

## Living In and Out of the Host Society. Aspects of Nepalese Migrants' Experience of Division in Qatar

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**Abstract:** This article examines the place that Nepalese immigrant workers occupy in Qatar, a country where migrants' social and spatial positions are determined by their nationality and qualifications. The article uses visual images, mainly photographs, to illustrate the divided nature of society in Qatar. While trying to adopt the migrants' point of view, the author spent time both in the place where they live, that is the *labor camps*, and in central Doha where migrants spend their free time. Thus, except for the work place, pictures were taken both in private and public spaces to outline migrants' living spaces. They illustrate the strong constraints migrants have to face in everyday life. For the author himself, pictures are a means of taking a closer look at these places, once back from a field trip. By playing with different scales, zooming from the *labor camp* setting to the details of how rooms are arranged, pictures enable us to grasp the multiple facets of segregation and the way Nepalese migrant workers draw on their own resources to make foreign places their own. However, the adjustments made to these living spaces continue to reflect their lowly position in a highly segmented society.

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## 1. Introduction

As soon as one lands in Qatar, it is impossible to remain impervious to the differences between the local and the migrant population. One is struck by the fact that, since the streets of central Doha are filled with men from South Asia, sitting, chatting and chewing *pan* (areca nut mixed with betel leaf), their body language expressing their *southasianness*, one can have the impression of being in Islamabad, Chennai, Dhaka or Kathmandu. "This is not an Arab country, this is somewhere else," an Indian expatriate working for a Qatari administration told

me. The scenery is definitely not South Asian but the great number of shops promoting South Indian food or *tandoori* is there to remind us of the difficulty in putting this kind of place on a cultural city map. [1]

The dress code, cars, the way of behaving and of consuming, everything epitomizes the huge difference between Qataris and non-Qataris, a difference the visitor rapidly understands to be a division based on nationality and qualifications and which translates the spatial aspects. As soon as one leaves the center of the town, along newly built four lane roads, different kinds of landscapes are to be seen, or surmised since many compounds lie behind high walls where entry is forbidden. Gated communities, office buildings, residential buildings and labor camps: all forms of man-made environments express the very strong divide that exists in Qatar.<sup>1</sup> Migrants' daily lives are thus strongly conditioned by the multiple divisions they encounter, with this separation from the Qatari population being monitored by the Qatari government and private companies' policies (NAGY, 2006). Migrants feel that this is part and parcel of their experience, when on a temporary contract. Moreover, they express the sentiment of being cast out of mainstream society, yet at the same time they find ways to appropriate the city and make their life bearable. [2]

In a country where "economic practices and cultural attitudes reinforce the exclusionary of hierarchising nature of the legal and immigration system" (NAGY, 2006, p.123), the use of pictures to demonstrate these segregation practices is useful, particularly if we try to consider the migrants' points of view regarding segregation and if we agree that "pictures relate to a social space of experience" (KNOBLAUCH, BAER, LAURIER, PETSCHKE & SCHNETTLER, 2008, §10). Pictures will be used as a main or complementary source of information. I will focus on spaces where Nepalese migrants in Qatar live, and try to show how pictures help convey how the migrants feel the segregation experience<sup>2</sup>. My research focuses exclusively on unskilled and lowly qualified Nepalese migrants, therefore I will not address the issue of other categories of migrants<sup>3</sup>. I carried out fieldwork among Nepalese migrants, who are one of the most important foreign populations in Qatar. Pictures were taken in almost all the places migrants frequent, except for their workplace to which I had no access. However, one migrant also gave me pictures he had taken at his workplace. [3]

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1 I purposely do not use the expression "Qatari society" since this would only refer to Qatari citizens.

2 All pictures were taken by the author in 2008, in Qatar, except for Picture 4 (Google Earth caption) and Picture 9 (taken by Ramesh R.). To protect the workers' anonymity, I have intentionally not provided the names of the places where I took the pictures.

3 Migrants constitute about 90 per cent of the total workforce in Qatar. They occupy positions throughout the job hierarchy.

