

Insiders/Outsiders-Emic/Etic Study of Women and Gender in the New Millennium

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Thematic Conversation Description

This Thematic Conversation will assess the impact and changes in a significant and ongoing debate within women and gender studies and related disciplines. This debate concerns the insider vs. external observer in the study of and/or teaching on women and gender of the Middle East. Within anthropology it is described as the emic vs. the etic approach to observation and understanding. Now that a broad and varied body of data and publications on the topics of women and gender of the Middle East has appeared in the last quarter of the twentieth century, it is fitting that transformations in the methodologies of research, academic discourses about these topics, and pedagogical approaches should have occurred in various ways. The intent of the Conversation will be to assess the value of the emic/etic debate in different areas of this multidisciplinary field and consider whether recent versions of this debate can further new directions for research (or new approaches to teaching on women/gender).

1. Sondra Hale's² presentation involves the differences and similarities in teaching about gender and women in the Middle East and in the U.S., teaching about Middle Eastern and Muslim women in U.S. academies, and the social location of those who are doing the teaching, i.e., "insiders" and "outsiders." The development of women's studies, which is closely associated with the "Western" academy, is based on modernist notions of emancipation and progress toward an end. Although some of the research agendas of Middle Eastern women's/gender studies programs and centers may appear to be, and are thought to be, very different in research agendas and methodologies, I argue that there are striking similarities, as well as possibilities for some shared goals. The differences may reflect our choices about the starting points for our enterprises and the differential centering of such concepts as "women," "genders," and "feminism(s)" as critical perspectives and as strategies of representation.

First, it is often argued by education policy-makers and curriculum builders that the concentration in the Middle East should be on "gender studies," and not "women's studies," and that research agendas in the Middle East should be practical and tied to policy. Yet, it is the very modernist component that gives them a similarity: i.e., the stress on developing women's power in a linear way, ideally, from low to high, toward equality (or emancipation, depending on the political ideology). For certain, there are differences: e.g., the Western feminist agenda of subverting the frame, unsettling the concepts, or blurring the borders versus the emphasis of Middle Eastern societies on making space for women within the frame.

We could argue, also, that some of the subjects rarely dealt with by Middle Eastern scholars in the academy may be the bread and butter of Women's Studies/Gender Studies in the U.S., e.g., sexuality, at least as it has been defined by the "West." Perhaps more importantly, Western programs are said to be woman-centered; whereas in some areas of the Middle East, gender studies are said to be society - or community-oriented. This woman-centeredness requires an emphasis on process over product, and although praxis has faltered, process in the form of liberatory pedagogy has not. However, in the Middle East, such a personalized, emotional, subjective, and non authoritarian classroom may be seen as antithetical to the kind of respect that gender studies seeks.

Women's studies in the West has become increasingly abstract and separated from community; whereas Middle Eastern gender studies may be more derived from community needs. What does this mean for the teaching strategies of the "insider/outsider" or emic/etic approaches in our pedagogies, practice, and theory-building?

2. Jennifer Olmsted³ maintains: As someone who grew up in Lebanon, I have always felt that Beirut was my home. When I came to the US, I felt very much like an outsider. And yet as a researcher, returning to the region as an adult, I have come to realize that I am still very much an outsider in the Middle East. Because of my childhood experience, I am neither a total outsider nor a total insider in either part of the world. As such, my experience challenges the dualist construction of the insider/outsider concept. In my presentation I will discuss how I feel caught between the categories of insider and outsider, not only in terms of my research and definition of 'home,' but also in terms of my disciplinary training. In addition I

will discuss how my insideout status plays itself out in the 'field' and at 'home.' Finally, I will explore how this experience has shaped my research and teaching. I will draw both on the literature on 'insiders/out-siders' and 'third Culture kids' which discusses children raised outside their 'home' culture.

3. According to Eleanor Doumato⁴ for the historian, the insider vs. external observer debate needs to be laid to rest. There is now too much convincing evidence that the two perspectives represent a false dichotomy, as no observer is wholly one or the other, and no observer is without a point of view (Doumato, AbuLughod). As to the types of sources with which historians work, at least two longitudinal studies show that the idea of a "genre" in the form of Western outsider narratives with a singular critical perspective is false (Melman, Tidrick), while information gleaned from court cases, an "insider" source, is skewed by the injection of legal fictions (false information to satisfy a legal requirement), the use of proxy, and the barrier of gender to unfettered access to the courts. (Tucker). Yet to be written is a survey of "insider" narrative sources, but I'm confident such a survey would reveal the same variety in point of view shown to be the case with "outsider" writings, without necessarily bringing more close-at-hand information. The historian has to go with what there is, and be satisfied that all of what there is has been read and weighed in relation to its time and context. Recognition of the essential falseness of the insider vs. outsider dichotomy needs to be brought to the question of classroom teaching.

4. Sherifa Zuhur claims: My response to the theme of insider/outsider - etic/emic positioning differs from my fellow historian, Eleanor Doumato. If the historian may be defined as an observer and recorder, s/he is also consistently an interpreter and creator of discourse concerning women. I doubt that a neutral narration of women's history exists, whether political, economic, cultural or social. But I also agree with her observations on the lack of purity, that one is never solely outside or inside of the area of research; that one cannot faithfully represent the subjects of study if one does not enter into dialogue with them.

