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Abstract
This paper focuses on transnational education (TNE) and student academic identity development. In recent years many North-American universities opened branch campuses abroad. This phenomenon resulted in growing interest in TNE. However, for the most part, the body of research on TNE reflects the perspective of the home institution, which privileges focus on curriculum design and program administration. There is still need for studies from an ecological perspective. Arguably, more attention needs to be given to the lived experience of students negotiating disparate discourses and conflicting cultural value systems, especially in the Middle East. The author presents a case study of a university on a mega-campus in Doha, Qatar to explore students' perceptions of their identity negotiation in a new complex social and symbolic space of a TNE campus. Discussing the findings of an exploratory research project, she asks what pedagogical practices can best help students to function between languages and cultures.
Keywords: gender, identity, sociocultural, symbolic competence, transnational education

Introduction

Recent years have seen not only a significant increase in internalization of education and but also opening of numerous American branch schools abroad. This phenomenon has resulted in an exponential growth of interest in Transnational Education (TNE). However, to quote Knight and McNamara (2015), "To date, the majority of research, discussion, and debate on TNE has been from the sending/home country perspective"(p.5). Looking through this lens privileges focus on program administration and quality control, i.e. issues such as curriculum development and implementation, concerns about standards and assessment, and preoccupation with protecting the reputation of the home institution. What often gets overlooked is the lived experience of TNE students, especially the affective domain of resolving identity issues on an international branch campus.

As argued by Miliszewska &Sztendur (2010), student attitudes, beliefs and experiences require more critical attention. This is true in all educational contexts and perhaps even more so in TNE. So far, the role of affect has been studied extensively in terms of its impact on student motivation and academic success (MacIntyre,2002; Arnold, J. 2011; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).Likewise, the role of affect as been investigated in foreign language teaching and English language teaching, where researchers emphasizethe role of desire in learning a foreign language (Kramsch, 2009) or postulate attending to differences and similarities between emotion scripts in the mother tongue and a foreign language (Dewaele,2015;Dewaele&MacIntyre, 2014; Pawlenko, 2012,2013). Nevertheless, as of now, little attention has been paid to the affective domain of TNE education. In particular, issues around student identity negotiation on transnational campuses in the Gulf region remain understudied.

Transplanting curricula into disparate sociocultural contexts raises a host of problems. Challenges can arise not only because of varying degrees of students' academic readiness but also because of a misalignment of goals and expectations due to different ideas about the meaning and value of education. Clearly, all freshmen need to learn how to become members of the academic community and, as evidenced by the literature, many find it a struggle. Schools produce cultures and identities (Hymes, 1972; Norton, 2010).There is a direct link between student identity and engagement with the curriculum (Van Lier, 2010) and, undoubtedly, students who perceive their academic identities as being at odds with their sociocultural identities will find it harder to succeed academically. The process of acculturation is even potentially more complex in the case of TNE students, as differences between their anticipated academic self and sociocultural self can be more pronounced and difficult to negotiate.
To feel empowered to enter the symbolic exchange process, these students may need explicit guidance on how to operate in and between disparate cultural discourses.

Studying on an international branch campus involves a great deal of culture learning. It requires at least some familiarity with the culture of the country and school that exports its curricula, with the culture of the specific field of study the students choose, and with the culture of the branch institution, in itself an amalgam of the imported and local cultures. It is important to ask how TNE students view this kind of learning nd how it can be facilitated and assessed. The literature on study abroad clearly demonstrates that culture learning is not a given and does not happen through symbiosis. On the contrary, for an unprepared student a sojourn abroad can lead to confirming stereotypes or even developing new ones. It has also been shown that students

need a safe space to reflect on their adjustment and benefit from explicit instruction designed to develop intercultural communication skills. The case of TNE students is not different in this regard. Helping students develop this competence is usually seen as the domain of liberal arts education. In off-shore operations, especially in schools with no liberal arts departments, the task of encouraging self-reflection, self-expression and a critical stance towards cultures frequently falls to writing instructors, who function as de facto mediators between languages and cultures. Thus, it is important to ask what pedagogical practices can most effectively introduce students to the discourses dominant in North American education as well as create a safe space in which they can deal with the affective domain of their academic identity development. The present paper considers this question based /in light of a preliminary research project conducted at a TNE institution in the Arabian Gulf.