## 2. Qatar, a Land of Control and Separation

Division in Qatar shapes the lives of most Qatar inhabitants, who are non-citizens (NAGY, 2006). The cultural, social and geographical gulf that separates the different populations in Qatar is reinforced by government institutions. In that sense, Qatar embodies all Gulf countries where "the segmentation and polarization of the labor force has sharper divisions from elsewhere in the world as a result of the necessity to import labor and the functions each migrant group fills" (MALECKI & EWERS, 2007, p.477). Spatial separation between the different ethnic groups is also evidenced in Dubai (ELSHESHTAWY, 2008). [4]

### 2.1 Migration in Qatar

The Qatar government actually regulates the supply of migrants according to the needs of the private sector and according to nationality quotas which are kept secret. The foreign population is kept under control thanks to the sponsorship system which makes every Qatari citizen a potential sponsor (*kafeel*), to whom every migrant must pay a monthly due in return for a residence permit and working visa. The sponsor must approve any change in the migrant's employer or residency, yet he seldom does so (LONGVA, 1999). Migrants, particularly those from the working class, are therefore stuck in the same job and place of residence, and have very little or no opportunity whatsoever of ever improving their situation however desperate it may be. [5]

The latest statistics reveal that the total population of Qatar amount to 1.5 million (Qatar Statistics Authority, 2009)<sup>4</sup> but the share of Qatari and non-Qatari is not officially published. However, according to some sources, only 350 000<sup>5</sup> are in fact Qatari and these form about 10 per cent of the workforce<sup>6</sup>. A lot of migrants originate from South Asia, particularly after the *de-arabization* of the workforce after the first war in Iraq (KAPISZEWSKI, 2006). It is said that the largest foreign communities are from India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh. As a result of Qatar's cosmopolitan character, the urban environment bears the traces of the multitude of languages that are spoken in Doha (Picture 1). Although English is the main language used in advertising, lots of other languages can be heard and seen on hoardings. Advertisements target particular communities.

4 <http://www.qsa.gov.qa/Eng/demographics%20Statistics.htm#d7> [Accessed: November 1, 2009]

5 <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51608.htm> [Accessed: November 3, 2009]

6 <http://www.qsa.gov.qa/Eng/publication/Annabs2008.htm> [Accessed: November 3, 2009]



Picture 1: Qatar, a crossroads of languages. Signboards in Malayalam, Arabic and English [6]

The Nepalese arrived in Qatar in huge numbers from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century onwards. They are generally preferred to Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis for various reasons. First of all, the authorities have adopted a policy of diversifying their source of manpower in order to not have to depend on just two or three countries. Furthermore, the low cost of Nepalese manpower, and their solid reputation (particularly in the eyes of Indian executives) have helped them find a labor niche in Qatar, as in all the Gulf countries. Since 2003, the number of Nepalese in Qatar has skyrocketed to reach 300,000 in 2008, according to the Nepalese ambassador. Among them, at least 90 per cent are unskilled workers mainly employed in the building and the services sector. A walk round central Doha and the industrial areas of the country is a good, practical way of grasping the reality of the huge presence of Nepalese in Qatar. These migrants live in a context dictated by extremely tight constraints that determine their position in the host society. [7]

## 2.2 A divided society based on nationality and class

Doha is typical of some Gulf country cities (Abu Dhabi, Dubai or Riyadh), and of global cities, which rely on a dual labor market characterized by both highly skilled and unskilled migrants (MALECKI & EWERS, 2007). In Qatar, this divide partly coincides with the most important one based on citizenship and nationality (i.e. Qataris versus non-Qataris) (NAGY, 2006). It corresponds to differential

access to political, civic, land and economic rights which are granted to Qatar citizens, yet which others are denied. [8]

National and ethnic stereotypes that sometimes merge on racism and xenophobia (JUREIDINI, 2003), developed by employers and society at large, are a means of categorization, just as in every Gulf country where "foreign workers are ranked by their place of origin, receiving differential payment and treatment" (LEONARD, 2003, p.133). In Qatar, Nepalese migrants not only meet fellow compatriots but also workers from South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East and East Africa. The Nepalese feel that they are at the bottom end of society, just as the Bangladeshis see themselves in Abu Dhabi (KIBRIA, 2008). Certain migrants even claim to be superior in the public space. Picture 2 shows how some Filipinos assert their identity and pride on a bus, in an area under construction, frequented by many migrants. The idea of "being the best" or of doing "good work" has to be placed in its context; there exists a hierarchy of workers according to their nationality, which can lead to competition. Given that very strong nationality-based stereotypes exist and really help people integrate the labor market, the slogans written by some workers on an ordinary bus which transports workers to and from their labor camps, portray the atmosphere expatriates live in. Workers, just as the institutions, have fully reconciled themselves to this countrywide division.



