



VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University
VCU Scholars Compass

Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

2020

Entitled versus Untitled

Johana Nasreen
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>

© The Author

Downloaded from

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/6470>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.



ENTITLED VERSUS UNTITLED

JOHANA NASREEN



ENTITLED VERSUS UNTITLED

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, all praise and thanks to Allah, for His countless blessings, strength and guidance, without which none of this would have been possible.

I am deeply thankful and indebted to my support system:

My mum, Hasina Alim Joly, I wouldn't have made it this far without your love and support. I can never thank you enough for always being my pillar of strength. I am forever indebted to you for all you have done.

My sister, Hena Alpona, for motivating me, being my experimental audience and giving me constant reality checks. Thank you for all your support, for never letting the stress get to me, and for reminding me to relax every once in a while.

My better half, Nagir Ahmed Apurbo, for always being there as my personal cheerleader, believing in me despite all my self-doubts, and being proud of every little thing I do. Thank you for making me feel extraordinary at all times.

My dearest friend, Abir Zakzok, for being my talent on set, my bro-in-a-studio, my gift from MFA. Thank you for always hyping me up, for your unconditional support and for going above and beyond.

My dad, Alim Uddin, for supporting me despite not having a clue about what I'm doing. Thank you for running around Qatar trying to find cobblers with me.

I would like to express my special gratitude and appreciation to my primary advisor, Dr. Diane Derr, for challenging, guiding and motivating me throughout my MFA experience. I am truly thankful to you for all the knowledge you have given, to help me develop, both professionally and individually. I am extremely grateful for my associate advisors, Law Alsobrook and Ryan Browning, for your energy, insight and support throughout this process. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to my reader, Patty Paine, thank you for your positivity and constant motivation throughout my education for the past 6 years. It has been a wonderful adventure working with my committee. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the MFA faculty: Rab McClure, for your endless optimism, the most memorable advice and invaluable life lessons, I will truly cherish them. Marco Bruno, for being the most understanding and amazing mentor, I thoroughly enjoyed being your student. Thomas Modeen, for helping me develop as a more thoughtful designer and an individual, your design thinking process inspires me.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank Abdul Karim, a cobbler located at Souq Al-Ali, who helped in the production of this thesis project, without questioning my absurdly unconventional design requests.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
ABSTRACT	8
INTRODUCTION	12
LITERATURE REVIEW	18
Social Stratification in Qatar.....	21
Lifestyle Differences of Social Groups.....	23
Social Identifiers in Qatar.....	24
PRECEDENT STUDIES	26
Generation Gap: Mike Campau	28
Rewind: Paul Rucker	30
Save Our Souls: Achilleas Souras.....	32
Hybrid Radio: Mathieu Lehanneur for Lexon	34
Public areas initiative: Space, not Spikes	36
Public areas initiative: RainCity Housing	37
INVESTIGATIONS	40
Object (Footwear) Exploration	42
Material Exploration	43
PRODUCTION & OUTCOMES	46
Footwear in Context	52
Footwear Hybrids.....	58
CONCLUSION	66
Reflections.....	68
Future Directions.....	69
REFERENCES	70
Endnotes	72
List of Figures.....	74

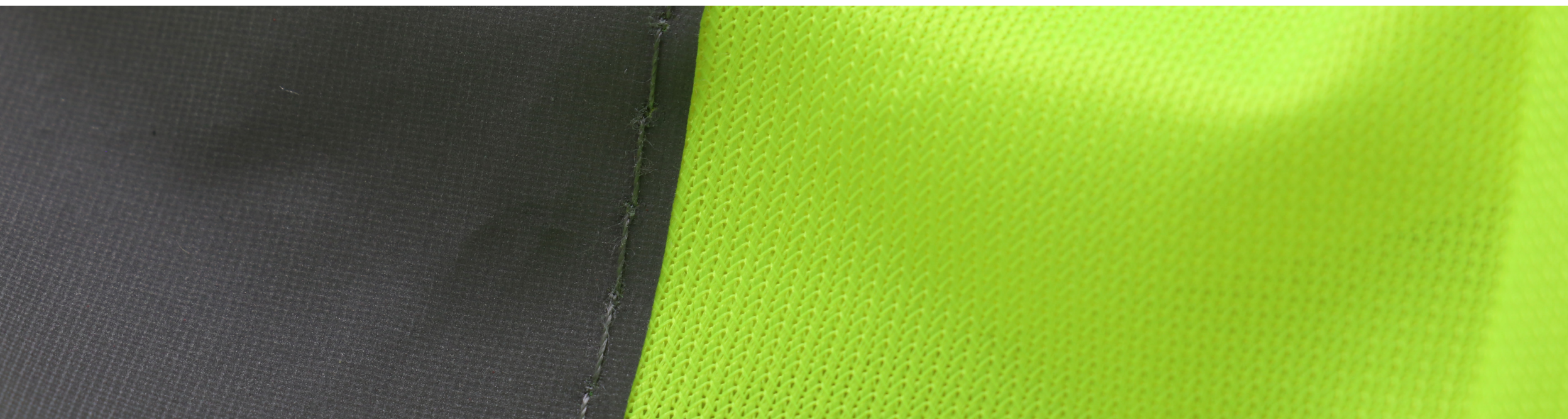
ABSTRACT



Social hierarchy across class divisions in Qatar is evident in clothing apparel. Materiality, objects and form act as powerful signifiers relative to an individual's social belonging. Our perception and identification of these elements is driven by our own pre-existing assumptions and position within Qatar's social stratification. We interpret social status and identity through symbolic representation.

Construction site materials are demonstrative of individuals working on the sites and their social status, just as the Birkin bag becomes emblematic of the women's position within the social hierarchy. This thesis project utilizes hybridization of material and form as a primary mode for translating the coexistence and interdependence of contrasting social subgroups in Qatar. Through the design of footwear, this project interrogates the relationship between materiality and social status to create a fusion to emphasize dynamics of social divide.