Case study: a North-American branch campus in Qatar
  Context and purpose
Any transnational campus is a new type of social and symbolic space, rich in meanings and rife with potential tensions. It is this entity, into which students carry their personal and socio-cultural narratives, that affords the development of their academic identities. To examine how the physical, social and symbolic space created by the local Qatari sponsor and the North-American branch schools intersects with students' habitat, and what kind of challenges it creates one needs to begin with a brief overview of the goals and history of Education City (EC).
The EC campus constitutes a unique cultural and institutional setting, different not only from typical American campuses but also from international branch schools in other Gulf countries. Like other Arabian Gulf countries, Qatar has been undergoing rapid industrialization and modernization fueled by its oil and gas revenues. This small Gulf kingdom has also been trying to become a regional leader in science and technology, and an important player on the international scene. *Qatar National Vision 2030*, the document that formulates the government's ambitious long term goals, postulates not only economic growth and environmental protection but also major sociocultural changes, "unlocking the human potential of Qatari citizens" (*Qatar National Vision 2030*). Recognizing that this goal is predicated upon development of education, the country's leadership initiated the process of reforming primary and secondary schools and developing undergraduate and graduate level education. Hence the construction of Education City, "a mega-university made up of cherry picked Western HEIs aimed to serve the Arab world" (Asquith, 2006, p.24).

  Over the period of just a few years, the 1,000 hectare campus, a brainchild of Qatar Foundation, became home to Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUQ),Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (WCMC-Q) in 2001, Texas A&M University at Qatar (TAMUQ) in 2003), Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q) in 2004,Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar (SFS-Qatar) in 2005, and Northwestern University Qatar in 2008.It was clear from the beginning that in addition to turning Qatar into a vibrant research hub, EC was to play a transformative role in the life of Qatari society. Called "more important than any economic project", and part of Qatar's plan to "reclaim the luster of Arab education after centuries in the dark ages" (Asquith, 2006, p.23) it offered unprecedented educational opportunities to Qatari youth, especially to women. It was also a means of rhetorical persuasion in the narrative of change, branding Doha as the place where tradition meets modernity.

EC presents a rather unique TNE model. The host country gave the North-American universities considerable autonomy and a promise of collaboration. Each school was asked to teach the same curriculum and use the same admission and graduation criteria as on their home campus. At the same time, it was deemed essential that importing foreign education pedagogy not undermine national character and identity. Consequently, the mission has been defined as promoting "constructive dialogue and openness towards other cultures in the context of Arab and Islamic identity" (*Qatar National Vision 2030*). This ideological directive is just as visible in EC logos and the design of the physical landscape as it is evident in its promotional materials and signage. A campus visitor cannot fail to see the key words from the EC discourse - critical thinking, creativity, intellectual inquiry and innovation – repeated verbatim in the signage dominating EC's linguistic landscape American style education emphasizes critical inquiry and transferrable skills; at its best, it strives to develop intercultural competence in addition to disciplinary knowledge. Qatar Foundation sponsors activities, initiatives and events that provide platforms for exchange of ideas. To give a few examples, one can mention the CIRS lecture series at Georgetown University, the Doha Debates, modeled on the Oxford Union Debates, the student-led club, Education City 'Majliss'4 or frequent all-campus public lectures, symposia and conferences. Thus, overall, the host's goals align well with those of western liberal education. By design, Education City is meant to be a model environment for interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue.

Successful as it is, this bold educational experiment invites a closer scrutiny. As a stage for identity performance the space of EC presents many challenges that need to be explored. It teems with intersecting, potentially conflicting cultural narratives. While it might be tempting to talk about a divide between the North American culture and Qatari heritage and identity, the reality is much more complex. The presence of international students from other countries in the Gulf region and beyond, and of faculty and staff who hail from virtually every part of the world gives the campus its cosmopolitan character but adding to the repertoire of possible identities dos not necessarily resolve the issue of othering. In this context, there are many questions that have not been answered yet. How aware are EC students of QF's goal of creating an intercultural dialogue and to what extent do they identify with it? How do they position themselves in the new symbolic field the campus affords and how do they conceptualize authenticity in their identity performance? Do they see their academic identity as shaped by westernization and globalization? In their opinion, is the issue of their academic and future professional identity development adequately addressed? Answers to such questions can only come from large-scale studies. The present inquiry, with its scope narrowed to one particular school in EC and the learning environment of one course, merely aims to signal some key issues for future exploration.

Student profile
To preface the discussion, one needs to stress that while EC universities encounter many similar challenges and opportunities, they obviously differ in their goals, curricula and student profiles. Moreover, although WCM-Q follows the curriculum of WCM in New York City, it is also different from any medical school in the U.S. Candidates for American medical schools apply with an undergraduate degree in hand. WCM-Q, on the other hand, offers a six-year program medical program(for most Qatari students a de facto seven-year program, since they have to complete the Foundation Program to be academically ready). Thus, high school graduates, some as young as 16, enter as undergraduates and progress to the medical program.

