

## Chapter 2

### Privilege on the Pearl: The politics of place and the 2016 UCI Road Cycling World Championships in Doha, Qatar

*Natalie Koch*

“The Pearl” is an affluent community situated on an artificial island on the northern end of Doha, Qatar. A primarily residential development of over 12,000 residents, it is one of the only areas in Qatar where foreigners may own real estate (Koch, 2015a). As a result, it has become an elite enclave for Doha’s most affluent, white, Western residents. This affluence is on full display through its carefully coordinated aesthetics, stunning cleanliness and sense of order (see Figure 2.1). The Pearl was designed to be Doha’s most exclusive community for foreign residents, who could not only enjoy its luxurious environs but also would be assured a comfortable sense of insulation from the grit and grime that might be found elsewhere in the city.

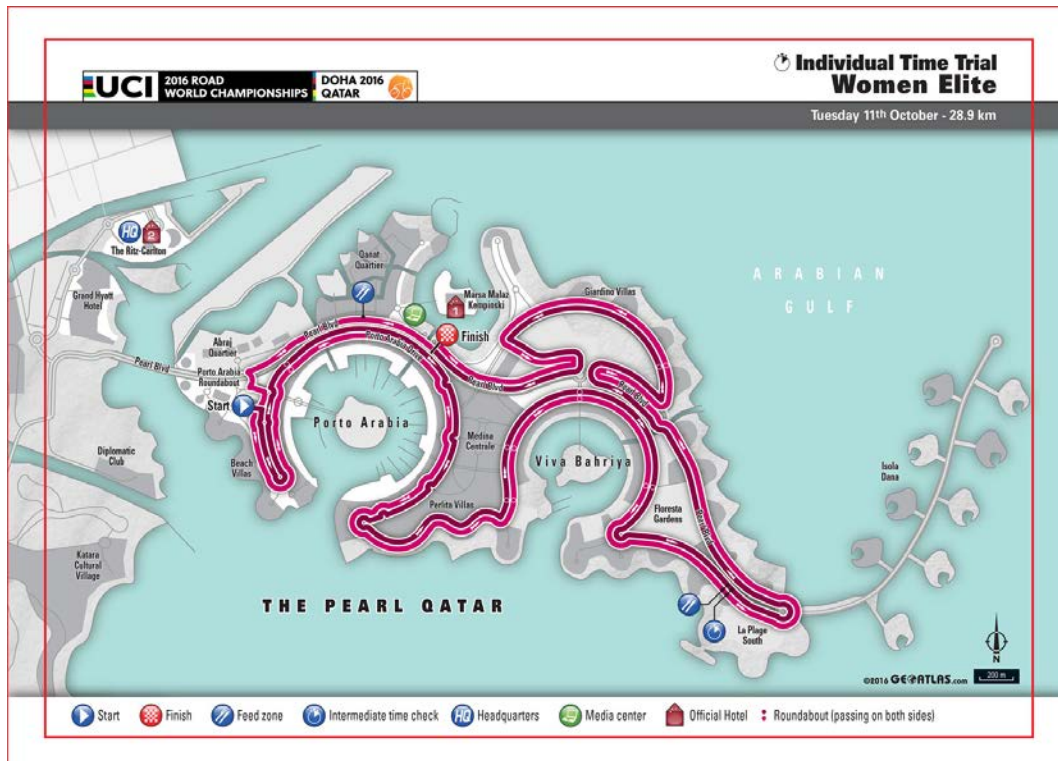
When Qatar was selected to host the 2016 UCI (Union Cycliste Internationale) Road Cycling World Championships, the Pearl was chosen as the centre of action for the one-week event. Qatar’s leaders have been actively developing the capital, Doha, as a way to showcase the country’s modernity and prosperity (Koch, 2014; Rizzo, 2013; Salama and Wiedmann, 2013). Much of the city’s recently transformed urban landscape is impressive, but only in the Pearl is such a coherent image of affluence and Western-style modernity so compactly visible. Local organizers thus considered the Pearl to be the best venue for putting this image of modernity on display for foreign visitors and television audiences of the cycling world championships (hereafter ‘Worlds’). This meant the Finish Line for each cycling race, and all associated temporary infrastructure for it was located on the Pearl, so all races either passed through, or were held entirely on, the island. Constantly referenced by officials and in race-related publications as being “iconic” and “luxurious,” the Pearl seemed to fit well with the organizers’ imaging intentions.