Here I will consider how the agenda set by research has followed and reflects, often unconsciously a bifurcation of the worlds of women — "pure", rural, traditional women, supposedly cut off from the globalization process, and representing all that should be transformed according to the proponents of modernity. These may be opposed to the cosmopolitan and hybrid world of urban women. This is an interesting, widely-held and also false dichotomy, yet it affects research agenda in several ways. It continues to illustrate linkages between social practice, gender ideologies and modes of production, but is supposed to serve liberal capitalist development agenda.

If all women are now hybridized and globalized (if not cosmopolitan) then where are the most common meeting points of their worlds? One arena is in the marketplace. Another is in the area of domestic service, often occupied by foreign nationals rather than poorer women working for richer women of the same nation. A third is in the area of legal restrictions over women, now the subject of some very interesting reform campaigns in the Middle East, and an area in which academic research needs to catch up with political activism. I will utilize examples from Egypt and Lebanon within the discussion.

1. Comparative International Gender Discourses: How Do these Translate Out in Teaching by "Insiders" and "Outsiders"

By Sondra Hale

Because I think that it is always important to know the context within which we write, not only the audience intended, I would like to make a few comments about the origins of the topic of my abstract: A couple of years ago I was invited to attend an Arab Regional Women's Studies Workshop, hosted by the American University in Cairo. The workshop/conference was to be part of launching the Women's/Gender Studies Unit at AUC. Cynthia Nelson and Soraya Altorki were the co-organizers. In addition to these two scholars, participants included Boutheina Cheriet, Eileen Kuttab, Haleh Afshar, Lila Au-Lughod, Mona Khalaf, Nadia Wassef, Nahla Abdo (although she was unable to make it to the conference, but sent a paper), Rania Al Malky, Seham Abdul Salam, Shahnaz Rouse, Soheir Morsy, and myself. These are the people whose papers were eventually published in *Cairo Papers in Social Science*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1997), but there were other participants who acted as organizers, discussants, and participants in the audience, e.g., Sherifa Zuhur, Malak Rouchdy, Barbara Ibrahim, Huda Lutfi, and many others. Soheir Morsy delivered the keynote address, which was on "Feminist Studies: Relevance for Scholarship and Social Equity in Arab Societies." I was asked to write on a comparison of the research agendas and methodologies for Women's Studies in the Middle East and in the U.S. I chose to compare and contrast what Women's Studies might (or should?) look like in the Middle East vs. what it looks like in the U.S. Quite an undertaking. I chose to minimize the differences, while stressing what the programs might have in common, what they might learn from each other, and the like. However, I did indicate that some of the teaching strategies in U.S. programs might be very different and why. I do not have time/space to go into the "why" part of the discussion, but I did indicate that feminists in the U.S. began their women's studies journey

using variations of what we came to call “feminist process,” a variant of Mao Tse Tung consciousness-raising and criticism/self-criticism pedagogy, in combination with Paulo Freire’s liberatory pedagogy (PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED). I asked if such strategies would work in the Middle East, since these are techniques that involved empowering the student, constructing a student-centered classroom, de-authoritarianizing the professor, minimizing or eliminating hierarchy in the classroom among students, and many other egalitarian processes. Of course, this was the ideal and was rarely ever applied in its “pure” sense in the U.S., not to mention that many women’s studies teachers never embraced that pedagogical philosophy. I imagined (never having taught women’s studies in the Middle East, only giving workshops on feminist ideas and teaching an anthropology infused with feminism) that some of these practices would be problematic in the M.E. classroom. I would truly like to have feedback on this thought.

I began to realize the complexity of my subject when I started to write the paper. As for women’s/gender studies in the M.E., were we referring to programs that are state-sponsored or state-controlled? Was the form of feminism in the country, state feminism? Would individual research agendas be supported, or should all of the agendas of the programs be community agendas? These are only SOME of the questions. As for teaching, I was aware I should be considering my own positionality (i.e., not just the methods) in terms of teaching ABOUT the M.E. in my U.S. classes; teaching Middle Eastern students within these classes—either about feminism or about women’s issues in the M.E.; teaching IN the Middle East about women’s issues or feminism. The permutations were perplexing to me. How many people can we be in our varied situations? “Insider/outsider,” then, becomes over-simplified. Are there pedagogical strategies that are “universal” in the teaching of women’s studies or any field?

One of the issues that I want to raise about what I have said above (as a form of self-critique) is that I have assumed a less egalitarian atmosphere for teaching in the Middle East. Is this fair? Or, more seriously, I have suggested that, if the atmosphere is less egalitarian, we might want to alter our egalitarian strategies. I am being a bit unfair to myself, but I would like to provoke a discussion on this.

Sherifa suggested that I might want to discuss my positionality. She wrote a brief introductory piece about me, but I could add more. My background is working class and populist, which is very important in my philosophy of teaching, i.e., in the insistence on egalitarianism and respect for students. My formal training is in African Studies, so my Middle Eastern research has been learned in a less formal way, i.e., through experience. I spent more than 6 years in northern, mainly Muslim, Sudan. I learned feminism in Sudan from Sudanese women and men. But I am also a North American feminist. I like to think that I bring both of these kinds of feminisms into my thinking and acting. As a leftist (I do not care if that is an old-fashioned word), someone who came out of the New Left in the 1960s, I am committed to liberatory ideals, including the emancipatory ideals of feminism. However, I am as concerned with issues of racism as I am concerned about class and gender. For all of these reasons it is important for me to continue to develop various forms of liberatory pedagogy, but to develop ones that are appropriate to diverse sociopolitical contexts. Is it appropriate/feasible/commendable/desirable for an “outsider” like me to offer liberatory pedagogical strategies while teaching in the Middle East? The big question for me is: How revolutionary can we be when we are teaching other people’s children?