Picture 2: From nationality-based division to hierarchy [9]

Class division overlaps this nationality-based division: there is a huge gulf between blue collar workers, such as the Nepalese, and the top end of the hierarchy. The image of unskilled workers sticks to them in a way seen as detrimental to them. They have the impression of being stuck in a position imposed on them mainly by society at large. It must be pointed out that, as Indians are the first or second largest community in Qatar, they tend to reproduce the same relationship they have with the Nepalese in their motherland. It is a double-edged relationship: the Nepalese benefit from their positive image as hard-working, reliable and honest, an image built up over centuries of Nepalese migrants working in India. It enables the Nepalese to enter the labor market easily, yet at the same time limits their prospects to unskilled work under the

domination of their Indian counterparts. It is very unlikely that they will benefit from any social upgrading. Finally, in the collective imagination, the term "labor," as used in Qatar to designate an untrained worker, corresponds to a spatial assignation. [10]

### 2.3 From divided society to divided city

As the Hindu cosmogony based on hierarchy translates a spatial segregation between groups, the Qatari/non-Qatari divide also leads to housing segregation: "the programme of land and building grants, the specifics of its implementation, immigration laws and employment regulations facilitate residential isolation and limited interaction between groups" (NAGY, 2006, p.135). Segregation is all the more subtle and deep-rooted in the Qatari social world: even gated communities have their own division of space according to the hierarchical level of the worker or to their marital status (Picture 3). As in 19th-century European industrial or mining cities, one's type of residence (houses and flats of different sizes) is directly linked to one's position within the company. Yet in Qatar, the division goes even further since bachelor housing is situated very far from family homes, as if bachelors were a threat to these families.



Picture 3: A subtly planned segregation





Picture 4: Al Khor town, an example of segregation [11]

As exemplified by Picture 4 (a Google Earth caption), in Al Khor city (north of Doha), dwelling-places are separated according to a person's nationality and qualifications. The three main areas identified correspond to contrasting degrees of development: the old Al Khor town is mainly inhabited by Qatari nationals, whereas foreign laborers are confined to the industrial area<sup>7</sup>. The third area is the gated community inhabited by Qatargas<sup>8</sup> executives and which stands out in the pictures because of its strict street plan and greenery. The landscape is indeed an indication of people's level of income. As shown in the pictures hereafter, it fully illustrates the different spaces migrants live in according to their nationality and job status. As far as the Nepalese workers are concerned, they are the link between these spaces, thanks to their coming and goings (Picture 5). In the day time, they work on high standard housing projects and at night return to their under-equipped labor camps. As such, they are almost the only ones to be able to wander to and fro between such contrasted places. The space division, the size of houses and flats, established institutionally according to the employee's position in the company's hierarchy and to their marital status, are fully understood and considered by migrants to be perfectly normal.

7 The expression "industrial area" must be understood in the Qatari context as an area of both industrial production and workers' lodgings.

8 Qatargas is the national company which exploits the gasfield.



Picture 5: Migrant workers in a gated community are the link between the city's spaces



Picture 6: Industries and workers' dwelling places in one of Qatar industrial area



Picture 7: Labor camp area facilities are minimal [12]

The question of migrants' integration in cities and of cities as gateways for immigrants is thus quite different from Nina GLICK SCHILLER and Ayse



CAGLAR's (2009) main focus: a migrant's (temporary) integration in Qatar is subject to their unbending submission to their respective company's rules. Most of them do not have the choice of their dwelling place and live in huge compounds locally called labor camps situated in areas given over to industrial activities and workers' lodgings (Pictures 6, 7). These labor camp areas illustrate the high differentiation and the differential treatment given to unskilled workers and to the rest of the population. The surrounding areas are deprived of facilities found in any other part of town: there is no greenery, no sidewalk, no lighting at night. Clouds of dust float into the air as soon as there is the slightest gust of wind. Camps are usually surrounded by walls and a watchman sometimes checks the people entering. They are built on the principle that they are merely functional, leaving little room for any poetic license or harmony (Pictures 8, 9). Their sole function is to house as many people as possible, in concrete buildings or in mobile homes. As "neo-liberal spaces" (MARSDEN, 2008), these labor camps are run by private companies, with the Qatari State making few, irregular checks, which sometimes leads to horrific living conditions. The architectural contrast between these camps and Qataris' "low-density housing areas" (NAGY, 2006, p.124), where villa-style houses are sprouting up everywhere, is well illustrated by Picture 10.