INTRO- DUCTION



As someone born and raised in Qatar, I was exposed to a certain lifestyle that included conservative families, segregated communities and unnecessarily extravagant but deserted public places. When I travelled to other countries, like Singapore or Sydney, the fact that different people of different classes lived the same lifestyle felt very foreign to me. People from extremely different social classes took public transport together. Not everyone required helpers to carry their belongings behind them, and construction workers and laborers were of the same nationality as the contractor and owner of the building company. People celebrated festivals together in public, vendors and buyers were both

local, and sometimes even neighbors. Then, I would return to Qatar, and it all felt stratified again.

I would come back to a place where I could visually distinguish and place individuals in different social groups. I noticed how individuals would be treated differently while living in the same community solely based on their occupation or appearance. Growing up in the GCC region, I was exposed to an entire spectrum of social groups. The extreme ends of this spectrum included the locals; Qatari women and men, and the migrant workers; blue-collar and domestic help. Each of these four subgroups have culture-based and occupation-based uniforms.

In Qatar, construction workers conventionally have bright monochromatic attire with reflective patches, borders and extra pockets. This ensemble is usually paired with heavy-duty construction boots and, either a hardhat

or a makeshift headwrap. They have designated housing zones and their access to public spaces is restricted. Domestic workers in Qatar have a regional conservative version of the universal housemaid uniform that consists of a buttoned down loosely fitted long blouse, paired with straight-cut pants. The two-piece set is usually pastel and white in color, completed with plain slip-on shoes. Additionally, some uniforms also consist of a color-coordinated headscarf. They typically reside and commute with the families they work for, hence publicly only identifying as domestic workers.

There's a certain division between the men and women in this region, due to their culture and values. Qatar has been described as a "traditional Muslim society with deep cultural roots and daily life can be described as divided into two parallel societies—a male and a female one—with minimal interaction between

men and women."¹ This divide separates them into two distinct social categories with their own cultural 'uniform.' Qatari women are expected to dress, talk and present themselves in a certain way, or else they are looked down upon by their peers or elders. There is an internal pressure to fit in, and a dependence on material goods to acquire an elevated placement in this society. Their cultural 'uniform' consists of an abaya -traditionally a black loose-fitted full-length robe- which serves more purpose than just being a clothing choice as addressed by Ottsen and Berntsen in their 2014-journal article that notes that: "...veiling is used not only to hide physical beauty and the attractiveness of the Western clothing that lies beneath, but also to hide from older and more traditional locals who would be highly critical of what goes on beneath the veil."² However, this veiling is also known to be left partially open in order

to exhibit their trend following opulent fashion choices mentioned by Sobh, Belk and Gressel in their 2014-journal article: "This includes designer clothes, flamboyant (often red) high heels, expensive makeup and perfume, and designer jewelry."³ These statements suggest a clear representation of Qatari women based on the visual elements mentioned above as indicators of their identity.

Similar to the Qatari women, the "men are also culturally expected to conform to a uniform traditional white dress (the thoub) and head covering (the ghutra) in public."⁴ The ghutra, in Qatar, typically has a white and scarlet red houndstooth pattern that is easily noticeable along with a bright white and crisp straight-cut thobe. These cultural and occupational uniforms stand out in public, easily assigning them to their social placement. Such elements act as signifiers that inadvertently interpret

an individual's social belonging. Their placement creates a divide, resulting in the individual experiencing different treatments and opportunities.

In this thesis, I aim to highlight the coexistence and interdependence of contrasting lifestyles in the same location—the representation of luxury versus necessity. This thesis presents a visual exploration of the social stratification in Qatar portrayed through objects and materials. The intent of this project is to raise awareness of current norms within the social stratification and the active disenfranchisement imposed on the social values of current and future generations.

LITER- ATURE REVIEW



In this review, my focus is on the presence of social stratification in Qatar, including the evident disenfranchisement of social subgroups and how objects can function as social identifiers. The presence of social stratification has a demonstrative impact on quality of life. This thesis focuses on four different subgroups: construction workers, domestic workers, Qatari women and Qatari men. This section intends to describe the different lifestyles and predetermined societal roles.

Social Stratification in Qatar

People have always been stratified into different classes and subgroups from the start of civilization. In a complex society, social stratification divides people and families into distinct ranked groups (strata) on the basis of their wealth and status. Moreover, complex

societies can be further divided into groupings on the basis of language, religion, occupation, or place of residence.⁵ This structure of grouping individuals portrays a present-day example of social stratification in Qatar, where the existence of a rigid class system is still evident.

There is an extreme contrast in the population distribution between nationalities in Qatar. According to a report, outlining the population demographic, published in 2019, Qatari nationals make up approximately 10.5% of the demographic while 55.85% originate from South Asian countries. Qatar can be considered diverse as it is a temporary home to residents from approximately 94 nations.⁶ Apart from the statistics, an example of the presence of disenfranchisement has been published and added to the country's legislation. The 2019 article *'Investigating Housing distribution for*

the Expatriate Population in Doha, states "in 2010, the government announced a law that effectively banned blue-collar workers from living in certain parts of the city, labeling them 'Family Zones'."⁷ Although domestic workers are required to reside within an employer's home, all other blue-collar workers are not permitted to enter 'Family Zones' and have separate malls and restaurants in their areas. The active segregation imposed on certain social subgroups makes the class division among the population even more apparent.

