Negotiating Gender Roles in Intercultural Communication in Qatar[1]

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Abstract
This sociocultural linguistic study explores gender roles within the Qatari community emphasizing masculinity-femininity in terms of education, marriage, interdependence-independence and from different perspectives, including religion and traditions. More specifically, it focuses on the ways whereby gender roles associated with male and female Qatari students in intercultural communication courses in a university in Qatar are negotiated between them and their two female instructors from the US and Greece. Qatar has come under the spotlight due to its successful bid to host World Cup 2022, resulting in the diversification of its population, a fact that renders intercultural communication a sine qua non for a smooth co-existence of everybody who lives and works in the country. Falling under the scope of the "education for intercultural exchange" stream of the conference, our aim is to contribute towards the development of good practices related to teaching "exchange of information between members who are unalike culturally" (Berry et al. 2011: 471) by arguing that an efficient way of overcoming misunderstandings between instructors and students is to engage in a pedagogical approach, which we call "dialogical infotainment". Used to negotiate relationship and professional roles, this pedagogical approach translates into holding a dialogue, interactive discussions, and oral interviews with our students aiming at eliciting ethnographic information about each other's cultures in an entertaining way, e.g. through the narration of stories and/or through role playing activities. Infotainment serves the ultimate goal of sharpening our cultural sensitivity and subsequent tolerance and respect for each other's gender role-related peculiarities.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, gender roles, Qatar, education infotainment, masculinity, femininity

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1 Introduction

The State of Qatar is a small country bordering Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (map 1) that came under the spotlight worldwide after its successful bid to host the World Cup 2022. After the discovery of oil back in the '70s and vast reserves of natural gas more recently, the economy of the country is considered to be one of the best in the world,[2] a fact that has led to the rapid modernization and subsequent diversification of the population of the country, which keeps expanding every month. Among the approximately 2,2 million people that form the contemporary population of Qatar (see figure 1), it has been calculated that the local population, i.e. holders of Qatari passports, are only 275,000 people.[3] This segment, which is the focus of our paper, is characterized by intense gender segregation, which is found in governmental institutions, such as ministries and state universities.
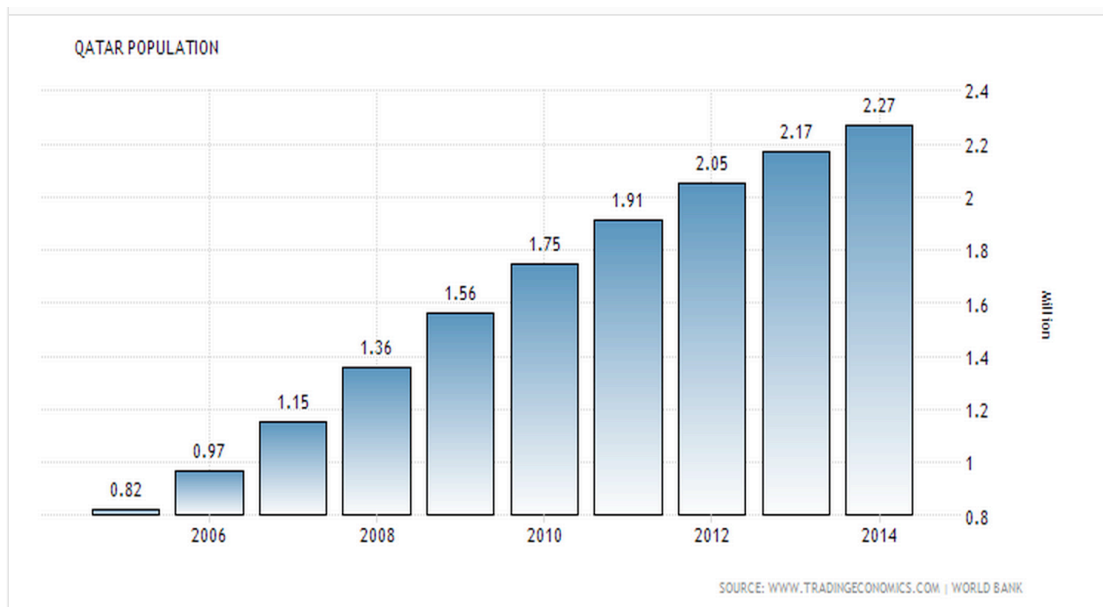