Responses

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Dear Sharifa, Sondra, and participants in this thematic discussion. Thank you Sharifa for coordinating, and Sondra for your honest and open questions. I am glad that you provided the context of your Abstract. As I was about to write my response to your abstract (that was posted Fri. Sept 22,00) when I found your context. My response has not changed, and I will present it shortly. Two reasons for not changing my response despite the fact that you have provided new information about the context:

1. Starting with your : “The big question for me is: How revolutionary can we be when we are teaching other people’s children?” If we see teaching as an instrument of “consciousness-raising and criticism/self-criticism pedagogy in combination with Paulo Freire’s liberatory pedagogy ” then why should we discriminate between Middle Eastern vs. American students. True, we might (and should) alter the instructional strategies (syllabus) and tools (course material), but the goal should not differ. We cannot be revolutionary sometimes and in one context and not revolutionary at other times and contexts. Also, you have, in a sense, answered the question when you stated that this ideal has rarely worked in US women’s studies program, exactly because they were not true to the egalitarian aspect of the matter.
2. Your assumption that because most of the women’s studies programs in the ME are run within state-sponsored institutions they cannot be egalitarian is not always valid. This assumption is, I must say, part of the problem in our training as social scientists/humanists where everything has to fall into categories to be accepted as a “scientific” enterprise, or considered an authority.

Now, back to the Abstract. It is not clear how the “social location” defines the “insiders” (INS) “outsiders”

(OUT)? I will, for the sake of time and space, assume the definition of “Western” and “Middle Eastern” academy and academics as a neutral factor (static, stable variable). Assuming that both (INS and OUT) are starting from a “feminist” perspective as defined by the liberal view of progress towards an end, are we talking about those who are in a Power social location vs. those who are not? If this is the case, then we are actually (now, and in this context of the discussion) addressing two levels of the issue:

Level A,

where those with the position of power (including the teacher/researcher) are seen by those from outside that position of power (including students/researched) as “outsiders” because “gender” or “women” is perceived as merely a tool of a power struggle. Regardless of the method of teaching and/or research, those who are doing the teaching/research will always see themselves as “INS” while they remain to be perceived as “OUT.” This is so because they are taking the position, consciously or not, of the “expert” who is dictating the policy/the world view/philosophy and “the practical solution.” Obviously, there are two sub-levels, the individual and the group, which I cannot even start to analyze here.

Level B,

where those with the position of power are seen by others in the same position as “INS” because they are propagating the same end/agenda and “gender” is still the means toward achieving it. In this situation, as long as the individual remains a “team player” s/he remains an “INS” regardless how and what s/he teaches and/or research. Yet, once s/he begins to critique, argue against the stated “norms” of gender equality, actually apply the consciousness raising technique and the liberating pedagogy, or just be sympathetic with the “OUT” (that eventually results in giving some of the power to the “outsiders”), that individual automatically becomes an “outsider.” The end-results is that s/he not only loses her personal power struggle, but the theoretical grounding from which she was operating becomes shaky and often is perceived as implausible on intellectual or policy, practical levels. The group has no choice but distance itself from her/his views because it fears losing its theoretical grounding as well. In effect, “feminism” is perceived as an “outside” concept, an add-on, that can conveniently be discarded, once it does not fulfill the ‘expected power agenda.’

Thus, we are back again at point zero, the question of social construction, even of feminism, of gender, and of women’s studies. My re-framing the question, therefore, might pedagogically serve our purpose of this discussion (if I understood it clearly, as being to move the dialogue of Middle Eastern Women’s Studies towards both a stronger theoretical grounding and an effective policy-making/pedagogy): Where and how does “gender” fall in the equation of any academic discipline and in policy-making? Is it “inside” or “outside” the power and social position? Is it a tool or an end by itself? Can it be both an end and a means, and how?

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I cannot resist a few remarks here on the differences between the Middle Eastern context vs. the US. I agree with Ni’mat that ideally one should attempt to address students in both contexts with the same goals in mind. But the realities of the power structure within the university and other factors, like censorship, reduce the academic freedom of the instructor. Moreover, Sondra has mentioned just one example of a pedagogical technique — “feminist process” that was indeed unfamiliar to my Egyptian students. In a classroom setting, it can be utilized by asking for each member to respond to an idea, or a phrase (without commenting at first on others’ responses). I only encountered one student in Egypt who was familiar with this classroom technique — and she happened to be a former student of Sondra’s! Sondra also alludes to a difference in the relationship between instructor and student; I think she means that Western students might be more familiar with instructors who expected them to participate actively in shaping the class, and who tried to address students as peers, not setting themselves up as “experts.” I was only successful in the former goal by arranging and assigning points to students for oral presentations or leading discussions while in Egypt. The latter goal — relating to students as peers was complicated by students’ (and sometimes their parents or relatives) attempts to bargain about their grades, missing assignments etc. But I felt that many recognized my efforts to reach them and came to me frequently outside of class for comments, advice, etc.

Distinguishing the two groups on the basis of nationality bothers me. Many of my students were bi-national. And because AUC has a study-abroad program, some classes were bi-national. For the teaching of women’s or gender studies, the most important factor for me appeared to be previous exposure to readings or courses with a gender studies component—not point of origin. My colleague at AUC, Hoda Lutfi commented that there our students lacked the idea of “gender as a category” (the ref. is to Joan Scott). Some students and even some colleagues (both Egyptians and non-Egyptians) seemed to regard gender merely as a biological fact, a marker coded M or F. Some are aware of the social construction of gender, but regard the entire topic as one “owned” by women or feminists.

