Triply Detached

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This issue of *Al-Raida* deals with the "Other" from a triply detached perspective. Writing about ethnic and linguistic minorities, immigrants and "guest workers" in the Middle East and North Africa challenges the researcher and author to see the Arab world as more than merely the object of Western expropriation and Orientalist misinterpretation. The peoples of our region have well demonstrated their ability to be both the victim and the victimizer, oft times simultaneously.

To date, the masculine gaze predominates when considering foreign cultures. Seeing non-Arabs from a gendered perspective undermines the common-sensical assumption that foreignness and alienation are first and foremost a male prerogative. The intercultural implications of issues as varied as income, mobility, nationality, family, cultural heritage and access to information can not be understood if gender mainstreaming is not placed at the very heart of our study of them.

Finally, scholarly reflection on the position of non-Arab women means writing about power and prejudice. And here, the well worn adage that racism (and sexism as well) can be defined as "prejudice plus power" can serve us well when grappling with the thorny issues of personal involvement and subjectivity. Can and should a writer - or guest editor for that matter - attempt objectivity, or is subjectivity a unique and valuable scientific method desperately needed in both the study of gender and cultural difference? "Betroffenheit", a term commonly used in my native Austria[1], puts a name to this phenomenon; i.e. the desire to deal with topics that directly affect our daily lives, that are woven into our privileged position as academics, compiling knowledge in the service of a system that is still so obviously based on our ability to secure a definition monopoly, to (pre-)judge and define others, and thereby perpetuate our power and their subjugation.

When I suggested compiling a file on non-Arab women *to* the *Al-Raida* board, I based my suggestion on several decades of personal experience, both as an academic and political activist, working with indigenous and immigrant minorities in Central Europe. As one of the few male researchers and trainers in the field of gender studies in Austria, I was acutely aware of the need to highlight the divergent ways in which women and men experience not belonging to the dominant group in society. I was also intrigued by the opportunity of editing an issue of this journal as a non-Arab and non-woman living in the Arab world now for almost half a decade.

As a Western, white, male academic, my position in Lebanon is privileged indeed. Having married into a well situated Beiruti family, I enjoy the fruits of a network of close ties on both sides of my wife's family. As anyone even faintly acquainted with the region is aware, without these connections nothing moves in Lebanon. Nevertheless, I found myself being drawn, like so many other Westerners in the Middle East, to the plight of the immigrants and "guest workers" at the bottom of the socio-economic pile; the Asian and African domestics, unskilled manual laborers and street vendors who enjoy few basic human rights and often live on the margins of society. My experience in the field of migration and minority studies in Austria has made me aware that life on the cultural sidelines of mainstream society almost automatically leads to an affinity with others who find themselves in the same boat. Thus, I don't find it surprising that many of my friends here in Lebanon are non-Arabs; along with a variety of Western immigrants, mainly Armenians from the Middle East. These contacts proved helpful during the often daunting process of finding contributors able to cover all the topics necessary for this issue. Finally, being a non-Arab male has proven to be an unexpected disadvantage when starting a household and family in Lebanon. Not only did my wife's Lebanese nationality in no way facilitate my immigration procedures, but more significantly, the predominant patrilineal legal system robs her of her birthright to pass her citizenship on to our future children. I have learned to appreciate the wisdom of the internationally sanctioned concept of reciprocity.

The most interesting challenge encountered while preparing the call for papers for this issue was the need to define the term Arab. There was some contention with respect to whether multiethnic countries like Morocco and Iraq should even be considered Arab. Initially, I felt that the term "predominantly Arab" would have been more accurate, as would be the case when carrying out a parallel study in a European setting. This question, along with determining the usefulness of religion when defining "Arabness," was avoided by choosing a political and linguistic definition for this category. The Arab world is seen here as being made up of all those countries that are currently members of the Arab League. Non-Arab women are defined as those who either do not speak Arabic as their mother tongue or who do not use it as their language of day-to-day discourse. This category includes women who have lost their ability to speak their (non-Arabic) mother tongue as the result of cultural genocide. Thus, the issues of power and dominance, with respect to the definition monopoly, have remained largely neglected in the interest of expediency and because of the need to adapt to the current, politically unstable situation in the region. One exception was made to the above mentioned, relatively restrictive and uncritical definition, namely the daughters of Arab women and non-Arab men who have been denied their Arab nationality because of the patrilineal family laws predominant in the Arab world.

