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Female and Foreign: An intersectional exploration of the experiences of skilled migrant women in Qatar

Abstract

This paper explores how the intersection of gender and foreignness shapes the experiences of skilled migrant women. Drawing on interviews with skilled migrant women working in Qatar, we situate their experiences in institutional, organizational and socio-cultural terms to show how the intersection is articulated and mobilized to subordinate, marginalize and exclude them in work and social spaces. Findings show that the intersection is used to reinforce the status of the women as outsiders to the country (foreignness) and its cultural order (gender), resulting in structural and qualitative differences in the experiences of the group. In highlighting their nuanced experiences, we contribute to debates about gender, skilled migration and work in the Middle East. We also contribute to intersectionality debates by expanding the conceptual limits and analytical use of social categories of difference to explain experiences of work and unpack the simultaneity of subject positioning within institutional, organizational and socio-cultural dynamics.

Keywords: skilled migrant women, intersectionality, gender, foreignness, Qatar

Introduction

Despite high levels of participation in global labor markets, skilled migrant women's experiences are shaped by instances of discrimination, disadvantage and lack of opportunity, insecure employment conditions and lack of acceptance of their professional legitimacy (Hutchings et al., 2012; Kuptsch, 2015; Moghadam, 2015). There is an emerging body of work (c.f. Metcalfe, 2008; Willoughby, 2008) exploring these issues in the context of the Middle East, where a patriarchal system of exclusion and segregation impacts women's participation in the labor market. For instance, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (i.e. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) are acknowledged to have extreme labor market segmentation, whereby all women are under-represented in employment, and a large majority of foreign women are employed in low level service work and subject to

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3 strict regulatory frameworks given their non-national status (Baldwin-Edwards, 2011). This
4 poses important challenges for skilled migrant women working in this region, where they are a
5 minority within a minority.
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10 To date, the experience of skilled migrant women in the Middle East has received limited
11 attention (see Glasze, 2006; Harrison & Michailova, 2012). Analytically, the two dominant
12 approaches exploring skilled migrant women's experiences of work adopt an 'add women, mix
13 and stir perspective' or a 'gender perspective' (Timmerman et al., 2015: 3). The first compares
14 women's experiences to that of men, and the second, despite using gender as a category, treats it
15 in isolation. While the gender perspective has helped to advance discussions because it
16 recognizes the fluid nature of gender dynamics, gender does not operate in isolation and its
17 intersection with other social categories of difference, whilst important, remains largely
18 overlooked in debates about gender and skilled migration. Recent discussions about
19 intersectionality in work and organizations (e.g. Rodriguez et al., 2016) highlight that, in order to
20 better understand what shapes experiences of work, we need to examine how gender intersects
21 with other categories of difference with a view of unveiling the role of intersections in the
22 location of individuals and groups within dynamics, processes and arrangements in particular
23 contexts. In the context of the Middle East, these discussion are starting to be developed more
24 insightfully (see for example, Kemp and Rickett, 2018), yet there is much scope to problematize
25 the ways in which cultural, political and institutional features of the context shape the day-to-day
26 lives of this group (McCall, 2005; Mäkelä et al., 2011; Shortland, 2015).
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41 In this paper, we explore how social categories of difference intersect to shape skilled migrant
42 women's experiences in Qatar. In particular, we focus on gender and foreignness. The
43 importance of looking at the intersection of these categories is rooted in their contextual
44 relevance in the organization of work and social life, in particular the ways in which the
45 categories are deployed institutionally, organizational and socially to define, legitimize and
46 perpetuate subject positioning. For instance, in her auto-ethnographic account of her experience
47 of living and working in Qatar, DeJong (2014) alludes to the centrality of her gender and
48 foreignness noting that, "I felt estranged twice, one for not being a man, secondly for not being
49 able to become one of the Arabs" (p. 115). This reflects what Kemp and Rickett (2018:355) see
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3 as having ‘dual minority’ status for women working in these contexts, stemming from both their
4 gender and foreignness. The dynamics at the point of the intersection is the central tension
5 picked up by this paper, which is related to what we see as the features of the intersectional
6 double-burden experienced by skilled migrant women. Whilst it could be argued that skilled
7 migrant women share similarities with local women as a result of gender segregation and
8 gendered social dynamics in Qatar, as well as similarities with expatriate men on the counts of
9 their foreignness; skilled migrant women have a particular status as ‘foreign women’ which we
10 see as unique to the structural and subjective features of their experiences in this context (see
11 Cole, 2009; Rodriguez, 2018).
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20 Throughout the paper, we use the term ‘skilled migrant’ to refer to a particular group who are
21 educated and working in professional occupations outside of their country of origin. It has
22 previously been argued that there is a lack of conceptual clarity (over skill level and migration
23 type) when it comes to the notion of skilled migrant (ICMPD, 2005) and that research in
24 management and organization studies has a tendency to switch or combine the term with
25 expatriate (self-initiated or company assigned) (Crowley-Henry et al., 2016). Our definition
26 encompasses a range of perspectives and areas of research, which is reflected in our review of
27 the literature. Moreover, we seek to challenge dominant perspectives of skilled migration, which
28 do not interrogate the impact of intersecting social categories (Zander et al., 2010). In doing so,
29 we enable a deeper and more critical understanding of the experiences of skilled migrant women,
30 locating them within the “historically and socially constituted mosaic of intersecting differences”
31 (Metcalf and Woodhams, 2012:134).
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43 The paper explores the following questions: *How do gender and foreignness as social categories*
44 *of difference intersect to shape skilled migrant women’s experiences in Qatar? In what ways are*
45 *gender and foreignness used to position skilled migrant women? How do these categories help*
46 *us to understand the diverse experiences of this group?* Drawing on interviews with eight skilled
47 migrant women working in Qatar, we show how the intersection of gender and foreignness is
48 used as part of patriarchal regulatory regimes that locate the women within fixed social
49 categories that sustain narratives of difference. These overlook their status as skilled migrants
50 and reinforce particular subject positioning within organizational and social spaces. The paper
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3 advances understanding of how intersections are articulated and mobilized within institutional,
4 organizational and socio-cultural structures and dynamics in ways that position and regulate
5 skilled migrant women and shape their experiences. In addition, the paper offers a broader
6 understanding of foreignness as a social category of difference and how it intersects with gender
7 in ways that subordinate and disadvantage skilled migrant women.
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13 The paper is organized as follows. First, we discuss the usefulness of an intersectional lens to
14 explore the experiences of skilled migrant women in the Middle East. We then explain the
15 methodology and provide details of the empirical study. Findings are then presented and
16 analyzed. The analysis is structured in two sections; in the first section we discuss how the
17 intersection is articulated and mobilized institutionally and organizationally to disadvantage
18 skilled migrant women's participation in the labor market and opportunities for development
19 and career progression. In the second section we turn attention to how the intersection operates
20 as a mechanism to control and subordinate women in social and cultural terms. In the final
21 section we conclude, discussing the significance of the findings for discussions of the
22 experiences of skilled migrant women in global labor markets, as well as the theoretical value of
23 the intersection for the exploration of their experiences. We also identify directions for future
24 work.
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36 **The value of an intersectional lens to explore the experiences of skilled migrant women in** 37 **the Middle East** 38 39 40 41