Beyond the fact of censorship (which limits the kinds of materials that can be practically utilized in the

classroom), and the realities of power (parents may interfere in the classroom, and colleagues may oppose or resent the introduction of 'new' pedagogical methods, or content that may be viewed as controversial, 'non-scholarly'). I attempted to address the problem by introducing mini-units on gender in my other classes. One example was a junior level course on nationalism. All of my students but one (these included Egyptian, American and bi-national students) simply skipped the readings, failed the quiz that I decided to give (on noticing their lack of involvement) and had a tough time writing a response paper to the readings. They seemed incredulous that they would be held responsible for readings on gender just like those on Syria, or Iran.

I visited a class of a colleague at AUB (Beirut) last year. Like AUC, it is not accurate to classify the students as being "purely" Middle Eastern. Many have studied in the West during the war years (in Canada or the US). This class was part of their core series, and they were to respond to a portion of Simone de Beauvoir's writing. One student (female) was able to answer the instructor's queries regarding the relevance of the gender issue to the ideas of liberation, self-will, and the existentialist programme. The others (who may or may not have taken the reading seriously) were then engaged in a discussion on the pressure to marry and socially conservative attitudes today in Lebanon.

This discussion reminded me of the more successful sessions at AUC also in introductory core tutorials where we try to introduce basic notions of gender inequality. When students were able to relate the issue to the realities around them, the discussions were both more controversial and meaningful.

I have enjoyed reading the material you have been circulating in this little group. I am a clinical psychologist and educator. I have been a college trustee and a political activist in the Arab American community. As such, I now come to the Middle East to train women who are running or consider them selves potential candidates in local or national elections.

In this capacity I have met many women varying in their perspectives from the more traditional in Qatar to the more liberal in Palestine. I have found the comment: "When students are able to relate the issue to the realities around them — the discussions were both more controversial and meaningful." I think the insider/outsider dimension is also very important but since there is not much one can do about one's position, I find it important to be sensitive to the limitations of one's role and opportunistic about its advantages—for, of course it has those, too. The women I worked with in the Middle East were struggling with gender issues as part of their empowerment. They were quite creative in their approaches, less bitter and acting less victimized than many of their peers in the West. I guess, it all goes back to "context", doesn't it?

I have a brief addition - more than a response - to Sherifa's comments about her teaching at AUC, which I think are also pertinent to Sondra's questions about how we teach and what we try to do. While I appreciate Sondra's sensitivity to possible differences in classroom expectations and how they play out in practice as one attempts to teach in a non-authoritarian manner, I also think that the issues Sherifa raises are very (unfortunately) relevant to college classrooms in the US. Teaching undergraduate "non-Western literature" (I didn't choose that title!) courses at the University of Illinois, I bring in gender as a category constantly, whether I'm teaching the *Shahnameh* or *So Long a Letter*. Some students respond enthusiastically, but many grouse, and so far, my favorite (!) teaching evaluation states, "She's way too feminist." The students who take this course are of all sorts of different backgrounds, nationalities, spiritualities, etc.; and quite often I do "get the message" that they feel the gender emphasis (one of a number of emphases, I should say) is an interruption, a diversion from "what's really important." Obviously, that very attitude spurs me to continue finding ways to insert, explain, and interrogate its relevance in ways that will be meaningful to them, and I do think that the personal experience "hook" is a useful one; but I simply want to make the point here that while we can either praise or criticize women's studies/gender studies programs in "the West" for particular interventions and outlooks, the by- now pervasive presence of gender as a category in the academy doesn't mean its pervasive acceptance as such by undergraduate students. Many of them - whatever their backgrounds - find gender in the classroom a "foreign import." I know I am not telling any of you anything new, but I do think it is important to recognize that the way students at AUC or elsewhere react is similar in at least some ways to students' reactions in - for example - Illinois. (As Sherifa reminds us, they are a diverse bunch at AUC, too.) And that also includes nervousness, sometimes, about nonauthoritarian teaching methods. After all, such methods usually require them to work harder and to think more!

This has been a very interesting conversation for me to eavesdrop ... as a Middle East historian who does not work in the fields of gender or women's studies, who is American, and who is a guy. I wonder about the insider/outsider aspect of my own position in this discussion, but I won't worry about it too much, except to say that I feel kind of like a spy.

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At any rate, in recent years I have incorporated in my courses materials related to gender and women for a couple of reasons. First, I intuitively believe that these are central issues in history and society. I don't feel the need to articulate a sophisticated theoretical justification. Pluralism in the academy is sufficient warrant. Second, I believe that much of the scholarship in these fields is the most exciting work in Middle East (and South Asian) studies.

My (mostly white) students (at a small undergraduate liberal arts college) respond in different ways to the materials that I introduce. Some men don't see the point of discussing "marginal" issues, some find it fascinating; almost all the women find it fascinating. One of the difficult obstacles I confront with all the students is their emotional response. For instance, my freshman seminar just finished reading *Khul Khaal* and the majority said that they found it "too depressing." I am curious to learn if others have met this emotional response, which is in certain ways more difficult to encounter than the cultural response (why are they so weird?)

Now to go out on a limb...on the non-authoritarian teaching method. This method has a number of advocates among the faculty here. I must admit that I find it puzzling and perhaps I misconstrue the sense intended. I agree that teachers learn from students, but in the college/university culture and the broader culture in which they are situated, I believe it is the case that teachers do have authority over students. Teachers grade students after all. Teachers and students are not peers. So I do not see how a non-authoritarian teaching method can really be something other than a pose that represents one's own discomfort with the notion of exercising authority in a responsible, non-oppressive manner. I am willing to be enlightened and converted.