In order to delve more closely into the issue of "Betroffenheit", i.e. the manner in which we all, as scholarly writers working in a Western context, deal with the way we are affected by both gender and cultural difference, a comparatively large number of articles were dedicated to the Western vantage point vis-à-vis the Arab world. My goal was to discover – through the eyes of non-Arab female scholars and travelers – whether the "kind of intellectual authority over the Orient within Western culture," so aptly described by Edward Said [2], is affecting not only Western women, but also Arab women working in Western academia. Here, an attempt was made to pay equal attention to both the issue of gender and the way in which cultural difference is experienced on both sides of the cultural divide between "Orient" and "Occident." The intended result of this sub-collection of articles is to determine whether an "encounter" between equals is actually possible or whether the Saidian "authority" enjoyed by women from the West will always tilt the playing field in their favor.

This file is a modest first step in the direction of a better understanding of Otherness in the Arab world. It is by its very nature highly eclectic and lacking in comprehension and balance. To be considered a success, it should, however, have illustrated that the Arab world is a major cultural and socio-economic center in its own right. This status brings with it not only international recognition, but also the responsibility to deal equitably with those members of society who, for whatever reason, have been marginalized, underrepresented or outright excluded from mainstream society.

End Notes

1. Born in 1956 in Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA into a Swiss-Austrian family, I immigrated to Salzburg, Austria as a teenager and have been living in West Beirut with my Lebanese wife and her daughter, under a varying set of circumstances, since the spring of 1999.
2. Edward Said, Orientalism. New York: Random House, 1978, 19.

On Being a Single White Arab Woman in Sudan

Anonymous

For many persons, these words would mean nothing. The reality is that each of these words carried for me serious implications and challenges in the years that I spent working in Sudan. Each of them brought with it feelings of sadness, a sort of "tristesse" that is hard to define, yet overwhelming at certain moments. In many instances, it left me helpless because there was so little I could change except continuing to be there.

Being white, I was always referred to as "khawagga" (used originally in Sudan to refer to the British during colonization). It was difficult for the majority of people to think that a white person could speak Arabic; it was even more difficult to believe that a white person could be an Arab themselves. It was very embarrassing for me to accept that people would refer to me as a "khawagga". I was embarrassed because people were referring to me by using a term that was associated with colonialism, something which gave me no pride at all.

But what shocked me most was that my identity was based on the color of my skin; it was maybe only then that I could understand what black people have felt throughout human history. I had never experienced this before, probably because I was living in countries where the majority is white skinned and I was one of this majority. Classifying people based on the color of their skin was something I could never put up with; yet, this is what I was being judged on.

Being referred to as khawagga created for me a lot of confusion particularly when I was around Sudanese colleagues. If I was with other white colleagues, that feeling was less acute because this term was used to refer to all of us indiscriminately. But when I was with Sudanese colleagues, I saw that the word was used by other Sudanese as a clear sign of discrimination, against these local colleagues. I found this disdainful to both me and them. Often, they could not do anything about this and would just turn around to whoever was speaking and tell them 'she is not a khawagga; she speaks Arabic; she is Lebanese'.

Being an Arab was even more of a serious challenge in a country whose identity was torn between Africa and the Arab world. I had to carry the burden of being an Arab throughout my stay in Sudan.

For the Sudanese Arabs, being an Arab meant that I had to have the same opinion as theirs, that I had to take their position on all issues. In that particular moment in the history of Sudan, this meant being pro-government, and believe me, no one should be proud of that.