Figure 1: Population of Qatar (taken from http://www.tradingeconomics.com/qatar/population, accessed on 3 Dec. 2015)

Against this backdrop, more often than not as Westerners interacting with students from both genders both inside and outside the classroom we feel that there are misunderstandings between our male and female students with respect to how they perceive each other, hence we became increasingly interested in fleshing out what "gender roles" mean to our students and to us as well as how these are or can be negotiated in the university classroom. As an institution that prepares tomorrow's citizens of Qatar, we feel that it is our mission to contribute towards the bridging of the gap between men and women, in order to have a harmonious and thus a prosperous society is of paramount importance, so this paper should be seen as a contribution towards that direction.

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[2] http://www.focus-economics.com/countries/qatar (accessed on 3 Dec. 2015)

[3] The bedouins (or igbaili) in Qatar trace their descent from the nomads of the Arabian Peninsula (Al-Amadidhi 1985).
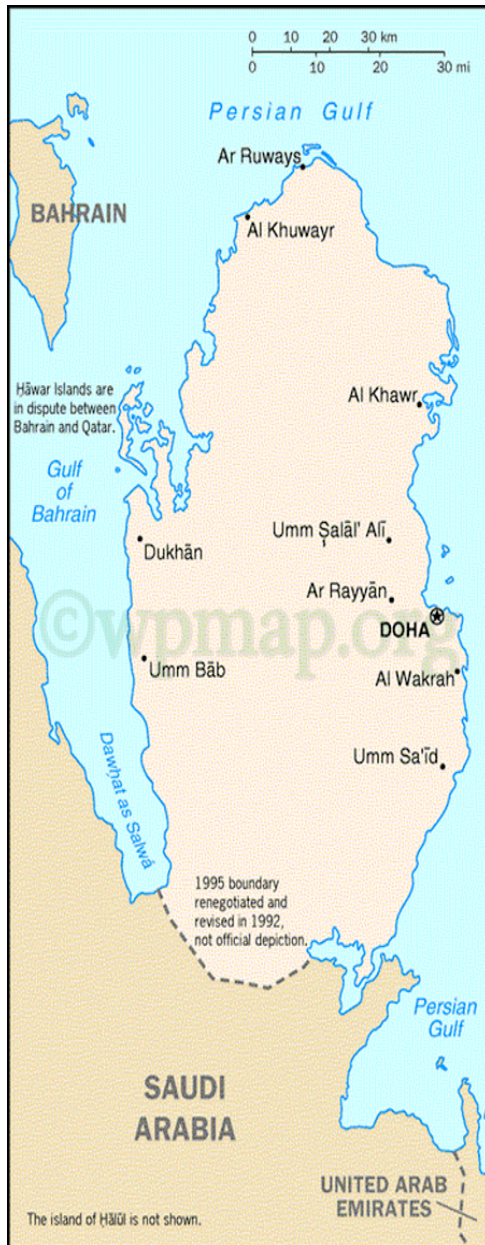
Map 1: Qatar (taken from www.wpmap.org, accessed on 3 Dec. 2015)