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I would like to jump into the conversation that Sondra initiated with her abstract and commentary on her abstract. I am in my third year of teaching at the American University of Sharjah. Some of you may know a little about the university. It is a private institution founded by the ruler of Sharjah, Shaykh Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qassimi, who is himself a scholar with Ph.D.'s in history and geography from Exeter and Durham respectively. It is seeking accreditation in the U.S. through the Middle States Association, so its obvious models are AUB and AUC. It is one of the few gender integrated academic institutions in the Gulf. Our students come from the Emirates and the other GCC countries including Saudi Arabia, and other Arab countries; they are from Arab expatriate families resident in the Gulf as well as Indian and Pakistani expatriates living in the Emirates. There are some Russians and Central Asians and even a handful of Americans. The student body as well as the faculty are multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and religiously heterogenous although predominantly Muslim. Devising a strategy to teach successfully here is clearly a challenge.

For three years, I have been teaching a Women in History course. It is a pretty standard introduction to Women's History. It is comparative in focus — Europe and the Middle East. It is organized topically and moves chronologically from the Ancient World to the Modern. I had no idea what to expect when I taught it for the first time, e.g., how receptive or hostile the students were likely to be to the material and to the concept of gender as an analytical tool for understanding history and organizing the course. The first time I taught the course, the majority of the women students were either nationals, i.e., Emiratis, or women from other Gulf countries, who wear what seems to have evolved as the "national dress" of not only the Emirates but other Gulf countries, the abaya (cloak worn over street clothes) and the shayla (the scarf). There were two men. In the second and third years, the number of non-national women increased, primarily among the Indian and Pakistani students, and so did the number of men. I have about eight this semester in a class of 35. The number of students overall has increased each year; I could easily have added another 10-15 to my current class or opened another section of the course. In the second year I taught the course, I had in my class the only woman in the student body who was completely covered, by that I mean, she covered her face. She turned out to be one of the best students in the class, one of the most receptive to the material and with attitudes and an independent spirit that would clearly identify her in the West as a feminist. I learned and continued to learn a lot from teaching the class. One thing the class has confirmed for me is that gender as we understand it now is a universal. Although I use and have been influenced by post-modernist and post-structuralist ways of thinking, including the need to deconstruct universals and essences, gender remains for me one of the organizing principles of societies historically and an important analytical tool for understanding history in general. My students come into the class knowing that societies are characterized by systems of power that have been and continue to be dominated by men. They can't articulate this theoretically at first but they know that at any time in history, women may have had more rights and more autonomy, but they have never dominated those systems of power nor have relations between the genders been egalitarian. Students make the connection between the class — the readings, the theories, etc., — and their own lives through one issue in particular, and that's arranged marriages. I don't think there is a more powerful or emotional issue for many, if not most, of the women here and also for men. Women are being educated; they are moving into the workforce; but on the personal level, such as choice of marriage partners, they have a lot less autonomy or possibly no choice at

all. It's an issue for men, too, but as women students point out in the class, men have options women don't have or for social and/or familial reasons can't exercise easily or at all, such as repudiation/divorce or taking a second wife.

Concerning the issue of feminist or liberatory pedagogy, I'd like to comment on the recent suggestion that this could be a "pose." I agree that professors have power and authority; we begin to exercise it even before we walk into the classroom in the readings we select and the structure of the class, etc.. And of course, we exercise power and authority in the classroom in a variety of ways including the ultimate, giving the students grades. However, are attempts to create a more egalitarian learning environment a pose? Ironically, I think the structures of power within which we operate make it more not less important to make the classroom more egalitarian. I think it's particularly important in order to equalize power between male and female students, i.e., not allow males to dominate discussions and encourage women to speak up and participate.

This is really an issue here. Also, when the wider society does not allow the exercise of political rights or stifles debate, then what happens in the classroom can be very liberatory as well as empowering. Actually, I think we could bring Foucault into this discussion not only because of the connection between knowledge and power but also his contention that nothing exists outside of systems of power.

Amal Winter

I, at least, find the language of these discussions both new and intimidating although I am no novice to the issues themselves. I am a 58 year old woman who grew up in Egypt and survived the 1950s in the U.S.A. I was an intelligent hard working student who got her B.A. from Stanford at 19. Married at 15. I delivered and raised two daughters during my undergraduate years. I was fired from my waitress job when I got pregnant and was not allowed to apply to medical school because I had children! I have come a long way from thinking I must have been wrong for asking but that doesn't help me understand the gender lingo used in some of these discussions.

One of my personal interests is cultural and bicultural identity. The issue wormed its way into me from birth in 1942. My mother was American, my father Egyptian, (before there were marriages of that ilk). Grandmothers from both sides asked who I would marry. Intuitively I knew they were gauging my cultural allegiance. My answer? "A man from Venezuela." Little did it matter that I didn't know where Venezuela was! I went to British schools from the age of four and was 15 during the Suez war. I remember my brother saying, "They are bombing Cairo airport," And wondering who was they and who was we, (apologies to Martin Buber and Pogo)

I can't do much with the Insider/Outsider dichotomy except to admire the problem. It is a given. I think the creative tension it produces is exciting. Perhaps, because I am a psychologist, albeit sociologically oriented, I see identity as psychological as well as sociopolitical. For example, I believe I define myself in reaction to the context in which I find myself partly because I am oppositional by nature and partly because the context defines me. I tend to feel my American side more when I'm with Arabs and my Arab side more when I'm with Americans. Perhaps, I made a healthy, if narcissistically arrogant, adaptation to being "Other." Perhaps, as I became more politically active in America I was pushed into my Arab side by the sociopolitical reactions to my civil rights activities. If I were in Egypt, I'd probably do the AUC gig.