In practice, however, certain logistical issues intruded to challenge this agenda and upset local residents. One particular issue was that there is only one road-bridge to access the Pearl (Figure 2.2). Since most of the races crossed over the bridge, it had to be shut down to traffic for much of the day during the week of Worlds. This created significant issues for Pearl residents seeking to get to and from their homes, as well as limiting spectators’ access to the event. Disruptions elsewhere in Doha were minimal, since races did not move through many other parts of the city. A second point of contention for Pearl residents was the influx of visitors to the island. The visitors of concern were not the athletes or spectators, however, but the event staffers, who did not fit the white, non-Muslim, and European norm of the Pearl. Since the experience of living on the Pearl was true to its marketing as a *Western* enclave in Doha, many residents were uncomfortable with having their space of privilege suddenly opened to event staff, race marshals, and security guards, who hailed primarily from South and Southeast Asia and Africa. Through an “event ethnography” of the 2016 Worlds in Doha, this chapter examines the politics of place through the lens of privilege on the Pearl and how this was articulated and experienced by the island’s residents.

Figure 2.1. View from the Pearl. Source: Natalie Koch, 2016.



Figure 2.2. Race map showing one of the course routes on the Pearl. Source: Doha Cycling, 2016a.



## Place and the politics of identity

Place has been a core concern in geographic theory for decades, historically theorizing it as contingent, socially constructed, and inherently relative to any individual's personal experiences (Agnew, 1987; Agnew and Duncan, 1989; Cresswell, 2015; Hoelscher, 2011; Keith and Pile, 1993; Paasi, 2003; Pred, 1984, 1986; Tuan, 1977). This constructivist or relational approach positions place not as a static category, but one that is always in the process of becoming. Viewed relationally, place is thus intimately connected with the politics of identity: "How one identifies oneself—and how one is identified by others—may vary greatly from context to context; self- and other-identification are fundamentally situational and contextual" (Brubaker, 2004, p.41).

Because place and the processes of identification are both inherently subjective, they are necessarily about power relations among people. In this chapter, I move away from an ever-present impulse to locate an objective essence of "place" by instead asking how particular individuals imagine one particular place: "the Pearl" in Doha. I also limit my case study to a short window of time: during the one-week period in October 2016, when the community was the primary site for Worlds. Through my ethnographic research, a brief snapshot of the cycling event's transformation of the Pearl illustrates how place is never experientially or materially static. I show how the social and spatial demands of hosting sporting events have a special ability to transform particular places.

While the politics of identity is an important theme in the literature on sports, *place* has received comparatively little attention (but see Bale, 1982; Vertinsky and Bale 2004). Where it has been addressed in sports studies, this work is limited in two ways. First, although all events are necessarily limited in their temporal scope, much of the writing on the place-based impacts of sporting events does not give sufficient attention to time. As Yeoh and Kong (1996, p.55) emphasize, the making of a place is closely intertwined with the passage of time, as well as "being 'in', moving 'through' and experiencing changing places." Time must be central to any analysis of place – and especially if we are to understand the different temporal scales at which events touch the places and people they do. To investigate the impact of the 2016 Worlds on the Pearl, scholars might expose different issues by analyzing a on a shorter or a longer time horizon. In this chapter, I adopt a short-term approach to highlight the intensity of the transformations that took place on the island over the one-week period of the championship. Short-lived as they were, the dynamics I address reflect a general pattern of how sporting events affect places: sometimes the changes they bring are fleeting and other times they are lasting.