Picture 8: A typical labor camp



Picture 9: Labor camp are usually surrounded by walls



Picture 10: Newly built houses are sprouting in old towns [13]

Qataris or expatriate residents may spend their life without ever going anywhere near these camps, often situated off the main roads, just as for Bangladeshis in Abu Dhabi (KIBRIA, 2008). Nepalese migrants may spend years in Qatar without even striking up a distant relationship with local residents. They see them from afar, they are struck by the way their wives are dressed and covered, but nonetheless respect them because of their newly built wealth. [14]

Although Qatar could be called a multicultural country, multiculturalism does not appear to be favored or viewed in a positive light. There seems to be no desire on the part of migrants or the local population to make a step nearer to each other: in such a context, Nepalese migrants build their own places. [15]

### **3. Living in a Divided Society: Migrants' Daily Life and Places**

Nepalese migrants are reconciled to all aspects of this divide experienced in Qatar, and they rapidly become aware of what degree of freedom they have. As such, the removal of their passport as soon as they step out of the airport is the first act of making it perfectly plain to migrants what their position is in the host society, described by some as similar to slavery. [16]

#### **3.1 The interiorization of hierarchy and segregation**

The Nepalese, as part of a Hindu hierarchy-based civilization, accept and even interiorize their lowly position in the social stratum: "we are small people" is an often heard saying to let other people know that they are well aware of what their place and position are. When I visited a luxurious gated community (see pictures above) with some Nepalese workers who work as garbage collectors, they were fully conscious of the spatial division in the community according to the hierarchical position of the employees in their company. Each area was described according to the rank of executives, ranging from "big men" to junior bachelor staff. Being set aside, even though acknowledged, is not discussed as such. Most workers say that "they are only here to earn money." They are conscious of the

major economic inequalities in Qatar, yet appear fatalistic about their own future. Migrants have no political claim or desire to become integrated, in a broader sense, in the host society since they, along with community leaders, know that this is completely unattainable. The perspective of obtaining Qatari citizenship is beyond the reach of even the most qualified and integrated foreigner. [17]

Finally, the division which young male migrants have most difficulty in coming to terms with is the gender division. Labor camps are areas exclusively inhabited by men, while women are often shut away in camps in other parts of the town, from where they are not allowed to go out. In the labor camp I visited, 33 per cent of the 201 men were bachelors, and none of the married men had brought their wives with them. Thinking about women (see below) and meeting some of them is thus a major preoccupation. Foreign prostitutes are to be found in some international hotels in central Doha but are beyond the means of these poorly paid workers<sup>9</sup>. Some of the migrants I met were employed in a gated community where they managed to make the acquaintance of housemaids at the risk of being expelled from the country for extra-marital sex. Entering a house to meet a girl is overstepping the limits of private territory and of laws. [18]

Though Nepalese workers seldom rebel against the position imposed on them by Qatari institutions, they demonstrate calm resistance to this situation by creating spaces of their own<sup>10</sup>. It so happens that Nepalese migrants turn to each other in order to find some degree of familiarity in a foreign land, both in private and in public spaces. [19]

### **3.2 Privates spaces**

Pictures may be used to understand how the migrant utilizes space to find a place of his own. Since time and places are frozen in pictures, they can be analyzed in detail, with the researcher using them to decipher the migrant's intimate landscape. Photographs carry a large amount of information and can therefore become objects of study in themselves. Indeed, this is the case for pictures of migrants' rooms. I will try to relate both what I saw, what migrants said and what the pictures convey. The way they arrange their belongings, the way they settle into their rooms reminds us that even subservient workers find ways to adjust and to create their own private spaces. [20]

Visualizing inner migrant's spaces can be done on various scales. The first is on the scale of the room. While the color of the painted walls is not chosen by migrants, like the double bunk beds, the rest (at least in the labor camp where I stayed) can be arranged according to the migrants' personal taste. Standard rooms are occupied by 8 to 12 men, usually group together on their date of arrival. They can change room if they wish to, with the approval of the "camp boss." Work overalls hang at the door to the room. Sometimes a map of Nepal is plastered over the wall, next to the Qatari Amir and his wife, to their company

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9 The monthly average company wage in this labor camp was 137 Euros in 2008.

10 Other migrant communities are no more rebellious than the Nepalese.

logo and to Shiva, as if signifying a quadruple allegiance (Picture 11). Plastic cupboards act as screens between beds and Hindu altars have their place in the corners of the room. Otherwise, the *Nepaliness* of the rooms is not immediately noticeable. A few pieces of furniture and chairs, rescued here and there, are monopolized by the long-time migrants. They are the ones who, if they have bought a computer, set it up on a table and thus appropriate a common space for themselves. Some video and electronic devices are bought collectively. That is the case for television sets and DVD players, and in some rooms, they are the sole objects immediately visible (Picture 12). Otherwise, the only space a migrant can transform and make his own, is the space surrounding his bed. In the total absence of any women, this young bachelor migrant has decided to surround himself with models (Picture 13). Others prefer pictures of their families, friends and villages, whilst others are keen on accumulating electronic items. The decoration is much richer and more sophisticated in rooms where migrants have been living for a long time. The more time passes, the more the room is appropriated, the more it is decorated and the more material goods are accumulated.