42 Following the tradition of intersectionality of discussing subordinate groups at the point of
43 intersection, in this paper we set out to explore how gender and foreignness as categories of
44 difference shape the experiences of skilled migrant women in Qatar. Much has changed around
45 the discourse and use of intersectionality since its introduction in the mid-1980s, with scholars
46 adapting it to address issues that were not the focus of intersectionality when it was initially
47 articulated (Crenshaw, 2014). In particular, intersectionality has gained momentum in
48 management and organization studies, where it is used to understand the dynamics of inequality,
49 oppression, subordination and marginalization that affect particular groups, not just Black
50 women (Rodriguez et al., 2016; Rodriguez, 2018).
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3 Alongside this expansion in the use of intersectionality, there is an important critique about how
4 its use to study groups other than Black women repackages intersectionality for universal
5 consumption and in doing so, risks re-marginalizing black women and women of color (Jibrin &
6 Salem, 2015). However, whilst this is a valid concern, in its very conceptualization
7 intersectionality provides a counter argument to essentialism because it offers a lens to capture
8 the fluidity of dynamics arising from temporal and spatial shifts in power relations. In this
9 respect, it is precisely the flexibility of intersectionality as a conceptual, methodological and
10 analytical tool which allows us to fight universalism.
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19 In this respect, the analytical strengths of intersectionality as both a theoretical and analytical
20 framework are especially relevant in the Middle East, given the large number of foreign
21 nationals working in this region. The focus on complexity, multiplicity and simultaneity,
22 intersectionality allows us to interrogate the ways in which social categories of difference are
23 used and deployed to include, exclude, discriminate and marginalize individuals and groups
24 (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2006). This is fundamental given that we all lead
25 intersectional lives and there is not a fixed positioning for either victims or oppressors because
26 systems of oppression are multiple, overlap and operate simultaneously (Hill-Collins, 2004;
27 Rodriguez 2018).
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36 The key foundational category of intersectional analyses is gender, which is explored in relation
37 to its intersection with other social categories of difference, like race, class and age. In this paper,
38 we use foreignness as a relevant social category in a similar manner as it has been used by others
39 (see Acker, 1990, 2008; Fournier, 2002; Newburry et al., 2006; Johansson and Śliwa, 2014) to
40 discuss the constructed and contextual nature of women's experiences of otherness in work and
41 organizational settings. These discussions allude to practices to 'keep women at bay' under the
42 assumption that they do not belong in work settings. In this paper we engage with the idea of
43 foreignness that builds up from these discussions, and expand its conceptualization to include
44 material aspects of difference that seem relevant to a more inclusive articulation of foreignness
45 (e.g. being a foreign national and looking different).
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3 It is worth noting that we are not looking to engage with foreignness as a universal category that
4 conflates all women who are foreign nationals in a setting; instead, we see foreignness as “a
5 dynamic quality which will produce different effects depending on how and by whom it is
6 mobilized, and for what purpose” (Johansson and Śliwa, 2014:26). The richness of this use sees
7 foreignness as a way of highlighting the binaries of difference in relation to context-dependent
8 materialities, such as normative expectations of behavior, language and appearance, which
9 signify the challenges of living as an Other (Kristeva, 1991:103; Ralph and Staeheli, 2011).
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17 In intersectional terms, foreignness is a complex multidimensional category because its
18 articulation is inherently racialized and also relies on context-specific materialities to shape and
19 reinforce social hierarchies of belonging (Walsh, 2006; Kaufman, 2012). In looking at gender
20 and foreignness, we keep within the tradition of intersectional work of engaging with the
21 complexity of social categories and their meaning, as well as how this complexity differs within
22 a specific group (see Collins, 2001; 2015; McCall, 2005). We see foreignness as a construct of
23 implicit intersections (see Bowleg, 2008); as a category, it is itself articulated by the intersection
24 of several categories of difference, such as racio-ethnicity, age, class, as well as non-class forms
25 of social division (see Anthias, 2001) and in a manner similar to gender, the notion of difference
26 is central to foreignness.
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36 However, in many cases foreignness has not been explicitly used to refer to difference, despite
37 alluding to how “categories of self/other and native/foreign are continually lived and contested
38 through communicative practice” (Mitra, 2014:70). As Mitra (2014) has noted, foreignness
39 relates to perceptions about not-being rather than on the features of being. Despite creating both
40 a site of familiarity/belonging with an in-group and a site of otherness/un-belonging within a
41 dominant group, the alien status of the foreign presents itself as an unresolvable exclusionary
42 puzzle because the foreign is seen as “the one who does not belong to the state in which we are”
43 (Kristeva, 1991:96).
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51 In the case of the Middle East, these categories are of particular relevance as they are seen to
52 sustain dominant patriarchal structures of social location and subject positioning (Moghadam,
53 2003). Extant work focusing on the Middle East (e.g. Joseph and Slyomovics, 2001) has
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3 highlighted the historical importance of patriarchal regimes and patriarchal relationality in
4 societal structures and social interactions, which traverse social and work lives. Institutional and
5 cultural barriers embedded in business systems affect women in the region, regulating both their
6 presence and visibility in work settings (Metcalf, 2008; Metcalf et al., 2009). Our exploration
7 of this issue departs from the premise that we must not assume that experiences are uniform for
8 all women because the structure of social power relations and resulting dynamics are both fluid
9 and situated (Collins, 1988; Acker, 2006, 2010; Holvino, 2010; Dhamoon, 2011).