Second, research on sporting events tends to focus on the negative impacts they have for the general population or the poor (e.g. Boycoff, 2014; Gaffney, 2010; Orttung and Zhemukov, 2017; Ren, 2009). This is the logical result of critical social scientists' concern with broader issues of social justice. But the flip side of the effort to raise awareness about the potential harms of hosting sporting events is that many scholars do not ask many questions about who stands to profit. In much of this writing, the benefits are imagined to accrue to a city or country's political and economic elites, who are largely characterized as a homogeneous group with financial rewards at stake. This works in direct opposition to ordinary citizens or marginal communities, who are cast as being essentially connected to particular places (usually urban neighborhoods), which are threatened by sporting event hosting plans. In this chapter's case study of the Pearl, which is one of the most elite communities in the Arabian Peninsula, I challenge this characterization as a caricature. Interrogating identity politics in this privileged community opens new perspectives on fissures within the often black-boxed grouping of social, cultural, and economic "elites." As this chapter demonstrates, and as recent scholarship on collapsed sporting event bids has shown (e.g.

Lauermaun and Vogelpohl, 2017), elites themselves are often at odds when it comes to the impact on communities.

In examining the case of the Pearl, we see that many more “elite” actors are caught up by events than planners alone. Viewed through the perspective of privileged actors, this study sheds light on how place is central to competing agendas and interests *among* elites. Crucially, this also *places* elite actors by seeing them as situated actors rooted to and involved in making particular places, rather than as part of an abstract group simply presiding over any particular sporting event. By taking seriously the narratives of privileged residents on the Pearl, and their immense frustration over how their community was transformed for the 2016 Cycling Worlds, we can begin to trace how sporting events might expand or simply cast new light on political fissures among elites.

In the context of Qatar, understanding the politics of privilege requires special attention to “expatriate” cultural identity politics. Through a critical approach to place, this chapter thus extends the small but important body of scholarship on privilege and whiteness in the Gulf region (e.g. Coles and Walsh, 2010; Kanna, 2014; Vora, 2014; Walsh, 2007, 2014). It also puts this work in conversation with interdisciplinary scholarship on what Croucher (2009) terms “migrants of privilege” (see also Beaverstock, 2011; Kunz, 2016; Leonard, 2008), who have stressed the importance of elite migrants or expatriate communities in shaping urban landscapes of privilege. In theorizing such “landscapes of privilege,” it is important to examine “privileged groups with resources and power to build landscapes, to protect themselves with invisible walls of zoning, and to shape their own identities through these landscapes” (Duncan and Duncan, 2004, 27). This case study takes this injunction seriously to demonstrate how the transformations brought to the Pearl for 2016 Cycling Worlds led to new contestations over place, identity, and privilege on the Pearl, and speaks to broader dynamics unfolding around sporting events, places and societies across the globe.

### **Connections undone: Mobility and privilege**

The Pearl’s lone bridge, which was entirely closed to traffic for much of the day during the week of Worlds, created significant mobility challenges for Pearl residents, who had to plan ahead to get on and off the island for their daily activities. Race planners knew this would be a problem, so in an effort to minimize the disruption caused by the event, they developed several responses. The first was simply to suggest to residents that they stay elsewhere in Doha for the week and they worked to secure discounts at a handful of hotels for those that chose to do so. These discounts were nominal and the hotels chosen were some of the most expensive in the city (such as the ultra-luxury St. Regis Hotel), so pursuing this option would have required that residents were willing to part with a substantial amount of money. Indeed, when one Pearl resident posted to a community Facebook page an advertisement for the St. Regis’s “stay action package” for the event, it sparked a number of angry replies:

RG: Seen this? The St.Regis have put together a stay action package for Pearl residents!

SP: Bargain 😂

LM: Can we offset it against our rent???

CJ: Why would you pay qr6,000 to stay in qatar hotel for 7 nights when you live in qatar?? Lol. I’d rather spend the money and book a flight somewhere!

LM: Exactly!!!

CJ: LM, do they think we fell of the special bus!

LM: CJ, obviously - and we lick the Windows all the way there!!! It's just a joke that they think we should check in somewhere rather than stay in our homes!!