This has important consequences. Firstly, there is the issue of student maturity level. Moreover, the need to intensify the pace of preparation for the medical curriculum prevents students from taking electives, cross-registering in liberal arts courses on campus or even participating in non-medicine related extra-curricular activities. Only freshman composition and Medical Ethics bring breadth to the science heavy pre-med curriculum. Not surprisingly, WCM-Q students are very invested in becoming physicians. Combined with relatively low prestige of liberal arts education in the region, this attitude also leads to initial disinterest in anything that is not perceived as medicine related.

To complete the WCM-Q student profile, one needs to touch upon some of the factors commonly mentioned in the literature as impacting college success and development of academic identity: ethnicity, gender and academic preparation

WCM-Q students are predominantly Muslim and of Arab descent. However, in terms of nationality and cultural background, the WCM-Q student body is strikingly diverse. The steadily increasing number of Qataris (currently close to 40 % if one counts the Foundation Program participants) is counterbalanced by a high percentage freshmen born in the US, Canada and Australia. For example, the incoming class of 2022 comprises citizens of 12 countries. This diversity, a source of strength and enrichment, brings together people with very different educational and personal experiences.

Moreover, all of WCM-Q students are bilingual and some speak three or even four languages. They are also well travelled, though few take trips independently, and since Qatari population is very diversified, they are exposed to disparate ethnicities and cultures on daily basis.

Most come from a culture that privileges oral discourse but their literacy levels vary depending on the schools they attended. Before coming to WCM-Q, many were exposed to the monologic style of teaching and learning, known for its emphasis on memorization at the expense of critical thinking. Some are also first generation college students. In some cases, lack of literacy skills and of so-called general knowledge can hamper their progress. Annual surveys of freshmen writing students at WCM-Q confirm that they do not do much reading and writing in high schools, especially in government schools in Qatar, and often do not know how to use and document sources. More importantly, before joining WCM-Q they were exposed to the monologic style of teaching and learning, known for its emphasis on memorization at the expense of critical thinking.

Last but not least, WCM-Q students' academic identity development is also impacted by socio-culturally shaped beliefs regarding gender. Like other schools in Education City, WCM-Q is co-educational, presenting a new type of setting for many Qatari students. Although the government strongly supports education and employment of Qatari females, studying or working in mixed gender environments is still controversial among the more conservative members of the society. For female students, who consistently constitute roughly 50% of the student body at WCM-Q, developing academic identity means dealing with issues related to socio-culturally shaped gender roles. The Qatari society values tribal loyalty and forms a tightly knit community in which the voice of public opinion matters quite a lot. Although Qatari female and male students do not live in the campus dorms, they spend most of the time in the social space that is

in some ways very different from the home environment they return to at the end of the day. Non-Qatari students can also have a sense of conflicting cultural value systems.

As this profile illustrates, what is of interest for American students may be perceived as irrelevant, inappropriate or unrealistic in Qatar. It is important to remember that effective tailoring of imported curricula and pedagogical practices to local needs should include questions about students' subjective realities, i.e. "perceptions, emotions, attitudes and values" (Kramsch, 2009, p.7).

Method
The research questions for the study were formulated based on the data collected from published collections of WCM-Q student essays *Qira'at* and course related work (essays, journal entries, assigned reflection pieces and mini auto-ethnographies) gathered over the period of four years, from 2012 to 2016. Except for the published material, all the collected data was de-identified and subsequently analyzed using the Grounded Theory. The main themes that emerged from the data formed the basis for a brief survey and semi-formal interviews with self-identified students.

To insure maximum participation, a paper questionnaire was distributed directly to students rather than sent electronically. The questionnaire asked the participants to assess the importance of discussing their identity formation and consider which of the factors such as gender, culture, family background, academic preparation, and the social and symbolic space of the campus impact their academic and professional identity development. Altogether, 35 questionnaires were collected.

The qualitative part of the research project involved 20-minute semi-structured interviews with students who volunteered to explain or expand on their answers to the questions in the survey. In total, 15 interviews took place. The participants chose to elaborate on the impact of globalization, English as the language of instruction and as a lingua franca in Qatar, cultural belief regarding gender roles, and the need to negotiate disparate socio-cultural scripts in building an academic and professional identity.

Findings
The first observation issuing from the study was the degree of the participants' interest in exploring their identity. Since in their previous educational experience the topic was insufficiently addressed, if not completely ignored, they welcomed an opportunity to discuss it. At the same time, due to the sensitivity of some issues related to globalization and westernization, they wanted a safe space for reflection and exchange of ideas.