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17 In this respect, an intersectional angle is useful to explore how difference in the context of the
18 Middle East is articulated through discourse and “how that affective representation is signified
19 and mediated by the body and experienced as a lived reality” (Mirza, 2013:13). For instance,
20 Hutchings et al. (2012) have noted that expatriate women (self-initiated or company assigned)
21 face complexities linked to prejudice in the Middle East. We see an important step in
22 understanding how this prejudice operates in the interrogation of the role played by governance
23 and institutional regimes in the creation of distinctions based on gender and foreignness. These
24 distinctions could be seen to emerge as a result of ‘embodied intersectionality’ (Mirza, 2013),
25 whereby the intersection between the material dimensions of difference (e.g. the visibility of
26 gender, the physical dimensions of foreignness) and the cultural dimensions of difference (e.g.
27 gender roles, the relationship between nationality and belonging) shape the subjective position,
28 social location and experiences of the women.

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39 Drawing on the centrality of the nuances of difference in shaping the experiences of foreign
40 women working in Qatar, we adopt an intersectional lens that brings together gender and
41 foreignness and locates them at the core of an analytical framework to explore the social and
42 political positioning of women. This facilitates capturing multiple overlapping levels of
43 disadvantage, which otherwise would slip through unnoticed (Crenshaw, 2016). For example, in
44 the context of GCC countries, all non-national workers, despite their level of skills, are subject
45 to the regulatory regimes established by policies of localization. These policies aim to maintain
46 foreign workers at the margins of social, political and organizational life, establishing
47 distinctions between national and foreign in order to privilege the employment and development
48 of the local workforce (Abdalla, 2006; Williams et al., 2011). This disproportionately affects
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3 skilled migrant women by adding another layer of complexity to the group's positioning in the
4 context. In that respect, it is relevant here to 'move on from gender' as a single-defining
5 category (Collins, 1999) because other categories overlap in ways that affect skilled migrant
6 women in unique, more fluid, complex and multidimensional ways than what each individual
7 form of inequality would do (Anthias, 2012; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006; Hulko, 2009;
8 Holvino, 2010). The previous discussion serves as the starting point to our argument that in the
9 case of skilled migrant women in the Middle East, gender and foreignness seem an important
10 point of intersection to explore in order to understand the power dynamics that underpin
11 rigidities and realities of inequalities, mobility restrictions, and lack of progression that have a
12 disproportionate effect on their experiences in this region (Kofman and Raghuram, 2006;
13 Zander et al., 2010).

24 **Methodology**

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26 The aim of this paper is to explore how gender and foreignness intersect to shape the experiences
27 of skilled migrant women in Qatar. We adopted an intersectional lens in order to emphasize "the
28 shifting and contested nature of the different axes of power in specific social situations and the
29 location of individuals and groupings along these axes" (Yuval-Davis, 2011:165). As a
30 methodology and a method (Winker and Degele, 2011), an intersectional lens facilitated the
31 understanding of the experiences of inequality faced by women and the problematizing social
32 processes of categorization that affected them. Intersectionality allows for distinct theoretical
33 projects to mutually benefit from coming together (Davis, 2008); in this case, discussions about
34 gender and foreignness in the context of skilled migration.

43 **Research Context**

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45 Qatar provides an interesting context to explore the experiences of skilled migrant women not
46 only due to the under-representation of and consequent lack of empirical understanding about
47 the Middle East in the literature (Metcalf, 2008), but also given the tensions between a
48 traditional culture that reinforces segregation on the basis of gender and foreignness amidst a
49 continuing need for migrant labor, including women (Knez et al., 2014). Table 1 provides
50 information about participation in the labor market, where the overwhelming majority is men,
51 with women representing just 13.4% of all employees in the economically active population.

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3 Nevertheless, despite the centrality of the rhetoric and policies of localization (Qatarization),
4 which seek to significantly increase the proportion of nationals in the labor force through quotas
5 and preferential treatment (Kamrava, 2009), the labor market participation of Qataris remains
6 low at 5%. Qatari women make up 36% of all Qatari employees, reflecting wider trends of
7 increased labor market participation by women across the GCC (Willen et al., 2016). However,
8 despite recognition of positive changes to their participation in employment in the last 25 years,
9 a large majority of these women (68%) are employed in government departments. There is
10 limited participation of Qatari women in mixed-gender private sector organizations (Felder &
11 Vuollo, 2008) and top level positions –just 15% (7,035) of all legislators, senior officials and
12 managers are women, of which 31% (2,181) are Qatari (QSA, 2017).
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22 This overall under-representation of women in the workforce in the Middle East has been
23 mainly attributed to the patriarchal system that keeps women at the margins of economic
24 activity and restricts them to the confines of the private sphere. However, some research (e.g.
25 Ross, 2008) has argued that these explanations overlook the role of the oil industry as the main
26 economic activity that has created an ‘oil-induced patriarchy’ where both the employment
27 practices and dynamics within organizations in this sector have shaped what happens in the
28 country’s labor market. For instance, Metcalfe (2007) has reported that companies in this sector
29 support gender segregation through subsidies for sex-separate offices and educational facilities,
30 which has limited the career development of women. Looking at the specific treatment of
31 women in the Middle East, Moghadam (2003) notes that the role of stratification by class,
32 ethnicity, education and age also plays a role in the position of women in society. This
33 stratification reinforces cultural norms that locate women in subordinate positions because
34 regardless of their level of education, they are still subject to institutional and socio-cultural
35 structures that govern their personal and family status and position them as second-class
36 citizens.
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53 Sampling and data collection
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3 Data reported in this paper were gathered through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with
4 eight skilled migrant women working in a public shareholding organization in the oil and gas
5 based industry in Qatar. The organization is fully owned by Qatari shareholders and conducts all
6 business from within Qatari borders. 88% of the workforce in the organization is comprised of
7 foreign nationals. The research was granted ethical approval by the researchers' institution and
8 was conducted in line with the institution's Code of Good Practice in Research. Access to
9 participants was facilitated by the Managing Director of the organization and individuals were
10 contacted via an email invitation to participate in the study. Participants self-selected to take
11 part. As previously noted, skilled migrant women are under-represented in the Qatari workforce,
12 which presented challenges for accessing a larger number of participants.
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22 Interviews were conducted at the organizational premises and followed a protocol that asked
23 participants about their experiences of being a skilled migrant in this context, reasons for
24 moving to Qatar, family and social life in the context, their experiences as women in this
25 context, their experiences at work, in particular interactions with colleagues, line managers and
26 clients, as well as questions about their career development and prospects. The questions
27 allowed us to explore their lived experiences as foreign women working and living in Qatar, and
28 the data collected helped us to understand the ways in which intersectional inequality operations
29 in a different geography and temporality to shape the experiences of this particular group
30 (Rodriguez et al., 2016). Interviews lasted on average one hour and were recorded and
31 transcribed in full. To maintain participant anonymity, for the purposes of our reporting all
32 names have been anonymized. All participants were in professional office roles. Given the
33 potential for participants to be identifiable in the Qatari context due to their hierarchical status
34 within the organization, we do not provide information about their specific roles (see Table 2 for
35 information about participants).
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51 Data analysis