NA: Cashing in on other peoples misfortune

CB: That's exactly what I thought. (*October 2*)

While this thread clearly demonstrates the residents' anger, it also evinces a strong sense of entitlement and no small amount of ableist intolerance (which inflect many expressions of privilege the world over). Yet some residents were presumably less appalled by the prospect of booking rooms at the St. Regis during Worlds, and instead exercised their privilege by paying for a hotel. I did not have access to any numbers, but I encountered a number of individuals in Doha who had chosen to do so, though a more popular (and cheaper) option was to stay with friends or family elsewhere in the city.

Residents who chose to remain at home during Worlds had two options for getting on and off the island when the bridge was closed on race days: they could either leave or enter the Pearl by car when the roads were still open, or they could take a 'water taxi' ride on a *dhow* boat across the bay at any point in the day. Since the roads were closed at odd and inconvenient times for most people, the former was often not the best option. The alternative was thus to take the water taxi. Many did so – albeit grudgingly because the trip was complicated and took an inordinate amount of time to travel a short distance. The 20-minute boat-ride shuttled travellers between one dock on the Pearl and Katara Cultural Village – a posh retail and cultural venue across the harbour. Getting to and from these pick up points could take quite a long time, however. This was because, if one was in the Doha city centre and wishing to get to the Pearl, the water taxi option included a number of steps: a car ride to the Katara Cultural Village, a 10-minute walk to the docks from the taxi drop-off or parking lot, between 5-30 minutes of waiting for a boat, a 20-minute boat trip, and after disembarking on the Pearl, a series of golf cart trips and transfers across the island to finally arrive at one's neighbourhood block (broken up because of the series of canals and bridges that the carts could not pass). I made the trip approximately 4 times and it took about 90-120 minutes each way. An additional layer of complication was added when going into Doha, if one did not have a car waiting in the parking lot (though most Pearl residents did): when disembarking at Katara, there were no buses or other special accommodations to transfer people to the city centre and hailing a taxi was nearly impossible. This posed a major challenge for race spectators, but for Pearl residents accustomed to easily jumping in the car and going wherever they wanted, whenever they wanted, the sudden imposition of these restrictions felt like a particularly egregious violation of their mobility.

In observing the discussions of a Pearl Facebook group in the weeks leading up to Worlds, the community was abuzz with anxieties about the event and many Pearl residents were angry about not being consulted about having their island effectively put on lock-down for nearly a week and a half. Several representative comments from the discussion board were:

AH: It's unbelievable that 'the powers that be' thought it would be perfectly acceptable to organise this insane circus without any consultation with residents. There is simply no reason why these races couldn't be spread out a lot more over the city and country instead of heaping massive inconvenience on one group of residents in particular. So far, there has been no word as to what people are expected to do with regards to school kids, getting to the airport, etc, how emergency vehicles will get to where they may be needed etc. (*September 25*)

NT: It's a shame that the event has brought a lot of anguish, stress and inconvenience to those who keep the place alive. . (October 2)

AV: I have a friend who is working with the event who is trying to alleviate the situation for residents talking to the stupid committee (the one who needs a place to stay here during the event from my other post. Apparently these twats planning it have been in Doha for less than 1 month - so they don't know how Doha "works", they don't even know how their own catering will come in and are asking employees to be on site when they well know they're not local to The Pearl (they don't even know how their own people will come in or out!). Completely stupid, she's pulling her hairs too. (October 2)

Most posts centred on more practical inquiries, such as advice about how to get to or from the island, or whether roads were open. Many of these posts demonstrate the community's exasperation about having their mobility limited, as well as the poor race organization and failure to keep to schedules or notify residents of changes:

RC: All roads in the Pearl closed this morning for one hour. Unnotified.

TR: Are we really surprised? We are preparing for Carmaggedon over here.