For the Sudanese Africans, especially the Dinka tribe, my Arab nationality carried with it certain prejudices. Hence, I was never perceived by them as a neutral person; I could never be impartial. All my positions and attitudes were biased by the fact that I was an Arab. It is difficult to describe the feelings that I had when one of my colleagues said "you are an Arab, the security people will never follow you or be interested in what you are doing or saying." It hurt me so badly because it looked as if I was a silent accomplice with the security people.

This was even more saddening for me because the project on which I was working dealt with the abduction of Dinka children by two Arab tribes in West Sudan. Arguments that I would make based on considerations aimed at the best interests of the child or on the rights of women were often interpreted as being sheer bias in favor of the Arabs. No matter how strong my arguments were, the Dinkas did not, or rather could not, get themselves to believe me. This was a very serious blow to me as a human rights practitioner and activist. It was even more of a serious blow because of my work on that specific project. It took a lot of patience and self-restraint from me to deal with these accusations.

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For my non-Sudanese, non-Arab colleagues I was a mystery, an odd case especially given the overall atmosphere in the world at that time. People were judged on the basis of their nationality, and not on the basis of what they said or did. This made me worried about how I would be classified; human beings like to classify; we all do; it is a simpler way of understanding the world and it is what we have been taught in school and even at home ever since we are born. Where would I fall in their eyes? What would they consider me to be? How would they look at me? What picture would they draw? No matter how brave you are by saying I do not care about what the others think of you, deep inside we are very much concerned about our image.

With respect to being a single woman, many people had a lot to say. For many African Sudanese, especially the Dinka, women could not be in positions of power and they were not to be influential in public life. Their place was elsewhere, and this is why it was difficult for me to establish myself in a position of authority towards them. It seemed as if they would never take me seriously no matter what I said, or how the others evaluated and judged me. For them, you were simply a woman, and consequently an inferior creature. The fact that I was an Arab woman was even more infuriating for them, because women in Arab society and culture were already considered lower class citizens. If I had been a European or an American, my nationality would have overshadowed my being a woman.

Being single made me the object of pity for the Sudanese Arabs. For them, I had to marry; it was not right to continue to be unmarried. Many even argued with me, asking how come I was not married, recognizing that I did not have any disabilities. They could see no reason for me remaining single; for them there had to be someone somewhere. I was also a source of concern for them because I was without a companion, without anyone to turn to in my old age.

Being a single woman out there alone in that difficult part of the world was bizarre for them. Why would I come all the way to Sudan to be alone on my own there?

For others, being single meant simply that you are easy prey, a target that they could engage with.

Recent Publications

- Amireh, Amal and Lisa Suhair Majaj, eds. *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000.
- Bhavnani, Kum-Kum, ed. *Feminism and Race*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Chowdhry, Geeta and Sheila Nair, eds. *Power, Post-colonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender and Class*. New York: Routledge, 2002
- Dekoven, Marianne, ed. *Feminist Locations Global and Local, Theory and Practice*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.
- Dhruvarajan, Vanaja et al., eds. *Gender, Raceand Nation: A Global Perspective*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.
- Wing, Adrien Katherine, ed. Foreword by Angela Y. Davis. *Global Critical Race Feminism: An International Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

Call for Papers

Violence in the Middle East
Lebanese American University - Beirut
26-28 May 2004
Violence has plagued the countries bordering on the Eastern Mediterranean for most of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This interdisciplinary conference aims to study the manifold phenomena of violence in the region from several scholarly perspectives. The aim is to trace the interconnected strands of social life that end in violence. Our hope is that by studying this topic across disciplinary boundaries a more nuanced vision of the conditions and causes of violence will emerge.

