’s sense of worth and belonging in Dubai, and affects female expatriates’ satisfaction with their migration experiences and desire to stay in the emirate.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Perhaps what all of the visible modern developments, record-breaking buildings, and mazes of highways do is have us fixate on the city from a bird’s eye view that can only capture the grandeur, and not the smaller spaces where real people live, work, play and move around. The shininess and newness distracts our attention away from the smaller spaces of lived experiences that need a closer look to recognize, explore and understand. These are the diverse yet segregated communities and neighborhoods, the parks that allow for a mingling of people from different countries, professions, languages, and income levels, and the homes that are lived in and shared with friends. Through this research project, a small window into the lived experiences of expatriate women opened up for me, and bettered my understanding of the repercussions of urban policy and planning on everyday lives. To address my original motivation for conducting the research, in this final concluding chapter I discuss what my findings mean to me as a budding urban planner.

6.1 Consequences of Social-Spatial Fragmentation

Extreme class polarization has created social-spatial fragmentation along both racial and income differentiators. Spatially, residents are dispersed between Old and New Dubai based on their social, economic and political capital. Socially, residents of different class and/or cultural backgrounds rarely interact with each other. There were more interviewees that acknowledged that the majority of their
friends are of similar background (i.e. all or mostly Filipinas, or all or mostly Westerners) than those that have ethnically or nationally diverse friends. Though Evie, the British business professional, claims, “I’m not saying that we don’t interact, everyone interacts; it’s a big melting pot,” there is limited meaningful interaction between the privileged and non-privileged (flexible citizen vs. flexible non-citizen; expat vs. migrant), other than one being serviced by the other. “I don’t really see a mixing of the two groups” and “People aren’t exactly wanting to get to know each other” were common comments by interviewees.

In a highly segregated society like Dubai’s, this is unfortunate as higher quality contact can “lead to a reduction in prejudice and the development of more positive attitudes about other ethnic groups” (Allport, 1953, as cited in Oney-Yazici et al., 2011: 5). Lack of meaningful interaction between social groups, or at the very least the absence of positive inter-group ‘memories,’ does not help residents to perceptively question or challenge inequitable social hierarchies, or to empathize with people having to deal with those inequities. The statement in which one of the flexible citizens justified laborers living in certain parts of the city with an assertion that there will always be people living in big houses and others in small apartments struck me as very insensitive. This flexible citizen seems to accept the status quo, that the stark division in housing quality and living standards is normal or natural. Perhaps she is not even aware of the low-quality housing conditions that characterize labor camps, because them living there are “just the way things are.” Her statement both generalizes and diminishes labor workers’ lived experiences. Social-spatial fragmentation results in missed
opportunity for mutual understanding and empathy, national cohesion, and strength of community. Spatial fragmentation contributes to delineating separate identities and unequal social capital. It becomes a normative mechanism. The status quo reinforces the benefits flexible citizens have, and allows flexible non-citizens to make more money than they would in their home countries. But it thoroughly diminishes the rights of one group over another, and contributes to further fragmentation. This is an especially relevant issue in the era of greater income inequality in both the United States and around the world.

6.2 Perceptions of Space and Belonging as a Function of Physicality, Society, and Public Policy

My question regarding the potentiality of physical and social landscapes to provide context and produce meaning, emotions, and memories has been substantiated by my interviewees’ anecdotes. Their perceptions of space and belonging are a function of both physical design and the social milieu. Though Dubai is not ruled by a dictator with a tyrannical hand, its authoritarian role in controlling development and residence rights has impacted the ways in which physical design and social understandings take place (see Figure 24).
Figure 24 Diagram that shows how space and belonging are functions of both physical design and social context; both are constructs determined by government policies.

**Physical and Social Environment**

Both physicality and the social frame in which Dubai residents inhabit are, to an immense degree, determined by political decisions resulting in state policies of control, acceptance in some practices (e.g. liberal dress code, alcohol in hotels, free-trade zones, etc.) and rejection of others (right to permanent residency, right to own houses in certain areas of the city, civic engagement). Dubai is a highly regulated place. Every sub theme mentioned in this paper is somehow or another created or influenced by public policy: spatial practices in the spaces of home, occupation, recreation and mobile space; the formulation of Old Dubai and New Dubai; spaces of exclusion and inclusion in the built environment; conditions of being a woman; networks of care; citizenship and hierarchies of power; and income and racial inequality and discriminatory practices.

**Space**
The first degree in the production of physical space in Dubai is top-down; it is regulated by the municipality and designed and built by state-controlled developers. The next degree in the production of space, a reproduction of space, is the way in which it is socially constructed – how physical space is used, perceived and claimed by residents. Spaces, whether they be the larger built landscape (skyscrapers, luxury developments, highways and sprawl), shared public spaces, or the smaller spaces of daily life where people live, work, and play, and move, are functions of both physicality and social context, requiring residents to negotiate daily with what is existing against what is desired.