Picture 11: Decoration indicating allegiance to one's country, one's guest country and one's company



Picture 12: Collectively bought items in a migrants' room





Picture 13: Living with stars [21]

For migrants, modernity and memory are the two driving forces behind decorating their beds, so that they feel that they are in familiar surroundings, even though they cannot feel "at home." The most basic way of getting away from the crowd, of trying to live as an individual in daily life, where one is never physically alone, is to hang up a curtain (Picture 14). It is used both to protect oneself from the outside (at night when others are still awake) and to symbolically shut off one's bed in the daytime. This cotton wall represents the ultimate divide in a segregated society.



Picture 14: The bed curtain as the ultimate barrier [22]

Labor camps are places of fellowship, places where migrants are huddled together, where playing with distance, staying away from other people, is merely a question of meters or even centimeters. The appropriation of public spaces also corresponds to the need of Nepalese migrants to have places where they can get together. [23]



### 3.3 The appropriation of public spaces: The example of Nepali chowk

The allocation of Nepalese migrants to various labor camps and the poor state of public transportation prevent them from meeting up easily. However, on Fridays (the official day-off in the week), such gatherings take place in specific places, demonstrating that in a divided territory migrants feel the need to create spaces for themselves. [24]

Apart from the Corniche, a promenade on Doha's seafront much appreciated by all sectors of the population (Picture 15), Nepalese migrants tend to gather in given places. Shopping malls are one of the places where they sometimes hang out in order to catch a glimpse of the modern world, although Picture 16 shows how shopping precincts are also subject to segregation. On the one hand, the atmosphere is definitely "south Asian," while on the other hand, the gigantic shopping malls are closer to the idea the migrants may have of America. The right picture is taken in one of the *bajar* (market) areas of the industrial area of Doha: everything a migrant might need is on offer, especially food arriving straight from South Asia. These two spaces are distinguishable by the consumer goods available and by their clientele. This particularly holds true when shopping malls abide by "[family day](#)" rules: in order to keep their high-profile clients, any non-Qatari and non-Western bachelors are turned away from the malls and from certain souks, therefore barring Nepalese migrants. Thus, the "cultural invasion sentiment" expressed by Qataris, according to an Indian executive working for the Qatari administration, has very practical implications (for a discussion of this phenomenon in Dubai see: ELSHESHTAWY, 2008). Therefore, it seems simpler for migrants to create their own space, rather than depending on any authorization they may only grudgingly be granted.



Picture 15: A photo souvenir at the Corniche in Doha



Picture 16: Contrasting shopping spaces: Villaggio shopping mall (left), Al Attya Industrial Area (right) [25]

Just as the Omonia area in Athens is a place where migrants gather (NOUSSIA & LYONS, 2009), "Nepali chowk" in Doha's old town is an informal and temporary meeting place where Nepalese migrants can assert their identity even if signboards prevent them from doing so (Picture 17). The writing in Hindi is definitely aimed at foreign sections of the population. However, by occupying the empty car park, migrants defy the established order opposing their freedom of movement. The place occupied by migrants is a "liminal space" (ibid.), a spatial and temporal "in-between": spatial because it covers a bank's car park, a Maserati car retailer and a public garden situated near a migrant-dominated area of Doha; temporal because it exists only on Fridays. It is situated near the main bus station from where migrants travel to their camps. Here, once a week, thousands of Nepalese migrants gather to meet friends and relatives, to buy Nepalese items and to soak up the feeling "of being in Nepal." Except for the total absence of women, the crowd and the atmosphere remind the visitor of central market places in Kathmandu. It is a space of freedom (pirated CDs are on sale, forbidden kinds of tobacco too), all of which constitutes a way of asserting their belonging to Nepal (Picture 18). Contrary to Omonia in Athens, it does not constitute a means of finding work, and rarely of finding a dwelling place: it is not a place through which they can become integrated in the host society. The place is mainly used to buy things that are not available legally and to meet friends and relatives scattered over Doha. These kinds of gatherings result from the lack of space made available to unskilled and low-income migrants. Such places become part of their territory, and are even "known as far as some Nepalese villages" according to one migrant. In a highly segregated environment, some migrants from particular communities may feel the need to express themselves<sup>11</sup>. Like migrants' "transitory spaces" described by ELSHESHTAWY (2008) in Dubai, it

<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that other large communities such, as the Indians or Pakistanis, have not built such places.

may also be considered a symbol of resistance away from mainstream places. In a country where political rights are negated, occupying a space no matter how temporarily is definitely a form of political assertion.