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53 In this paper, we adopt an intra-categorical approach (McCall, 2005) to support our interest in
54 examining the complexity of the intersectional experiences of skilled migrant women,
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3 simultaneously challenging binary thinking that dichotomizes men, male and masculinity
4 against women, female and femininity (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). Following the tradition of
5 personal story as a main source of experiential data (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000), we focused
6 on individual accounts. As Ludvig (2006) has noted, “it is through narration that the axes of
7 identity and subjectivity become explicit” (p. 249). Narratives are not inseparable from
8 institutions and events that individuals experience every day, and the act of using narrative to
9 talk about experiences reveals much of the meaningfulness of events for individuals (Bochner,
10 2001).

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19 As previously stated, our focus on the categories of gender and foreignness is rooted on the
20 relevance of the intersection of these categories to position foreign women in the work and
21 social domains within the Qatari context. In our analysis we highlight the relevance of the
22 institutional, organizational and socio-cultural context to understand how intersections operate
23 as part of systems of differentiation that shape the experiences and positioning of this group (see
24 Choo and Ferree, 2010; Dhamoon, 2011; Brah and Phoenix, 2013).

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31 We structured the data analysis following an iterative process that involved individual and joint
32 coding. We started our analysis of the data by independently reading the interview transcripts
33 and formulating codes that we identified as emerging from participants’ accounts (see the first
34 level codes in Figure 1). The codes were identified from the interview responses by participants;
35 for example, we asked questions about the process of entry to the country, their interactions
36 with migration authorities, what it was like to be a woman in the Qatari context, their
37 interactions with line managers and peers and their activities and interactions outside of work.

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45 For the second coding we focused on grouping categories based on our interest in situating the
46 experiences of the women in institutional, organizational and socio-cultural terms. Another
47 element of this second step in our coding process was to address the extensiveness and potential
48 unmanageability of first code categories in qualitative data (see Gioia, 2004); for this, we aimed
49 at further data reduction to facilitate our interpretation within the intersectional framework,
50 jointly looking for similarities and differences in each other’s coding. Where codes were similar
51 we sought to agree on terminology. In cases of discrepancies we either reassigned or re-coded
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3 the data. For our final step, we grouped the codes into theoretical categories to show how gender
4 and foreignness as categories of differentiation were mobilized (see the second level codes in
5 Figure 1).
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10 There is a tension in intersectional work related to balancing the expected analytical depth when
11 exploring intersections, against the risk of infinite regress whereby there may be categories
12 within categories, which risks not defining the boundaries of the analytic effort of the
13 intersection (see Rodriguez et al., 2016). Our decision to code in relation to the categories
14 looked to address this. Our third and final step was to focus on the intersection of the categories
15 of gender and foreignness, where we aggregated the codes based on how we identified them as
16 articulating an integrated framework that shaped the experiences of the women in our sample
17 (see the aggregate dimensions in Figure 1).
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26 In the spirit of the interpretive tradition of qualitative research and mindful of the complexity
27 and diversity in how intersectionality is used and understood, in particular the lack of a distinct
28 intersectional methodology (Bowleg, 2008; Nash, 2008; Shields, 2008, Cho et al., 2013), we
29 crafted our intersectional interpretation focusing on what allowed us to reflect on the points of
30 intersection. In this respect, we drew inspiration from Cole's (2009) questions: (1) who is
31 included in this category? (2) what role does inequality play and (3) where are the similarities?
32 These questions helped us to focus on the interdependency of the categories, the nuances in the
33 positioning of the categories as part of hierarchies of power, privilege, and disadvantage, and
34 the commonalities across the categories found in the experience of being dominant or
35 subordinate (Rodriguez, 2018).
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45 An important consideration in qualitative work is the extent to which the complexity in the
46 process of data analysis is captured in the way the analysis is represented (Procter & Randall,
47 2015). In this respect, we recognize that our approach is one way where there are others in
48 which intersectional analyses could be crafted. The intention remains that findings could be
49 made sense of within the theoretical framework that locates the intersection of gender and
50 foreignness within the institutional, organizational and socio-cultural dynamics of the context,
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3 and that this helps us to show how resulting dynamics shape the material and relational
4 experiences of skilled migrant women in this context.
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8 ****INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE****
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10 11 **Findings and analysis: Understanding the experiences of skilled migrant women in Qatar** 12 13

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15 In the following sections we discuss how gender and foreignness, as social categories of
16 difference, intersect to shape skilled migrant women's experiences in Qatar. The findings are
17 organized in two sections. In the first section we show how the intersection operates in
18 institutional and organizational terms to disadvantage skilled migrant women. In the second
19 section, we show how the intersection operates as a mechanism that regulates and subordinates
20 skilled migrant women in social and cultural terms.
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26 27 **The intersection of gender and foreignness as a location of institutional and organizational** 28 **disadvantage** 29 30

