Dear Maddy,

It has been quite some time since we had a dialogue in this format, and I welcome the chance to do it again. How are you? Not writing you as often is unhealthy for this format, and I welcome the chance to do it again. You might be thinking why I am connecting Scene 1 with whiteness when you are depicting how people respond to your research. Let me try to explain my intentions by asking some questions. Her being a non-Chinese woman researching Chinese women and you being a non-Arab woman doing research on Arab women can/could be a location for sameness. So why was it not the same in her eyes? Why could she not find sameness and some sort of link/connection? Why was it that she identified your research as harder or less meaningful for you because you are not studying your “own” while her interest and meaning goes without question? She is not only non-Chinese, but white and you are not only non-Arab but Malaysian (“colored”). One can speculate that she was not just asking questions, offering you advice and-sharing/changing conversation, she was asserting her white privilege over you and naming and authorizing you through a sense of knowing and belief systems that whiteness holds superior authority and status. I wonder what would have been the response if you told her that perhaps she would make more meaning of her research process if she studied whiteness history and culture?

I have grown to become troubled by this idea that people need to place each other in categories, it can be quite dangerous when squeezing into something that does not fit. I was introduced to a Lebanese graduate student visiting from New York. The topic did not fall far from our research interest. For some reason (probably my physicality), this person assumed I am researching South East Asia until with some embarrassment and discomfort silence (after my clarification), he asked why I am interested in Arab women and the Middle East. I wonder if he felt “put in his place” by my clarification. Perhaps not because he then asked if I am Muslim. He seemed pleased that I possess at least one “requirement” (despite the fact that Islam is not just a religion, but also a world view that does not seem to matter to him – e.g., people can be Muslims, but are not necessarily religious). He proceeds to mumble on how interesting it is that my name is Arabic and that perhaps I have some long lost connection that “legitimizes” my interest. After countless such encounters since starting school, I never cease to be amazed how many ways there are to assume about one question, to patrol borders and boundaries, to authenti- cate, and to rationalize and/or de-legitimize my interest!

Scene 1- I had to smile when I read scene 1. It is all too familiar - classic examples of whites that are aware of white privilege and reposition and rearticulate themselves. It has been my experience that many white Americans do not believe race is an issue, so it does not fit. They are not studying your “own” while her interest and meaning goes without question. She is not only non-Chinese, but white and you are not only non-Arab but Malaysian (“colored”). One can speculate that she was not just asking questions, offering you advice and-sharing/changing conversation, she was asserting her white privilege over you and naming and authorizing you through a sense of knowing and belief systems that whiteness holds superior authority and status. I wonder what would have been the response if you told her that perhaps she would make more meaning of her research process if she studied whiteness history and culture?

Scene 2) Perhaps the obsession of graduate students as you pointed out, of obsessively asking each other their area of interest and research, is something you may need to adjust to. It doesn’t seem that this is only what frustrates you. It is assumed that your interest would be your own people and creates an unhealthy relationship of white supremacy and reposition and rearticulate themselves. It has been my experience that many white Americans do not believe race is an issue, so it does not fit. They are not studying your “own” while her interest and meaning goes without question. She is not only non-Chinese, but white and you are not only non-Arab but Malaysian (“colored”). One can speculate that she was not just asking questions, offering you advice and-sharing/changing conversation, she was asserting her white privilege over you and naming and authorizing you through a sense of knowing and belief systems that whiteness holds superior authority and status. I wonder what would have been the response if you told her that perhaps she would make more meaning of her research process if she studied whiteness history and culture?

I have grown to become troubled by this idea that people need to place each other in categories, it can be quite dangerous when squeezing into something that does not fit. I was introduced to a Lebanese graduate student visiting from New York. The topic did not fall far from our research interest. For some reason (probably my physicality), this person assumed I am researching South East Asia until with some embarrassment and discomfort silence (after my clarification), he asked why I am interested in Arab women and the Middle East. I wonder if he felt “put in his place” by my clarification. Perhaps not because he then asked if I am Muslim. He seemed pleased that I possess at least one “requirement” (despite the fact that Islam is not just a religion, but also a world view that does not seem to matter to him – e.g., people can be Muslims, but are not necessarily religious). He proceeds to mumble on how interesting it is that my name is Arabic and that perhaps I have some long lost connection that “legitimizes” my interest. After countless such encounters since starting school, I never cease to be amazed how many ways there are to assume about one question, to patrol borders and boundaries, to authenti- cate, and to rationalize and/or de-legitimize my interest!

Scene 1- I had to smile when I read scene 1. It is all too familiar - classic examples of whites that are aware of white privilege and reposition and rearticulate themselves. It has been my experience that many white Americans do not believe race is an issue, so it does not fit. They are not studying your “own” while her interest and meaning goes without question. She is not only non-Chinese, but white and you are not only non-Arab but Malaysian (“colored”). One can speculate that she was not just asking questions, offering you advice and-sharing/changing conversation, she was asserting her white privilege over you and naming and authorizing you through a sense of knowing and belief systems that whiteness holds superior authority and status. I wonder what would have been the response if you told her that perhaps she would make more meaning of her research process if she studied whiteness history and culture?
between self-actualization (meeting one’s own human potentials on this earth) and our responsibility and contribution to community, greater society and the global world.

Scene 3) Well at least you do have that one check off on the list, you are a Muslim, and there is that name of yours that stresses my remarks, but after all a while one needs humor to deal with such things. Before I respond further, I am curious to know if this is also a common example of your encounter with Arabs in relation to your topic of study.

Dear Maddy,

I can always count on you for making these issues more complicated! I thought of whiteness when Scene 1 was happening, but given the topic of conversation, whiteness was the furthest factor from my mind. Often times I forget how white privilege is exercised in so many different ways, and how it reshapes and represents itself in even more dangerous ways. Perhaps I was just too agitated with the question to really take notice of how whiteness was in action (not that I should ever forget). Why the overwhelming need to categorize people in this country? (I realize that this form of categorization takes place in many other countries as well). I guess when “attacked” that way, more often than not, I am “silenced”, regardless of who is asking the questions. Why the silence? Entitlement, ownership, identity, borders, boundaries, privilege, language, and individual actions. Being a Muslim and fulfilling one of the “requirements” I am allowed to “cross” the border. However, this “crossing” also comes with a price - a price that legitimates my research interest? Perhaps other forms of “border patrolling” will now come into play? Who and/or what determines the boundaries of insider/outsider? Isn’t the insider/outsider category fluid and ever changing?

Interesting that you asked about Scene 3. Recently I had an encounter with an Arab-American woman who was about to begin graduate school. When it came to the question of my research, she did not exhibit any of the responses from Scene 1, 2 or 3. To her, the project sounded important and exciting. Even when I asked her opinion (of the fact that I am not Arab but doing research on Arab women, etc) the response was simple: “Why do white people think they can study us and never exhibit guilt or discomfort? Why should you? Besides, are you not a Muslim?” For her, the Muslim half of me allows one foot into the world of Arab-Muslim women and minimizes the question of identity and authenticity. I am not claiming that being a Muslim automatically grants me an insider status because the differences that exist in our language, cultures, and norms and languages are all very salient factors. By positioning myself as a Malaysian-Muslim woman interested in researching Arab-Muslim woman, I hope to expand the possibilities of discovering, examining and reconstructing sameness and/or differences. Going back to my encounter with the Arab-American woman who research our mutual respect for each other also stems from the fact that we are both women of color and perhaps that is a bond that also legitimizes my research interest. To answer your question about my encounters and the differences that I would say that many are generally curious as to why I have so much interest in the Middle East. Sometimes when they find out that I am also a Muslim, the curiosity sorts itself out. Interesting isn’t it? Perhaps the Muslim part of me (which I cherish dearly) does “legitimize” certain issues.

As an Arab-American, how do you feel about this? Do you feel that the type of research done on Arab women is important and exciting? I am always surprised by the number of Arabs who say that they have never read about, or heard of Arab women’s perspectives. I am always surprised by the reaction of colleagues, friends and family to my research plans. Do you think that your research interest will be taken seriously? Who cares? You are a Muslim, and there is that name of yours that stresses my remarks, but after all, a while one needs humor to deal with such things. Before I respond further, I am curious to know if this is also a common example of your encounter with Arabs in relation to your topic of study.

Dear Azza,

I am going to attempt to answer your question about my views on non-Arabs doing research on Arabs. It is a loaded one and not that easy for me to use written language to explain.

Let me begin by speaking from my experience of growing up in the American Educational “banking” system (note Freire’s Chapter 2 (pg 52) in Pedagogy of the Oppressed for the defined banking concepts in education). From grade school through secondary school I was surrounded by teachers, textbooks, curriculum and social experiences that portrayed histories, cultures and identities of Arab people in ways that were false (particularly when the topic involved Palestinians), and romanticized, orientalized and misunderstood, along with the history of Blacks, Latinos, Asians and the first Americans (of the fact that I am not Arab but doing research on “your people”? (your people is in quotation marks because I know like many people, you inhabit multiple spaces and negotiate multiple identities as Palestinian, as Arab, as Arab-Palestinian, as Arab-American, as Arab-Muslim woman, as Palestinian-Muslim woman, etc).

My dilemma is neither new nor unique. Many scholars have debated and written about the phenomenon of the insider/outsider in conducting research. I am thinking of our professor at Roosevelt University in Chicago, Heather Dalmage’s theory, whereby people are taught from an early age to know where “boundaries” exist, why there are needs to “patrol” those borders, and the consequences of attempting to cross them. As a non-Arab woman researching Arab women, the borders I encounter are loaded with meanings and signify the most important sites of struggle, resistance and accommodation. I think that the work in Scene 1 asserted her whiteness over me through policing the boundaries of authority and superiority, in Scene 2, the borders are created to identify and locate me to fulfill categorization needs and in Scene 3, cultural borders are created to protect power and privileges, which are kept in place by cultural norms, language, and individual actions. By being a Muslim and fulfilling one of the “requirements” I am allowed to “cross” the border. However, this “crossing” also comes with a price – a price that legitimates my research interest? Perhaps other forms of “border patrolling” will now come into play? Who and/or what determines the boundaries of insider/outsider? Isn’t the insider/outsider category fluid and ever changing?

It is important to have a place of one’s own to think and make sense of what is happening in our lives and the lives of others.

I am very interested in your experiences because I think you can share some insight about what is like. I work at a civic public policy organization in Chicago, our initiatives and projects center around public policy and race. Because we work with all sectors of society I get to step inside the academia occasionally to work with people and network. Many times I feel like I am “at home”. I always enjoy the classroom, even with all its limitations one can still appreciate the opportunity of space and time to study, learn, reconstruct and re-create ideas and such. It is important to have a place of one’s own to think and make sense of what is happening in our lives and the lives of others.

So with that said I will answer your question and say that I have no trouble with the idea of non-Arabs doing research on Arabs. Purpose and meanings are exposed through the process. Perhaps I was just too agitated with the question to really take notice of how whiteness was in action (not that I should ever forget). Why the overwhelming need to categorize people in this country? (I realize that this form of categorization takes place in many other countries as well). I guess when “attacked” that way, more often than not, I am “silenced”, regardless of who is asking the questions. Why the silence? Entitlement, ownership, identity, borders, boundaries, privilege, language, and individual actions. By being a Muslim and fulfilling one of the “requirements” I am allowed to “cross” the border. However, this “crossing” also comes with a price – a price that legitimates my research interest? Perhaps other forms of “border patrolling” will now come into play? Who and/or what determines the boundaries of insider/outsider? Isn’t the insider/outsider category fluid and ever changing?

Dear Maddy,

I am attempting to answer your question about my views on non-Arabs doing research on Arabs. It is a loaded one and not that easy for me to use written language to explain.

Let me begin by speaking from my experience of growing up in the American Educational “banking” system (note Freire’s Chapter 2 (pg 52) in Pedagogy of the Oppressed for the defined banking concepts in education). From grade school through secondary school I was surrounded by teachers, textbooks, curriculum and social experiences that portrayed histories, cultures and identities of Arab people in ways that were false (particularly when the topic involved Palestinians), and romanticized, orientalized and misunderstood, along with the history of Blacks, Latinos, Asians and the first Americans (of the fact that I am not Arab but doing research on “your people”? (your people is in quotation marks because I know like many people, you inhabit multiple spaces and negotiate multiple identities as Palestinian, as Arab, as Arab-Palestinian, as Arab-American, as Arab-Muslim woman, as Palestinian-Muslim woman, etc).

My dilemma is neither new nor unique. Many scholars have debated and written about the phenomenon of the insider/outsider in conducting research. I am thinking of our professor at Roosevelt University in Chicago, Heather Dalmage’s theory, whereby people are taught from an early age to know where “boundaries” exist, why there are needs to “patrol” those borders, and the consequences of attempting to cross them. As a non-Arab woman researching Arab women, the borders I encounter are loaded with meanings and signify the most important sites of struggle, resistance and accommodation. I think that the work in Scene 1 asserted her whiteness over me through policing the boundaries of authority and superiority, in Scene 2, the borders are created to identify and locate me to fulfill categorization needs and in Scene 3, cultural borders are created to protect power and privileges, which are kept in place by cultural norms, language, and individual actions. By being a Muslim and fulfilling one of the “requirements” I am allowed to “cross” the border. However, this “crossing” also comes with a price – a price that legitimates my research interest? Perhaps other forms of “border patrolling” will now come into play? Who and/or what determines the boundaries of insider/outsider? Isn’t the insider/outsider category fluid and ever changing?