Mikolai Napieralski, a Melbourne-based writer and former expat in Qatar, wrote about his observations in the online blog *Medium*. In his post, Napieralski describes his interpretations of the social subgroups and breaks them down into "five-tiers" of Qatar's society: Qataris, Western Expats, North African Expats, Asian Retail Staff and South Asian Workers & Laborers.⁸ Alex Eisa, a

blogger and expat in Qatar characterizes his observations of the social 'tiers', in seven different subgroups as the "Doha social food chain". According to Eisa, these include Qataris that are considered "real" Qatari by other Qataris, Qatari citizens that are not considered "real" Qataris by other Qataris (usually based on their tribal affiliations), Non-Qatari Skilled Arab Expats such as Khaleeji Arabs and Non-Khaleeji Arabs, Western Expats, Skilled Non-Western/Arabs Expats, Semi-Skilled Non-Western/Arab Expats and Unskilled Laborers.⁹ These observations from multiple perspectives aided in the selection of subgroups for my research agenda based on the contrasting social standing.

Migrant laborers and blue-collar workers comprise more than 90% of Qatar's workforce and are the lowest of all the tiers. According to a 2017 report by the Gulf Labour Markets and Migration Program, "Indians,

Nepalese, Filipinos, and Bangladeshis alone made up about 78 per cent of the foreign laborers, with 1,088,556 workers as of September 30, 2013."¹⁰ A 2017 BBC news article described Qatar as "a state built by immigrants, who are overwhelmingly young and male."¹¹ The majority of the population, consisting of the demographic identified above, is easily susceptible to being disenfranchised. According to several reports, laborers and domestic workers have been at risk of exploitation and abuse for years.^{12 13} "As it appears, the nationality or regional origin factor plays an essential role in defining the conditions of stay in Qatar...Nepalese and Bangladeshis are quasi-exclusively workers, thus clustered to the lowest tier of the occupation and income ladder (and presumably housed mostly in labour compounds)."¹⁴ Despite the clear presence of contrasting lifestyles, they actively continue to coexist in this region.

From these findings, the cohabitation of diverse social subgroups is what I aim to highlight and address in my thesis.

Lifestyle Differences of Social Groups

Class divisions—determined by numerous factors—dictate lifestyle options-, choices and necessities. Various social groups may choose a lifestyle based on the luxury of options, whereas others have a lifestyle developed out of necessity. There is a significant distinction between a lifestyle based on luxury versus one based on basic necessity and survival. With luxury defining their social class ranking, material possessions can be objects used as a social rank identifier. Since the socio-economic position and expenditure priorities of a housemaid is vastly different from a regular Qatari woman, their appearances based on social patterns are easily

distinguishable.

The reality of these lifestyle divisions in Qatar creates a significant divide between social subgroups. One can differentiate between a Qatari woman and a housemaid, or a Qatari man and a construction worker based on what they wear makes them belong to their distinctive social subgroup.

Social Identifiers in Qatar

Objects are perceived and identified through a connotative process. We understand the meaning and the function of an object through representation and associate certain elements to a broader context based in semiotics. "Semiotics is concerned with meaning; how representation, in the broad sense (language, images, objects) generates meanings or the processes by which we comprehend or attribute

meaning."¹⁵ For instance, if we see neon blue coveralls on construction workers, we begin to link that color and clothing to construction workers. Similarly, in Qatar, if we see a man wearing a ghutra & thobe (houndstooth patterned traditional headwear & white robe), we associate them with local Qatari men, as these are elements of their traditional garment. These elements become signifiers that generate meaning, in this case: the social identity of the wearer.

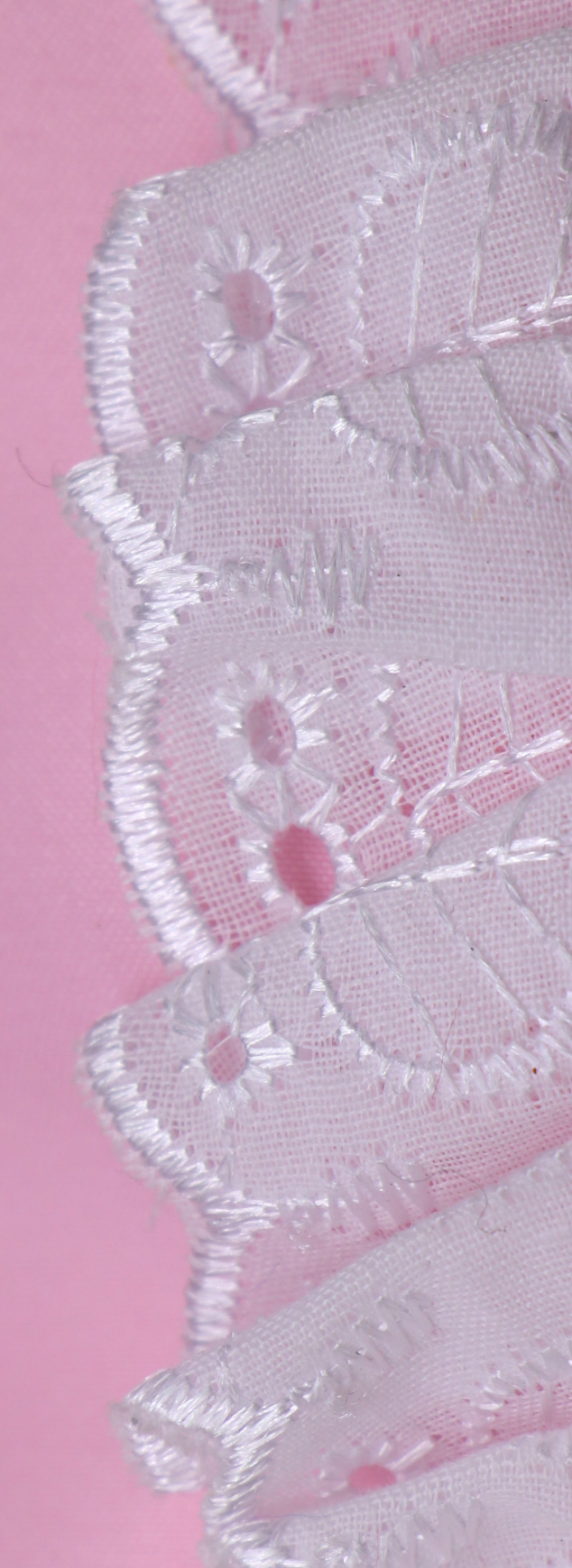
Material possessions play a significant role in identifying an individual within a social group, and its importance varies in different regions. According to designer Dr. Brian Curtin "...the significance of images or objects is not understood as a one-way process from image or object to the individual but the result of complex inter-relationships between the individual, the image or object and other factors such as culture

and society."¹⁶ In Qatar, different social groups can be identified through various material possessions, wearables and related objects. For instance, casual use of trendy luxury handbags, heels and jewelry paired with traditional abayas help identify local Qatari women.