Abstracts are invited from scholars working in area and gender studies, social science, communications, and literary-cultural studies. Papers addressing topics such as the following are particularly welcome: Intimate violence: family, sexual, social; Social and religious constituents of sectarian violence; Occupation and Resistance; Human ecologies of violence; Culture and geopolitical violence; Terrorism and perceptions of it; Representations and violence; Semantics of violence: "the forbidden," "shame," "justice," "rights," "terrorism,"etc. Deadline for 250-500 word abstracts: February 28, 2004. Send by email attachment to comparative.literature@lau.edu.lb

Grants

Global Fund for Women Offers Grants to Women's Groups Outside the United States
Deadline: Open
The Global Fund for Women works to strengthen women's organizations outside the United States by providing small, flexible, and timely general-support grants ranging from $500 to $15,000.

The Fund supports organizations that demonstrate a commitment to women's equality and female human rights; show concern about the way women are viewed and view themselves in society; are governed and directed by women; consist of a group of women working together (the fund does not accept requests from individuals); and are based outside the U.S. Applications, in any language, may be handwritten or typed and submitted via mail, fax, or e-mail.

GFW also administers the Preston Education Fund for Girls, which supports schools, teacher training and curriculum programs, locally based community organizations, non-governmental organizations, and local women's associations and women's rights organizations and coalitions focused on the issue of girls education.

See the Fund's Web site for detailed guidelines and application procedures. Contact:
Global Fund for Women
1375 Sutter Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94109
Tel: (415) 202-7640, Fax: (415) 202-8604
E-mail: grants@globalfundforwomen.org
Link:http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/3grant/index.html

Films

Les Passionnées du Cinema (2002)
Directed by Marianne Khoury – Egypt/France
Only passion could make us understand the grand adventure that a group of women undertook at the beginning of last century to take the first steps in building a new industry for a new art: cinema. Only passion can explain the enormous energy these women spent to oversome traditions and be actively involved in laying its foundations.

The Legend of Rose Al-Youssef (2002)
Directed by Mohamad Kamel Al-Kalioubi - Egypt
This film is a biography of Rose al-Youssef, traced through testimonies of persons who were close to her as well as personal archives, which have been released by her family only recently. The availability of such archives made it possible to achieve a better understanding of an era, both at the social and political levels.

“When asked where I come from, I tend to hesitate in responding. I do not know where I am from nor do I think I am alone in this situation. I was born in Lebanon, grew up in Switzerland, and pursued my college education in the United States. … Like many of you, each day I find myself enticed by a mosaic of opinions, cultures, religions and people. I am at home everywhere and nowhere. I am never a stranger, yet I never quite belong. Today, I am still rummaging for answers on how to create a stronger base for my precarious situation perched in between two radically different cultures. I belong to a culture that has no name. I do not belong in Lebanon, nor do I belong in the United Sates, and the need to belong is of no urgent importance for me. However, what is important is the knowledge that I will not be ostracized in Lebanon for the person I have come to be: an individual, a feminist, someone with an opinion rather than what I am supposed to be thinking and believing.” (Lina Alameddine, *Al-Raida* No. 79, Fall 1997 p. 5-6)

“When I was a child, I lived in Nablus for a couple of years. There, people always regarded me as a foreigner. I tried my best to be accepted as an Arab girl, but very often. I was spoken to in English, even if I talked to people in Arabic. My friends frequently accused me of not being able to understand their culture and what the Palestinians have been through because I was not a “real” Arab. It seemed to me they had created an intimate circle in which they could talk freely. A silent wall was built between themselves, the Arabs, and me, the “outsider”. There was a general kind of mistrust toward my mother, my siblings, and me. Once, my parents wanted to choose a new school for my sister and me and when we went to look at the new school, many kids started insulting us, calling us Jews and apostates, and saying we would burn in hell.” (Mona Katawi, *Al-Raida* No. 101-102 Spring/Summer, 2003, p. 77)

“As someone who grew up in Lebanon, I have always felt that Beirut was my home. When I came to the US, I felt very much like an outsider. And yet as a researcher, returning to the region as an adult, I have come to realize that I am still very much an outsider in the Middle East. Because of my childhood experience, I am neither a total outsider nor a total insider in either part of the world.” (Jennifer Olmsted, *Al-Raida* No. 90-91, p.41.