31 Accounts by participants emphasized how gender and foreignness shaped their participation,
32 interaction, visibility, opportunity and recognition in the workplace and ultimately played a role
33 in their lack of career progression. Their accounts alluded to struggles for legitimacy at work,
34 reflecting their perception that they were outsiders:
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40 “[The sector] anyways tends to be male oriented, and you come to Qatar, and it's almost
41 dominated by men, so I don't think at [organization], they knew what to do with me. I
42 think they expected me to just sit in the office and keep the back seat. When you come
43 from a culture where you're used to going to meetings and discussing freely, it's quite
44 shocking when that's not expected of you [...] I don't feel when I first came, people
45 actually used me as a [occupation], and that was frustrating [...] I know the other
46 companies we deal with, they don't have one female [occupation] and non-Qatari.”
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51 (Margaret, British)
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3 “Men tend to look at you as a secondary citizen. They feel they are stronger, and you are
4 not able to do your job as well as them, your abilities are only this much. They also think
5 that all the top positions should be for males and they can progress better. It’s very male
6 dominated here. And I think because of the mentality; that becomes a barrier for the
7 woman to advance in her career.” (Naomi, British)
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13 Foreign women find themselves in an odd positioning within the organizational space. On the
14 one hand, the presence of skilled migrant women in professional roles challenges the gender
15 social order because Qatari women would not normally occupy such roles and as a result of
16 gender segregation practices that are embedded in employment structures, local male peers as
17 well as local clients would not expect to interact with women (Felder and Vuollo, 2008;
18 Metcalfe, 2008). These accounts highlight differences in treatment experienced by skilled
19 women in relation to men in similar positions and where the intersection of gender and
20 foreignness is used to exclude, marginalized and undermine them. For instance, despite
21 Margaret being highly qualified and experienced, both her exclusion from meetings and her
22 restricted participation in discussions were down to the fact that she was a foreign woman,
23 which was unusual for the sector and occupation. In a similar vein, Naomi notes that men
24 question women’s ability to perform top roles. Further expanding on the impact of the male-
25 dominated setting, Naomi mentioned that that, as a result of how Qatarization policies mobilize
26 the idea that there are too many foreigners in Qatar, she faced challenges as a foreign woman as
27 a result of perceptions from Qataris that “they are out of jobs because of people like me”.
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41 In addition, due to the structure of economic life, Qatari men would be unlikely to compete with
42 Qatari women for jobs in the private sector as the salaries are deemed to be low and the working
43 hours too long (Kapiszewski, 2006). In this respect, the presence of foreign women in the
44 workplace is complicated not only by the relevance of foreignness inherent to the policies of
45 localization, but also the dynamics of gendered workplaces. Ultimately, participants’ accounts
46 revealed how the intersection is invoked in ways that negatively impact the professional
47 standing and career opportunities of skilled migrant women.
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55 **Gendered interactions at work**
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3 On the back of the gendered dynamics that complicate the presence of foreign women, accounts
4 reflect tensions related to the interactions between foreign women and Qatari men in the context
5 of dynamics of social governance that prioritize male identities:
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10 “At work you have to be very formal when dealing with a [Qatari] man here, people can
11 get the wrong idea and you can’t get close or affectionate like we do back home” (Tala,
12 Filipina).
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17 Foreign women face the challenges of navigating reconfigured forms of social subordination in
18 the workplace that seek to regulate interactions. This regulation speaks to the complexities of
19 the interrelationship between gender, workplace dynamics and Islamic values in male-
20 dominated work settings (Metcalf, 2006). In this context, skilled migrant women, by virtue of
21 being in a mixed-gender work setting, unsettle the strict gender roles in Qatari society and a way
22 in which their presence is regulated involves informal rules underpinned by understandings of
23 appropriate female behavior.
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30 31 **Organizational opportunities**

32 In addition to challenging gender norms, skilled migrant women also faced challenges related to
33 the expectations of locals about skilled migrant workers in professional roles. The male-
34 dominated nature of the environment translated into expectations that skilled migrants in
35 professional roles would be men. This is simultaneously complicated by Qatarization, which
36 presented further barriers and limited opportunities for career development and progression
37 within the organization for foreign nationals. For example, Amanda (British), who had
38 previously worked as a functional director elsewhere in the Middle East, had come to Qatar with
39 the expectation of being promoted to a vacant manager role in her area of expertise and noted
40 the following:
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49 “Interviewer: Did you have any expectations coming here?”

50 Amanda: The [Department X] manager role. That’s why I came.

51 Interviewer: And you didn’t get it?
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3 Amanda: That's right. And I don't think I will. It will be Qatarized. I have discussed it
4 with senior management but nothing's happened. These are the things that attract people
5 to places, because you feel it's something you can work forward to."
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10 Whilst the presence of foreign women could be seen to challenge patriarchal disadvantage within
11 this context (i.e. a woman employed in a senior position in a setting where local women would
12 not normally hold such positions), it also highlights how structural relations of subordination and
13 oppression are built upon gender and foreignness in ways that frame the experiences of skilled
14 migrant women (Jureidini, 2005). For instance, the political commitment to pursue Qatarization
15 combines with patriarchal practices that limit the participation of foreign women in management
16 and leadership roles (Lari, 2016). Whilst this may also lead to the exclusion of foreign men from
17 such roles, being a woman is used as another reason for exclusion. So for example, women's
18 accounts highlighted that, contrary to foreign men, their appointment to higher level managerial
19 positions did not include expectations that they would mentor a Qatari successor because of their
20 gender - managerial and leadership positions in this context would not normally be filled by
21 women (Felder & Vuollo, 2008). In the case of Amanda, whilst qualified to fill this role and with
22 a desire to do so, being a foreign woman is invoked to exclude her from this opportunity. The
23 burden of the intersection was also present in a comment by Imee (Filipina), who spoke of her
24 frustrations in trying to achieve promotion:
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38 "I have a feeling I will stay in the same position, not because I am not qualified, but
39 that's the way it's structured here [...] I am able to achieve a senior level in my
40 department, and I feel I have proven myself, but nothing has happened. There is not a lot
41 of movement in the company, Qataris move up, and other nationalities like the white
42 people and the Arabs, but never a Filipino or Asian."
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48 Institutional regulation and control