Interesting that you asked about Scene 3. Recently I had an encounter with an Arab-American woman who was about to begin graduate school. When it came to the question of my research, she did not exhibit any of the responses from Scene 1, 2 or 3. To her, the project sounded important and exciting. Even when I asked her opinion (of the fact that I am not Arab but doing research on Arab women, etc) the response was simple: “Why do white people think they can study us and never exhibit guilt or discomfort? Why should you? Besides, are you not a Muslim?” For her, the Muslim half of me allows one foot into the world of Arab-Muslim women and minimizes the question of identity and authenticity. I am not claiming that being a Muslim automatically grants me an insider status because the differences that exist in our language, cultures, and norms and languages are all very salient factors. By positioning myself as a Malaysian-Muslim woman interested in researching Arab-Muslim woman, I hope to expand the possibilities of discovering, examining and reconstructing sameness and/or differences. Going back to my encounter with the Arab-American woman who research our mutual respect for each other also stems from the fact that we are both women of color and perhaps that is a bond that also legitimizes my research interest. To answer your question about my encounters and the differences that I would say that many are generally curious as to why I have so much interest in the Middle East. Sometimes when they find out that I am also a Muslim, the curiosity sorts itself out. Interesting isn’t it? Perhaps the Muslim part of me (which I cherish dearly) does “legitimize” certain issues.

As an Arab-American, how do you feel about this? No doubt our friendship might make you biased, but what do you really think? This is the perfect opportunity to hear an Arab woman’s perspective on my dilemma. How do you feel about non-Arabs doing research on “your people”? (your people is in quotation marks because I know like many people, you inhabit multiple spaces and negotiate multiple identities as Palestinian, as Arab, as Arab-Palestinian, as Arab-American, as Arab-Muslim woman, as Palestinian-Muslim woman, etc)
That has no name. I often wonder if perhaps this is a issue that I need to come to terms with (the sooner the I am still struggling with and for now it is the “problem it is a combination of trespassing, guilt and pain. I wish I a group not one’s own. I cannot describe this feeling, but my soul. There is something to be said about researching spaces with each other and that is why we are able to You are not being intrusive. We are comfortable in our academy that offer support to your studies and sense of knowing? Do people honestly think that it is fascinating to study their own people? I would imagine it is not fascinating but rather necessary (and you don’t need the academy for this but I know what context you were writing in). Perhaps, though I am bias in this sense because I am Palestinian and feel studying one’s own people and culture is crucial to survival and existence (but I can’t be the only one to think this way).

Sometimes I wonder why people from other countries come to America to study their own coun-try? I know there are many different answers and I don’t want to be ignorant to the fact that there are global conflicts, occupations, wars and economic instability that would bring someone here to study. I sup-pose I’m taking to those that might not fall into those categories. (I’m using the categories now). I think though we unwillingly volunteer to put American institutions in a higher place and I’m not so sure they have earned it. But who am I to judge? I would imagine that doing research on the topic of Muslim or Arab Muslim women reveals many complex-ities? How are you finding it so far?

Wednesday, 2003, 2.54 am

Dear Maddy,

Your experience in being rejected It sounds like you are in the process of working your issues out. Because I know you I have all the confidence that you will be conscious and use each challenge to be an accessible educator and researcher. Perhaps this is part of your “training” process. I absolutely do not want to see you pack your bags and leave graduate school. I think the pain and silencing you speak of is real and should be recognized. If you didn’t care you would not be agonizing. I think you should always remember the pain, whether it is yours or some-one else’s, use it as a tool to heal injustice, create and work for change. Of course you did not become colored until you came to the United States. It comes with the territory. Were you not stamped and labeled “alien” when you entered the borders? That’s a hint courtesy of United States hegemo-ny. People have told me that we are so obsessed in America about race. I would have to agree and that is one of the reasons why I need and want to make sense of it all. Remember this is my topic of interest and research. We have been naming and giving examples of what we mean by all this. I feel no need to keep going. It becomes quite draining.

About the women of color issue. Your experience in being rejected and your feelings about solidarity I can relate to and validate. I have had my share of border patrolling (you defined it rather well earlier) in my in-group and outside groups to know that it is a life process that fluctuates, moves and changes. Of course you did not become colored until you came to the United States. It comes with the territory. Were you not stamped and labeled “alien” when you entered the borders? That’s a hint courtesy of United States hegemony. People have told me that we are so obsessed in America about race. I would have to agree and that is one of the reasons why I need and want to make sense of it all. Remember this is my topic of interest and research. We have been naming and giving examples of what we mean by all this. I feel no need to keep going. It becomes quite draining.

About the women of color issue. Your experience in being rejected and your feelings about solidarity I can relate to and validate. I have had my share of border patrolling (you defined it rather well earlier) in my in-group and outside groups to know that it is a life process that fluctuates, moves and changes. Of course you did not become colored until you came to the United States. It comes with the territory. Were you not stamped and labeled “alien” when you entered the borders? That’s a hint courtesy of United States hegemony. People have told me that we are so obsessed in America about race. I would have to agree and that is one of the reasons why I need and want to make sense of it all. Remember this is my topic of interest and research. We have been naming and giving examples of what we mean by all this. I feel no need to keep going. It becomes quite draining.

About the women of color issue. Your experience in being rejected and your feelings about solidarity I can relate to and validate. I have had my share of border patrolling (you defined it rather well earlier) in my in-group and outside groups to know that it is a life process that fluctuates, moves and changes. Of course you did not become colored until you came to the United States. It comes with the territory. Were you not stamped and labeled “alien” when you entered the borders? That’s a hint courtesy of United States hegemony. People have told me that we are so obsessed in America about race. I would have to agree and that is one of the reasons why I need and want to make sense of it all. Remember this is my topic of interest and research. We have been naming and giving examples of what we mean by all this. I feel no need to keep going. It becomes quite draining.

About the women of color issue. Your experience in being rejected and your feelings about solidarity I can relate to and validate. I have had my share of border patrolling (you defined it rather well earlier) in my in-group and outside groups to know that it is a life process that fluctuates, moves and changes. Of course you did not become colored until you came to the United States. It comes with the territory. Were you not stamped and labeled “alien” when you entered the borders? That’s a hint courtesy of United States hegemony. People have told me that we are so obsessed in America about race. I would have to agree and that is one of the reasons why I need and want to make sense of it all. Remember this is my topic of interest and research. We have been naming and giving examples of what we mean by all this. I feel no need to keep going. It becomes quite draining.

About the women of color issue. Your experience in being rejected and your feelings about solidarity I can relate to and validate. I have had my share of border patrolling (you defined it rather well earlier) in my in-group and outside groups to know that it is a life process that fluctuates, moves and changes. Of course you did not become colored until you came to the United States. It comes with the territory. Were you not stamped and labeled “alien” when you entered the borders? That’s a hint courtesy of United States hegemony. People have told me that we are so obsessed in America about race. I would have to agree and that is one of the reasons why I need and want to make sense of it all. Remember this is my topic of interest and research. We have been naming and giving examples of what we mean by all this. I feel no need to keep going. It becomes quite draining.

About the women of color issue. Your experience in being rejected and your feelings about solidarity I can relate to and validate. I have had my share of border patrolling (you defined it rather well earlier) in my in-group and outside groups to know that it is a life process that fluctuates, moves and changes. Of course you did not become colored until you came to the United States. It comes with the territory. Were you not stamped and labeled “alien” when you entered the borders? That’s a hint courtesy of United States hegemony. People have told me that we are so obsessed in America about race. I would have to agree and that is one of the reasons why I need and want to make sense of it all. Remember this is my topic of interest and research. We have been naming and giving examples of what we mean by all this. I feel no need to keep going. It becomes quite draining. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences.
I thought maybe you were rejected by the non-profit Arab-group because you don’t wear the hijab (in addition to what you’ve mentioned) – interpreting you as not “Muslim enough” thereby disqualifying you. I have myself experienced this among some Arab Muslims/Muslims (mostly women and men who believe all Muslim women should wear the hijab). Sometimes being born something does not necessarily give you the “inside status,” being a Muslim woman wearing or not wearing the hijab can be an example. I’m not sure if I am correct in my statement though because rarely do I get an opportunity to discuss this openly and honestly with others and don’t have a good sense of all the multiple feelings and experiences.

Thanks for sharing with me your story of how and why you became interested in your studying Arab women. I wonder what your location of your location and where you are speaking from. I love to hear autobiographical testimonies. I would be interested to know more about what your relatives described their travels to the Middle East. Perhaps another time.

In closing, I would like to end with our beginnings. In many ways it highlights some of the intersecting themes and topics we have been discussing throughout this exchange.

We both were taking the same women’s studies class on the history of ideas on women. It was the second or third day of class, we were finishing up reading/discussing the philosophy on creation of man and women. The instructor and most of the students were focusing on Christianity and citing passages from the Bible and having what seemed to be a “inside” limited discussion in many ways. I felt frustrated because the last class period they were doing the same thing and I didn’t understand them. No one could even seem to notice and go on as if everyone knew what they were saying. I felt a little invisible and did not want to disappear. I was so eager to thought to myself is this how the rest of the semester will be in this class? I did not want to continue in this position. I hesitated but spoke up and said something like I was not that knowledgeable in Christianity and although I am familiar with some things I am not familiar with what they were discussing and asked if someone could explain so and so. The professor who newly emigrated from Europe turned red and apologized for assuming we all knew. She thanked me for bringing this to her attention. The white female student who was doing most of the talking turned to me and asked me what I was. The discussions after that were more inclusive but had many agents of silencing throughout the semester. I felt out of place, but was relieved that I was able to move out of invisibility and pass into visibility and voice myself. I remember looking around the room and craving someone’s face. I felt a warm connection. We talked afterwards and re-introduced ourselves outside the circle. I later learned you were interest-ed in doing research on Arab-Muslim women and you discovered I was interested in race and whiteness. I remember feeling that sense of hope I was writing to you about earlier. You are a welcomed “intruder” in my space!

Who owns knowledge? This is a great question to ask and reminds oneself to stay grounded. There are endless multiple answers to this question and even still you can not finish seeking all of them out. I would like to believe we all own it. But that is somewhat naive.

I enjoyed this dialogue very much. I am reminded of Freire in concluding, “upon your smiling face. I felt a warm connection. We talked afterwards and re-introduced ourselves outside the circle. I later learned you were interested in doing research on Arab-Muslim women and you discovered I was interested in race and whiteness. I remember feeling that sense of hope I was writing to you about earlier. You are a welcomed “intruder” in my space!”

I wish you the all the best. Take care and keep in touch.

Dear Maddy,

I smiled to myself when I read the story of how we first met. I remember you looking at you (you were sitting across from me and I sensed you were looking around for some “connection”) and when you asked that question (about Christianity), I knew I had found an ally (perhaps I am categorizing you?).

Feeling trapped in this maze of complexities (despite every now and then seeing a light at the end of the tunnel), I can only hope that the pain and silencing that you will speak of will heal itself as we move along in our lives. I identify with what you wrote, “I think you should always remember the pain, whether it is yours or someone else’s use it as a tool to heal injustice, create and recreate, faith in their vocation to be more fully human. Being a woman is not privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all.10"

You also wrote, “Sometimes being born something does not necessarily give you the “inside status”...” – but being born an “outsider” will never make a person an “insider” ever, no matter how connected oneself is to a group that is not one’s own.

Dialoguing with you gives me hope and makes it more viable to think through the issues that I am dealing with. I was not hoping for solutions, but insights and pointers to raise more questions (it’s unavoidable) and take it to the next level. My location as a woman of the global south now living and working in the United States also plays an integral part not only in constructing my new fragmented identity, but it also unfortunately contributes to doing research as a researcher. One might ask if I lived in my country of origin (Malaysia), would my positionality and the research process be less problematic? That is a question that I constantly ask myself and I regret to say that that might be something that I wish I had had the opportunity to explore before I migrated to the United States. New knowledge occurs through tension, difficulties, mistakes and chaos. I am hoping that the knowledge I am gaining, sharing, exchanging and producing is a knowledge that will go through such stages.

Thank you for going on this journey with me. I hope we have many more ahead. Say hello to your feline friends for me, perhaps I will see them sometime soon. I leave you with this poem12 that speaks to and for my troubled soul.

The bridge I must be is the bridge to my own power.
I must translate
My own fears
Mediate
My own weaknesses
I must be the bridge to nowhere
But to my true self
And then
I will be useful
By Donna Kate Rushin

Thank you for going on this journey with me. I hope we have many more ahead. Say hello to your feline friends for me, perhaps I will see them sometime soon. I leave you with this poem12 that speaks to and for my troubled soul.