Similarly, domestic helpers have a distinct conservative version of the universal housemaid uniform, usually pastel and white, and loosely fitted. These uniforms are so commonly used that it has been normalized and is recognizable. This shows how A person's social status can be identified through their clothing. For the purpose of this research project, I identified footwear as an object of exploration due its common link across the spectrum of classes in the social hierarchy. Each of the selected social subgroups have specific uniforms, however their footwear is unique and

exclusive to their category. The shoes are easily identifiable and classify an individual within vastly different social subgroups. For instance, the Na'al is associated with Qatari men as it is a part of their cultural 'uniform', while construction boots are typically worn by, and therefore associated with construction workers/laborers. Evident in its function, footwear is demonstrative of class divisions and defines a person's social position within the community. Therefore, these four social subgroups can be identified through four distinct types of footwear.

PREC- EDENT STUDIES



The selected precedents gave me diverse perspectives on how to approach the use of materials and objects as signifiers in various forms. These examples show how attention to detail can be effective when displaying visual projects the audience can relate to. Studying the narrative and method of each project has given me insight into the depth and process behind its making.

Generation Gap: Mike Campau

Generation Gap by Mike Campau (2016) is a retro-inspired series of renderings that portray nostalgia through popular objects from the past. The images feature objects that were significant and are easily recognizable. The objects act as signifiers of an earlier time and are only recognizable to a certain age group and audience. Campau describes the images as “images of my childhood—when we had to get up to change the channel,

collected enough stickers to fill a photo album (oh, and we had photo albums!), played video games on rainy days, used film to capture images, cranked up our boomboxes with homemade mixtapes, ran around with toy guns that looked like the real thing, and had to ‘dial’ a number.”¹⁷ Objects are able to act as signifiers of a specific time, place or category. He depicts the stories of objects, via photorealistic renderings with a strong narrative, to trigger a sense of reminiscence and nostalgia. Additionally, the project introduces objects that may be known by one generation but is unfamiliar to a larger demographic. It acts as a conversation starter between different and potentially segmented subgroups of people.

Using objects as signifiers, the way Campau does, directly informed the approach I have taken in this research project. Producing a set of footwear with a list of materials and distinguishable forms that relate to certain social subgroups in Qatar would demonstrate



Fig 1. *Generation Gap*, by Mike Campau

the coexistence and interdependence of the different subgroups and represent each of them through incorporating materials in footwear that categorizes the respective group. Campau’s project shows how minimalistic and straightforward the use of symbolic objects can be effective with a focus on details, composition and just a single

object (prop) per image. I aim to achieve an effective outcome by following a similar approach in portraying the significance of an object as Campau did with his images.

Rewind: Paul Rucker

In his exhibition, *Rewind*, artist Paul Rucker displays a collection of hybridized historical artifacts emblematic of slavery and white supremacy. The

exhibition includes 52 Ku Klux Klan robes constructed with a selection of fabrics latent with embedded contextual and cultural meaning, including military camouflage and traditional African



Fig?. *Rewind*, by Paul Rucker

patterns. In his 2018 Ted Talk, Rucker describes his use of the camouflage in its representation of the “stealth aspect of racism” and how it has the “power to hide and when it hides it’s kept safe, because it blends in.”¹⁸ His hybridized use of pattern and form presents a depiction of the past and the present reality of racism in America. In an interview with the New York City-based non-profit *Creative Capital*, Rucker states that his use of modern recognizable fabrics is “to show the changing form of systemic and structural racism.”¹⁹ Constructed using recognizable fabrics, this iconic garment creates controversy in a way that addresses the wrong side of history and stands up in remembrance of a former community. It makes the topic relevant and, to a certain extent, relatable to the current audience with the use of commercialized materials that build the narrative as well as activate the presence of unjust environments. This

successful incorporation of identifiable fabrics has a direct impact on my work, as I intend to use familiar materials that distinguish different social subgroups. This approach of modifying an existing template of clothing to represent respective subgroups in Qatar, using materials as visual identifiers in footwear, allows me to transform the object into a hybrid of signifiers.

Save Our Souls: Achilleas Souras

Save Our Souls is an art installation by Achilleas Souras in response to the refugee crisis taking place in Greece due to the influx of refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea from the Middle

East, particularly Syria. Souras collected and repurposed discarded life jackets used by refugees arriving on the Greek island of Lesbos, to create tents for shelter on land. In addition to the formal structure, the use of the discarded life jackets shows the significance and

symbolism of the object during and after the crisis.²⁰ It is also a direct commentary on the number of people displaced that made it possible for him to create these structures.

Save Our Souls is symbolic of the crisis and seeks to highlight and contribute to the refugees' desperate need for shelter. The life jacket represents displacement and embodies protection and survival for the refugees. In an interview with *Dezeen*, an online architecture and design magazine, Souras humanized each life jacket saying "...when I picked a jacket up, it stopped being just a material. When you hold the jacket in your hand and you smell the sea, you look at things through a different prism and you realize that every jacket represents a human life."²¹ Souras' description illustrates the power of an object's character, emotion, life and story. In this way, the objects become precious and highly valuable.