2 Gender, sociolinguistics and IC communication with Arabs

The literature on intercultural communication with Arabs focuses primarily on the religious differences between Islam and the rest of the world's religions, primarily Christianity, which more often than not create misunderstandings and potential clashes between people due to the different values and practices associated with them (e.g. chapters in Raddawi 2015). However, the literature on the different takes on gender roles and the ways these are constructed and negotiated in the Arab world is rather scarce (Albirini 2016: 189), maybe due to the fact that gender is not viewed by many scholars as a type of identity that is associated with different cultures (however, see Sadiqi 2003, 2006; Vicente 2009; Pollard 2013). We understand "gender" as "the cultural traits and behaviors deemed appropriate for men or women by a particular society" (Cameron 2006: 724). For us, though, and in alignment with Deborah Tannen's work on Greeks and Americans (e.g. 2005), male and female genders along

with their respective masculinities and femininities can be seen as a continuum which has been created through the different ways boys and girls are socialized from day one of their lives, a fact that leads to the emergence of different cultures and different gender roles associated with these cultures. Against this backdrop, the research questions that we address in this study include the following: 1) how do Qatari students understand "masculinities" and "femininities" ? and 2) how do we as instructors and our students negotiate gender roles in the classroom?

3 Gender-oriented ethnography

In our study, the methodology we used to collect our data was primarily linguistic ethnography (Rampton et al. 2004; Tusting & Maybin 2007), both inside and outside the classroom. Having lived and worked in Qatar for over 5 years, both of us have engaged in extensive participant observation and field note taking with respect to our students in the classroom, in the hallway, in the Men's and Women's Activities Buildings found in the gender-segregated campus of Qatar University, where our students spend their break time. Similarly, both of us have attended weddings or have participated in desert camps or have visited former students' houses, where we have been invited, so in this way we have been offered the privilege of getting a glimpse into their academic and more personal lives. This background knowledge is vital for our understanding of their gender-related behavior given that it stems from a gender-segregated environment, with which none of us was familiar before we arrived at Qatar.

Our understanding of gender-related roles has been significantly informed by conducting ethnographic interviews with both our male and female students. In these interviews, we asked them questions about what they consider as typical features and personality traits of "a good man" and "a good woman" in Qatar as well as how they see themselves in terms of their gender. In addition, we have kept a record of interesting stories, in which the gender-related expected roles have been blurred, twisted or undermined, that both students and us have shared with each other. Finally, in order to complement our primarily oral data with written ones, we have also relied on classroom material (from both male and female students) that we have collected from the Intercultural Communication class that Iglal has offered in Fall semesters 2013, 2014 and 2015 as well as from the Language & Gender class that Irene has offered during the Spring semesters 2013, 2014 and 2015. This classroom material consists of midterm exam papers, quizzes, home assignments and notes that deal with gender-related topics addressed in the classroom.

All of these resources have been used collectively in order to answer the aforementioned research questions. We start our discussion with how our students perceive masculinities and femininities, before we give our own take on these and we conclude our analysis by demonstrating what have turned out to be good practices of negotiating gender role diversity in the university classroom.

4 Gender roles from the perspective of Qataris

Gender roles involve outward expressions of what society considers masculine or feminine. What gender means and how we express it depend on a society's values, beliefs, and preferred ways of organizing collective life (Holmes 2008). We demonstrate gender roles by how we speak, dress, or style our hair, to mention just a handful of typical gender-related behaviors (cf. Wood 2012).

Gender roles are ascribed to us early on in life and are constructed through social norms, values, and beliefs, which are culture-specific. To be feminine is to be physically attractive, deferential, emotionally expressive, nurturing, and concerned with people and relationships (Spence & Buckner 2000), while to be masculine means to be strong, ambitious, successful, rational, and emotionally controlled. Although these requirements are perhaps less rigid than they were in earlier eras, they remain largely intact. Those whom we regard as "real men" still do not cry in public, and "real men" are successful and powerful in their professional and public lives (cf. Milani 2015). Within the Qatari society, femininity and masculinity are constructed primarily on the basis of their Islamic beliefs, traditions, and cultural norms. Gender roles are also constructed through socialization.