The bridge I must be is the bridge to my own power.
I must translate
My own fears
Mediate
My own weaknesses
I must be the bridge to nowhere
But to my true self
And then
I will be useful
By Donna Kate Rushin

The Western and Eastern View

End Notes

1. Azza Basarudin was born and raised in Penang, an old colonial town in Malaysia and grew up living among a blend of working and middle-class Muslim, Chinese, Hindu and Eurasian cultures. Maddy Mohammed lives in Chicago where she is a fulltime student of conscious living. She is an intellectual-activist working on multiple social justice projects. She is interested in returning to the Academy someday to continue her research in Race, Ethnicity and Whiteness studies.
3. As I write this the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq continues. The American educational institutions that educated me rather poorly on Arab people’s history, culture and religions is now in an authority and holds “consulting” positions in overseeing Iraqi educational institutions. This is truly concerning.
4. This does not mean that it was only in college I was reading credible research on Arabs by non-Arabs. I was reading in and out of school, (multiple kinds of books and narratives by non-Arabs and Arabs alike) on my own.
6. I wrote this the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq continues. The American educational institutions that educated me rather poorly on Arab people’s history, culture and religions is now in an authority and holds “consulting” positions in overseeing Iraqi educational institutions. This is truly concerning.
8. The benefits of studying one’s own society is cited from Altorki and El-Solh’s book.
We felt no fear of them, for we had heard in Jaffa that if there was a woman in the caravan there was no danger of their attacking it. They have a profound respect for courage. (Kate Kraft, shortly after arriving in Palestine, 31 March 1868)

Joseph rushed into the tent, exclaiming: ‘Sir, your revolver, the Bedouins!’ Until then we had believed that if there was a woman in the caravan there was no danger of their attacking it. They have a profound respect for courage. (Kate Kraft, on the occasion of seeing all of those armed Bedouins was an indication that those stories were true. Not surprisingly, Eames concluded that the reason, at least in part, for the safety problem in Palestine was due to the extensively armed Bedouins. She never suggested that the Bedouins were armed because Palestine was unsafe. Instead, she believed that Palestine was unsafe because Bedouins were armed.)

Throughout the nineteenth century, more and more Americans traveled abroad, especially after the American Civil War (1861-1865). Many, upon their return home, published their travel accounts. I have collected and analyzed the published accounts of fifty American women. What follows is an investigation into how American women travelers who ventured to Palestine perceived and interacted with Palestine’s Bedouin populations by examining their published travel accounts. American women either tended to feel safe because they were in the care of Bedouins who acted as their guides and guards, or, conversely, they felt unsafe because Bedouins were nearby. In either case, it was rare for these American travelers to identify Bedouins without some negative descriptor. Most, such as Mary S. Allen, qualified Bedouins as “the wild Bedouin tribes.”

also, some American women compared Palestine’s Bedouins with American Indians. Hilton Obenzinger notes that Americans typically equated Arabs with American Indians, usually within the settler-colonial context of seeing Palestine as the American West and the Arabs as American Indians who fought against being “civilized” by American settlers.

At first, few American women drew connections between feeling or being safe and being in the presence of Bedouins. In all but one case, Bedouins were hired to serve as guides and guards for these Americans. Sarah Haight, being the exception, still recalled a sense of safety when she was in the presence of Bedouins. While traveling from Jerusalem to the Jordan River, Haight and her party came upon a group of Bedouins who sought to race the American travelers. “We were not to be outgeneralled [sic] by a Bedouin . . . so we slackened our reins and put our fleet courser to their utmost speed.” Haight reportedly beat the Bedouins in the race, and established her camp right in the middle of the Bedouin encampment.

While she did describe them as “wild,” she noted nothing but hospitality and respect from them. According to Haight, the Bedouin “sheik” offered both pipe and tea to her. After smoking, and drinking a cup of tea, many Bedouin men came to her tent in order “to pay their respects to us.” Before leaving the next morning, Haight presented the “sheik” with a pair of Turkish pistols in exchange for his hospitality. In fact, Haight never felt that the Bedouins, while “wearying so rough an exterior,” would ever harm her or her fellow travelers because the Bedouins were simply too hospitable, as she told her reading audience.

Almost all American women in my study hired Bedouins to be their guides or to act as personal guards while in Palestine. This indicates that the women believed themselves to be in harm’s way and thus needed an armed guard; they nevertheless did not feel the harm came from Bedouins. For example, Lizzie McMillan hired “a Bedouin guard from the time of leaving Jerusalem until we got back, as they say it is not safe to travel in this country without one.” Unlike Sarah Haight’s description of Bedouins as wild and rough, McMillan called her Bedouin guard “very handsome . . . [who] took good care of us.” Similarly, Mrs. Marie and Miss Emma Straton hired Bedouins as guides. Mrs. Straton also described Bedouins as “wild Arabs” who were traditionally noisy. “The Bedouins and camels kept up such a noise and every moment I expected to see a dusky head peep through the covering.” Likewise, Louise Griswold hired a Bedouin “sheik” to act as the group’s escort and guard. Mattie Wood hired a Bedouin not only to guide her through Palestine but also to act as her personal guard. It was not her idea, however, to hire this particular Bedouin. According to Wood’s account, he was “furnished for our protection at the request of the United States Consul.” Furthermore, Wood claimed that some Bedouins were “paid by the Turkish government to protect travelers from the assaults of wandering Bedouins.”

Bedouins were not only to serve as American women’s guides and guards, however. Sometimes they provided information and other times they were trading partners. Sarah Bancly Johnson noted her relief when she came upon a party of Bedouins. Johnson became lost somewhere in the “wild region” near “the banks of a deep and rapid river.” She had unsuccessfully looked for a place to ford the river when she came across a group of Bedouins: “A party of Bedawin [sic] approached, and for the first time we felt a sense of relief!” Because she had hoped that they might be able to tell her where she could safely cross the river.

Near the Jordan River, Johnson came across another group of Bedouins who traded their fruit (“the veritable apples of Sodom” as Johnson described them) for her telescope. It was not her telescope that these Bedouins were most interested in obtaining, however. Johnson claimed that Bedouins always treated her with respect and “with the greatest kindness” because she had medicine, which they needed.

Yet she also noted that “the profound ignorance of these semi-civilized beings, very naturally leads to the grossest superstition, of which we often had instances.” Also, “of medical knowledge, they have none,” reported Johnson. She noted that Bedouins would frequently place their sick upon the tombs of saints, or a Koran would be hung around the patient’s neck in the hope that divine intervention would cure the malady. “Another popular mode of treatment is a severe flogging!” proclaimed Johnson. Nevertheless, according to Johnson, she and her party were always safe in the company of Bedouins because Bedouins needed and sought western medicine.

Johnson’s characterization of Bedouins as “semi-civilized,” ignorant, and superstitious does not seem to be outside the norm for how westerners viewed non-westerners. According to Judy Mabro, “accusations of prejudice and superstition are common.” Yet, Mabro also sees these accusations more prevalent when the subject is a non-European woman.

There was one thing that each of these six women who portrayed Bedouins in a positive manner had in common: none of them traveled alone. Each one came to Palestine with at least one American companion. This could suggest that these travelers already felt a level of safety and security simply because they were not alone. This cannot be said about those who felt unsafe when Bedouins were near by, however.

While those six travelers felt most safe when in the company of Bedouins, the majority of American women, both the lone travelers as well as those who ventured in groups, felt just the opposite. Ten of the twenty-five travelers who observed Palestine’s Bedouins noted in their published accounts being unsafe when Bedouins were nearby. Jane Eames felt generally unsafe because Bedouins were armed “with a gun or a sword or pistol, and sometimes with all three.” Eames had heard stories about Palestine being “unquiet and unsafe.” She said that seeing all of those armed Bedouins was an indication that those stories were true. Not surprisingly, Eames concluded that the reason, at least in part, for the safety problem in Palestine was due to the extensively armed Bedouins. She never suggested that the Bedouins were armed because Palestine was unsafe. Instead, she believed that Palestine was unsafe because Bedouins were armed.

Writing their Own Way: American Women, Palestine’s Bedouins and Issues of Safety in the Nineteenth Century

Jim Ross-Nazzal
Associate Professor of History, Montgomery College, Houston, Texas

Volume XX, No. 101-102 Spring/Summer 2003

The Western and Eastern View

File

The Western and Eastern View

File

52

53
Like the ideas purported by Eames in her travel account, many other American women, such as Susan Brewer Thomas, believed that Palestine was unsafe due to the hostile, as she called them, “wild Arabs,” and consistently portrayed Bedouins as unruly, uncivilized, and uncontrollably vagabonds. Susan Walter believed that Palestine was unsafe because the Bedouins did not acknowledge law. They are a law unto themselves, and acknowledge no other ruler.11

Others, such as Susan Elston Wallace, Mary Ninde, and Clara Moyse Tadlock believed that Bedouins were born thieves. While passing through Hebron, Wallace noted that soldiers were stationed in the area. She attributed the presence of these soldiers to “thieving Bedouins, who infest these desolate roads, robbing with impunity, unless the averaging sword is in sight.”12 Ninde and Tadlock also portrayed Bedouins as murderous heathen who would put to death any foreigner they came across. According to Tadlock, Bedouins killed travelers just to steal their possessions, “like those Texas stage-robbers.”13

Likewise, L.L. Adams reported that “Bedawin [sic] . . . are known to be great robbers, and often attack parties of travelers.”14 Nonetheless, she hired a Beduin for protection: “In front, on a splendid white horse, rode an Arab Sheikh, in all the warlike array of gun, sword, and spear . . . He was to be our guard as well as our guide.” She believed that she and her party “from these wild, fierce, marauding people.”15

Most of these women who forwarded racist or stereotypical views of Bedouins never experienced a negative encounter with Palestine’s Bedouins themselves—they were merely passing on to their readers the rumors and innuendoes they had heard about Palestine’s Bedouins. In fact, it was not unusual for these women who reported over and over that everyone should be frightened of the murderous, thieving Bedouins as a group, to describe individual Bedouins as caring, hospitable fellow travelers. Clara Benneson, for example, noted that the Bedouins she met respected “the laws of hospitality; however, and if any one in trouble solicits their aid, they give him the kind-est reception, and protect him for three days after his departure from their camp.” On the one hand Benneson told her readers not to trust Bedouins (as a monolithic entity) because they are thieves, robbers, and murderers and thieves. She also told her readers how individual Bedouins were helpful to, kind towards, and receptive of foreign travelers.

Benneson described an encounter she had with a Bedouin troupe led by a man named Ibn Ishmair. First, this is one of the few cases I have encountered in which an American woman took the time to note the name of their Bedouin host. Second, while Benneson told her readers to fear Bedouins, she also described her chance encounter with this particular Bedouin in nothing but pleasant terms. For example, she said how one wife of Ibn Ishmair entertained them in “European” custom, while his other wives dined in “traditional [Bedouin] hospitality.” She noted that Ibn Ishmair and others in his group lived simply, yet were “famous for his native dignity and grace of manner, which might have been envied by a prince.”16

Nevertheless, Benneson continued to fear Bedouins, even after her meeting with this one Bedouin leader. Upon departing from Ibn Ishmair’s camp, she once again reported being very nervous for fear of running into a group of Bedouins. “It is an attack of safety,” she reported.17 This entire exchange is rather odd because while Benneson witnessed or experienced nothing that should have made her fearful of Bedouins, she nonethe-less feared Bedouans and passed on those feelings to her readers by never challenging or questioning the veracity of the rumors that Bedouins were, by nature, a thieves, murderous lot.

If anyone had initial cause to fear Bedouins out of personal experience it was Dr. Sarah Wells who reported being captured by a group of Bedouins. “Horrors of those who before had fallen into the hands of these lawless wolves, rushed before our minds. What were we to do,” Dr. Wells pondered. She noticed “no indication of mercy . . . in their black fierce looking eyes [while] they demand-ed our money and other effects.” Wells, et al., were ordered to mount their horses. “For hours we traveled on under the guidance of our captors.” Wells noted.18

Upon reaching the Bedouin encampment, Wells’ drago-man was taken to the leader’s tent while the travelers awaited their fate. “In a little while, we were invited into the tent,” recalled Wells, “and to our surprise and great relief, the sheik received us with the utmost hospitality.” Wives of the sheik spread out new mats on the ground for Dr. Wells and her fellow travelers to sit upon. They also served fresh bread, cheese, and eggs to the Americans. In exchange for the food and drink, Dr. Wells gave them lemons, oranges, and some sugar.

After “resting for a while,” as Wells called it, the sheik provided the travelers with a guide and an armed escort. She noted that the Bedouins were from the “Azehaneh” tribe which she called “the largest and most powerful of all the wild Arabs.” Interestingly enough, she believed it was divine intervention that delivered her and her party “from these wild, fierce, marauding people.”19 It was not that the Bedouins met hospitable, kind, and generous. She believed that it was Providence that saw them to safety. It must be remembered, however, that Wells’ ten-year long trip around the world resulted in a large, published account, which in turn spawned one across-the-country circuit of lectures about her ten years away from the United States. In other words, it is not impossible that Dr. Wells just made up, or at least embellished, her encounter with the Bedouins in order to sell more books, which in turn would bring more people to her lectures, which would result in more sales of her book. She portrayed herself as a woman who faced certain death, yet somehow God intervened on her behalf to deliver her back to the United States alive and well. Her harrowing experiences with the American reading public.

Similarly, Kate Kraft never believed that Bedouins would attack a party of travelers, until her party was attacked one night. Her concern, however, was not of being killed by Bedouins. “I already fancied I was carried off by an Arab chief, tied behind him on his horse, riding at a fearful rate over mounts and valleys to the place of his abode.”20 There seems to be a possible romantic notion to Kraft’s wording, nonetheless. Her fear of being taken by an Arab sheik “to the place of his abode” was unique among her fellow American travelers.