49 An important element in the articulation of foreignness is the role of racio-ethnicity in
50 structuring social location and how it determined differential and unequal social outcomes for
51 the women (see Anthias, 2001). In this respect, the agency of particular groups (e.g. Western
52 white women) was shaped by perceptions about their desirability as foreign migrants where
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3 whiteness, in particular, could be seen as creating a powerful cultural void of otherness, which
4 allows some of the women to navigate structural dynamics more swiftly. In some
5 circumstances, white foreignness was deployed to challenge the social order; for instance, some
6 participants spoke of invoking foreignness to legitimize non-conformity with expectations of
7 gender-appropriate behavior within organizational spaces:
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13 “I speak up for myself so I don't really have a problem even if men bother me, which
14 they have. And trust me; the men don't like it when you speak up to them. Sometimes
15 you are seen as too much of an independent opinionated westerner, which doesn't do you
16 any favors.” (Amanda, British).
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22 An important element of the enactment of foreignness is that, in some cases, it serves to
23 legitimize performing cultural difference and embracing a process of relational differentiation
24 (Choo and Ferree, 2010). Whilst it is important to contextualize Amanda's comment within the
25 particularities of cultural attributions made to the meaning of 'being Western', it also speaks
26 about power differentials in the way being 'a foreign woman' is deployed by skilled migrant
27 women.
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34 **The intersection of gender and foreignness as a location of social and cultural** 35 **subordination** 36 37

38 The social and cultural positioning of the women can be framed within processes linked to their
39 arrival in Qatar. Most accounts highlighted limited prior knowledge and understanding of
40 gender expectations and cultural norms in Qatar. Some indicated that they had assumed
41 dynamics would resemble those of other countries in the Middle East where they had previously
42 lived and worked. However, their experiences suggested that their status as foreign women was
43 embedded as part of the social and cultural fabric of the context:
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50 “I didn't really feel any strong culture in Dubai because it was very free and
51 multicultural. Here you have to be a little more reserved, watch what you are wearing
52 etc. Even when you walk on the street, you think twice before you do it” (Kara, Indian)
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3 Interviewer: “So you feel you had to change your attitude or behavior working [here]?”

4 Oneida (Filipina): “Yes of course. The clothes I wear, the things I say. Sometimes I have
5 to hold back.”
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10 The unspoken demands placed on foreign women to conform to expectations of the gender
11 order presents a key tension related to the interplay between gender, foreignness and national
12 culture. Dress and interactions between women and men who are not related are important
13 symbolic markers attached to conceptualization of social appropriateness for women, as well as
14 their regulation and location within the social system in the Middle East (Syed & Van Buren,
15 2014).
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20 Skilled migrant women’s accounts alluded to expectations about their status as professionals
21 serving as defining factors shaping their work experiences in Qatar. These expectations are not
22 unusual of the way skilled migrants view countries in the Middle East, where prior expectations
23 about international experience are characterized by narratives of unproblematic elite positioning
24 (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014). In this respect, the social location resulting from the intersection
25 between gender and foreignness poses an important tension for the women as it pitches the
26 understanding of the self as part of a group that engages in unfettered global mobility against the
27 realities of contextual framing of women based on socio-cultural norms that underpin ideas of
28 difference and otherness.
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39 **Gender violence and nationality objectification**

40 Accounts highlighted diversity in the experiences of white and non-white women, which speak
41 to relevance of the visible embodiment of gender and foreignness in the experiences of the
42 women. Stereotyping based on physical features and appearance is central to social distinctions
43 in Qatar, and is used to create hierarchies of individuals and legitimize ideologies of difference
44 (Nagy, 2006; McDowell, 2008a). The accounts by Filipina participants highlighted that their
45 interactions with Qataris appeared to be informed by the visible embodiment of their
46 foreignness and associated stereotypical views of their racio-ethnic identities:
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3 “Sometimes you encounter men who show you respect and some harass you. Some are
4 rude and perverted. Few years ago, I would just be standing on the street, and they
5 would throw their numbers at me”. (Oneida, Filipina)
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10 “[Qataris] treat the white people and the Arabs different to the Asians” (Imee, Filipina)
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13 “I experienced harassment in the malls, on the road from men asking me how much,
14 even when I’m with my husband!” (Tala, Filipina)
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19 There is a prevalent popular discourse in the Middle East about the sexual availability of foreign
20 women, in particular those from The Philippines and Malaysia. Institutionally, this fetishization
21 has been linked to the large number of women from these two countries undertaking domestic
22 work in Qatar under the GCC’s Kafala sponsorship system (Malit and Naufal, 2014). This has
23 seen recruitment agencies target low skilled labor from Southeast Asia. Many of these groups of
24 women have limited labor rights as a result of an unregulated labor market for domestic
25 workers, which see them forced into the sex trade (Ullah et al., 2015). Socially, the
26 commodification of female bodies is rooted in cultural dynamics of power, which have seen
27 domestic workers reporting experiences of physical and emotional abuse from Qatari employers
28 (Falconer, 2014). In addition, unwritten rules legitimize different forms of gender violence
29 against women justified by the need to enforce gendered social governance to sustain societal
30 values. There is an important tension here about the complexity of these mechanisms of social
31 governance as they are sustained by seemingly arbitrary assumptions yet ones that reveal
32 particular ways in which the intersection of gender and foreignness is used to regulate foreign
33 women.
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46 **Gendered cultural norms** 47