The data showed that WCM-Q students frame their experience in terms of success, achievement, and being members of an elite cohort. They are proud to attend a competitive school and follow a rigorous curriculum. Not surprisingly, they see the education they are getting as a key to social success and a leadership role in shaping the future of their country. This proves especially true in the case of Qatari female students, who emphasize being different from the generation of their mothers and grandmothers due to new opportunities and ambitious future goals.

Like their Western peers, WCM-Q students are technologically savvy, immersed in social media, and familiar with image management strategies. Overall, they are interested in difference and tend to question simple binary categories. However, Qatari students seldom see themselves as bi/multicultural. While enthusiastically embracing the narrative of change they also worry about preserving their ethnic and cultural heritage. Regardless of nationality, the participants defined globalization as Westernization, and 12 % of them associated it with imperialism.

The participants were most eager to talk about gender as a factor in their identity development. Changing gender roles can be problematic for both male and female students. Yet, unquestionably, women's identity performance is much more closely scrutinized. There is no unmarked woman on a transnational campus in the Gulf, where sartorial choices and body language seldom go unnoticed. In addition, WCM-Q female students face the challenge of preparing to enter a non-traditional field. Although medicine is regarded as a prestigious choice for males, more conservative members of the Qatari society view it as a less commendable choice for their daughters or nieces. Accordingly, 85 % of the study participants voiced concerns about being able to successfully balance personal and professional life and 28% mentioned that their career choice might negatively impact their chances of getting married. The interviews clearly proved the significance the participants attached to being able to exercise agency; this was especially important to women, who want to redefine their roles within - not outside - Islamic teaching, by seeking a more modern interpretation of the Quran.

Addressing the topic of EC campus as a model of intercultural and interdisciplinary communication the participants stressed how much they enjoy the "Western" style of teaching defined by them as "class discussions" and less formal interactions with faculty. They also elaborated on the importance of building critical thinking skills. However, while they appreciated the dialogic style of learning and teaching in their classes, they did not see enough dialogue between the institutions located on the same campus, the students from the different EC schools or EC and the community at large.

Discussion
Due to its a small sample, the preliminary research study presented here cannot offer any conclusive answers or solutions. However, it is hoped that it can be used to open a much needed discussion. All learning is situated and educational outcomes are context bound. In this case study, the students' need to negotiate different cultural discourses in daily interactions in and outside of class is undisputable. The participants also proved to be fully aware that in the future, as healthcare practitioners, they will face a similar challenge. Living and learning between languages and cultures is not easy and may exact an emotional toll, especially in the case of younger students. Needless to say, institutional support in the form of counseling, awareness raising activities or intercultural communication workshops can be of great help. But it is also essential that structured, critical reflection on lived experience be incorporated into - and taught across - the curriculum.

To succeed, TNE students need to become critical and self-reflective. Teachers can only serve as mediators in the process of building this habit of mind, but that does not diminish their responsibility for providing students with the tools needed to build symbolic competence.

Originally defined by Kramsch& Whiteside (2008), the concept of symbolic competence has recently been reformulated by Vinall as "the potential to become aware of and critically reflect on and act on the crossing of multiple borders between linguistic codes and cultural meanings, the self and others, various timescales and historical contexts, and power structures" (2016, p.3).This is exactly the type of competence and disposition WCM-Q need and that most TNE students would benefit from. At present, the most obvious place for teaching symbolic competence can be found in the liberal arts courses, especially in freshmen writing classes. After all, as Cumming observes, "Writing is where language, culture and identity intersect" (2013). Hence, writing instructors who work with international students may want to supplement the traditional focus on teaching rhetorical patterns with assignments developing symbolic competence.

The entry points into perspectives fostering symbolic competence in a writing class can be found in activities that highlight reframing and repositioning; this would allow students to develop what "a multilingual imagination, definedas "the capacity to envision alternative ways of remembering an event, of telling a story, of participating in a discussion, of empathizing with others, of imagining their future and ours, and ultimately of defining and measuring success and failure"(Kramsch, 2009, p. 201).Emphasis on building symbolic competence aligns with the principles of liberal arts education and fits in well with the institutional goals of promoting critical thinking and intercultural dialogue. Last but not least, it prepares students for becoming global citizens.

Conclusion
This paper aims to open discussion on developing identity on a TNE campus rather than to offer definitive answers or specific conclusions. It would be a mistake to overlook the affective domain of student academic identity. While more research is needed to find effective pedagogical practices that develop and assess symbolic competence it seems reasonable to propose that helping students explore the interplay between their sociocultural identity and academic identity hones their critical thinking skills and eases the process of acculturation.

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