FA: This is really messed up .. I guess we cannot count on the road closure schedule that was shared as roads can be closed sporadically without notice. (October 6)

MV: I guess everyone has noticed the great organization skills of the Pearl management this morning. Another big mess in the roads on no notice!!! Any info on the plans forward will be highly appreciated... (October 5)

EC: It would appear that while they are unable to supply marshalls or traffic police for the road closures this morning they are monitoring their twitter feed and removing anything about traffic disruption on the Pearl !!!! (October 5)

LS: Hi ladies, what is everyone doing ref school run when we are in prison on the pearl???? (September 28)

MG: Does anyone know if dogs can go on the water taxis next week? Mine has a vet appointment. (October 5)

RS: I've seen this: [Twitter feed image from UCI RWC Doha 2016: We wish to inform residents that pets are not permitted aboard our public transportation vessels. We regret any inconvenience. #QATraffic] 😂

MG: So he needs to swim to his appointment 😂 (October 5)

Such content suggests consistent tones of anger and frustration running through most posts. But there is certainly a self-selection bias among those posting. Based on my meetings with residents during my time in Doha the dialogue across the city was so negative that several residents took it upon themselves to write blog posts showing how they were "making the most of a bad situation" by documenting all the wonderful amenities and activities available when they could not easily leave the Pearl (e.g. Bagley 2016; Rizvi 2016). But when one woman posted such an entry from



her personal blog (clumsychic.com), in which she documented all the enjoyable activities and services that the event organizers put together for residents, she was roundly chastised by another woman. Their exchange again suggests how the transformation of the Pearl for UCI event cast new light on the community's fissures, here along the lines of working and non-working residents:

ND: All well and good to play tourist but what about the people who live there and have to go to work. At the end of the day all I want to do is go home and chill for a bit. This I can't do because the road is blocked until 5/5.30 and then if you attempt to go home at this time you have to deal with the traffic. For me it means having to be out of my home from 6/630am until 6/30pm at night. I don't want to play tourist, I want to go home! This is so NOT helpful.

KN: Yeah I would feel the same way. It was the weekend yesterday so we thought we'd utilize the facilities being offered and share our experience on the blog since I myself didn't know what was going on or how to get to places especially for a stay at home mom like myself. I apologize that you don't find this helpful.

In discussing these optimistic blog posts and related newspaper stories, one visitor I spoke with suspected that they were paid for by a public relations firm. Based on my own interactions with the white, Euro-American expat community in Doha and having previously worked with such media stories in Qatar (see Koch, 2016), my sense was they actually arose unprompted. To be sure, they strictly conformed to the norms of congratulatory speech that is typically printed in Qatar, but they should also be understood as a genuine response to the overarching negative atmosphere among residents.

The authors of the optimistic commentaries sought to directly challenge the negative spirit of critics, whom they largely dismissed as privileged and exceedingly imperial in the outlook. But as in so many other contexts around the world, this anti-imperial attitude is often itself quite imperial. For instance, one post reacted to a flurry of complaints:

Come on people it's 8 days, enjoy the buzz and there is one. We walked to MC this morning, people are out walking and speaking to you, the marshals and Police are being helpful and friendly, we bought 24 bottles of water in Spinneys and distributed them to the Police and Marshals on the way back, we have had a ball this morning (October 8).

This "benevolent" expat subject position resonates strongly with the various identity performances of expat women in post-colonial Hong Kong discussed by Leonard (2008). As she and other scholars of privileged expat migrants consistently emphasize, these communities are often quite fractured. Some individuals bristled at what they saw as another's sense of entitlement or imperialism, while often overlooking their very own outlook.

The interesting question here is how certain narratives come to be stigmatized as problematic expressions of privilege and imperial mind-sets when they had gone completely unremarked upon or unnoticed previously (Foucault, 1991). In this case, the cycling event became a turning point for certain members of this community. Its transformation of the *island as a place*, even if brief, created an opportunity for these competing narratives about *one's place as an expat* in Doha to arise. Whatever their motives, and wherever individual residents fell on the optimistic/pessimistic spectrum about the event, the very fact that many in the elite expat community viewed the positive accounts as "alternative" (or staged) illustrates the degree of Pearl

residents' indignation at having their space of privilege disrupted. But going well beyond airing their frustration online, residents were active in lodging complaints with the organizers and others they perceived as authority figures. For example, one woman shared the letter she sent to United Development Company, the developer in charge of the Pearl:

I'm sure you must have been made aware by now the anger and frustration that most Pearl residents are feeling now regarding the upcoming road closures, both because of the lack of consultation, the utter lack of respect shown to the residents and the unprecedented disruption that we will have to endure. This will most definite have a further negative effect on how many people view The pearl, not to mention all this is to host a sport that is riddled with drug cheats and corruption, now under the spotlight yet again.