Souras' project shows how a piece of equipment or material can contain more meaning than just its ordinary function and become an identifier because of its association to a certain event or group. The use of unconventional materials to produce a different structure has had an impact on my project in which I intend to incorporate an unconventional approach to traditional footwear. By using a variety of materials and forms as signifiers of a particular social group, I will be able to hybridize specific shoes that are linked to different social subgroups. This shows how materials can be identifiers and contain more value/information than just its visual/utilitarian function, and in a way giving it character.



Fig³. *Save Our Souls*, by Achilleas Souras

Hybrid Radio: Mathieu Lehanneur for Lexon

Hybridized Radio by Mathieu Lehanneur for Lexon (2014) incorporates an unconventional material—woven rattan—into a conventional radio to create a contrast between materials and form that empower the notion of craft. Hybridizing the digital radio with the traditional craft of rattan adds meaning to the object, celebrating a combination of high-tech with traditional, skilled craft.²² The function of this object goes beyond the utilitarian nature of a traditional radio and its meta-function to explore the nature of its production. Lehanneur describes this product by stating that “digital intelligence is blended here with a raw material, what might be called smart and craft.”²³ Lehanneur’s approach illustrates that the potential of crafts might be underappreciated and can

be incorporated into everyday objects to celebrate forgotten craftsmanship techniques. Materials, foreign to the traditional composition of a given object, extend its function to illuminate hidden meanings. This unexpected incorporation of an unconventional material to a device adds value and heightens the materiality of an everyday object. This influenced my own investigations to be more experimental with the production of my project outcomes. The simplicity of the craft element on this project shows how a product can be minimal and impactful. The choice of limited elements in this product emphasize the details, specifically the woven rattan, as it is an unconventional component for a radio. This shows how the use of an unconventional component highlights its presence in an ordinary object.



Fig⁴. Hybrid Radio, by Mathieu Lehanneur



Fig⁹. Public areas initiative by Space, not Spikes

**Public areas initiative:
Space, not Spikes**

Space, not Spikes is an activist collective that aims to vocalize a common, inhumane practice that is overlooked due to its normalization in mainstream audiences. Their projects are responses to the notorious urban planning of the streets of London, that are known to integrate spikes in spaces inhabited by the homeless. These spikes create hostile environments for people who are in need of short-term shelter.²⁴ The group creates cozy settings in public spaces for the homeless to reside, focusing on inviting them instead of

dehumanizing the space. This shows the inclusivity of a disenfranchised population by giving them a place to temporarily reside.



Fig⁶. Public areas initiative by RainCity Housing

**Public areas initiative:
RainCity Housing**

In a similar endeavor, a Vancouver based company named *RainCity Housing* that provides housing for homeless people, initiated a program introducing public installations in the form of bus stop benches with statements like “*Find Shelter Here*”, and other benches that glow in the dark with the text, “*This is a bench,*” in the morning to, “*This is a bedroom,*” at night time.²⁵ This project addresses both the real issue of people struggling to find a place to sleep and the lack of empathy towards their situation.

These projects portray inclusivity, acceptance and respect towards less fortunate individuals. It also encourages empathy over hostility, while highlighting the normalization of unacceptable practices and active marginalization in today’s society. This aspect of coexisting with respect resonates with the intent of my thesis, as it is my aim to portray inclusivity of distinctly different social subgroups in Qatar through a hybridized series of footwear. Similar to this project, I modified the components of an existing footwear, through materials that add a different identity to the original footwear.

Each selected precedent works with functional materials and objects, layering meaning and symbolism to address socially relevant critiques. They have a narrative, some raising awareness, some reminiscing about a culture, tradition or craft, while others aim to change the perspective of existing memories or objects. Each of their approaches to making, ideation and outcomes informed my process of hybridization even further. However, since my project has a regional

context, it comes with a preconceived list of materials/components for production. I aim to achieve a similar level of audience relatability, as the list of materials have been identified from individuals residing in Qatar. This research will provide an alternate perception and highlight the coexistence and interdependence of a diverse range of socio-economic populations, instead of their differing lifestyles.

INVESTI- GATIONS



As opposed to Napieralski's interpretation and breakdown of social subgroups in Qatar into "five-tiers", I identified four subgroups through a series of observations: Qatari Men, Qatari Women, Laborers, and Domestic Workers. These subgroups exemplify the extremes of social status in Qatar and are distinct in the materials of their garments and objects in their everyday lives. I investigated the social strata of these subgroups through object and material exploration.

Object (Footwear) Exploration

Based on my observations, I identified footwear as a fundamental object distinguishing the different subgroups. Although it mainly functions as protection for the user, footwear is commonly seen as a status symbol revealing one's social class and group. While footwear is a common wearable,

the materials and function differ significantly between the subgroups in Qatar. From this point of exploration, I identified specific forms of footwear linked to each of the subgroups, based on either the user's occupational or cultural signifiers:

Qatari Men: Na'al (Traditional Arabic mens' footwear)

Qatari Women: Heels (Specifically high stilettos with red soles)

Laborers: Construction Boots (Mustard and brown, large heavy-duty boots)

Domestic Workers: Slip-ons (Generic scrubs-like footwear with elasticity)

Material Exploration

These identified forms of footwear are visually associated with the aforementioned subgroups in Qatar. For instance, construction boots in other countries are a familiar footwear and sometimes worn as a fashion statement. In Qatar construction boots are almost exclusively worn by blue-collar workers and laborers and not worn for fashion purposes. Similarly, Na'al is more specifically related to Qatari men as part of their unique cultural 'uniform'. This association supports my central aim, which is to highlight these objects as signifiers or social identifiers.