Even when individual “wild Arabs” proved to be hospitable, provided shelter and food, and gave American travelers guides and escorts, these women still continued to believe and portray Palestine’s Bedouins as a monolith-ic entity of ruthless barbarians who would not be able to steal from and kill travelers over being hospitable. This does not suggest, however, that American women travelers saw nothing positive or compassionate characteris-tics upon individual Bedouins. In fact, just the opposite was true. For example, Maria Ballard Hoyolke called Bedouins “lawless and solitary” but praised their “friendly characteris-tics upon individual Bedouins. She described them as “the Sheik of the whole district” who offered her protection. She identified him as “a splendid fellow, with a keen black eye, and a countenance expressive of sagacity, dignity and good nature.” She described another Bedouin man as “brilliant eyed” who “readily returned a courteous salutation.”21 Similarily, Nellie Sims Beiskman was interested in the Bedouins because she saw them as contradictory:

Muder and plunder they delight in, yet an act of kindness they will never forget. They respect the laws governing their ideas of hospitality, but do not hesitate to rob, plunder, and murder any one to whom they are not obligated. They have scanty food and clothing, but their evident happy and contented life make them objects of interest.

Marion Harland placed both positive and negative characteris-tics upon Palestine’s Bedouins, yet her “observations” were based on stories she heard from other members of her traveling party. She never actually met, spoke with, or reported seeing any Bedouins. “Their object in living seems to rob other tribes, and to fight the injured parties afterward,” Harland believed. She identified their “lead-ing characteristics” as “patriotism and hospitality to guests; revenge and ill-doing to enemies; and a large and
level eye to the main chance, especially in the matter of robbery and horse trades.”

According to Harland, not only were Bedouins harsh to their wives, they were equally harsh to their wives or daughters who they suspected of carrying on extra-matri- monial liaisons. The husband or father would take his wife or daughter on a hunting expedition, or for a long ride, and always return alone. According to Harland, no questions were asked. Or, “her father or brother takes her off out of sight of the camp, and shoots her as he would a dog suspected of hydrophobia.”

No other American woman traveler recorded this unusually severe method of dealing with adultery or suspected adultery or other acts of “disobedience,” however. Yet that is not to say that “honorable killings” were not widespread in Palestine or any other place in the Middle East in the nineteenth century.

These examples tend to suggest that the American traveler- ers did not differentiate between Arab culture and indi- vidual personalities. Thieving and murder were seen as cultural traits, while physical features and adherence to law codes were viewed as personality traits that were shared by particular Bedouins. Yet even though some Bedouins were portrayed with handsome physical fea- tures who routinely followed cultural laws regarding hos- pitality, underneath that veneer, so believed some of these Americans, were the sociopathic traits of thieving and murder.

As stated above, some Americans identified the Bedouins they came across as something akin to American Indians. Again, Oberniger noted that it was “a standard associa- tion” for American travelers to equate Arabs with Indians. Louise Griswold, from New York, noted that the Bedouins she came across resembled “the Camanche Indian of our own country.” Later on, she came upon a Bedouin encampment. She noted that they were “savages looking” and their yell resembled “an Indian war whoop.”

Anna P. Little came across a group of Bedouins near Jericho. Some of the Bedouins began dancing and per- forming for the travelers. “The leader came up to us,” recalled Little, “placed his mouth to our ears, and with his hand patting his lips gave the most thrilling howls, some- thing like the Indian war-whoop.” Also, Little noted that the leader of this Bedouin group, whom she called “Sheik Yosef” (possibly a take off on the Nez Perce leader Chief Joseph, who would have been known in the United States at that time) gave the women a presentation of “an Arab of the war-path.” According to Little: He suddenly dashed off, racing over the plains, and quick- ly turning his horse, came like a flash to Anna Little’s guide, who had also started his horse, and when the two met, Yosef gave an unearthly yell and drew his sword as though he intended cutting off Anna’s head. It was not the yelling of Bedouins that reminded Lulu Palmer of Indians, rather it was their horsemanship. In Bethany, Palmer noted that the government placed a group of Bedouins in charge of protection for the town and its vicinity “...the sheik was an experienced rider; he came out to meet us, but his son, here apparent, was to accompany us. At our appearance the son gave cajoling down the hill at a speed that would astonish an American Indian, called Palmer.” In another account, Lucy Bainbridge por- trayed the English spoken by her Arab dragoman as bro- ken and awkward: “Must go now, gemman; run horse six mile. Day’s bad, very bad Bedouin here; me can no make e’m do.”

Several women in this study tended to portray Bedouins as “Palestine Indians.” It is unclear just how widespread that mentality was among the other women in this study, however. Brigitte Georgi-Findlay noted that Americans developed more intense anti-Arab views later in the nineteenth century. It is clear that some of the women in this study described Palestine’s Bedouins as Middle Eastern Indians. If there was a pervasive anti-Arab sentiment among the American women who ventured to Palestine, and if they tended to view Bedouins as Indians, it should not come as a surprise that Bedouins were being characterized in a negative manner. Of the six who consistently por- trayed Bedouins negatively, Benness, Tadlock, Ninde, and Bainbridge all traveled to Palestine after 1872, the year of the Modoc War.

Overall, American women travelers drew a connection between their personal safety and the relative proximity of Bedouins. While some believed the presence of Bedouins meant that they were safe and secure, others felt anything but safe and secure when Bedouins were present. Even though almost every woman in this study placed some good qualities or characteristics upon individual Bedouins, nonetheless most also feared collective Bedouins.

Only one woman in this study viewed Bedouins in a neu- tral manner: Tadlock. Miller simply noted “During the day Bedouin [sic] Arab camps were passed, as we saw their tents, which were made of goats’ hair closely woven together, making them water-tight. . . . These people are of a roving nature, therefore remain but a short time at one place. Their families go with them, of course.” Miller also noted that the Bedouins she saw hunted and fished for their food in and around the Lake Hulch area. She did not place any fear in connection to their presence, nor did she seem relieved that Bedouins were in the vicinity, thus suggesting that Bedouins were not connected to safety, as many of Miller’s contemporaries tended to believe. Miller’s account is also unique because she used the words “peo- ple” and “families” in describing the Bedouins. In short, she never judged them; she just described them.

In conclusion, while most American women portrayed Bedouins in their published accounts as a monolithic enti- ty and reacted with fear, some also showed individual Bedouins to be kind, honest, helpful, and hospitable. Even a few Americans drew parallels or connections between Palestinian Bedouins and American Indians. Those women never mentioned the sources of their apprehen- sion thus suggesting that they could have simply feared what was culturally and socially foreign. Of course, by equating Bedouins with American Indians they were pos- sibly perpetuating stereotypes of “savage” and “uncivi- lized” American Indians and transferring those stereo- types on people who they believe physically and socially resembled American Indians.
As a child Lucie Duff Gordon (née Austin) had travelled a lot with her intellectual parents, learning to appreciate the customs of different people in many foreign countries. Yet it was not for pleasure, or by her own choice, but for the sake of saying Al Fatah when starting on a journey, or considering a bargain.4 While many Victorian women preferred to be left alone and—like Marianne—were more interested in exotic flowers than in the respects of Eastern women, women’s her/stories, women’s point of view, and their writings. Lady Duff Gordon’s Letters from Egypt could have contributed to shape the Western conception of the Orient in quite a different way. She happened to witness what was to be a pivotal period for Egypt, the one in which Ismail Pasha succeeded Said Pasha. In her letters the Victorian aristocrat juxtaposed their violent rule, as well as European exploitation and disrespect for human rights, with Islam.

The main characteristic of Islam, as Duff Gordon perceived it, was in its respect: particularly for those who are small, poor, female, particular. “What I have met with everything Arab—nothing but kindness and politeness,” she wrote to the prejudiced Baroness who was her husband.13 To her mother she explained:

As to that difference, I can only say that, the writer, with great political acumen, focus on a further key point. “East and West is the key point: “East and West is the difference, not Muslims and Christians. As to that difference, I can only say: I sleep every night in a masonry open to all Luxor, and haven’t a door that has a lock. They bother me for back-sheesh; but oh how poor they are, and how rich must be a woman whose very servants drink sugar to their coffee.”

Lucie Duff Gordon’s Letters from Egypt

Lucie Duff Gordon was immediately enchanted by Islam, almost by forty-year-old lady to leave her children, her friends and her mother she explained:

What chokes me is to hear English people talk of the stick being ‘the only way to manage Arabs’...

Victorian philanthropy was characterized by the will to “improve” the life of the lower classes at home and of the natives in the colonies. Lady Duff Gordon, however, affirmed: “I don’t want to improve mankind at all, or assist in the advance of civilization. Quite the other way.”14 The writer took a firm stand in favour of the oppressed Egyptians: “My heart is with the Arabs,” she seemed to cry, and she stuck to her position. “This country and these people... are so full of tender and affectionate feeling, when they have not been crushed out of them,” she affirmed.15 Lady Duff Gordon indig-nantly reported how ill-treated the Egyptians actually were: “What chokes me is to hear English people talk of the stick being ‘the only way to manage Arabs’ as if any-one could doubt that it is the easiest way to manage any people where it can be used with impunity.”16

Having grown up among “Radicals,” literally on John Stuart Mill’s knee, Lucie thought it only natural that the Egyptian people should have the possibility to enjoy the same rights as her own fellow countrymen. She also earnestly believed that British authorities were intent on using their influence to help the natives obtain their “natural” rights. Unfortunately, she was proved wrong: “I have been amazed at several instances of English fanatis-cism this year. Why do people come to a Mussulman country with such bitter hatred ‘in their stomachs’ as I have seen three or four times?” Duff Gordon asked in 1865.17 Two years later she remarked: “I wonder when Europe will drop the absurd delusion about Christians being persecuted by Muslims. It is absolutely the other way — here at all events.”18 The writer, with great political acumen, focus on a further key point. “East and West is the difference, not Muslims and Christians. As to that difference, I can only say: I sleep every night in a masonry open to all Luxor, and haven’t a door that has a lock. They bother me for back-sheesh; but oh how poor they are, and how rich must be a woman whose very servants drink sugar to their coffee.”

As far as differences between East and West were concerned, Lady Duff Gordon was impressed by the fact that in several instances Arab women were freer than European women. Not only were corsets almost unheard of in Egypt, she realized, but marriage was not the only possible lifestyle for women. In 1864 she met “an eccentric Bedawee lady” called el Hagghe, The Pilgrimess: dressed like a man but for her beautiful jewels, “she is a virgin and fond of men’s soci-
she wrote home, at once shocked and relieved, bewitched. “No one seemed surprised, no one stared,” of men, could learn to love one other: “My pretty neigh-

Lucie enjoyed visiting hareems, and dresses and behaves like a man,” she wrote home.

Lucie enjoyed visiting hareems, where she sat for hours listening to intriguing stories told by women storytellers as skillful as Sherazade

gradually the writer adopted a form of transculturation: she sits with the men all day and sleeps in the hareem. . . . as soon as I can talk I must try and find her out. . . . There are a good many things about the hareem which I am barbarous enough to think good and rational.

Several weeks later, the writer was still thinking about the mysterious pilgrim: “I asked Mustafa about the Arab she is a young lady, and he . . . is to let me know if she comes by this queer lady. She kept on asking about el Haggeh, who she is likely to have seen as her own doppelgänger yet seen.20 To me she seems far the most curious thing I have ever encountered.

Lady Duff Gordon was on very good terms with the Ulama, who praised her as a “complete Arab” 33 and “a ‘stupid, lazy woman’!” she exultantly wrote.46

Lady Duff Gordon wrote a letter to her mother in 1866.37 In April, 1868, she closed her mother all night, even after I had put out the lantern and he could not see me in bed,” she wrote. Her estrangement from British people appears evident to the reader when she narrates about the visit of the traveller and painter Marianne North and her father, whom Lucie had known since childhood: “Mr. North looked rather horrified at the turbaned society in which he found himself. I suppose it did look odd to English eyes,” she told her mother in January 1866.

Time itself seemed to flow in a ‘Arabe for Lady Duff Gordon. Little by little, Western time ceased to convey any meaning whatsoever to her. “Ramadan,” she dated a letter to her mother in 1866.48 In 1868, she closed a letter with the words: “I no longer have any idea of British time, but here it is the eighth day of Moharram.”

Lucie’s love was then changed by the Egyptian people, who called her Sittey (“Lady”) Noor-al-ala-Noor (“light from His light”). This new name was given to her by a poor widow whose only son Lady Duff Gordon had saved from death.49 In 1863 Lucie began to study Arabic seri-

Little by little Egypt and its Arab inhabitants became the touchstone for Lady Duff Gordon. Egypt was the country of well-bred, well-mannered people par excellence, Europe was “savage” and “incivil.” In 1863, after an unhappy summer interlude in England and France, Lucie wrote contemptuously from Luxor: “It is a relief after the courtly English to fit into a strongly marked national character such as that of an Egyptian woman.”49

gradually the writer adopted a form of transculturation: she sits with the men all day and sleeps in the hareem. . . . as soon as I can talk I must try and find her out. . . . There are a good many things about the hareem which I am barbarous enough to think good and rational.

Several weeks later, the writer was still thinking about the mysterious pilgrim: “I asked Mustafa about the Arab she is a young lady, and he . . . is to let me know if she comes by this queer lady. She kept on asking about el Haggeh, who she is likely to have seen as her own doppelgänger yet seen.20 To me she seems far the most curious thing I have ever encountered.