In terms of communication, there are various distinctions between female and male students' communication styles. Women's communication style is often described as supportive, egalitarian, personal, and disclosive, whereas men's is characterized as competitive and assertive (Wood 2005; cf. Theodoropoulou 2015a). However, Qatari women tend to be more competitive than their male counterparts. They are competitive with each other in terms of physical appearance as well as personality attributes and in order to demonstrate and ascertain their femininity. In this way, given that for some of them going to the university is the only way to socialize, they end up being far from egalitarian vis-a-vis each other. However, many of the intend to be equally open with their Western female instructors and sometimes share their personal stories, especially outside the classroom, which is their way to create rapport with them. On the other hand, male students tend to be personal and autonomous, while they do not show an interest in establishing intimacy and rapport with us.

With respect to femininity, the feminine norm of a woman in Qatar is to become a good wife and a role model for their children. In the case of bedouins (= people of nomadic origin), femininity is attributed by personality traits, such as reliability and interdependence, even though hathari (= people of urban origin) men perceive physical appearance as more prominent to femininity than personality traits. Since public segregation of gender is a common practice within the Qatari culture, they would have to defer to their female relatives to share with them whether their perspective bride is fashionable. Qatari men rely heavily on their female relatives' opinion regarding femininity of their perspective wives. Usually when female relatives visit the homes of a perspective wife, they will report back to the groom about her fashion style and whether she is dressed in designer clothes and jewelry.

Qatari female students tend to be respectful and obedient within the classroom setting. This is due to cultural restrains. Typically women should carry themselves in order for their behavior not to reflect negatively on their family or society. This is part of the Arab cultural norms as it is a collectivist society (Abu-Lughod 1986). Qataris are

internally stratified according to factors, such as tribal affiliation, religious sect, and traditional values (Theodoropoulou 2015b).

Femininity in Islam, the official religion of Qatar, encourages modesty. One of the characteristics of our female students is to dress modestly by wearing the abaya (loose over-garment) and sheila (modern scarf), which are the country's national and traditional clothes for women. Among bedouins, women tend to be more traditional. A few of them cover their face by wearing niqab. In order to avoid offending traditional, religious, and culture sensibilities, often Western instructors would have to learn to differentiate between female students who are wearing the niqab by recognizing distinctive features pertaining to each student i.e. eyes, or voice.

Image 1: Qatari women with sheilas and niqab (© Google Images)

More specifically, as Western women it is impressive to see Qatari women's knowledge of and engagement with the latest trends of fashion, both Arab and international, even though in public women are expected to be covered by being dressed in their black abayas, black sheilas and very often they also wear the niqab (in the case of bedouin women), in order to perform modesty and not to provoke. However, there is significant variation, which indexes different degrees of femininity. For example, there are a number of young women, who wear extensive makeup and strong perfumes, or they wear abayas with fancy colored cross stitches. Along the same lines of variation, there are women, who wear their sheilas in such as way that they cover their hair fully, whereas some others adopt the so-called "Sheikha Moza style", which translates into wearing the sheila with some hair at the front of the head showing. This hair is usually dyed in fancy colors, in order to create a contrast to the black of the sheila. Another feature of feminine gender in Qatar is long hair. This is a historical notion which dates back to the Prophet's time, where women should not have their hair cut excessively short so that they resemble men.

Femininity is also closely related to stylishness indexed by accessories, such as expensive bags and shoes by trendy high end fashion designers. Coupled with these is also body language applied to the use of accessories, which means that slow walking with ostentatious showing of both the bag and the femininely decorated cell phone is considered the way to do femininity on a daily basis in public spaces, such as the university or the mall. In fact, some hathari women go as far as to walk with their abayas opened at the front, in order to show their expensive high end fashion designer clothes, and heels. Part of femininity is also doing your hair as frequently as possible and showing it off to your female friends when exchanging visits at home. Subsequently, young Qatari women get very competitive in order to outdo each other in terms of their looks and accessories. Interestingly enough, these practices are not considered very feminine on behalf of our male participants, who prefer women to wear less makeup, in order for their physical features to be more evident to them.