As we have seen, public policy and regulation (or the intentional lack of policy and regulation) have contributed to delineating spaces that flexible citizens and flexible non-citizens do not share: segregated private communities, different pay and work opportunities, separate spaces of recreation, divided mobility (car versus transit), and conflicting ownership of New Dubai and Old Dubai. The state has also created public and private, inclusive and exclusive, and in-between spaces, and is integral in the regulation of street activities that keep public space safe for women.

**Belonging**

The ways in which expatriate women perceive belonging, as accepted bodies in space, are also dually influenced by the physical and social landscape. Tangible spaces are affixed with social loading and meaning and compel expatriate residents to confront how they feel about being foreign and female. The polarized conceptions of New Dubai and Old Dubai conjure up flipped spaces of exclusion,
inclusion, and belonging. These conceptions of belonging and identity help us to understand how residents imagine their place in space and in society.

Belonging has been promoted by state-installed options for high consumption and luxury living, but constrained by rigid laws on citizenship and family sponsorship, and the encouragement of social segregation and discriminatory practices. State-controlled developers build buildings and communities in alignment with promoting global capital and extracting monopoly rent. Neoliberal policies have consequentially privileged certain economic livelihoods over others, creating a fragmented and inequitable form of urban citizenship and participation.

*Framework is one-directional*

Since development and policy implementation in Dubai is so top-down, by design of its ruling family and local elite, the experiences of space and belonging of expatriates would not substantially feed back or influence the authorities to change the city’s trajectory in physical design or social structure. The highly regulated built environment becomes the reinforcement of top-down decisions and priorities, and not the producer of new meaning or claims to space. There is no allowance for political protest or democratic processes. Foreigners, while making up 90% of the population, have no right to live permanently in Dubai, let alone give voice to shape public policies and practices. Flexible citizens and flexible non-citizens “make” the city while they are there and get a defined payout for their services, but cannot influence the city in the long-term.
6.3 The Global City

Dubai has defined itself as a ‘global city’ of iconic mega development and luxury living. There are not too many places just like Dubai, but increasingly cities around the world are taking on aspects of Dubai (sometimes referred to as the Dubaization\(^{33}\) of cities) (see Figure 25). At a Harvard conference on urban planning and design earlier this month, I heard urban geographer Piper Gaubatz say, “We are global and important and we want to look like other cities that are global and important” in reference to certain Chinese cities. This mantra applies to a growing amount of cities in the Global South and “second-tier” cities in the developed world that are trying to modernize and attract foreign capital. This is a perturbing issue; cities, striving for growth and global recognition through neoliberal mechanisms and aesthetic “upgrading,” are beginning to have very similar features.

\(^{33}\) A term introduced by Yasser Elsheshtawy in 2004 to depict the influence of Dubai on the urban discourse. The meaning of dubaization is “the act of building a city which relies on spectacular, non-contextual architecture” (Elsheshtawy, 2013)
Beyond aesthetics, the installation of high-end downtown centers and the proud display of global brands do, as one would expect, exclude a large segment of the local population, as this research has shown. It excludes flexible non-citizens from taking part or claiming belonging in those spaces (or claim belonging to the city if the whole city is full of such places, as in the case of Dubai). I do not want to altogether demonize making money off of exclusive spaces. David Harvey (2002) reminds us that it is a matter of determining which segments of the population are to benefit most from the city’s collective symbolic capital. Harvey cites Singapore as a superior example of a city that extracts monopoly rents but ensures that the benefits are widely distributed through housing, health care and education. He says,
The struggle to accumulate marks of distinction and collective symbolic capital in a highly competitive world is on. But this entrains in its wake all of the localized questions about whose collective memory, whose aesthetics, and who benefits. (2002: 105)

Monopoly rent collected off of structures and services perceived special and valuable should be shared more widely with the people who make them (and the city) special and valuable. Instead, flexible non-citizens in Dubai, who have built (and are still building) Dubai’s towers and attend to its glitzy stores, receive no state support and face limited housing, occupation, recreation, and mobility options.

The great value in exploring Dubai is that Dubai makes the neoliberal approach to city-shaping and its effects starkly apparent. Residents do not have the power of political voice, are segregated and made to feel lucky to be in a certain space or class, and constantly threatened with deportation. People are measured and afforded flexibility (accommodation by the state) based on their market value. Dubai captures monopoly rent and is willing to pay flexible citizens handsomely to contribute to its image. But no one will grow old in Dubai and there is no collective memory. Dubai gives us a clear, unfiltered picture of the neoliberal model of the global city.