Materials commonly found in Qatar can be used to identify different subgroups. It is so distinctive that materials are symbols of a subgroup's socially recognized identity. Individuals in these subgroups may become indistinguishable in the absence of these elements in their profiles. Materials communicate the social standing of a person through colors, textures, longevity to use, necessity or luxury, with each material having its own characteristic.

Through observations I conducted across Qatar, I cataloged materials associated with each of the aforementioned subgroups. The distinguishing materials associated with each subgroup include:

Qatari Men: Ghutra fabric with distinctive houndstooth pattern (traditional headwear component), agal strands (traditional headwear component), leather and buckle from na'al (traditional mens' footwear)

Qatari Women: Quilted velvet and leather luxury bags, gold hardware, fastenings, fur insoles, red soles in high heel shoes.

Laborers: Orange construction vests, blue uniform, neon and reflective elements, artificial turf, mustard construction boots

Domestic Workers: Pink/pastel and white two-toned uniforms, frilly lace uniform decorations, snaps/buttons, traditional house rugs

After classifying the materials, I redesigned a series of footwear incorporating materials from one end of the social spectrum with materials from the other end of the spectrum. I manipulated and applied materials, considering pattern, color, and decorative elements into the recognizable footwear creating a hybridized end product. The intent of using a process of hybridization was to reflect a coexistence of these polar social subgroups and to explore the interactions between materials from these subgroups and their respective objects and materials. I started with a breakdown of each element in the selected footwear to maximize the opportunity of using a particular

signifier. Starting with a longer list of materials, I experimented with the way each material behaves when applied to forms of footwear. After extensive experimentation of usability and contextual relevance, I narrowed down the list to maintain focus for a refined outcome.

The hybridization applied in this project seeks to highlight how footwear consist of two functions; the form and utilitarian use; and personal belonging within a stratification of social groups. My intent in this approach was to recognize stratified communities in Qatar through equal representation at either end of the social spectrum. This approach allowed me to bring the four identified subgroups together in the same platform where their identifiers co-produced a unique outcome.

PRODUC- TION & OUT- COMES



After gathering the identified objects and materials, I experimented with their form, features and flexibility. For instance, a construction cone has very limited malleability, which prevented me from applying it on a footwear form that requires flexible materials. However, the reflective surface on the construction cone is pliable and could be applied on a form, signifying the construction cone. When choosing unconventional materials, I had to be careful with the materials' elasticity to the curved surfaces and contours of a shoe.

I created template patterns for parts of the construction of each footwear using components from the forms to direct material placement and integration. The form of the footwear had to be maintained since the base also acts as an identifier. For instance, heels have different styles like platform, wedges or stilettos and can have various elements such as straps, peep toes or lace-ups. Therefore, I used the different styles of heels as an

opportunity to experiment with the materials. Conversely, other identified footwear had rigid limitations, which meant any significant modification of the form could result in the footwear being unrecognizable. Hence, I decided to incorporate materials to the original form to maintain the footwear's identity and create a cohesive series.

These shoes act as hybrids of the social subgroups; representing elements of one subgroup through material and another through form. For instance, producing a Na'al using materials from a construction worker and vice versa. Figure (A) is a selection of initial sketches of the hybrid footwear showing the use of material on the existing forms. Figure (B) demonstrates the outcome of the footwear series, presented as a mirror image of the initial sketches.

I collaborated with a local cobbler, Abdul Karim, who has a stall at Souq al Ali. This collaboration, which requires working with unconventional footwear materials, resulted in a substantial amount of troubleshooting. Figures (2.1.1 - 2.1.5) showcase the footwear within the specific context of Qatar.

Footwear in Context



Fig^{2.11}. Footwear in Context: Construction na'al in a majlis



Fig^{2.12}. Footwear in Context: Qatari construction boot in site



Fig^{2.13}. Footwear in Context: Domestic worker uniform heel in a cafe



Fig^{2.14}. Footwear in Context: Luxury slip-ons in a maid's quarter



Fig^{2.1.5}. Footwear in Context: Entrance of a public mosque with the footwear hybrids in disguise

Among the footwear in context images, the first four are arranged in a diptych format as two sets of images showcasing contrast of the location, footwear and the individual itself. This emphasizes on the coexistence and interdependence of the subgroups. The contextual details in each image relates to the footwear material components in the other. Whereas, for Figure 2.1.5, the footwear hybrids are placed in disguise with regular shoes at the entrance of a mosque, a typical location for prayer time gathering, in Qatar.

The following Figures (2.2.1 - 2.2.12) showcase individual footwear shots focusing on the materiality and form.

Footwear Hybrids

Figure 2.2.1.: Construction worker x Qatari woman

Form: Peep-toe platform heel

Hybrid form signifiers:
Artificial turf insole
Reflective tape- construction vest and cone
Mustard leather- construction boot
Stitching, shoe lace and eyelet details



Fig^{2.2.1}. Construction worker x Qatari woman

Figure 2.2.2.: Construction worker x Domestic worker

Form: Slip-on shoe

Hybrid form signifiers:
Artificial turf insole
Reflective tape- construction barricade
Construction worker uniform fabric
Mustard leather- construction boot
Stitching, shoe lace and eyelet details



Fig^{2.2.2}. Construction worker x Domestic worker

Figure 2.2.3.: Construction worker x Qatari man

Form: Na'al

Hybrid form signifiers:
Artificial turf insole
Reflective tape- construction barricade
Reflective tape and neon fabric- construction vest
Construction worker uniform fabric
Mustard leather- construction boot
Stitching, shoe lace and eyelet details



Fig^{2.2.3}. Construction worker x Qatari man

Figure 2.2.4.: Qatari man x Construction worker

Form: Construction boot

Hybrid form signifiers:
Tan leather insole- na'al
Black leather
Ghutra- red and white fabric
Agal strands and tassel



Fig²²⁴. Qatari man x Construction worker

Figure 2.2.5.: Qatari man x Qatari woman

Form: Chunky T-strap heel

Hybrid form signifiers:
Tan leather insole- na'al
White ostrich leather straps and buckle- na'al
Ghutra- red and white fabric