Image 2: Qatari women with their abayas open (© Google Images)

For bedouin women, on the other hand, femininity is a concept that is talked about but not performed excessively, especially in public, contrary to hathari women. Because the dominant ideal is the concept of modesty, bedouin women refrain usually from highlighting their femininity, in order to avoid provoking other women and especially men. However, when in private settings, bedouin women like to perform femininity primarily via dressing up and wearing expensive and elaborate heavy gold jewelry, called marria, which also indexes wealth and social status. Along the same lines, and like hathari women, bedouin women wear characteristic perfumes that index femininity, with flavors including jasmine, amber, musk and oud. In terms of Arabic perfumes, there is a preference for brands, such as Rakaan, Nashwa, Roohi Fedak,

Attar Al Kaaba, Haneen and Alif Laila O Laila.In addition, they also enjoy spraying themselves with the latest Western perfumes by brands, such as DKNY, Burberry, D&G, Gucci, Tom Ford, and others. Some of them can also get customized perfumes, namely perfumes whose bottles have engravings with their names.

Apart from their appearance, women in Qatar are expected to demonstrate femininity through ways of being and acting. For example, when in public women, and especially bedouin women, are not supposed to speak in a loud volume, because the norm is that men are not supposed to hear women's voices. Similarly, soft voice is usually associated with femininity. Men also perceive as feminine characteristics practices, such as being reserved or not appearing in public late at night without a mahram (unmarriageable male kin/chaperon). In addition, contradictory practices, such as doing sports and smoking, are considered as less feminine, even though women have started engaging in these practices, even in public spaces in Qatar.

In terms of the expected careers, women's scope is more limited than men's, inasmuch as the former are encouraged to pursue studies in more 'feminine domains', such as education, medicine and social sciences, but not 'hard core sciences', such as engineering. These norms have led to a perpetuation of women in companies and ministries falling under these fields, while at the same time they have resulted in a scarcity of women in scientific domains, such as computer engineering, marine engineering and aero space divisions. Against this backdrop, both bedouin and hathari female students obsess with their grades as the latter are perceived to be the steppingstone to compete with their male counterparts and to gain positions within the aforementioned limited professional arena.

Finally, femininity in Qatar does not go hand in hand with professional development, in the sense that the very few women who have managed to promote and become managers and/or leaders are usually described as 'women who behave like men'. Of course, there are exceptions to this, such as H.H. Sheikha Moza, who albeit a leader in a number of institutions and projects both inside and outside Qatar, including Qatar Foundation, is a woman who is very often appraised for her stylistic choices and her femininity as well.

Image 3: H.H. Sheikha Moza, the Chairperson of Qatar Foundation (© Google Images)

Masculinity in Qatar is demonstrated through varied ways, and more specifically, through men's hobbies, appearance and values they believe in. With respect to hobbies, males in Qatar enjoy participating in outdoor, indoor and group-based activities. Especially bedouins[4] tend to express their masculinity through breading of camels, falcons, hunting, and camping. Ownership of falcons is a masculine trait which also indexes wealth and status within the Qatari culture. Sometimes men would walk around the souq[5] with their falcons on their shoulders.

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[4] A traditional outdoor mall which consists of shops, restaurants, and Hookah cafés.
[5] It is an ankle-length Arab garment, usually with long sleeves, similar to a robe.

Image 4: A Qatari man with a falcon (© Goole Images)

Another predominant masculine hobby in Qatar is the possession of extravagant cars, such as Lamborghini, Ferrari, Maserati, Rolls Royce, and Bentley. In fact, sports cars, such as Mustang, are perceived to be more masculine than for example the omnipresent in the streets of Qatar Land Cruiser. Sometimes the cars are custom made or painted with gaudy colors, such as fuchsia, and accessorized with high end designer interiors, such as Burberry. The purchase of unique and elaborate license plate numbers is another indication of masculinity among Qatari men. The uniqueness of numbers is indexed through the existence of less than six digits, the purchase of which would range from thousands to hundreds of thousands of riyals (the currency of Qatar). However, for desert and camping trips, men usually drive Toyota Land Cruisers. These activities are deemed prevalent in demonstrating masculinity in both bedouin and hathari (= urban) men. Through these practices, masculinity is coupled with status and power.