So, how can we use this understanding of Dubai to analyze our own communities? What could development look like if it does not look like this? How can it attract economic activity, but at the same time be inclusive and inviting to everyone? Planners can use this way of framing to make sense of their communities where the neoliberal approach to city development and the capture of urban wealth is not nearly so obvious. For example, in our American cities,
neoliberal development might take the form of gentrified neighborhoods with charming cafes or aesthetically pleasing ‘complete streets.’ Flexible citizens could be members of the ‘creative class’\textsuperscript{34} – technology workers, artists, gays, and such, incentivized and invited by local governments in shrinking cities (or even well-to-do cities, such as New York City) to stimulate economic growth and compete with other cities. In a powerful way these “upgrades” are also a type of Dubaization, in the sense that they are trying to make urban spaces highly attractive, which results in the disregard, exclusion and displacement of the community members who originally created those neighborhoods.

If a global city whose objectives are supposedly more democratic and progressive then it must design for collective memory and action. Our responsibility as forward thinking and mindful planners is to attempt to develop in a way that is sensitive to local context, place and people. If not, we will continue to create divisive spaces, inequitable conditions, and conflicted and conflicting conceptions of space and belonging among our diverse citizens.

\textsuperscript{34} The term is coined and described in various writings by Richard Florida.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Background questions
- How long have you lived in Dubai?
- What’s your age?
- How long do you plan to stay?
- Where is your home country?
- Why did you move to Dubai?
- What was your occupation back in your home country?
- Previous migration experiences

Public space questions
- Do you like to spend time in public spaces in the city? If so – where?
- How do you feel about walking around outside?
- People have written that Dubai can be an exclusive environment. From your experience, would you agree and why/why not?
- What do you think of Dubai’s landscape? How is it similar or different from the physical environment of your home city?
- Do you feel that some spaces are prohibited or discourage access? Please explain.
- Are there spaces that feel inviting or welcoming to you? Please describe.

Space of the home questions
- Where is it located?
- How did you find it?
- Are you comfortable in your house?
- How do you feel about the neighborhood? Do you feel you belong there? Why or why not?
- Does your neighborhood fit in with the rest of Dubai? Why or why not?
- How comfortable are you with your neighbors?
- How diverse is your neighborhood?

Space of occupation questions
- What is your main responsibility?
- Where is it located?
- Do you like the location? Why or why not?
- How do you get there?
- How did you find your job?
- Are you satisfied? Why or why not?
• What do you think about the physical environment of where it takes place?
• Are you comfortable there and is it easy to move around? Please explain.

Space of recreation questions
• What do you do in your free time?
• Where do you like to go for fun/recreation and why?
• Where do you go to meet friends and socialize and why?
• What type of friends? Are the demographically diverse?
• Are there places you can go to interact with foreigners of different backgrounds or UAE nationals? Do you interact with them? Why or why not?
• Are there things you would like to do but cannot in Dubai? Please explain.

Mobile space questions
• How do you get around the city? For example, to go to work, home, or to socialize.
• Are there any restraints on where you would like to go to or how to get there?
• Have new transportation facilities (i.e. Dubai Metro, expansion of buses, bikeways, pedestrian amenities) improved your life? If so, how?
• Is car ownership affordable for you? Why or why not?
• Is public transit affordable for you? Please explain.

Final/Conclusion questions
• What is it like to be a woman in Dubai?
• Dubai is very male-dominated, do you notice that and how does it make you feel?
• Have you had problems with discrimination?
• Do you feel like you belong?
• Is there anything that could be changed that would make you feel more like you belong?

Note: Questions were not always asked in the exact wording or order of this list. Sometimes questions were re-phrased or left out, or questions off the cuff arose as circumstances dictated.
Appendix 2: Real Estate Listings and Rental Prices

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- **DG-Building 201 Discovery Gardens**
  - Amazing value
  - 1 studio
  - 495 sq. ft.
  - AED 34,000

- **DG-Building 201 Discovery Gardens**
  - Amazing value
  - 1 bed
  - 900 sq. ft.
  - AED 53,000

- **DG-Building 201 Discovery Gardens**
  - Amazing value
  - Studio
  - 506 sq. ft.
  - AED 34,000

- **DG-Building 201 Discovery Gardens**
  - Amazing value
  - 1 bed
  - 1,005 sq. ft.
  - AED 53,000

- **AAM Building**
  - Bur Dubai
  - 1 bed
  - 450 sq. ft.
  - AED 45,000

- **Marina Heights**
  - Dubai Marina
  - 2 bed
  - 1,075 sq. ft.
  - AED 110,000

- **DG-Building 47 Discovery Gardens**
  - Amazing value
  - Studio
  - 485 sq. ft.
  - AED 37,000

- **Sadaf 6**
  - Dubai Marina
  - Full ocean view
  - 1 bed
  - 1,302 sq. ft.
  - AED 135,000

- **Marina Diamond 3**
  - Dubai Marina
  - Close to all amenities
  - 1 bed
  - 683 sq. ft.
  - AED 65,000
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# The price is right

Compare and contrast the latest dirham cost of villas and apartments in the UAE with our at-a-glance guide

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1 USD = 3.67 AED  
1 Euro = 4.78 AED

## VILLAS

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