Of course not all Pearl residents were so active in lobbying for more consideration of their logistical needs. The above example illustrates how community members were quite accustomed to and comfortable with certain forms of civic engagement, largely due to their elite and Western backgrounds. Indeed, the outcry did lead to action. Although they could not halt the event, residents did receive extensive concessions and accommodations from the organizers as a result (or in anticipation) of their agitating, including a special 'Resident's Hub' tent with various amenities and children's activities, special medical services and emergency helicopter service, extended water taxi service beyond that available to the general public, and 'resident cards' for discounts at restaurants, shops, and even hotels if they chose to stay elsewhere for the duration of Worlds.

So even where democratic input might have been shut down, some residents' refusal to remain complacent forced open certain spaces of connectivity and concessions. Nonetheless, these concessions did not satisfy certain Pearl residents, who allowed their criticisms to be printed in local newspapers. In doing so, they again exercised their privilege to critique local decisionmaking – a notable practice in a context where more marginalized expats would fear reprisal for speaking out against official policies (most commonly taking the form of losing one's job and residency permit). Residents were well aware of the significance of speaking critically "on the record." This became clear when a *Doha News* reporter (see Walker 2016) solicited comments from the Facebook group and various respondents explicitly stated their willingness to be quoted:

NQ: I am very annoyed as my son has just started school after 6 months being at home. He's just settling in. Keeping him out is not an option. He uses the bus and pick up times will be ok as it's early in the morning. But school comes out at around lunch time with him being dropped at around 2pm. I have a baby at home and can't exactly stay away from home the whole day or even half a day as baby doesn't sleep or feed if not at home. You can quote me. (September 25)

ES: I have two children, they finish school at 1pm and 2pm, my options are to leave my home at 6:30 am for the entire day and arrive back with the children just in time to transfer them straight into bed, or keep them off school for an entire week. The only information we have been given so far is the road closure map, if there is any sort of plan for residents access during those hours they haven't shared it with us. With



children only just settling into school after the late start this year it's going to be very disruptive. For working parents it's going to be a logistical nightmare.

LW: Are you happy to be quoted saying this?

ES: Yes that's np (September 25)

It is important to note that the criticisms aired concerned family issues. Given the oft-repeated stereotype that Qataris are extremely family-friendly, residents clearly perceived this issue as the safest realm for criticism: the comments here all work to pull at heartstrings, rather than critiquing the government in any overtly “political” manner. Overall, these commentaries and far more diffuse conversations in the expat community demonstrate how the temporally-limited but spatially-discrete undoing of connections for Worlds completely altered the Pearl as a place of privilege. Places are never closed in on themselves and, especially for elites, they are often defined by the mobility that they afford. A relational understanding of place thus helps us to see how the cycling event both challenged residents’ ability to claim their privilege through uninhibited movement, but also how it led to new dialogues among residents as they negotiated appropriate responses to the event – and their own subject positions in the process.

### **Bodies out of place: Policing social exclusivity on the Pearl**

The restrictions on residents’ mobility over the course of the event was the main focus of these critiques, but their space of privilege was also interrupted by the sudden influx of event staffers, who did not fit the white, non-Muslim, and European norm of the Pearl. Janitorial crews, security guards, and course marshals (who were stationed all over the island to ensure that no one walked into the roads) were primarily poorly paid South Asian or African expat men (see Figures 2.3 and 2.4) . Residents regularly interact with this demographic, but far less frequently on the Pearl, where they dress less modestly than they would elsewhere in Doha. The Pearl thus serves (and indeed has been marketed) as a Western enclave, where they are freer to engage in culturally-familiar practices, just as Coles and Walsh (2010, p.1323) note of expat social spaces in Dubai, which allow them “to maintain familiar practices which were culturally inappropriate in Dubai, for instance drinking alcohol or walking around in swimming costumes.”