Another car-related trait to show masculinity is the way men drive in Qatar. Apart from being a necessary daily practice, driving is for Qatari men also a hobby. More specifically, men tend to engage in reckless and fast driving as it is demarcated to be more masculine. However, not all of our participants agreed on this point, because they have also witnessed veiled and niqabed women, who also engage in this sort of driving. Such driving practices are omnipresent in Qatar, to the extent that some driving schools, such as Karwa Driving School, offer "defensive driving lessons" to their customers. We have interpreted this type of driving as a practice indexing powerfulness as opposed to masculinity, but given that the type of power evident in the public sphere is usually associated with men, it makes sense to assume that eventually this sort of driving indexes masculinity (even on behalf of women).

Image 5: "Masculine" driving in Qatar (© Google Images)

Qatari men index their masculinity through their appearance. In particular, they demonstrate modesty by wearing traditional garment known as thawb.[6] The thawb is usually tailored and made out of expensive fabric. They distinguish themselves from other males by wearing expensive accessories, such as designer watches and cufflinks, expensive pens placed on the pocket of the thawb, and sun glasses. They also wear ghutra[7] and there are varied ways of wearing it in order to express their individuality and national identity. Both thawb and ghutra are white, though during the winter months, some men wear yellow or blue thawb and a red ghutra. In a class setting in Qatar, Qatari men express their masculinity by wearing their traditional garments. Western clothes, such as jeans or shorts, are not viewed as prototypical masculine clothes, even though a number of Qataris wear them inside Qatar.

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[6] A headscarf for men.
[7] Verbally transmitted record of the teachings, deeds, and sayings of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

Image 6: Qatari man (© Goole Images)

In terms of physical appearance, masculinity in Qatar is indexed through facial hair and the way their hair and facial hair is groomed. Men go to barbershops and spas on a regular basis for hair grooming. However, a number of religious, mainly Bedouin, men, tend to have a long beard as part of sunnah.[8]

Within the classroom setting, masculinity is perceived through respectfulness of their instructors translated into the students being diligent, attentive, and punctual. Qatari male students perceive themselves as gentlemen and due to cultural expectations they do not want to seem emasculated, given that their instructor is from the opposite sex. Additionally, male students have the freedom of choice regarding their studies as opposed to cultural restraints on their female counterparts. This is evident through the way they carry themselves within the classroom and seem to take great interest in their school work. However, they do not experience exam anxiety or obsession of grades, as they seem content with their scores but always seek help for improvement. This is perhaps related to the notion of autonomy and lack of expression of emotions;

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http://portal.www.gov.qa/wps/portal/topics/Family,+Community+and+Religion/Marriage+and+Family (accessed on 3 Dec. 2015)

the latter is usually associated with women. Societal expectations of men encourage the lack of expression for love with the exception of spouses. They are the ones that are expected to act as breadwinners of the whole family.

Aside from their appearance, car possession, and education, Qatari men are more privileged in choosing a spouse but due to their traditional and conservative society and in order to protect the female's virtue, female relatives will have to initiate the process with the perspective bride's family. This is in contrast with their female counterparts who are not able to choose their spouse but they have the liberty of refusing a potential spouse. Bedouin men practice polygamy in order to demonstrate their masculinity within their tribal affiliation. In addition, having more offspring is perceived 'more' masculine, as offspring, and especially male offspring, are seen as the pledge for the continuation of the tribe. Qatari men can pass citizenship on to their children and their non-national wives, whereas women cannot do the same. Subsequently, females are encouraged to marry nationals in order to reinforce the social norms within the state of Qatar.