Lucie enjoyed visiting hareems, where she sat for hours listening to intriguing stories told by women storytellers as skillful as Sherazade

gradually the writer adopted a form of transculturation: she sits with the men all day and sleeps in the hareem. . . . as soon as I can talk I must try and find her out. . . . There are a good many things about the hareem which I am barbarous enough to think good and rational.

Several weeks later, the writer was still thinking about the mysterious pilgrim: “I asked Mustafa about the Arab she is a young lady, and he . . . is to let me know if she comes by this queer lady. She kept on asking about el Haggeh, who she is likely to have seen as her own doppelgänger yet seen.20 To me she seems far the most curious thing I have ever encountered.

Lucie enjoyed visiting hareems, where she sat for hours listening to intriguing stories told by women storytellers as skillful as Sherazade

gradually the writer adopted a form of transculturation: she sits with the men all day and sleeps in the hareem. . . . as soon as I can talk I must try and find her out. . . . There are a good many things about the hareem which I am barbarous enough to think good and rational.

Several weeks later, the writer was still thinking about the mysterious pilgrim: “I asked Mustafa about the Arab she is a young lady, and he . . . is to let me know if she comes by this queer lady. She kept on asking about el Haggeh, who she is likely to have seen as her own doppelgänger yet seen.20 To me she seems far the most curious thing I have ever encountered.
nate” by choosing not to differentiate between an Arab and an European tyrant — or at least a conniving accomplice of European injustice. “One feeds six or eight Arabs well with the money for one European,” she bitterly remarked, “a water-melon and a loaf a-piece, and a cup of coffee all round; and I pass for a true Arab in hospitality. . . . no European can live so, and they despise the Arabs for doing it.” Moreover, the writer witnessed several massacres of unarmed, innocent people. She also realized despairingly that no one in England seemed to care for what the Arabs were enduring: “your letter shows how little moment the extermination of four villages is in this country,” she wrote her husband. 51 Lucie, on the contrary, expressed what was happening in Egypt:

Mohammed was really eloquent, and when he threw his melayeh over his face and sobbed, I am not ashamed to say that I cried too. . . . I know that Mohammed feels just as John Smith or Tom Brown would feel in his place. . . . Every man and woman and child in any degree kin to Achnet-et-Tayib has been taken in chains to Keneh and no one here expects to see one of them return alive.54

In a desperate letter to her mother, Lady Duff Gordon expressed her views with great clarity, situating her perspective in the same dust where the Arabs were forced to stay: “You will think me a complete rebel, but . . . one’s pity becomes a perfect passion, when one sits among the people — as I do, and sees it all, least of all can I forgive those among the Europeans and Christians who can help to ‘break these bruised reeds.’”55 Lady Lucie Duff Gordon’s letters told the story of two cultures, the Eastern and the Western culture, which never really met each other. It would seem the violent, stupid, prejudiced Europeans still bear the blame for that.

To conclude in her spirit, though East and West have not yet truly met but only clashed; yet, they still may meet, Inshallah.

End Notes

3. Ibid., p. 18.
4. Ibid., p. 93.
7. Ibid., p. 63.
11. Ibid., pp. 125-127.
15. Ibid., p. 64.
17. Ibid., p. 365.
18. Ibid., pp. 177-178.
19. Ibid., p. 96.
20. Ibid., p. 96.
21. Ibid., p. 98.
22. Ibid., p. 102.
23. Ibid., p. 189.
24. Ibid., pp. 29, 112.
25. Ibid., pp. 32, 363.
26. Ibid., p. 73.
27. Ibid., pp. 60, 135.
28. Ibid., p. 142.
29. Ibid., p. 79.
30. Ibid., p. 72.
31. Ibid., pp. 55, 57.
32. Ibid., p. 161.
33. Ibid., p. 89.
34. Ibid., p. 189.
35. Ibid., p. 163.
36. Ibid., p. 266.
37. Ibid., p. 263.
41. Ibid., p. 42.
42. Ibid., p. 94.
43. Lucie Duff Gordon, Letters from Egypt, p. 115.
44. Ibid., p. 123.
46. Ibid., p. 166.
47. Ibid., p. 110.
48. Ibid., pp. 182-183.
52. Ibid., p. 226.
53. Ibid., pp. 221-222.
54. Ibid., p. 240.

The Doubly Bound World of Kurdish Women

By Diane E. King

Anthropologist, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, American University of Beirut

The original caption of this picture, which appeared in the 2000 Amnesty International wall calendar, tells us that it is of “Kurdish refugees” as they “collect wood for heating, village of Doganli, Turkish Kurdistan 1997.” While other women trudge through the snow behind her, a woman has taken a moment out of her task of burden-carrying to pose for the camera. Most likely at the behest of the photographer, she affects a needy, helpless person reaching out for assistance.

By the most commonly accepted definition, a refugee is a person who has been granted protection from violence after crossing a state border. Such people rarely live in villages; they are usually housed in cities or in camps. The women in the picture are residents of a village built by the Turkish army after it
destroyed their homes in its conflict with Kurdish separatists. I immersed myself in gathering wood, most likely for use as fuel. This suggests the agrarian lifestyle of Kurds, who are restricted, sometimes violently, to an extent that it is likely that in many families, the older members of the household were aware, and they had arranged for me to live in a household that included one unmarried female, however, there were few households that qualified. If I lived in a household that included one or more males, I would be the object of sexual gossip by the watching community. This would cause social problems not only for me, but for the host family. Households without men were few and far between.

One such household existed of which the NGO person- nel were aware, and they had arranged for me to live there during my stay. A woman around the age of fifty who had been widowed several years earlier lived with five of her twelve children, daughters who ranged in age from early teens to early twenties. I was not the first outsider to live with them; they hosted another American, a woman who worked as a nurse for an NGO. Over the following five weeks the seven of them gave me a crash course in local mores. I hired one of the daughters as a translator and assistant. She and I made numerous visits to homes, NGO offices and the offices of local officials as I worked out the details of my research topic and settled on a plan that I would implement beginning the following summer. I returned to the US with plans to begin the following year with six months of language study followed by a year of residence in a village examining how villagers interacted with and understood the presence of international NGOs.

From the start, my introduction to Kurds and Kurdishness centered around the world of Kurdish girls and women. For me, the most striking feature of life and women I lived among was its restrict- edness. During the initial weeks I struggled to learn the rules. I learned that it was considered uncouth to be seen eating in public, to walk alone anywhere, to chew gum in the presence of a male or to drive a car. My research assistant and I took taxis and rode the bus around Tuz, the center of Kurdish life, to the border a few hours away. At the border my luggage was searched by gruff border guards as we waited in the scorching heat. Finally I crossed the bridge, where I was searched by a representative of the NGO, an American man who worked as a veterinarian.

My first discussions with the American NGO personnel involved where I would stay, and this was determined by the local gender conventions. I had made it clear in correspondence that I wanted to be as immersed as possible in the local social environment, and I therefore insisted on living with Kurds. As a young, unmarried female, however, there were few households that qualified. If I lived in a household that included one or more males, I would be the object of sexual gossip by the watching community. This would cause social problems not only for me, but for the host family. Households without men were few and far between.

The future is uncertain, but one important thing is certain: that Saddam and his regime is out... nothing worse than that could happen to us in the future.

In 1996 I attempted to return to Iraq to begin my lan- guage study and fieldwork. Although this was made possible due to the political repression of Kurds there, which was much in evidence. As an outsider associated with Kurds, I was also considered suspect. I was fol- lowed regularly by the secret police, interrogated in a threatening manner, and had to hide from interrogations from local Kurds of Turkey’s violent repression. Faced with all of this, I made an unplanned trip back to the US. Determined to continue my trajectory of learning the Kurdish language and culture even if I was displaced, I visited a refugee English course for women and asked for their help. One woman told me that her husband was away working in another city, that she was living alone with her six children, and that I was welcome to come and live with her. I thus took up residence in my second Kurdish household, this time in California. Again, gender conventions dictated where I lived and among whom I associated. My host made it clear that I was able to stay only because her husband was away for an extended period. She guarded her movements and those of her teenage daughter in a manner similar to what I had observed in Iraq.

A few months later I was hired by a refugee resettlement agency as a counselor for Kurds evacuated from Iraq as a result of the same events that had prevented me from crossing the border from Turkey. The group I counseled had been employees of the NGO that had ini- tially invited me to northern Iraq. We marveled at the unanticipated topic of events that led to our reuniting together again, this time on the other side of the world. In 1997 I tried again to return to Iraq. After waiting for two more months, I was granted crossing border-crossing permis- sion through Syria. I was finally success- ful. The moment I actually crossed the border was etched in my memory as a kind of homecoming. My involuntary displacement from the Kurdish region for the year before, and attempts to reconstruct a Kurdish experience elsewhere, had ren- dered this “authentic” Kurdish locale highly desirable to me. I understood the longing for homeland that I had heard from diaspora Kurds with a new potency, one root- ed in similar experiences.
Ingrid Jaradat Gassner
An Austrian Media Activist in Palestine

This is an interview conducted via email with Ingrid Jaradat Gassner, director of BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights. Jaradat, who is of Austrian origin, recounts what it is like to be a foreigner living in the Arab world.

1. Background information about your self and previous political and personal interest in the Middle East before moving to Palestine.

My name is Ingrid Jaradat Gassner. I was born and raised in Austria and am an Austrian citizen. Since I grew up in an environment without any personal relations to the Middle East - no Palestinian relatives, no Jewish relatives - I grew up knowing very little about the region and the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. I was also too young to understand events during the so called “high-times” of Austrian (Bruno Kreisky’s) involvement in the Middle East, and later on there was no longer any Austrian involvement. I did, however, always have a lot of curiosity and a strong sense of doubt in the validity of Austrian public opinion, including in what was said and reported by the media about the Palestinian people, starting from the days of the June 1967 war, when Austrians admired a strong and victorious Israel. My first trip to the Middle East was to an Israeli kibbutz - by pure coincidence and not by choice. Simply because there was nobody to help me and my friends travel after high school and work anywhere else, Latin America, for example, would have been our first choice.

My political education therefore began in Palestine: it was easy to understand that the kibbutz had nothing to do with socialism and that Israelis’ missed the major root causes when trying to explain the conflict with the Palestinian people. Later on, I finished my B.A. degree at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. At that time, I already was active with a small group of anti-Zionist Israelis and Palestinians (Matzpen). I have remained a political activist since then, was involved in socialist organizations in Austria, the solidarity movement with the anti-colonial struggle in Latin America, until I returned to Palestine at the time of the first Intifada. For 12 years now, I have been married in Palestine. My husband and I have one son (Nadim). We live in Beit Jala, West Bank and are both founding members of BADIL Resource Center, an organization working to promote Palestinian refugee rights, foremost their right to return, as well as to restitution.

2. Why did you decide to move to Palestine?

Although I did return to Austria for a period of time (1983 - 1984) I want more Kurdish artists like my friend Azhar Shemdin, who recently wrote to me, “I, as a person and artist, cherish my free spirit and individualism and detach my judgment on things from the influence of relatives and groups whatever they are. I paint what I see and experience, or read about. I try to look at the positive things that come out of misery, and try to heal life’s wounds by taking refuge in nature.” Azhar paints Kashmiri subjects, yes, but more importantly she paints human subjects. She paints life and death. She paints tolerance. She paints pain. She paints beauty. You can see her art on the web. There are so many ways to tell the story.

I am especially grateful to my Kurdish friends for sharing their lives with me so generously. I also thank the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, which funded my 1996 trip and my research in 1995-1998. I have also received funding from Washington State University, American University of Beirut, and the University of Kentucky.

End Notes

I am especially grateful to my Kurdish friends for sharing their lives with me so generously. I also thank the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, which funded my 1996 trip and my research in 1995-1998. I have also received funding from Washington State University, American University of Beirut, and the University of Kentucky.
My Palestinian relatives, i.e. my husband’s mother, brothers and sisters live in Sa’ir, one of the large Palestinian villages (in the meantime declared towns) in the Hebron district. My husband’s mother, Um Hamdi, is a very tolerant and smart woman, although she never had any formal schooling. She has always loved me, because she is so happy that her son found the woman he wanted to marry - after years that she and the whole family thought that he will never get married. She, as well as his brothers and sisters accept the fact that I live differently from the way they do. It is enough for them that they feel that I respect them and they respect me. The fact that we do not share a household, and even live in a different town, has certainly helped to avoid all kinds of tensions that would have appeared if we lived next to each other. So - no problems on the family front.

4. How is your relationship with your Palestinian relatives? My Palestinian relatives, i.e. my husband’s mother, brothers and sisters live in Sa’ir, one of the large Palestinian villages (in the meantime declared towns) in the Hebron district. My husband’s mother, Um Hamdi, is a very tolerant and smart woman, although she never had any formal schooling. She has always loved me, because she is so happy that her son found the woman he wanted to marry - after years that she and the whole family thought that he will never get married. She, as well as his brothers and sisters accept the fact that I live differently from the way they do. It is enough for them that they feel that I respect them and they respect me. The fact that we do not share a household, and even live in a different town, has certainly helped to avoid all kinds of tensions that would have appeared if we lived next to each other. So - no problems on the family front.