“There are two forms of human rights violations in Lebanon, which have become part of the normative practices in the employment of foreign domestic workers. These are, first the withholding of passports and other identity papers by the employer; and second, the restriction of movement. Justification for both types of restrictions are based upon the following arguments: Practices such as the withholding of passports are seen as justified because both the recruitment agencies and the sponsors/employers have an up-front financial stake in the employment process. Therefore, the agency requires some assurances, because within the first three months the agency is liable for her replacement. It is partly for this reason that many agents now stipulate that restrictions like the withholding of passports and the refusal to leave the house are required as conditions of the guarantee. From the employer’s perspective the withholding of the passport and restrictions are to safeguard this ‘investment’ at least until the contract period has expired, or sufficient labour has been served to work off the money expended. Even the withholding of payment of wages is practiced supposedly for the same reasons. In other words, there exists a type of debt bondage here in addition to the kind of “contract slavery”. There is a lot of support for this argument not only from employers and agencies, but even from priests and nuns who assist domestic workers in need, and from some embassies.

The second argument is that all the types of physical restrictions are required to insure against the employee ‘getting into trouble’ by meeting others whom may use her to enter the house for theft, becoming pregnant or getting diseases. She also might meet others who will tell her to leave because she can make more money in other ways (implying prostitution, or freelance domestic work). If taken seriously, these justifications concern personal protection and fears of added complications, which the employer simply does not want to have to deal with. The last matter concerns the labour market and the employer does not want competition or poaching of the employee who may be attracted by other arrangements.” (Ray Jureidini, *Women Migrant Workers in Lebanon*, International Labor Office.)

NewsBriefs

From Iran

Nobel Prize goes to Iranian Rights Activist

Iranian human rights activist Shirin Ebadi was chosen by the Nobel Prize Committee to receive this year's Peace Prize. Ebadi won the Nobel prize for her efforts in promoting the rights of women and children in Iran and worldwide. She is the first Iranian and Muslim woman to win the award. Ebadi was the first female judge in her country, serving as president of the Tehran city court, from 1975. With the advent of the Islamic republic in 1979, however, she was forced to resign when it was decided that women were not suitable for such posts. Ms. Ebadi was jailed in 2000 for several weeks on charges of publicizing evidence of official involvement in those attacks, and she was barred from practicing law for five years after a closed trial.
(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3181992.stm

From Iraq

Aquila Al-Hashimi Dies

Aquila Hashimi, one of the three women on the U.S. – appointed Iraqi Governing Council, died of gunshot wounds five days after her convoy was ambushed by six men in a pickup truck near her home in western Baghdad. Al-Hashimi was supposed to attend the United Nations General Assembly in New York and was expected to become Iraq's new ambassador to the United Nations.
(http://www.4reference.net/encyclopedias/wikipedia/Aquila_al_Hashimi.html)

Afghanistan

Women Still Being Arrested for “Moral “Crimes

The Taliban may have left Afghanistan but women, especially those in rural areas, still live in fear due to restrictions that recall the morality policing of the Taliban.

Women who are arrested for talking to men who are not their husbands, brothers or fathers are still subjected to “chastity tests.” Some women are arrested while talking to a relative or riding in a cab with a male driver.