48 However, mechanisms of social governance appeared also to be reconfigured, showing
49 ambiguities linked to the layers and interstices of the interplay between appropriateness and
50 belonging. Kandiyoti (1991) has noted that elements of national identity and cultural difference
51 are used as mechanisms to control women in Muslim countries. In the case of our participants,
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3 this is used to position them as ‘other’, regulating them by invoking their outsider status despite
4 their engagement in practices of cultural compliance:
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8 “Actually, when I came, this is the first time in my life I noticed I am embarrassed of
9 being a woman. For example, sometimes I just want to go for a walk, all the men are
10 staring at me so hard, I feel so confused, what is this? I never felt like this before! Even
11 though I cover myself, it still happens.” (Carmen, Peruvian)
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17 There is layered complexity in the embodied reality of otherness as it is constructed both
18 discursively and embodied in practices of dress and behavior (Mirza, 2013). Carmen mentions
19 going for a walk and being stared at despite being ‘covered’, which reflects social and cultural
20 differences regarding her understanding of respectable femininity in this context, which is
21 articulated as something that goes beyond the issue of dress. Nagy (2006) has noted that social
22 distinctions are central to how Qataris structure relationships with non-Qataris, using physical
23 characteristics and differences in dress and behavior as markers of otherness. In the case of non-
24 Qatari women, it is not only the dress code (not being fully covered) but also behavioral
25 markers such as being chaperoned, which are used to differentiate them from other women in
26 public spaces. These expectations are linked to traditional notions of modesty and privacy in
27 Qatari culture, which are rooted in religion and marital status and underpin differential treatment
28 between Qatari and non-Qatari women (Knez et al., 2014).
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39 *Cultural differentiation*

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41 Qatari women are expected to conform to traditional understandings of moral behavior that
42 center around restrictions on independence and interactions in social spaces; for example being
43 fully covered at all times and chaperoned when alone or with non-family members (Shah et al.,
44 2018). The institutionalization and politicization of women’s roles in public social spaces is
45 enhanced by foreignness, and serves to mark differences between Qatari and non-Qatari women
46 (Knez et al., 2014). For instance, Carmen notes that even though she covers herself in an
47 attempt to conform to expectations of dress, she still receives unwanted attention from Qatari
48 men and feels awkward. In this respect, Carmen’s experience brings the intersection of being a
49 woman in a public space which behaves in a manner that is foreign to the cultural norms (e.g.
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3 being unchaperoned), which influences how she is seen and responded to by locals, particularly
4 men.
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8 In addition to socio-cultural mechanisms, gender and foreignness were deployed politically to
9 regulate women. Regulation through entry, residency and exit permits has been used in GCC
10 countries to monitor migration inflow (Baldwin-Edwards, 2011); however, its importance as a
11 rhetorical device to politicize the presence of foreign nationals is significant. Entry to Qatar is
12 heavily regulated, with particular groups (e.g. White nationals from English speaking countries)
13 being favored over others (Atiyyah, 1996). While speaking of the different nuances in the
14 intersections of gender and foreignness for this group of women, most participants reported
15 feeling that these instances were a constant reminder of their status as outsiders; for instance,
16 those who were non-white and not from English speaking countries noted that they had to rely
17 on husbands for visa sponsorship, whereas this was not always the case for white women from
18 English speaking countries. However, within the accounts it also emerged that all foreign
19 women, regardless of their marital status but particularly those who were unmarried/single, were
20 positioned as less desirable to employers than foreign men. In this respect, we observe another
21 layer in the articulation of foreignness, where its categorical complexity is captured through the
22 encapsulation of other social categories, such as age and marital status.
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36 For instance, Amanda (British), spoke of how her employer had “passed a stupid rule” that
37 prevented the hiring of single women following concerns by senior management that two
38 expatriate women had become intimate. In addition, Margaret, also from the UK, explained that
39 as a single foreign woman under 40, she “didn’t get the visa immediately and the organization
40 had to keep reapplying”. In her view, the organization had “taken a big risk” in employing her
41 because, as she was informed by her employer, the country did not want women like her (single
42 foreign women under 40). These accounts reveal how foreign women are positioned as an
43 unwanted, undesirable ‘other’ and perceived as a challenge to the Qatari social order.
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51 An interesting tension emphasized by the accounts of the women in our sample is related to
52 intra-group differences in the way the intersection of gender and foreignness operates. Even
53 when all the women recounted experiences where the intersection is invoked and used as part of
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3 processes, practices and dynamics that negatively shape their experiences, where in some cases
4 some elements of foreignness (e.g. racio-ethnicity) were brought to the fore, in others, other
5 categories of difference (e.g. marital status and age) to invoke the otherness of the women in
6 this context in ways that subordinate them.
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10 11 12 **Conclusion** 13

14
15 This paper set out to explore how the intersection of gender and foreignness shapes the
16 experiences of skilled migrant women in Qatar. By situating their experiences in the wider
17 institutional/organizational and socio-cultural context, we have shown the interdependency and
18 simultaneity of gender and foreignness, and how the intersection is mobilized in ways that
19 negatively impact skilled migrant women. In this respect, the paper has taken an important step
20 in interrogating the idea that skilled migrant women enjoy a privileged status in their
21 international work experiences. Contrary to previous work (see Adler, 1987; Stalker & Mavin,
22 2011; Kemp & Rickett, 2018) that has suggested that foreign women are not subject to the same
23 degree of expectations with regards to cultural compliance and occupy privileged positions
24 relative to local women in terms of access to roles and career opportunities, this paper presents
25 evidence that the intersection of gender and foreignness is articulated and mobilized in ways that
26 control, subordinate, marginalize and exclude skilled migrant women in work and social spaces.
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37 We can conclude from our findings that in contexts highly regulated in social, institutional and
38 organizational terms, the intersection of gender and foreignness is used as a marker of the
39 unfamiliar. Foreign women are perceived as outsiders to both the country (foreignness) and its
40 cultural order (gender). In response, their subjectivities are culturally and institutionally
41 regulated, which sees them experience simultaneous dynamics that while allowing forms of
42 inclusion (e.g. participation in the labor market), are simultaneously sustained by forms of
43 exclusion (e.g. having limited progression opportunities). Part of this differentiation is also the
44 reconfiguration of the intersection whereby it operates and is mobilized in ways that shape the
45 experiences of groups of women (e.g. white and non-white) in structurally and qualitatively
46 different ways so “there is not one category of “woman,” but many “women” who are different
47 and unequal to men and to each other” (Crenshaw, 1991: 1245; Holvino, 2012:162).
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5 By highlighting both the inseparability of the intersection of gender and foreignness and the
6 diverse ways in which it operates, we see this intersection as an open empirical question that
7 shapes and is shaped by contextual dynamics and factors. In this respect, the paper also takes the
8 important step of highlighting the relevance of context in the way intersections play out and
9 shape experiences. Highly-regulated environments present an ideal ground for the intersectional
10 exploration that accounts for in-group differentiation because they use difference as a divisive
11 mechanism where the strength of the mechanism relies on the strength of its ability to reinforce
12 notions of difference. The intersection of gender and foreignness helped us to explore and
13 explain this.
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22 Finally, the adoption of broader analytical frameworks like the one we used in this paper, allows
23 for the exploration of the multidimensionality of women of/in systems, arrangements and
24 institutions within specific contexts, in particular the power laden discourses that sustain their
25 experiences (Holvino, 2010). While women's efforts see them as challenging cultural, social and
26 political barriers in the global work arena; their experiences are situated within tensions between
27 global discourses of freedom of movement and local dynamics of discrimination and inequality
28 (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008). Exploring the intersection of gender and foreignness in this
29 paper enabled us to get insights into these tensions.
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38 **Contributions and directions for future research**