5. Please describe your work at Info Badil? I am the director of BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights. We are an organization with a General Assembly of some 50 veteran community activists in the West Bank refugee camps, a Board of seven, and a staff of nine. It is my job to draft overall institutional strategies, raise funds, write institutional reports - in addition to taking part in the advocacy and information work implemented as part of our program.

6. How would you describe your identity today, as a woman of Austrian origin having lived in the Arab world for an extended period of time? I would describe myself as a woman with Austrian citizenship, familiar with central European culture and thinking, but feeling like a Palestinian. I have very little tolerance for Western ignorance regarding Arab history, culture and religions. Zionism and the Palestinian struggle - and even less tolerance for Western arrogance and the perceived Western monopoly on democracy and civilization.

BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights is a Palestinian community-based organization that aims to provide a resource pool of alternative, critical and progressive information and analysis on the question of Palestinian refugees in the quest to achieve a just and lasting solution for exiled Palestinians based on the right of return.

BADIL was established in January 1998 and is registered with the Palestinian Authority and legally owned by the refugee community represented by a General Assembly composed of activists in Palestinian national institutions and refugee community organizations.

PO Box 728, Bethlehem, Palestine; Email: info@badil.org; Website: www.badil.org

Arda Arsenian Ekmekji
An Armenian-Lebanese Academician Recounts

Arda Ekmekji is an Armenian-Lebanese scholar living in Beirut. Born in Jerusalem, Ekmekji lived in Jordan until 1968 after which she came to Lebanon to enroll in the American University of Beirut (AUB). She holds a BA in Ancient History and an MA in Archaeology from the AUB. She also has a Ph.D. in Archeology from the University of Paris I (Sorbonne). Ekmekji served as a faculty member at AUB for around two decades teaching Cultural Studies, Ancient Religions and Civilizations as well as Archaeology. She then moved to Haigazian University in 1997. She began as Director of the Faculty of Humanities and since 1998 has served as Dean of Arts and Sciences at Haigazian University.

Ekmekji recounts that her family fled to Palestine due to the ethnic cleansing of Armenians that took place at the beginning of the century in Turkey. She recounts: “Thousands of Armenians fled to Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt and Iraq.” Ekmekji asserts that even though she is ethnically Armenian she feels very Lebanese and admits that culturally she is very Arab because she has been living in Lebanon for the past 35 years. She asserts: “I think I have lived in Lebanon more than I have lived anywhere else in my life. I feel very Lebanese and part of the system. I strongly believe that when you live through a war and then peace in the same county that counts for something.” Ekmekji admits that most Armenians living in Lebanon consider themselves Lebanese. “Let’s face it, we are very much part and parcel of the local fabric. We have no anxieties regarding not knowing where we are or where we belong. We feel we belong here, that is why we never thought of leaving Lebanon during the war years. We lived the hardships of the war just like our Lebanese next-door neighbors. We were threatened by the same bombs, endured the same misfortunes.”

On living in Lebanon Ekmekji continues that the Lebanese system accommodates everyone. The multi-cultural makeup of the Lebanese society is what is distinctive about Lebanon, she admits. Moreover, the fact that the system in Lebanon is based on 19 denominations with religious representation makes all the difference. Ekmekji explains: “In Lebanon you are born, you get married, get divorced, inherit, die and are buried based on your religious sect. Things happen first at the religious level unlike the West where matters are settled at the civic level. In this part of the world religion is not an option, without a religious passport you can’t do much. Hence, the fact that you are an Armenian living in Lebanon does not...
Armenian, I appreciate the Armenian culture and speak Given that both my parents are Armenian, I feel very burdened in a sense because we are fighting a number of heritage due to the Armenian exodus, they strive to pre- heritage that binds them. However, in terms of modes of dress, mentality, and ways of thinking one is typically Kirakosian the other is typically American and the third typically Armenian. How I think, vote, the way I dress are all influenced by the culture in which I live. In fact, an Armenian woman living in Tehran might be wearing the chador when she steps out of her house. On the other hand if you take me as an example, as an Armenian woman living in Lebanon, I am no different than any Lebanese. When walking on the street I do not send out signals indicating I am Armenian. I do not wear a sari for instance. In my private life I am different because I talk to my daughter in Armenian. Moreover, if there is an Armenian dance group performing I would like to attend the event. Besides, I attend a church service each Sunday that is in Armenian. Yet, I do all the other things the Lebanese way i.e. I celebrate my independence day, labor day, I vote, etc. If I sit with my Lebanese neighbor, who is a non-Armenian, and discuss the situation of women within the family we wouldn’t find much difference in our situations.”

Ekmejki affirms: “We Armenians are very conservative. A situation in which women are well integrated in the Lebanese system and has attended an Armenian school for 14 years of her life. Moreover, if I am to ask her where she would like to live and encouraged her to choose any country in the world she would choose Lebanon. She is a typical Armenian Lebanese.

On moving to Haigazian, Ekmejki admits that leaving AUB was not easy. The move was a big and challenging one she affirms. “Given that small context, the challenges were great and I felt there was so much I could do.” Ekmejki explains that Haigazian was founded in 1955 in honor of Dr. Armenag Haigazian, a highly respected Armenian scholar during the Armenian genocide. When Haigazian opened its doors in 1955 it had an enrollment of 43 students. With time student enrollment increased and the current student body is 750 students. When the university was first established it was designed to function as a Junior College, offering two years of university-level education. However, the demand for upper classes increased, pressuring the insti- tution to develop a variety of four-year programs. The student body is 50% Armenian, the rest come from a large number of different nationalities. Ekmejki holds: “I am very happy with the move because at Haigazian I feel I am reaching out to students. Qualitative changes happen very fast at Haigazian because it is a small institution. If someone has a creative ingenious idea it is easily imple- mented, there is no need to go through the bureaucratic impositions by big universities, one can decide to work in the public sphere has to fulfill all the domestic requirements first.” On mixed marriages Ekmejki admits that intermarriages between Armenians and non-Armenians are acceptable nowadays. Given that Armenians are dispersed all over the world they are mar- rying non-Armenian men. These marriages are taking place because it is hard to convince the new generation why they should marry Armenians only. However, Ekmejki asserts that getting married to an Armenian and in the Armenian way is still highly valued and essential in order to preserve the Armenian culture and heritage.

Ekmejki recounts that when the Armenians first came to Lebanon they were unable to mix with Lebanese because of the language barrier. Given that they only spoke Armenian and Turkish they felt very isolated. Moreover, the trauma of belonging to a coun- try and nation which has experi- enced genocide drove them to cling to their traditions. Given the importance of survival and the need for protection and even over protec- tion. This is where the myth, that Armenians live in ghettos, devel- oped. Armenians are accused of liv- ing in the past, refusing to mix with others and forbidding their children to play with their non- Armenian neighbors. This was part- ly true, however, later generations saw the situation change because Armenians graduated learned Arabic and thus the artificial barriers disappeared. Ekmejki holds: “Given that we live in Ras Beirut, my daughter is mistaken for a Ras Beirut because she has the typical accent. She is one hundred percent Lebanese, 100% Lebanese, and has attended an Armenian school for 14 years of her life. Moreover, if I am to ask her where she would like to live and encouraged her to choose any country in the world she would choose Lebanon. She is a typical Armenian Lebanese.”

According to Ekmejki, what unifies Armenians is the Armenian culture and language. She recounts that she once attended an International Armenian women’s gath- ering in which there were around 200 Armenian women from all over the world and the only common denomina- tion that women valid through various NGOs, being a member of various committees, belonging to the Armenian evangelical church, etc. Ekmejki affirms that these multi-faceted lay- ers that form her identity have added spice to her life. “Being able to shift gears between all these different lay- ers is vital and enriching. It does not affect me negative- ly or make me feel schizophrenic. On the contrary, I think it’s very boring to hear an orchestra playing on one string. If you can play on a number of different strings you will get nice music provided you can blend the sounds prop- erly.”

Being an archeologist, I think of myself as downtown Beirut with all its layers... I have all these levels which are extremely rich in my life. I am an archeologist I think of myself as down town Beirut with all its layers, namely the Byzantine level, the Roman level, the Greek level, etc. When I think of myself I have all these levels which are extremely rich in my culture. Given that both my parents are Armenian, I feel very Armenian and appreciate the Armenian culture and speak the Armenian language and this is one important layer of my personality. The fact that I am Armenian is like the cherry on the cake, it never slowed me down. Another enriching layer is due to the fact that I was born in Jerusalem and saw there till the age of 17. Besides, hav- ing lived all my adult mature life in Lebanon, I have an enormous layer which is Lebanese. Also there are the still more sub-layers that come in like a diverse mixture, a diverse system of education, the American and the French. Besides, being engaged in academia, in voluntary work through various NGOs, being a member of various committees, belonging to the Armenian evangelical church, etc. Ekmejki affirms that these multi-faceted lay- ers that form her identity have added spice to her life. “Being able to shift gears between all these different lay- ers is vital and enriching. It does not affect me negative- ly or make me feel schizophrenic. On the contrary, I think it’s very boring to hear an orchestra playing on one string. If you can play on a number of different strings you will get nice music provided you can blend the sounds prop- erly.”

According to Ekmejki, what unifies Armenians is the Armenian culture and language. She recounts that she once attended an International Armenian women’s gath- ering in which there were around 200 Armenian women from all over the world and the only common denomina- tion that women valid through various NGOs, being a member of various committees, belonging to the Armenian evangelical church, etc. Ekmejki affirms that these multi-faceted lay- ers that form her identity have added spice to her life. “Being able to shift gears between all these different lay- ers is vital and enriching. It does not affect me negative- ly or make me feel schizophrenic. On the contrary, I think it’s very boring to hear an orchestra playing on one string. If you can play on a number of different strings you will get nice music provided you can blend the sounds prop- erly.”
The unveiling was enacted on the eve of the feminist movement they would help lead for a quarter of a century. In telling me the story of her unveiling, Nubarawi was urging me to investigate and question restrictions and injustices imposed in the name of culture. She was teaching me that there was also a local tradition of dissent and resistance against injustices to women and that this was as much a part of the culture as the restrictions it opposed. She told me about the feminist movement of which she had been a part from the 1920s until the mid-1950s and how, after the dissolution of an independent feminist movement in 1956 by the state under President Nasser, she had kept a low profile at home and had become visibly active in the international arena. Had I not met Saiza Nubarawi, Hava Idris (the niece of Huda Sha’rawi), Inji Aflatoon (a communist and feminist writer, activist and artist), Dunyaa Shafiq (leader of the Bint al-Nil feminist movement), and others in whose homes I visited, I would not have been aware of the continuation of a behind-the-scenes feminist discourse. I could point now to them and their activism as examples of a tradition of insider resistance: I could make their arguments mine - arguments framed in the discourses of culture, nation and religion. I did not have to be the dutiful pupil forced into remedial learning.

Early last century, when Egyptian feminists exposed and confronted patriarchal oppression, they were branded foreign. They and their feminism were discredited as Western despite the fact that these “aliens” were Egyptian women with impeccable nationalist credentials, who had been active in the nationalist movement against British colonial rule, and whose nationalist activism - inseparable from their feminism - was enthusiastically accepted. Thus, it was with Egyptian activist women castigated as foreigners that I began my journey through the minefields of the gendered “us-es” and “thems”. From these women, I learned about ways of thinking and behaving that were alternative to the conventions that had been presented to me as obligatory in the discourses of nation, culture, and Islam. I learned from them how they had fought to construct a new identity for Egyptian women, initially simply as persons with the right to move in public space, to alter their dress and habits, and to be respected while exhibiting new forms of decent behavior, and I learned how they later demanded their rights to be fully participating citizens of a modern, independent state. These women, who had bridged colonial and postcolonial society, found that their own subject positions had changed from fully accepted participants in the militant nationalist-struggle to second-class citizens in the new quasi-independent state in 1923.

From them, I learned how they experienced being foreign. This was first, by not being accorded in practice the full and equal rights of citizenship that the Egyptian constitution granted them and, second, by being labeled as “Western” and thereby delegitimizing and underclassifying them as a social object. I was reinforced in my own will not to succumb to the attempts of others to define and control me, not to bow indiscriminately to inherited modes of behavior. I soon found that it was not simply one set of Egyptians - or only conserva-
tive Egyptians - who would admit one into society, nor one set of conventions, to which one must adhere to become “properly” Egyptian. I learned that the epithet “Western” used in a pejorative sense could be applied to anyone in an attempt to place her outside the borders of acceptability, to “foreignize”. The last of the “first-wavers” accepted me as “one of them”, in Saiza Nubarawi’s words. She, Hava Idris, Amina al-Sa’id, Inji Aflatoon, and others understood that I had not come to Egypt to perch on the fringes, enjoying the easy social and economic benefits that accrued to expatriates, but to settle, to live the hard times with them, to become one of them. Intentions and actions mattered as they dissolved the borders between themselves and me. These feminists, who well understood the manipulative, delegitimizing, and stigmatizing uses of the foreign, gave me the chance to be an insider and to choose what to accept and reject, and the chance to shape my own identity.

My interactions with these Egyptian feminists drew together two projects: the personal project of becoming an insider in Egypt and a professional project of academic research on the history of the rise of feminism in Egypt. The two projects worked to reinforce and enhance each other. I felt that my research was a path to a deeper understanding of Egypt and a grasp of its culture - of both its plural realities and its possibilities for change. My relationships with my elder mentors, meanwhile, helped me live Egypt differently.