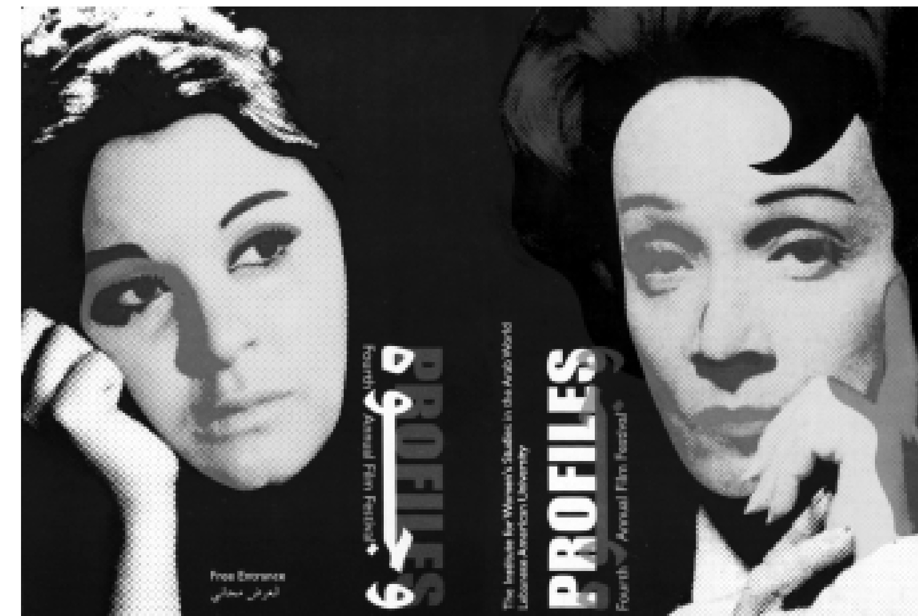
In the Western province of Herat, women have been arrested for driving cars and threatened for working with foreign organizations. To prevent “un-islamic” behavior, the governor, who was once a warlord, assembled a battalion of 13 to 14 year old boys to spy on women. The boys lurk in parks and other public gatherong places watching for indiscretions.

According to a recent report by the European Commission. women are very susceptible to punishment for “family crimes” as a result of the country’s very conservative patriarchal society.

When the Taliban were finally chased out of Afgahnistan in early 2002, US President George W. Bush declared in his first State of the Nation Address: “Today, women are free.” In some ways the lives of girls and women have clearly improved since the toppling of the Taliban. According to UNICEF, an estimated 1.2 million girls went to school last year. Educated women have returned to work as teachers, doctors and lawyers. These developments however are mostly limited to the capital Kabul. A substancial portion of Afghanistan, now ruled by provincial governors and former warlords, is still being issued restrictive orders that are just a few degrees away from the Taliban’s radical Islamic code. (We, Isis International, September 2003 No. 35, p. 2)

IWSAW News

Fourth Annual Film Festival



The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University - in consultancy with Cine-Club Direct Line - organized its fourth annual film festival entitled "Profiles". The festival lasted for 4 days (May 27 -30, 2003). The films and documentaries screened, directed by several renowned directors, featured various profiles of women such as Marlene Dietrich, Rose Al-Yusif, Valerie Solanas, Nico, etc. On the final day, IWSAW hosted Lebanese-Egyptian director Marianne Khoury who presented "Les Passionnees du Cinema" a documentary she prepared in 2002.

Launching of Al-Raida's Centenary Issue

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University launched, on July 28, 2003, the centenary issue of Al-Raida entitled **Women’s Movements in the Arab World**. The issue in question is divided into three sections and includes: a historical introduction to the Arab women’s movement which covers three basic areas namely the Mashreq and Egypt, the Maghreb and the Gulf; an email interviews conducted with 19 respondents who are either movement activists, scholars, or Muslim feminists; and a gender-sensitive fact file with comparative data related to gender for each Arab League country. Moreover, the issue also includes a book section, as well a bibliography containing books published on the Arab Women's Movement.

The keynote speaker for the event was Mrs. Mervat Tallawy, Under-Secretary of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA. Moreover, President Riyad Nassar, Acting Vice-President Abdallah Sfeir and IWSWA Director Mona Khalaf gave individual talks about the history of IWSAW and AL-Raida. The audience included UN officials and staff, NGO representatives, faculty members representing various Lebanese universities, journalists, as well as gender studies researchers.

IWSAW Director Mona Khalaf with Mrs. Mervat Tallawy, Under-Secretary of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, at the launching.