Fig²²⁵. Qatari man x Qatari woman

Figure 2.2.3.: Qatari man x Domestic worker

Form: Slip-on shoe

Hybrid form signifiers:
Tan leather insole- na'al
Black leather
Ghutra- red and white fabric
Agal strands



Fig²²⁶. Qatari man x Domestic worker

Figure 2.2.7.: Domestic worker x Qatari man

Form: Na'al

Hybrid form signifiers:
Traditional indoor house rug insole
Pink fabric- domestic worker uniform
Filly lace and button details



Fig^{2.2.7}. Domestic worker x Qatari man

Figure 2.2.8.: Domestic worker x Qatari woman

Form: Loafer-style heel

Hybrid form signifiers:
Traditional indoor house rug insole
Pink and white fabric- domestic worker uniform
Filly lace details



Fig^{2.2.8}. Domestic worker x Qatari woman

Figure 2.2.9.: Domestic worker x Construction worker

Form: Construction boot

Hybrid form signifiers:
Traditional indoor house rug insole
Pink and white fabric- domestic worker uniform
Filly lace details



Fig^{2.2.9}. Domestic worker x Construction worker

Figure 2.2.10.: Qatari woman x Qatari man

Form: Na'al

Hybrid form signifiers:

- Fur- insole
- Quilted leather and velvet- luxury handbag
- Gold hardware details- jewelry
- Red sole- luxury shoe sole & lining colorway



Fig^{2.2.10}. Qatari woman x Qatari man

Figure 2.2.11.: Qatari woman x Construction worker

Form: Construction boot

Hybrid form signifiers:

- Fur- insole
- Quilted leather, crocodile leather, plain black leather- luxury handbag
- Gold hardware aglet- jewelry
- Satin shoelace
- Red sole- luxury shoe sole & lining colorway



Fig^{2.2.11}. Qatari woman x Construction worker

Figure 2.2.12.: Qatari woman x Domestic worker

Form: Slip-on shoe

Hybrid form signifiers:

- Fur- insole
- Quilted leather, velvet fabric- luxury handbag
- Gold turn-lock hardware on leather strap
- Gold hardware details- jewelry
- Red sole- luxury shoe sole & lining colorway



Fig^{2.2.12}. Qatari woman x Domestic worker

CONCLU- SION



This thesis explores the context of interdependent stratified subgroups coexisting in Qatar through a hybridization of footwear in form and material. It addresses and recognizes the disenfranchised expat communities alongside the local population, i.e., laborers, domestic workers, Qatari men and Qatari women. These subgroups were selected as they represent opposite ends of the social spectrum. Using footwear, as an object of exploration and materials as social identifiers, this project portrays the contrasting social subgroups within Qatar. This series of footwear highlights the social hierarchy and division, opens dialogue, and introduces this topic to a wider audience through the use of recognizable materials to highlight the hybridized forms. It shows the existence

of a social class system that segregates the population based on material signifiers that are distinct for each subgroup in the form of garments and objects in their everyday wardrobe.

Reflections

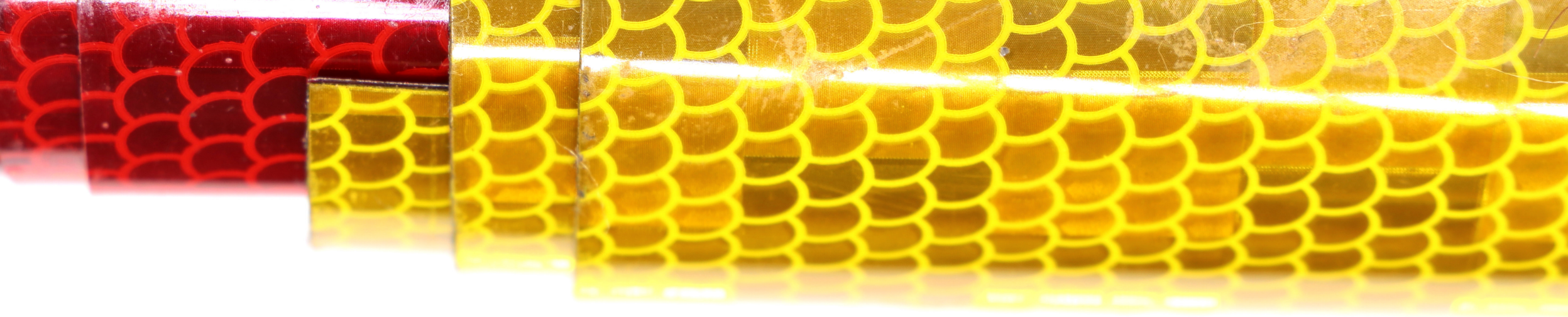
The presence of a social strata in this region is very apparent throughout my investigations, observations and background research. This topic could be investigated through a vast number of processes with a wide range of outcomes. This project allowed me to focus on diverse coexistence. It created opportunities for me to work with different subgroups that provided me with more knowledge about each of these class divides and the impact on their lives.

Future Directions

For further development, I want to capitalize on personal storytelling approaches to convey anecdotal connections between an individual's social status and their personal belongings. This would give the audience an insight into different lives through a different and more personal perspective by having them narrate their own experiences and stories.

I foresee expanding this approach into a video series to share stories of individuals from diverse social backgrounds in countries outside of Qatar. I will continue to develop my

platform in an effort to voice personal stories from various social classes through visual storytelling and the semantics of their material belongings. This could further expose more nuanced conditions in the social strata in different social, cultural and political constructs.



REFER- ENCES

Endnotes

¹ Christina Lundsgaard Ottsen and Dorthe Berntsen, "The Cultural Life Script of Qatar and across Cultures: Effects of Gender and Religion," *Memory* 22, no. 4 (May 19, 2014): 390–407, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2013.795598>.