Sondra Hale

If you recall, I was asking if radical pedagogy travels and if teaching as transgression (to steal from bell hooks) is portable. By asking that question I was expressing my discomfort with the imposition of certain Euroamerican-originated feminist processes on the M.E. academic situation - to be blunt - the "outsider" teaching the "insider" (while recognizing that we are all both of these and neither of these in differing degrees) ways of "being whole" (one of the stated goals of Western feminism 'to make women whole'). However, I broadened the question in order to apply it to a geographically diverse set of teachers/facilitators and students and asked about transporting one's values, period, to other people's children.

One of the problems which may have led to Nimat's first and second queries, in combination, is that I failed to comment on the cultural content of consciousness-raising. I should have remarked that it is dangerous for us to believe that the ultimate political and pedagogical goal is to raise consciousness about a person or people's situation without contextualizing that "condition." So, if the ultimate goal is the "emancipation" of women, for example, and we have failed to consider the question of emancipation from what, or the quality of that emancipation, then our consciousness-raising strategies are culturally biased. For example, if I, as a secularist, choose to facilitate the raising of women's consciousness about religion so that they can be "emancipated" from religion, is this culture-neutral or situation-neutral? (I am dangerously close to sounding like a cultural relativist here, which I am not!). I am not trying to say that consciousness-raising pedagogy should be neutral; I am saying that it is not. And there is the rub, or, one of the rubs.

Sherifa and Marilyn at once expanded and narrowed the discussion of context by remarking on the political, sometimes authoritarian, nature of some M.E. academic environments. Nimat, however, has effectively brought into question the use of “authority” and “authoritarian.” She did misquote or miss cite me a couple of times, and I should clarify. I did not say that most of the women’s studies programs in the ME are run within state-sponsored institutions [and therefore] they cannot be egalitarian. She was right, however, that I drew a negative equation between “egalitarian” and “authority,” which I might want to rethink. I also did not say that “this ideal [of feminist process] has rarely worked in U.S. women’s studies programs...” What I said was that it was rarely applied in its pure state and some WS practitioners never embraced it. However, these changes I have made do not detract from Nimat’s points.

I was immensely stimulated by Nimat’s deconstruction of insider/outsider, especially her linking of these locations (and their fluidity) to the struggle for power (this is where the suggestion of calling on Foucault seems appropriate), and then linking these to feminisms and gender. My ending question was really intended to ask if ‘we’ have the right to teach concepts such as ‘gender’ and politics such as ‘feminism’ to other people’s children. Nimat’s ending question(s) is/are “where and how does ‘gender’ fall in the equation of any academic discipline ... Is it ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the power social position, Is it a tool or an end by itself.”

In fact, a number of us either directly or indirectly raised the question about the relevance/appropriateness of using ‘gender’ as a primary (or even secondary) concept in the M.E. classroom. Sherifa describes the difficulties, as do Marilyn and Mary Ann. Sherifa, in fact, cites AUC colleague Hoda Lutfi’s comment to her (and to me, in another geographical context) that [AUC] students lacked the idea of ‘gender’ as a category. Some, says Sherifa, “regard the entire topic as one ‘owned’ by ... feminists.” This same debate is being carried out internationally, as we know, and has surfaced at UCLA in the Institute for the Study of Gender in Africa. West African scholars such as Oyeronke Oyewumi and Nkiru Nzegwu debunk the usefulness or relevance of the gender concept in research on African societies. They seem to be trying to free themselves of the yoke of gender and to start again.

In our debate Nimat asks if ‘gender’ may be seen as just a power tool of the outsiders, who may, then, forever remain outsiders. I would add that women’s studies, feminist theories, gender studies, feminist process/pedagogy, etc., all are framed (the colonial frame) and controlled by the powerful (the forever “insider”) and have their set of rules and ways of being that are parceled out (e.g., in classroom teaching) to the “less powerful.” Whether or not recognizing and acknowledging this through stating one’s positionality, self-interrogating, deauthoritarianizing oneself, etc., are effected, this may not be enough. Enough for what?

What does it mean to me when a Middle Eastern woman student tells me that I have “changed her life”? Does it have the same effect on me or meaning to me when an American woman student says it? Are these qualitatively or quantitatively different in my perception? The answer to this question should tell me a great deal about the progress of my journey.

Sherifa grew uncomfortable with “distinguishing the two groups [insider/outsider?] on the basis of nationality”. I can acknowledge that. She, Amal, Marilyn, and Mary Ann all addressed the enormous diversity (in all its ramifications) in their classrooms both in the U.S. and in the Middle East. Since I teach at an institution (UCLA) which is now said to be the most diverse campus in the U.S. (But we all know how much Americans love superlatives!), I should be more cognizant of that when I generalize about classrooms anywhere. Therefore, I, too, am uncomfortable at the generalized idea that M.E. students “lack the concept of gender.” We can pursue this later.

2. The Insider Versus External Observer Debate

Dear Sherifa: It seems to me that the subject of teaching and the “insider-outsider” debate raises issues that are quite removed from this debate in relation to the use of historical sources. So in my response I think I’m really changing the subject, but I hope my comments will still be useful.