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41 This paper makes three distinct contributions. First, the paper takes intersectionality outside of
42 both the Western context and Western scholarship, unpacking the simultaneity of subject
43 positioning as part of socio-cultural, organizational and institutional dynamics and showing how
44 intersections produce and are produced by systems of differentiation that are context-specific
45 (Choo and Ferree, 2010). In doing so, the paper responds to the call to explore intersectionality
46 across space and time, in ways that consider not only intersections but position them within their
47 interplay with other debates, such as migration (Rodriguez et al., 2016). The paper also shows
48 the importance of analytically embedding the intersection of gender and other categories of
49 difference to understand what shapes the uneven experiences of diverse groups of individuals.
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3 This adds to debates that call for more nuanced understanding of intersectionality in work and
4 organizations (Rodriguez et al., 2016) and responds to calls for more intersectional analyses of
5 the work experiences of skilled migrants (Ali et al., 2017; Kemp and Rickett, 2018).
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10 Second, the paper contributes to expanding emerging scholarship in the area of gender and
11 international work in the Middle East. In particular, the paper challenges previous research (c.f.,
12 Harrison and Michailova, 2012) that has suggested that women engaged in international work in
13 the Middle East do not problematize cultural norms as a barrier to their work adjustment.
14 Findings reported in this paper show how women in Qatar are subjected to personal and
15 professional judgement based on prevailing cultural norms, and how this impacts on their
16 experiences of work. **Drawing from the heterogeneity of experiences of skilled migrant women
17 shown in this paper, there is need for more in depth consideration of how sector, profession or
18 organizational type can lead to different experiences in segregated labor markets.** In this respect,
19 the paper sets the grounds for more nuanced interrogation of difference and marginalization and
20 their implications for skilled migrant women's experiences (Metcalf & Woodhams, 2012).
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31 Third, the paper contributes to the methodological understanding of the analytical use and
32 potential of intersectionality to explain experiences of work. We frame this contribution within
33 calls to engage with the tensions inherent to the structuring of intersectionality as a field of
34 enquiry (McCall, 2005). The intra-categorical approach that informed the discussions in this
35 paper allowed us to reveal the complexity of the lived experiences of skilled migrant women.
36 However, capturing the multiplicity and complexity of these experiences also required us to
37 engage methodologically with intersectionality: on the one hand, we had to delimit foreignness
38 as a social category of difference and delineate its conceptual boundaries, and on the other hand,
39 we had to craft the intersectional analysis mindful of the complexity of the intersection. Where
40 previous works have used nationality and citizenship as markers of foreignness; our study
41 broadens the conceptual boundaries of this category to make it inclusive other categories (e.g.
42 racio-ethnicity, age, class and other non-class forms of social division), which are context-
43 specific in its articulation. In doing so, we contribute a nuanced exploration that reveals
44 diversity and heterogeneity that goes beyond the categories and instead focuses on their
45 contextual articulation and mobilization.
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5 Moving forward, we identify much potential in expanding the intersectional exploration of the
6 heterogeneity of skilled migrant women in global labor markets, particularly in the Middle East.
7 We found the intersection of gender and foreignness useful to problematize the fluidity of
8 inequality and disadvantage. In addition, it helped us to understand how these and other social
9 categories of difference (e.g. age, family status, racio-ethnicity and nationality) are mutually
10 constituted and reproduced to frame constructions and interpretations that disadvantage skilled
11 migrant women. However, while we would agree that a productive exposition of difference and
12 its intersectionalities can only be accomplished by problematizing dichotomies such as actual
13 and potential, native and foreign, familiar and strange; further questions remain. In the context
14 of the increasing participation of women in global labor markets, intersectional analytical
15 frameworks are useful to complicate how resulting dynamics interact with notions of a
16 capitalist/imperial/patriarchal/racial colonial world-system. This is an interesting direction that
17 could advance discussions such as the one we have presented in this paper; more specifically,
18 further exploration is needed on how skilled migrant women mobilize, (re)create, expand and
19 defend their positioning to navigate intersectional disadvantage that affects their work,
20 employment and careers, and in the process of doing so, articulate and legitimize alternative
21 positions beyond these dichotomies.
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Table 1: Number of economically active population (15 years and above) with employee status

All employees	Qatari	Non-Qatari
	103,944	1,950,558
Total	2,046,085	
Women	Qatari	Non-Qatari
	36,287	238,687
Total	274,974	
Men	Qatari	Non-Qatari
	64,086	1,707,025
Total	1,778,457	

Source: Qatar Statistics Authority (2017)

Peer Review

Table 2: Participants

Codename	Age range	Nationality	Number of years of international work experience	Time in Qatar
Amanda	40-45	British	2 years	1 year 6 months
Carmen	35-40	Peruvian	n/a	3 years
Imee	45-50	Filipina	2 years	3 years
Kara	30-35	Indian	11 years	7 years 6 months
Margaret	40-45	British	7 years	2 years
Naomi	55-60	British	32 years	32 years
Oneida	35-40	Filipina	3 years	7 years
Tala	30-35	Filipina	4 years	4 years 1 month

For Peer Review

Figure 1: Data analysis structure