² Rana Sobh, Russell Belk, and Justin Gressel, "Mimicry and Modernity in the Middle East: Fashion Invisibility and Young Women of the Arab Gulf," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 17, no. 4 (July 4, 2014): 392–412, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2013.865166>.

³ Sobh, Belk, and Gressel.

⁴ Sobh, Belk, and Gressel.

⁵ David Toye, "World History Connected | Vol. 1 No. 2 | David L. Toye: The Emergence of Complex Societies: A Comparative Approach," accessed February 14, 2020, <https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uillinois.edu/1.2/toye.html>.

⁶ Jure Snoj, "Population of Qatar by Nationality in 2019," August 15, 2019, <http://priyadsouza.com/population-of-qatar-by-nationality-in-2017/>.

⁷ Hatem Ibrahim et al., "Investigating Housing Distribution for the Expatriate Population in Doha," *Urban, Planning and Transport Research* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 34–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21650020.2019.1635520>.

⁸ Mikolai Napieralski, "Qatar's Class System Explained...", *Medium* (blog), June 10, 2018, <https://medium.com/@mikolainapieralski/qatars-class-system-explained-2f3b68c602d1>.

⁹ Alex Eisa, "The Social Hierarchy of Doha | Musings from Doha," accessed February 14, 2020, <https://musingsfromdoha.wordpress.com/2014/10/01/the-social-hierarchy-of-doha/>.

¹⁰ "Demography, Migration, and the Labour Market in Qatar, by Françoise De Bel-Air," accessed April 4, 2020, https://gulfmigration.org/media/pubs/exno/GLMM_EN_2017_03.pdf.

¹¹ Rory Cellan-Jones, "Five Surprising Facts about Qatar," *BBC News*, June 5, 2017, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40163636>.

¹² "Qatar 2018," accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/qatar/report-qatar/>.

¹³ Human Rights Watch | 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor | New York, and NY 10118-3299 USA | t 1.212.290.4700, "Domestic Workers' Rights in Qatar," June 26, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/26/domestic-workers-rights-qatar>.

¹⁴ "Demography, Migration, and the Labour Market in Qatar, by Françoise De Bel-Air."

¹⁵ Brian Curtin, "Semiotics and Visual Representation," 2009, /paper/Semiotics-and-Visual-Representation-Curtin/e10668409de8b1ab9b1965fee0a94432699e074d.

¹⁶ Curtin.

¹⁷ Mike Campau, "Mike Campau: Digital Artist - Combining Photography and CGI - Generation Gap," accessed March 22, 2020, <https://mikecampau.com/generation-gap>.

¹⁸ Paul Rucker, "The Symbols of Systemic Racism -- and How to Take Away Their Power," accessed March 22, 2020, https://www.ted.com/talks/paul_rucker_the_symbols_of_systemic_racism_and_how_to_take_away_their_power.

¹⁹ Paul Rucker, "Paul Rucker Calls Attention to the Normalization of Systemic Racism Through His Art Practice," interview by Alex Teplitzky, accessed March 22, 2020, <https://creative-capital.org/2018/08/16/paul-rucker-uses-art-and-history-to-call-attention-to-disparities-around-race/>.

²⁰ Achilleas Souras, "Save Our Souls Emergency Shelter / Achilleas Souras," *ArchEyes*, July 28, 2016, <https://archeyes.com/save-our-souls-project-achilleas-souras/>.

²¹ Tucker, "16-Year-Old Artist Builds Igloos with Refugee Lifejackets for Moroso Installation."

²² Caula.

²³ Mathieu Lehanneur, "Mathieu Lehanneur | Hybrid," Mathieu Lehanneur, accessed March 22, 2020, <http://www.mathieulehanneur.fr/project/hybrid-191>.

²⁴ Tim Chester, "Activists Transform Anti-Homeless Spikes into a Bed in London," *Mashable* (blog), accessed March 22, 2020, <https://mashable.com/2015/07/22/homeless-spikes-london-bedroom/>.

²⁵ Aaron Taube, "These Bus Benches Transform Into Homeless Shelters In A Matter Of Seconds," *Business Insider*, accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/these-bus-benches-turn-into-homeless-shelters-2014-7>.

List of Figures

All figures courtesy of the author unless noted.

Fig¹. Campau, Mike. "Mike Campau: Digital Artist - Combining Photography and CGI - Generation Gap." Accessed March 22, 2020. <https://mikecampau.com/generation-gap>.

Fig². Rucker, Paul. "REWIND, A Solo Exhibition by Paul Rucker." Accessed March 22, 2020. <https://rewindexhibition.com/>.

Fig³. Tucker, Emma. "16-Year-Old Artist Builds Igloos with Refugee Lifejackets for Moroso Installation." Dezeen, April 6, 2017. <https://www.dezeen.com/2017/04/06/achilleas-souras-builds-igloos-refugees-life-jackets-morosos-sos-save-souls-installation-milan-design-week/>.

Fig⁴. Caula, Rodrigo. "Woven Rattan Smart Radio by Mathieu Lehanneur for Lexon." Designboom | Architecture & Design Magazine, January 27, 2014. <https://www.designboom.com/technology/hybrid-smart-radio-by-mathieu-lehanneur-for-lexon-features-woven-rattan-01-27-2014/>.

Fig⁵. Chester, Tim. "Activists Transform Anti-Homeless Spikes into a Bed in London." Mashable (blog). Accessed March 22, 2020. <https://mashable.com/2015/07/22/homeless-spikes-london-bedroom/>.

Fig⁶. Taube, Aaron. "These Bus Benches Transform Into Homeless Shelters In A Matter Of Seconds." Business Insider. Accessed March 22, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/these-bus-benches-turn-into-homeless-shelters-2014-7>.