You ask, “Do you think that you might want to add any additional comments, or possibly examples of topics/writings/subjects that you hold to be “neutral” regardless of the positionality of the historian?” I thought it was clear that my position is that there is no such thing as “neutrality.” I hold no source to be neutral; what I question is the value of investing energy into determining the personal background of the author of any particular source. In my experience, the written work ultimately stands alone, apart from its author. For example, missionary writings: there could not be a more “orientalist” lens than that of the authors of the 1911 Cairo Conference, where the “woman as target” modus operandi was laid out. And indeed one can read the letters of, say, Eleanor Calverley, who was in Kuwait at that same time, and see the Cairo Conference as her blueprint, but if one reads her husband’s letters, or those of their contemporary Paul

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Harrison, one hears their authors' depth of knowledge and language facility, their sensitivity to, even empathy with, the people they write about.

Now there's Gertrude Bell, who strove to establish herself in a man's world as a British civil servant, and maybe and maybe not consequently, avoided women and barely included anything about women and society in her writings. Lady Anne Blunt similarly wrote little about women, though she was an adventurer who spoke Arabic and camped among bedouins and was a great Arabophile. How does "knowing where these people stand" help me to sift through their writings? Both are disappointing to the researcher wanting information of a social or cultural sort.

I should raise here the awkward question of who is an insider and who is an outsider? Hafiz Wahba was an Egyptian who spent some 10 years at the court of Ibn Saud and wrote extensively about Arabian society, and a lot about women. Yes, he's cynical, but is he cynical because he's an outsider, being Egyptian, or because, being Arab and a long-time resident of Najd, even Ibn Sa'ud's minister of education, he's an insider and he's knowledgeable?

It seems to me the historian needs to focus his/her attention primarily on the written source itself and not the writer. Trying to interpret what is written based on the writer's "positionality" presupposes, first, that one can know what that is, and that people's positions don't change over time, and second, that his/her positionality so skews the writing that the reader must know where the author's coming from in order to decipher it.

Finally, what about the complication of what the reader brings to the reading: I've recently read Billie Melman's fascinating *Women's Orient*, which looks at scores of British women travel writers on the M.E. in the 19th century and the genre they produced. As much as I admire the book, when it comes to her interpretation of these travelers' viewpoints as expressed in their writing, I am intrigued to discover that her interpretations are quite at variance with my own. ... not to end with too cynical a note, but I wonder if next time I sit down to do research I ought to see myself as part of a team effort: the writer, the written work, and me and my positionality. Responses welcome.

Responses

Manal
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I have been reading the comments and enthusiastically absorbing the wide array of knowledge and experiences - so forgive me for my silence. The comments I will share now are more of an introduction of my own background and interests relevant to the discussions. I feel that there is so much to be learned on women and gender, and my passion as an American-Muslim-Palestinian woman is to find a way to balance my western teachings of feminism with my Arabic roots and my strong commitment to my religion. Although we are often told that the ideas are not contradictory or mutually exclusive, I have a hard time balancing all the hyphens in my identity.

My work and educational background has been primarily economics and development with a concentration in the MENA region. I have worked for UNESCO in Baghdad, and now work for the World Bank. Over the past few years I have realized the importance of looking at things from a gender perspective. Amazingly enough, my research into gender in the region, and more specifically, gender in Islam, have been more of a journey of self discovery than any academic or practical work approach. Although my primary work experience is more development than any gender issues, I have done contracts with USIA on women in Islam for embassies overseas, and work closely with American Muslim groups to incorporate the Muslim women's experience.

Sherifa Zuhur

I'm going to jump in and disagree slightly with Eleanor. While I agree that the historian's priority is to examine the "material," — historical description of events, persons, cultural issues, etc — it seems to me that to overlook the location of the source is to ignore what we have learned from historiography since Herodotus, if not earlier.

Historians ask certain research questions based on their own training, orientation, and knowledge which differs from one location to another. Even if that were not so, I believe that certain locations or (position- alities) cause one to interpret individuals and their actions, or events and their consequences in extremely different ways. This may not always pertain to the reporter's power, but to her/his vista.

Eleanor says that essentially there is no neutral voice — and if that is true, isn't it so because location (or positionality) — however blurred — matters?

A few examples: a certain reviewer from a journal from the US South identifies Nawal Saadawi's novel, *Woman at Point Zero* as being "picaresque" (the outsider's attack on society) — completely missing the

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identification of the fallen woman protagonist with Egypt, herself, subject to exploitation and degradation by external sources.

A male critic from the 1940s analyzes the female singer, Asmahana as being an abnormal woman (unable to feel love), not out of personal knowledge, but with an assurance borne of his time, milieu, and gender that “true” women were not interested in their careers, only in protected and safe marriages. Perhaps some of you will think of other examples

Amal Winter

I agree with Sherifa. I think it is imperative to understand as best as we can the “worldview” of the writer in order to better understand the writing. “Worldview” includes personality (influenced by culture), time (when in history), and place. It’s interesting to read the abstracts and comments and find no mention of general systems theory which seems to have gone out of fashion. Amal