As former British protectorates, the Gulf Arab states share this history and clubs were an important aspect of expat life in the region, coming to be seen as a “haven” where Western expats “could, in the absence of old friends and relatives, relax with ‘their own kind’” (Coles and Walsh, 2010, p.1322). For some of Doha’s elite expats, this kind of spatial enclave is particularly valuable – not just as a physical space of comfort in a foreign country, but also for the social dimension that makes it a *place* of comfort. The narrative of mingling with one’s “own kind” is often framed along national lines, though racial categories are often deeply embedded in this imaginary, even if implicit. As an island, the Pearl is spatially more extensive than expat clubs found elsewhere in the world, but the community’s social milieu similarly reinforces the “routine production of Self/Other boundaries” (Coles and Walsh, 2010, p.1322). So too does its aesthetic ordering result in landscapes of privilege, which are “a subtle but highly effective mechanism of exclusion” (Duncan and Duncan, 2004, p.7).

**Figure 2.3.** View from the race finish line, with primarily white European spectators and a South Asian janitor looking on (far left). Source: Natalie Koch, 2016.



**Figure 2.4.** Spectators departing after a race, while East Asian cart-drivers negotiate excessive demand to take move them along to the next pick-up point. Source: Natalie Koch, 2016.



Aestheticized landscapes are highly effective at obscuring class- and race-based forms of social exclusion, as well as “the exploitation that produces them” (Duncan and Duncan, 2004, p.26). As an enclave space organized around a particularly Western and elitist aesthetic, the Pearl allows residents to experience what scholars describe as “painless privilege,” allowing them to “spatially and visually insulate themselves from uncomfortable questions of race and poverty,” which makes that privilege possible (Duncan and Duncan, 2004, p.9), and is much more apparent in other parts of Doha. For this reason, many Pearl residents were uncomfortable with the perceived influx of a new demographic on the island during Worlds, as it challenged their ability to keep those visual cues of social inequality out of sign and out of mind. Though this discomfort became apparent to me throughout my experience of moving about the island during the event, it was not a major focus of discussion on the resident’s Facebook group. On 10 October 2016, a woman posted to the about an incident of allegedly being ogled by an event security guard, as described and discussed among other female Pearl residents in the following thread:

KM: Ladies out alone with dogs during these races.....the UCI security were just filming me on their personal mobile phone while I was out with my dog and not for anything official if you get what I mean!!! He was trying to be sneaky about it but he did a dreadful job, caught him red-handed! There was a Lekhiwya [Qatari internal security force] officer I’ve told him and he was less than impressed and went over to talk to them too....Sorry to rant but this sort of thing just sickens me so if this sort of thing bothers you just be aware that it’s happening.

ES: Do you think he was maybe filming your dog rather than you?

KM: No! I’m sure the dog was on the video too of course, but the way he was doing it he was trying to be a perv! ☹

SP: ☹

KF: These dudes are from different countries and are very flirtatious, one spoke to me yesterday. Typical. Don’t feel bad, it’s something they believe is appropriate.....

ND: Because we are westerners, they wouldn’t do it with their own womenfolk.

KF: ND, indeed.....

CL: Thanks for posting. Glad you reported it.

MG: Disgusting, everyday I get stared at or approached when I’m with my dog - not just during the cycling but it’s much worse with these “helpers”

MP: I have to deal with disgusting attention on daily basis when we walk with my dog, wish I could report it all the time!

AR: Disgusting.

CL: What’s most important is that we stick together and look out for one another. If you SEE something, SAY something.

KM: I can hold my own with it....but my concern I guess is if people are letting their daughters out to walk their dogs alone....just to have your wits about you a little more!

LT: Sheesh...sorry to hear that KM!! Did you wall ball that shizzle out of your system?! on a serious note though they need educating, it’s total ignorance

KM: I need to wall ball him in his face!!