By the mid-1980s, Egypt had been my home for twenty years, although during these years I came and went frequently. Several years earlier I had finished my thesis on the first wave of Egyptian feminism for my doctorate at Oxford University. Throughout the process I had continued to mesh personal and professional projects. Twenty years was a long time and my sense of being foreign in Egypt had become muted. I had staged resistances and had made accommodations. If I felt that people had given me more space to be myself, I also was a different person than I had been before. And it would not be long before I would lose my early feminist mentors and guides: Saiza Nubarawi, Hava Idris, Inji Aflatoon, and Amina al-Sa’id, all of whom died in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Egypt was a different place from the country I had first entered. In 1970 and with the coming to power of Anwar Sadat, Arab socialism was dismantled “open door” capitalism was introduced, a multi-party system was permitted to surface, and formerly silenced voices and ideologies were once again allowed in public space. This period saw the rise of islamism, or political Islam, and with it the dissemination of a reactionary discourse on women and gender. But feminism, too, found expression once again in this new, more open public space. If the first-wavers I met in Egypt lent me a hand in pulling me in and mentoring me, I participated alongside second-wave -women & formed our own feminist movement from the base of shared experience and the common problems we faced living in Egypt.

We came together as women & formed our own feminism from the base of shared experience and the common problems we faced living in Egypt.
When I was offered to write an article as a non-Arab woman living in Lebanon, I paused for a while before answering, wondering whether I really felt like a non-Arab. I have been pondering about this ever since, wondering whether I really felt like a non-Arab. This subject turned out to be more elaborate than I had first thought. If being, or for that matter, not being an Arab were simply a question of origin, of blood and genes, things would look slightly more calculable. I rather doubt that one can be born as an Arab, since “Arabism” is not a state induced by natural processes, but rather through socialization and acculturation. It seems that many factors have to be taken into consideration, as the place where one has lived, which language one speaks and, sometimes, the physical appearance. Two worlds that often clash are the way people view themselves and the way they are viewed by others. This is precisely the point where I faced most of the difficulties. My father was born in a village in Palestine, and he left his village for Germany to continue his studies when he was about 18 years old. My mother’s family emigrated from Portugal, turning Germany into their new home decades ago. I thus see myself as a product of three cultures and that such a question is more oversimplified. It would certainly be justifiable to ask whether at all it is important to answer this question. However, as a product of living in Beirut, I realized that this question was central to my experience in Lebanon and other Arab countries. This might be linked to the fact that people, in general, are afraid of what they don’t know, and therefore like to categorize things. A human being without a culture must seem like a bewildering case!

My impressions are mainly based on my experiences in Beirut, in particular, and Lebanon, in general, and I will narrate a few incidents from my past to clarify the points I’m trying to make. 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 that the Palestinians have been through because I was not a “real” Arab. It seemed to me they had created an Arab, since “Arabism” is not a state induced by natural processes, but rather through socialization and acculturation. It seems that many factors have to be taken into consideration, as the place where one has lived, which language one speaks and, sometimes, the physical appearance. Two worlds that often clash are the way people view themselves and the way they are viewed by others. This is precisely the point where I faced most of the difficulties. My father was born in a village in Palestine, and he left his village for Germany to continue his studies when he was about 18 years old. My mother’s family emigrated from Portugal, turning Germany into their new home decades ago. I thus see myself as a product of three cultures and, my mother tongue is German and Germany is the place where I feel at home. When people ask me whether I feel more like an Arab or a German, I tend to say that I am “fragmentary”, that I am a product of many cultures and that such a question is oversimplified. It would certainly be justifiable to ask whether at all it is important to answer this question. However, as a product of living in Beirut, I realized that this question was central to my experience in Lebanon and other Arab countries. This might be linked to the fact that people, in general, are afraid of what they don’t know, and therefore like to categorize things. A human being without a culture must seem like a bewildering case!

My impressions are mainly based on my experiences in Beirut, in particular, and Lebanon, in general, and I will narrate a few incidents from my past to clarify the points I’m trying to make. 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 that 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 Arab, and me, the

ENDNOTES

1. Saiza Nabrawi herself had had insider-outsider problems when, after having been raised ostensibly as a “French girl” in her early teens, she returned to live in Egypt in her country of birth. Her parodic recounting of this story told me that she never quite got over a sense of displacement, even though she felt intensely Egyptian and was a fervent nationalist. See my article “Alternative Visions of Gender,” Al Ahram Weekly (No. 13-19, 1997), 11.
4. One of the papers I presented is “Al-Nis’iyaa ka qwawa fi al-alam al’arabi” [“Feminism as a Force in the Arab world”] which was published in al-Fikra al-mu’asira al-arabiyya wa al mar’a [Contemporary Arab Thought and the Woman] (Cairo: Arab Women’s Solidarity Association, 1989).
5. The article is called “Ma hiyya al-nisa’iyya?” [“What is Feminism?”] Nisf al-dunya 34, no.7 (Sept. 21, 1990), 85.
6. The article is called “Feminism and Islamist women activists wanted to change the ground as part of a larger move-ment intent upon establishing an Islamic state. In 1990, Valentine Moghadam organized a conference on Women and Identity Politics in which I participated along with many scholars from the Middle East. At this conference, we discussed the dissatisfaction we detect-ed on gender issues from women associated with Islamist movements, specifically the older Islamist move-ments in Egypt and Iran. We were seeing the seeds of what was later to be called Islamic feminism.

To be an Arab or not to be... that is the question!
“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.

Interestingly, my sister, who has darker skin than I do, and whose Arabic is more fluent than mine, found it easier to be accepted as an Arab. Here I would like to clarify what I mean by more “fluent”. In fact, we both have the same accent, which our friends often teased and called “heavy”. The difference between us was that my sister mastered many of the expressions common to the Arabic language. There are expressions in the Arabic language for several occasions, as when somebody has showered, when someone gets a new haircut, or when one returns safely from a trip and many other occasions. I reckon this is an important aspect of the Arabic language I have failed to master. On one occasion, I met the sister of a friend and I asked her how her sister was doing. She said her sister was sick, and instead of using the proper expression “May she get healthy”, I said “Thank God for her health”, which was certainly unsuitable. Another thing my friends often found amusing was that I never learned how to belly dance. Many of my attempts to imitate their elegant dance failed. They used to wrap ashawl around my waist and make me dance in the middle of the classroom, while everybody else was clapping and laughing.

Nevertheless, these memories certainly do belong to the positive sides of my experience in Nablus, even though it often was painful for a child of my age to feel like an outsider. Surprisingly, when it came to my behavior, many expected me to be just a simple Arab, my norms and rules that were common at that time in Nablus. I remember getting angry looks and receiving hostile remarks for the way I walked, dressed or laughed. It was not common to see me talk aloud. We were alone in the Internet café, and we felt sure that in many cases, people didn’t have bad intentions.

However, the anger I felt was increasing. Since I felt my Arabic was bad, I often talked to people in English. Some would simply answer in Arabic. Once, when I asked a man something in English, another man who was standing next to him said, “Talk to her in Arabic. She’s an Arab.” One day, I went to an Internet café with my boyfriend, who is German and looks German, as people say. We sat there, surfing on the Internet, when the shopkeeper came and asked us where we are from. We both said Germany, but he didn’t seem to like my answer. He told me that I look Lebanese. I just ignored what he said. He left, and I thought the issue was settled. After a few minutes, he came over again, emphasizing the fact that I certainly don’t look German. Since I felt he was intruding into my private sphere, I didn’t give him the answer he would have liked to hear. He went back to his desk, and a few minutes later, he took out a Koran and started reading some verses aloud. We were alone in the Internet café, and we felt extremely uncomfortable.

However, this is just one part of my experience in Lebanon. I guess that living in Beirut has also helped me solve the dilemma of my identity. I learned to be open about my origin and to talk about the way I view things. I met several people who seemed to be just as fragmentary as I was and who were interested in talking about their experiences abroad and in Lebanon. This experience has helped me to combine all aspects of my identity and not to refuse the Arab elements of it, since without it, I would probably not be the same person. My time in Lebanon will soon come to an end, but I am glad I have realized there were many people who have accepted me for who I am.
Bahrainis are allowed to work in any field. In addition, the female workforce supply for Bahraini citizenship. A wife's application for Bahraini citizenship takes a minimum of five years. In the meantime, she must maintain her household or shop. The visa regulations, however, are not really obstacles to mixed marriages. In fact, it's unlikely that many men and women learn about these legal requirements until after they are married. For them, it's a bureaucratic hassle and a periodic reminder that they've gone against social norms.

Women in the Migrant Workforce
If the legal obstacles are not sufficient to deter marriages across boundaries of nationality, what then has kept the numbers of mixed marriages low? One factor has been the gender balance of the migrant population. Since migration to Bahrain is primarily a migration of unskilled and semi-skilled laborers, the migrants have until recently been overwhelmingly men unaccompanied by their families. Women were at first only a very small part of this labor force. It was not until the 1980s, with the shift to South East Asian labor and the growth in the service industry, that Bahraini employers began recruiting women in increasing numbers.

Household work was one of the first jobs available to non-Bahraini women. This despite the fact that, until fairly recently, Gulf Arabs hired men to work as household laborers at least as often as they hired women. Like other occupations, both male and female household workers were originally recruited from other Arab or South Asian countries. The feminization of household labor in the Gulf States began roughly in the late 1970s and is still incomplete in some countries. The demand for female workers was actually greater in other occupations where women are recruited as groups to work in institutions and factories. In the 1950s and 1960s, Bahraini schools recruited Egyptian and Palestinian women as teachers. In the 1970s, Indian women joined their Lebanese and South African counterparts when Bahrain's hospitals recruited them to work as nurses. At this time, European women also began entering the labor force. Women then began to turn to South East Asia, particularly the Philippines, as a source of unskilled and semi-skilled labor. The fertility of this influx into Bahrain was tempering some of the criticism of their sexual behavior. It can be assumed that many of them "use" the women for extra-marital affairs or as entertain- ment to pass the years as they wait for a respectable arranged marriage.

As Bahraini's economy diversified in the 1980s, employers began to turn to South East Asia, particularly the Philippines, as a source of unskilled and semi-skilled labor. The fertility of this influx into Bahrain was tempering some of the criticism of their sexual behavior. It can be assumed that many of them "use" the women for extra-marital affairs or as entertainment to pass the years as they wait for a respectable arranged marriage.

In either case, the level of supervision during their off time is much lower. Employees may be restricted from entertaining guests of the opposite sex in their apartments, but are only rarely subject to curfews.2

Third, the feminization of the service sector shapes criteria for assessing feminine attractiveness. Workers serving the public are recruited based on the perceived appeal they will have to prospective clientele. Employers regularly set height and weight standards; impose dress codes; and, screen applicants for personality, physical appearance and personal hygiene. In general, Bahraini men and women working in South East Asian and European women were to be more positively and attractive than they do South Asian or African women. Many of the cultural and physical features deemed typical of South East Asian and European women prove to be advantages in the labor market, and the continued placement of such women in particular occupations and industries temper the perception of their sexual attractiveness. However, as we will see in the following discussion, these same features and the nature of work in the public sphere contribute to a stigma associated with immorality and sexual promiscuity. It is important to emphasize here that cultural and class values can be a strong deterrent to inter-ethnic dating and mixed marriages.

Cultural Attitudes Discouraging Inter-Ethnic Dating and Mixed Marriages

Until the mid-1980s, marriages between Bahraini men and non-Arab women remained relatively rare. During the 1970s and 1980s, one would occasionally hear about Bahraini men who'd married European or American women. More often than not, these were upper and middle class Bahrainis who’d met their wives while travelling or studying abroad. At the other end of the spectrum, are the tales about Arabs travelling to India for "cheap brides"—young women taken from poverty to wed elderly and often poor grizzled. While the later were often understood as representing the sexist and patriarchal horrors of polygamy, arranged marriages, bride wealth sys- tems and poverty, the former were interpreted as inevitable signs of Bahrain’s emerging cosmopolitanism.

While this handful of brides were being brought back from the West or India in the 1960s and 1970s, the vast majority of mixed marriages must have taken place between Bahraini men and foreign women working in Bahrain. However, these marriages were often marked by signs of disapproval and criticism. The occasional marriages to household workers would not have represented a significant shift in practice. Arabia had been intermarrying with their African and Arab servants for generations. With regard to the foreign teach- ers and nurses, these women were employed in respected professions, were carefully supervised during their off time, and so forth. The emerging middle class expressed covert rather than overt disapproval when a co-worker had an off time love match. Even fewer marriages that did take place were likely to have been deemed respectable due to the cultural and, in most cases, religious similarities.

In this early phase of women’s migration to Bahrain, it was the accompanied European, particularly British, women who were often negatively perceived. The flight attendants working with Gulf Air were an obvious example of non-Arab women working in Bahrain before the 1980s. Although housed together in employer provided apartments, by nature of their work the flight attendants had considerable freedom to move about and socialize in mixed gender set- tings. Unlike from the perspective of Arab men, these unaccompanied European women raised some con- sternation and many eyebrows. What sort of families would "allow" their daughters to travel with strangers and unsupervised? What kind of background encouraged them to work and socialize amongst men not related to them? How could they monitor their social life, their sexual and physical features deemed typical of South East Asian and European women prove to be advantages in the labor market, and the continued placement of such women in particular occupations and industries temper the perception of their sexual attractiveness. However, as we will see in the following discussion, these same features and the nature of work in the public sphere contribute to a stigma associated with immorality and sexual promiscuity. It is important to emphasize here that cultural and class values can be a strong deterrent to inter-ethnic dating and mixed marriages.