Social, cultural, and religious norms prohibit premarital relations. In some contexts, males demonstrate their masculinity by engaging in premarital relations. Since Qatar is a very conservative society, usually the context is limited to the majlis and/or in khayamiya /khayma (tent) during camping. In some rare cases and in order to be perceived as 'macho' among their rabaii (close friends), their non-Qatari girlfriends accompany them to the khayamiya.

Overall, within the Qatari culture, male supremacy is the norm and males are perceived as the authoritarian figure (regardless of their age) within the household and in professional environments. Despite the fact that the percentage of divorce in Qatar has increased significantly over the last decade[9] and women have started becoming more independent financially, the ideal woman is still considered the one who prioritizes her family over her career and is obedient to her husband.

5 Negotiating gender roles in the classroom

Having discussed how our students view gender roles and the norms associated with them, it becomes evident that there is a major discrepancy in our respective perspectives, translating primarily into the fact that for us women should have a more active role in the society being entitled to excel in both their family and their professional life in par with men, something that for our students is not valid in general, given the priority that women need to give to their family-related duties. As a result of this, for us, as Western instructors, engaging in gender role-related discussions is usually a challenging but at the same time an exciting venture. On the one hand, it is challenging given the different approach we take vis-à-vis the concept of gender and the subsequent roles we assign to each gender.

More specifically, we consider gender as a continuum between masculinities and femininities, which makes the identification of gender identities less rigid than the way through which our students perceive them. In this way, for us femininity can be more hybrid in the sense of accommodating a set of what our students would consider as 'masculine' traits, such as self-decisiveness. In addition, what is considered as

masculine for our students is not necessarily masculine for us: for example, when a woman wears jeans or when a woman is ambitious and successful in her career, this does not mean that she looks or she has adopted masculine features or traits.

In addition, what has become evident in our interaction especially with our male students is that there is a discrepancy in terms of the expected roles of women. More specifically, one of our male students told us that he once had a nightmare that he had to stay at home and cook for his family, while waiting for his wife to come back from work. This reversal of the stereotypical roles associated with the two genders instilled in him a sense of breaking the social order found in the Islamic world, which he found hard to cope with. For us both, such fixation to stereotypes is simply inconceivable and this is exactly what we are trying to negotiate and, eventually, to render less rigid in our classrooms. Obviously we do not wish to impose on our students our values and take on what gender means and how it can be used in the society, but through our classroom discussions we try to encourage people to critically think about how their perspective on gender can impact their family, peers and, by extension, their society. The way we usually go about negotiating gender roles is through the discussion of gender-related behaviors from our respective cultures, which we consider as characteristic or, more interestingly, non characteristic of the respective gender category. Some examples of these uncharacteristic examples include the stay-home father, who needs to take care of his newborn baby, while his wife goes to work after giving birth, or the female CEO, who sets the tone in the managing of the company by giving orders to and evaluating the performance of her (fe)male employees.

Such dialogues about gender-related issues are exciting ventures, because we can learn a lot from each other about each other's cultures, norms, values, belief systems and, as a result, we can try to understand and interpret everyday life both inside and outside the university. For example, it was really revealing for us to find out that in the bedouin culture women in the past used to participate in physically demanding tasks, such as camel milking or wood transferring, in par with men. Such information has contributed towards the breaking of the stereotypes we had about the position of women and their respective roles in the bedouin culture. Eventually, such exchange of information and experience can contribute towards developing a sense of tolerance for each other's cultural peculiarities, which will allow us to coexist in a harmonious environment.

In terms of the negotiating style per se, we usually apply what we can the 'dialogical infotainment' approach. This can be seen as a pedagogical method, which aims at educating each other, while at the same time entertaining each other through dialogue, performance and visual aids. In terms of dialogue, we try to engage as many students as possible in our classroom discussions by addressing them with their first names and encouraging to share with us stories from their personal lives that are related to the topics we are discussing.