MM: I have never seen police man to even look at any woman here . So probably he was just checking smth on his phone and not taking video for shure :)

The racist and Orientalist contours of this discussion are not unfamiliar to anyone who has circulated in white, Western expat crowds in the Gulf states. On the Pearl, as elsewhere in Doha, the low-paid guards and workers are never Euro-American or white. The act of denigrating them here is not framed through explicitly racial language, but through cultural otherness and differences based on national origin. For instance, one woman writes that “these dudes are from different countries” and that their behaviour is somehow “typical.” She also explains it as being a social or cultural norm: “Don’t feel bad, it’s something they believe is appropriate.” Though framed more as a defence of this behaviour, such ascriptions of cultural backwardness here and in wider conversations among privileged Western expats are both more and less explicit, with comments such as “they need educating, it’s total ignorance” representing one end of the spectrum and tropes such as “their own *womenfolk*” and “*these* ‘helpers’” marking them off in a more casual manner.

This conversation also sets the commentators apart from the security guards and other lower-class workers in Doha, both by emphasizing that this dynamic unfolds because “we are westerners,” as well as through several calls for them to “stick together and look out for one another.” The event here serves as a platform for these residents to articulate the very category of “westerners” in specific, more cohesive ways. The sense of community that these women seek to conjure in this exchange is here inflected by a sense of benevolence and caring, but emphatically for *one another* and in the face of apparent threats from *others*. Here again, the act of denigrating these men and questioning their motives (or rather, attributing pernicious motives to them) is clearly positioned not as a form of xenophobia, but instead framed as one of self-defence and concern for the group’s integrity and the safety and well-being of “their daughters.” The boundaries between these privileged women and their ostensible cultural Others are also policed through frequent references to “disgust.” This began with the first post author’s comment that the incident “sickens me” and subsequently widening to a series of comments about how disgusted these women feel in being watched as they move through urban space in Doha on a regular basis. Yet many feel frustrated about their inability to do anything about this unwelcome attention, as seen when one the resident notes: “wish I could report it all the time!”

The transformation of the Pearl for Worlds is important here because it facilitated KM’s sense of and actual agency in doing something concrete. Not only did she report the incident to an official (an act that could easily lead to an employee’s dismissal), but she also clearly felt that it was important to teach others in her community about being on guard and to “report bad behaviour!!” Furthermore, since residents and event staffers substantially outnumbered the spectators and athletes on the Pearl, the event illustrates how diffuse encounters related to the production of such a sporting event go well beyond the athlete/spectator binary that is often the focus in writing about sports. The Pearl residents were exceptional in their ability to push back because they had at their disposal time, resources, connections, and previous experience with civic involvement from having lived in democratic states in the West. Similar to their efforts to lobby for additional accommodations, when they learned about how the event would restrict their mobility, the event opened up certain opportunities to (re)assert their privilege and a claim a right to move about their community around a particularly Western conception of public space, dress, and gender relations – while ultimately reinforcing the Pearl as a place that excludes, or at least stigmatized, certain (lower) classed and (non-white) racialized bodies that disrupted unspoken norms in their social enclave.

## Conclusion

As I suggested at the outset of this chapter, “place” can often appear to defy definition. If, however, we move beyond a search for its essence and toward a relational understanding, we can begin to see how *place-making* involves a deeply political set of practices. Identity politics are inherently bound up with these practices and, in the unique case of one elite enclave in Doha, wealthy, predominantly white, and Euro-American expats are deeply committed to policing the boundaries of privilege through the social and material construction of the Pearl as a place. Yet in approaching place relationally, it is essential to understand how it fluctuates temporally – and this is the power of examining place through the lens of sporting events. Events such as the 2016 UCI Road Cycling World Championships in Doha, which demanded a complete, if brief, alteration of parts of the city’s urban fabric, forms of mobility, and flows of individuals, shed light on how place is never experientially or materially static. In highlighting the role of time, this chapter has sought to augment the literature on sporting events and place, which has done little to take this into account. Furthermore, in focusing on the privileged communities affected by Worlds, I have sought to push beyond the typical focus of research on sporting events on the negative impacts they have for the general population or the poor. If scholars are to explain the persistence and appeal of hosting large (and small) sporting events, it is essential to understand the full spectrum of attitudes, affinities, and concerns of groups at different points in the social hierarchy. It is also essential not to assume too great a degree of coherence among “elites” involved in and impacted by events in their locales. As this chapter has illustrated through the lens of place, we can see how events open new fissures among certain groups, as well as the need for scholars to see these identity politics play out in real time.

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