Cultural Attitudes Discouraging Inter-Ethnic Dating and Mixed Marriages

Until the mid-1980s, marriages between Bahraini men and non-Arab women remained relatively rare. During the 1970s and 1980s, one would occasionally hear about Bahraini men who’d married European or American women. More often than not, these were upper and middle class Bahrainis who’d met their wives while travelling or studying abroad. At the other end of the spectrum, are the tales about Arabs travelling to India for “cheap brides”—young women taken from poverty to wed elderly and often poor grizzled. While the later were often understood as representing the sexist and patriarchal horrors of polygamy, arranged marriages, bride wealth sys- tems and poverty, the former were interpreted as inevitable signs of Bahrain’s emerging cosmopolitanism.

While this handful of brides were being brought back from the West or India in the 1960s and 1970s, the vast majority of mixed marriages must have taken place between Bahraini men and foreign women working in Bahrain. However, these marriages were often marked by signs of disapproval and criticism. The occasional marriages to household workers would not have represented a significant shift in practice. Arabia had been intermarrying with their African and Arab servants for generations. With regard to the foreign teach- ers and nurses, these women were employed in respected professions, were carefully supervised during their off time, and so forth. The emerging middle class expressed covert rather than overt disapproval when a co-worker had an off time love match. Even fewer marriages that did take place were likely to have been deemed respectable due to the cultural and, in most cases, religious similarities.

In this early phase of women’s migration to Bahrain, it was the accompanied European, particularly British, women who were often negatively perceived. The flight attendants working with Gulf Air were an obvious example of non-Arab women working in Bahrain before the 1980s. Although housed together in employer provided apartments, by nature of their work the flight attendants had considerable freedoms...
At the same time, cultural attitudes about mixed marriages also became more critical. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, although Filipinas of all social backgrounds emigrate to work overseas, a large proportion of Filipinas migrating for work in Bahrain are young, single women of marriageable age. On the one hand, such young women are prime candidates for labor emigration. It is common practice in the Philippines for an unmarried daughter to migrate to work in order to help support her parents and younger siblings. These unmarried women are not hindered from emigration by marriage or children and provide a potential income for their families of birth. Another common profile of a Filipina émigré is the single/deserted mother in need of income to support her children (cf. Constable 1997).

Second, contrary to Bahraini stereotypes of Filipinas, their culture discourages extra marital relations and prioritizes marriage and starting a family during ones twenties. Filipino culture also values exogamy and encourages love matches rather than arranged marriages. Out marriage is an acceptable practice and a strategy for emigration from the Philippines and children of mixed marriages are praised as physically attractive. With few cultural deterrents to mixed marriage, the single Filipinas migrating to Bahrain often entertain hopes of finding a spouse while abroad. Bahrain’s multinational population offers many opportunities for Bahranis of all races, their European, and American men.

Because Filipinas select their own spouses rather than enter arranged marriages, their courtship practices involve mixed gender socializing and dating. Thus they share the flight attendants’ reputation as accessible and approachable women attractive to each other. Each use different criteria for mating and the eroticization of Asian-ness in Bahraini culture. Their respective positions in the economic and social hierarchies, structuring labor migration, make these men and women attractive to each other. Each use different criteria for assessing attractiveness, but each are constructed within specific power relations that eroticize race and class.

The economic aspirations can work both ways. Like many women around the world, the Filipinas I interviewed hoped for a husband and a marriage that would provide economic stability for themselves and their families. For many of these women who come from areas of high unemployment and economic hardship, the chance to marry a foreigner (or an overseas worker) offers greater economic possibilities than marrying at home. Since visa regulations allow the foreign wives of Bahraini men to work in Bahrain, marriage may relieve some of the uncertainties about employment continuity. For some of the women I interviewed marrying a Bahraini secured their residence and employment opportunities in Bahrain. In many cases, the boyfriend or husband not only provides for his wife but also provides economic assistance to the wife’s kin in the Philippines. In this regard, they replace the woman as the overseas supporter of the family. It is quite common for the Bahraini spouse to find jobs in Bahrain for his wife’s relatives or to invest in family businesses in the Philippines.

Grace and Walid, one of the couples I interviewed, have been married for 11 years. In many ways, they personify the ideals of many entering these marriages. Their respective positions in the economic and social hierarchies, structuring labor migration, make these men and women attractive to each other. Each use different criteria for assessing attractiveness, but each are constructed within specific power relations that eroticize race and class. In the same vein, a young Filipina who’d just moved in with her American boyfriend told me she refused to hire a maid for fear that she’d “Steal my boyfriend.”

Economic hierarchies and class issues contribute to the constructed attractiveness of Filipina women as being sexual and potential marriage partners, and may explain why lower-middle class Bahraini men marry or are engaged to Filipina wives. Filipina wives are believed to be less economically demanding than a Bahraini wife might be. First of all, they do not demand a bride price. Second, many of the Filipina wives would willingly continue to work or are at least more likely than most Bahraini women to perform household and child rearing tasks without the assistance of household workers. The opinion that men like to date or marry Filipinas because “they get a housekeeper in the bargain” is widely held in Bahrain, of Arab, European and American men.

The eroticization of Asian-ness is enhanced by an eroticization of “Asian-ness”. Bahrain is host to many women such as Grace and Judith. It is in their relationships with Bahraini men that we see the inseparability of race and class as factors shaping attitudes about mixed liaisons and marriages in Bahrain. Their respective positions in the economic and social hierarchies, structuring labor migration, make these men and women attractive to each other. Each use different criteria for assessing attractiveness, but each are constructed within specific power relations that eroticize race and class.

End Notes
1. This paper is a small portion of 20 months of fieldwork conducted in Bahrain between June 2003 and April 2004 from support from a Fulbright Research Grant and UCSC grant from DePaul University.

2. Marriages between Bahraini women and non-Arab men are even rarer. Those that do occur tend to be between western educated women of elite status and highly educated or wealthy European or North American men.

3. Interestingly, as the culture of retail sector has been feminized by the recruitment of Asian women, Bahraini women have more opportunities for jobs in this sector.

4. The Sri Lankan garment workers are the most notable exception to this, as they are housed in labor camps. Household workers generally live at their workplace and their movements are much more restricted than workers in the service and commercial sector.

5. For a very interesting and honest first hand account of the mail order bride experience see Mackiew (2000).

References
The Denial of Citizenship
The case of Arab women’s rights to pass on their nationality

By Rima Habib and Lina Abou-Habib

Lina Abou Habib, Gender and Development Trainer and Director of the Center for Research and Training Development

Background and Rationale
At present, women throughout the Machreq and Maghreb regions are being denied their full national identities by being excluded from the rights, privileges, security, and status that citizens of a country should have access to. Unjust laws, discriminatory constitutions, and biased mentalities, that do not recognize women as equal citizens, hinder women’s rights to such things as political participation, economic security, mobility, and state protection.

In every country throughout MENA (Middle East and Northern Africa), women are not granted full-citizenship, and are thus treated by the state and society as second-class citizens. In many Arab states, women are frequently denied their right to nationality. This works to increase the dependency women have on their male family members for their right as citizens, it also denies children their basic access to. Unjust laws, discriminatory constitutions, and biased mentalities, that do not recognize women as equal citizens, hinder women’s rights to such things as political participation, economic security, mobility, and state protection.

In the Middle East and North Africa, married women are denied their right to nationality if their husbands are non-nationals. In some cases the women cannot pass their citizenship to their children or their husbands’ children, while a man married to a non-national can. As such, all signatory Arab states have expressed reservations on this provision of the Convention.

If the state is designed to only protect women from within their role in the family, the state often fails to protect women who are in need of protection from their families. By failing to protect women adequately from violence such as domestic abuse, rape, marital rape, and honor killings, the state fails to provide the protection forthcoming to a full-citizen. In fact, by ignoring issues of gender-based violence or by granting lenient punishments to perpetrators of violence against women, the state actually reinforces women’s exclusion from the rights of citizens.

Additionally, women are frequently denied their right to nationality by requiring a male relative’s permission to access the rights and privileges that she should inherently have access to. This works to increase the dependency women have on their male family members for economic, social, and legal stability. For example, in many Arab countries women must attain the permission of their fathers, brothers, or husbands in order to obtain a passport, travel outside of their country, start a business, receive a bank loan, open a bank account, or get married. All of the above should be available to women independently as equal citizens of their country, yet they continue to be denied.

Citizenship, Nationality and the CEDAW

Article 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), explicitly holds state signatories responsible for granting women equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality as well as the right of women to pass their nationality on to their children and husbands. However, many of its Arab states signatories do not respect this right and do not fulfilled their promise to grant full citizenship to women. Across the Middle East and North Africa, married women are denied their right to nationality if their husbands are non-nationals. In these cases the women cannot pass their citizenship to their husbands or their children while a man married to a non-national can.

Those countries involved in the campaign and its attention to this issue have aimed to: a) generate knowledge, b) set the stage for change and c) inform advocacy. Known as the Action Oriented Research Component, the second component of the campaign, organizations are trained and developed to train groups of people in the research skills and methodologies of research and to implement the GLIP. The third component of the campaign, the Advocacy Component, is the last and most important part of the campaign which takes the action research and advocacy skills developed and trains groups of people in the advocacy skills and methodologies of advocacy.
Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East

Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East is a stimulating collection of essays authored by twenty women who have addressed the concepts of gender and citizenship across the different states of the Middle East. Following a provocative theoretical introduction, the volume is structured along four regional parts: North Africa, Eastern Arab States, The Arab Gulf, and the non-Arab Middle East, each of which includes specific country cases examining the reasons why women in these countries fall short of being “full-citizens,” and offering an in-depth examination of national legislation on personal status, nationality, social security law, labor law and penal law.

The importance of this book derives from the underlying notion according to which the Middle East cannot be examined in a unified and generalized way. Thus, each essay examines the specificity of one state, or draws a comparison between two states based on “points of departure” as the editor suggests, viewed from the lens of evolving gender-state relations. Indeed, from the very beginning, the editor “cautions against essentialising the Middle East or stabilizing any aspect of these continually changing societies” (p. 4).

In the case of Algeria, Nawira Lazaar examines the historical formation of the concept of citizenship regarding women; she argues that since the country’s independence, Algerian women have been locked in between the state’s conventional interpretation of citizenship and the sharia, which represents women as subjects primarily. Lazaar contends that this parallel has strained to the interests of all Algerian governments that have existed since 1962: “The extension of formal citizenship to women enabled the state to disregard the antinomy between the assertion of equality before the law, a secular endorsement of (substantive) citizenship, and inequality between men and women as prescribed by the sharia”.

Mounira Charrad draws a comparison between Tunisia and Morocco to explain how lineage and kin-based societies have impeded the individual citizenship rights of women. “Whereas in Morocco the legal discourse tends to enrol kin privileges, in Tunisia the law provides considerably more space to a construct of self as an individual and, consequently, more rights to women.” This difference emerged from the two states’ divergent interests, and thus foundational policies: “In Tunisia, the newly formed sovereign state had an interest in transferring the allegiance of the population from particularistic loyalties to itself, and attempting to undermine traditional kin-based groups. In Morocco, the state maintained particularistic loyalties by placing them under a supra-authority.” Suad Joseph also puts the emphasis on the notion of kinship, which is a widely acknowledged factor shaping citizenship in Lebanon. However, Joseph’s innovative argument is that in the context of a weak state, kinship in Lebanon has played a hegemonic role over males, females, seniors and juniors - and not only over females and juniors. She blames this shortcoming in studies about Lebanon to the “hyperfocus on the civic myth of sectarian pluralism,” which she argues, “has glossed the critical kinship dynamics that have underwritten pluralism (legal, social, and cultural), resulting in the gendering and aging of citizenship laws and practices”.

Another major case is that of the Palestinian Authority: Jad, Johnson and Gacaman explain that the fact that the state is in transition, Palestinian women have a role to play in shaping the setting of citizenship: “Whereas women activists in other contexts have often argued for inclusion in citizenship, under the particular circumstances of Palestine in transition, the women’s movement must create the conditions of citizenship. This is both an opportunity for engendering citizenship, and an enormous challenge, which the women’s movement addresses within the context of the democratic movements in Palestine.”

One common conclusion that all the authors seem to agree upon is that patriarchy, “defined as a system of social relations privileging male seniors over juniors and women, both in the public and private spheres,” is a decisive factor in the gender-citizenship equation. But they differ on the channels through which women in each country could focus their efforts to expand the scope of their rights, while working in practice or in theory. Depending on the cases, some authors strongly denounce the restraints imposed on women as a result of kinship and religious forces, upholding the need to secure women’s rights as individuals (Lazaar, Charrad), while others contend that women in certain countries need to work on securing their rights through family, as the basic unit of their societies (Altorki, Al-Mughni and Tétreault).

Deniz Kandiyoti concludes that through the cases studies presented in this book, it would be possible to conclude that women’s rights “reveal the most serious fault lines in modern concepts of citizenship for the region.” This, she argues, could mark the “difference specifica” of the Middle East.