A very good example, which summarizes the concept of educational infotainment is the following picture:

Image 7: Irene with H.H. Prince Sultan, the Saudi Minister of Tourism in Medinah (© Irene Theodoropoulou)

This stems from Irene's trip to Medina in Saudi Arabia to present a paper at a conference, which was organized by H.H. Prince Sultan Al Saud. As a Western woman traveling to Saudi, she had to wear the abaya and the sheila while at the same time abiding by restricting rules, such as not driving and going to places, where there are only women. These were unique circumstances, in which she had to live for one week. At the end of the conference, as a delegate she participated in the opening ceremony of a cultural exhibition, which was organized by H.H. and to which he had invited her. While being there, she was sitting in a female only zone and she asked to thank H.H. for the hospitality he had provided all of the conference delegates with during the week of the conference. The women who were sitting at the table laughed at her and asked her the rhetorical question whether she had realized that she was a woman in Saudi Arabia. Irene, despite her knowledge and respect of the sociocultural and Islamic values, wanted to meet with H.H. in person anyway, in order to express her gratitude for the hospitality offered to her, urged by her Greek values. Eventually, what happened was that she was able to meet with H.H., who shook her hand and had a brief chat with her about the similarities between Greek and Saudi Arabian traditional architecture. This story epitomizes the idea of overcoming stereotypes and aiming for intercultural communication on the basis of what connects people rather

than what separates them, and this is how it was framed in the context of the Intercultural Communication class, in which it was discussed.

After presenting our female students with this picture, we asked them to talk to us about their reactions and the ways they see gender's relevance in it. Some students acknowledged Irene's respect for the local values and traditions of Saudi Arabia indexed through her wearing the traditional female attire, while some others commented on the exolinguistic features of the picture, and more specifically on the fact that the distance between her and H.H. was about right, i.e. it was formal but not too formal. Others noted the difference in terms of facial expressions between H.H. and Irene, who are both smiling, and the H.H.'s security guard, who looks very austere. All of these interesting dimensions were discussed among students themselves, who were trying to paint a psychological portrait of the figures of the picture, as well as between the students and us as instructors. It turned out that many students considered this incident as an entertaining breaking of the sharp boundary of gender segregation due to the fact that it was initiated by a Western female, who is considered to be an outsider and thus not a representative sample of the female Islamic values in the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, according to which women are not supposed to strike up a conversation with strange men, regardless of their rank. Linguistically speaking, our students expressed this general idea through the use of hedging (e.g. discourse markers, like 'maybe', 'like', 'it seems that…', 'I think that…' etc.) when addressing us, but when they were talking to each other and they were negotiating the meaning of the picture, they tended to sound much more upfront and direct, indexed through the lack of mitigation and the attempt to overlap with each other and to raised their voice, in order to make themselves more audible and, hence, more dominant, than their interlocutors. This is in alignment with competitiveness, that was discussed previously in this paper. These performances, which were done primarily in English, were oftentimes enriched with codeswitching in Arabic through utterances in the students' native dialects, which aimed at easing the tensions that were created in case of disagreements and at also establishing an entertaining tone.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, instead of employing the oftentimes opposing views in order to highlight differences in terms of how we perceive gender-related roles and thus create unbridgeable gaps in our communication, we use these differences instead as our point of departure and stimulus in our educational infotainment approach, which we hope will trigger interesting and enthusiastic responses on behalf of our students in the context of a healthy discussion in class, from which we can also benefit by familiarizing ourselves with their gender-related customs and values. At the macro level, we see such an approach a useful pathway towards leading people from different genders to understand each other and, hence, to create the circumstances of co-existing harmoniously in their societies. At the meso level, such pedagogical approach, which has worked pretty successful for both of us so far, can be seen as an engaging way that maintains both our students' and our own motivation in the classroom at high levels. Finally, at the micro level, educational infotainment helps our students and us as instructors and human beings expand our sociocultural horizons. Future research on this topic can look into how to translate this theoretical knowledge into tangible steps towards bridging the gap between genders in Qatar.

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