Picture 17: Resisting spatial eviction in central Doha on Fridays



Picture 18: Nepalese traffic on Fridays [26]

Situated somewhere between private and public space, places of work, which I did not get to visit, are also appropriated by the migrant, as the following example shows. From the migrant's point of view, photographs fulfill the function of bearing witness to one's own predicament. This is what can be seen in these self-portraits taken by Ramesh R. at his workplace (Picture 19). He was 26 years old here in 2008, and worked as a "photocopy boy." Indeed, photographs embody the way migrants perceive and present their stay in Qatar. Leaving Nepal and going abroad manifests a desire to confront the modern world: apart from economic constraints, the pull to discover the world is strong among young Nepalese people. Since Nepalese workers are mainly from an agricultural background and have often spent the first part of their lives in areas with no electricity, roads or running water, they discover a world that only used to exist in their imagination. Having oneself photographed in front of a swimming pool or a computer carries a certain prestige, not to mention the digital camera (the

equivalent of two months' salary) that can be shown to relatives. It is a proof that from now on, in the eyes of their parents, these migrants belong to a new world. Even if they themselves do not own a computer or a swimming pool, their proximity with such expensive, modern items bestows prestige on them as well. The ability to show it, instead of merely talking about it, lends pictures power over the non-migrants that has yet to be investigated.



Picture 19: Having access to wealthy space is a sign of prestige [27]

#### **4. Conclusion**

The "migratory world" in Qatar, a world in itself with its own norms, codes, representations, differs from the world left behind by the Nepalese. In Qatar, every worker sticks to his own social and spatial position. Because of the lack of political and spatial freedom, there is a tendency for the Nepalese to turn their backs on other communities and to be left to their own devices. They create their own world to adjust to the segregation pattern that exists in the host society. Although they are the backbone (with other migrants) of the Qatari economy, Nepalese migrants cannot be considered as "active participants in the reconstitution of urban life" (GLICK SCHILLER & CAGLAR, 2009, p.196). Through their particular way of adapting to Doha city, which is controlled and strictly oriented, they leave an imperceptible, fleeting and very temporary mark on the city; which reflects their low position in a divided society. [28]

I have tried to put forward the hypothesis that photographs are not just an illustration, but that social realities can indeed be understood through pictures. The building of places, from collective spaces to very private ones, clearly stands out in the pictures. The use of pictures to analyze social and spatial division in Qatar has enabled me to grasp some realities that I had either overlooked or not fully understood. While carrying out fieldwork, and particularly new fieldwork, the researcher is continually bombarded with a flow of information, making it at times difficult to focus on everything of interest. Pictures are therefore a way of focusing on detail, especially in a migrant's room, which might not necessarily have been studied while talking to migrants. Looking at pictures taken in an almost random way is also a way of reactivating one's memory. Distant places, emotions and



memories come to life when perusing pictures. Things that were not first noticed when the photograph was actually taken, but were "discovered" thanks to a careful study and comparison of pictures, come across as important and make sense. A juxtaposition of scenes has helped me identify common points between places. Moreover, pictures have helped me show the different levels of spatial segregation, from the town to the migrant's bed. Images of walls and of physical separation may prove to be speaker louder than mere words in making the reader realize what segregation really is. Indeed, pictures can play the role of backing up research and be a valuable tool in that they convey large amounts of information that would sometimes be harder to explain verbally. [29]

Of course, the researcher's pictures are subjective views of the world and only represent the photographer's point of view. Yet while analyzing them, one is forced to distance oneself from one's own subjectivity, which is indeed a difficult process. Having some critical assessment of one's own production calls for honesty, and the temptation to consider pictures as pure reality is very strong. As argued by GRADY (2008, § 3), the intentions of the photographer are definitely different from those of the researcher. Analyzing pictures taken by someone else, as in Picture 19, enables the researcher to have a more unbiased outlook and to consider the picture as a mere object. This greater distance from the object leads to another type of analysis, more similar to that of a piece of artwork. [30]

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