Nimat Hafez Barazangi

When I first used this argument in my paper that was presented at MESA ‘95, I used it in the context of the panel “Self-Identity of Muslim Women.” My exact argument was that because Muslim women had limited access to Islamic higher learning, they were denied their basic human rights as the human trustee. I emphasized, ‘Islamic’ vs. ‘religious’ exactly to distinguish some orientalists’ and Muslims’ (predominantly males who follow precedence) reduction of Islam to religion from the meaning of Islam as a worldview. I explained in the paper [that was unfortunately delayed, but finally published in Gisela Webb’s edited volume (Syracuse, 2000)] and in its sequel [in Afkhami’s and Friedl’s edited volume (Syracuse, 1997)] that my intention was neither the secular higher education, nor the religious education. I present Islam as a belief system, a world view that encompasses religion, and argue that because women were denied access to Islamic higher learning (i.e., deeper knowledge of the primary sources of Islam, specifically the Qur’an and its interpretation) they were denied their human rights as the trustee (Khalifa). By not having this deeper knowledge, Muslim women’s participation was also reduced to some religious rituals. In addition, they were denied the participation in the interpretation of the text and, consequently, in the political decision-making process. The end result is that the Muslim woman could not any more exercise her trusteeship nor her self-identify with Islam as a belief system, because ‘Islam’ has taken on a different meaning and was practiced merely as a ‘religion.’

Therefore, the self-identity paradigm that I was (and so were the other panelists) arguing for was intended to show how Muslim woman’s identification with the Islamic framework as a world view sheds different light on the question of human rights. Though at the time we were not specifically addressing the insider/outsider issue, one could see the implication of the self-identity paradigm on the “limited access to Islamic learning” argument on two different levels here: First, the Orientalist and the Muslims who follow precedence (Muqallidun) who reduce Islam to “religious learning” are in a sense outsiders to Islam. Second, women who do not self-identify with Islam as the over arching framework of a total belief system when addressing issues of gender within Islam are also outsiders to Islam, even when we call them or call themselves” Muslim women.”

Eleanor Doumato

I’m glad to read your responses because it helps me to clarify my own thoughts and also points to perhaps a difference in our understanding of the term, “positionality.” If I started off with an incorrect interpretation, my apologies.

One sort of “position” is physical: where does the writer stand physically in time and space in relation to his sources; was he there on the spot, which reports did he read, how far removed from the events were those who produced the sources he uses, and on whose behalf were those sources produced. I doubt that we would disagree that Herodotus’s information about North Africa was largely second-hand and dated, so that his history, being mixed with rumor, myth, and travelers’ observations, is one we would not take at face value.

The other sort of position is personal and internal to the writer, and this is the notion of “positionality” I have been talking about: what is his/her religion, where did he grow up, what are his political affiliations, whom did he marry, what does he tend to think about certain issues, in short, “where is he coming from?” I don’t doubt for a moment that one’s personal position(ality) causes “one to interpret individuals and their actions, or events and their consequences in extremely different ways.” My problem is in investing time in trying to extract meaning from discovering what that positionality is, first, because you will never get it right and even if you do the conclusions you draw are just as likely to be wrong.

Let me give you one example based on an issue that is near to our hearts at the moment: No political appointment of Bill Clinton’s was a greater insult to Arab-Americans than Martin Indyk as Middle East spokesperson on the National Security Council and then Ambassador to Israel. He was until then a career employee of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, founder of the Institute for Near East Policy,

an AIPAC-funded think tank designed to lend legitimacy to Israeli policies with the media, the American public, and on Capitol Hill, and, even more insulting, he wasn't even an American citizen. Yet, as Ambassador to Israel he has evidenced a conversion of sorts, and in the spectrum of Israeli politics would be viewed as a Palestinian-leaning liberal. Therefore, how can one interpret based on his "positionality" his recent fall from grace? Is it due to his compromising American security by taking a lap-top home, putting himself in a position to share information with his Israeli comrades, or is he being gotten rid of by the Israelis who find him no longer in their camp? This example reminds me of a similar change of heart (perhaps not relevant to this discussion) on the part of his American cultural attachee for Gaza, who, when she was an undergraduate at the University of Pittsburg, went to a talk given by Edward Said just so she could heckle him, yet as a young adult working in Gaza she sought Said out to apologize to him personally and tell him she was wrong.

In further response to your comments, Sherifa, you say that "Eleanor says that essentially there is no neutral voice — and if that is true, isn't it so because location (or positionality) — however blurred — matters?" My answer is "yes, of course it matters, but, as I said above, you are unlikely to have a clear grasp of what that positionality is in relation to the written work, and highly likely to open yourself to misinterpretation. That I question your critique of the reviewer of Nawal Saadawi illustrates this point. I thought women at point zero was a real indictment of the poverty and powerlessness of women but I did not see the analogy between the fallen woman protagonist and Egypt, and what do you know about my positionality that could explain such a failure on my part? As for your second example, well, I'm not sure I see the relevance to the "positionality" of the reviewer. Cultural history is all about uncovering and understanding how different people at different times interpret the world around them. In Freud's case of Dora, Freud presumed that what is normal would have been for Dora to desire sex with a man, even an old one, but do we need to know anything about Freud's life or personal relationships to see that his view-point was male-centered and oblivious to the personhood of Dora?"

In answer to Nimat's question, "How is it possible to see the experience and the "depth of Knowledge" of Eleanor Calverly's husband as "standing alone"? Wasn't this knowledge the result of him being given access to the [male]courts while the women (his wife, for instance) were denied that access?" The work stands alone in so far as what I as an historian can do with it. Yes, it's good to know that women cannot access the courts and that that fact limits their access to information, and if I were writing about the relative merits of women's writings as opposed to men's writings as sources of information about the courts for the historian, that fact would be most pertinent. It would not, however, alter the usefulness of Eleanor Calverly's writings for me as someone who wants to know about the workings of the courts.

I try to show that the exclusion of women from higher religious learning also meant their exclusion or marginalization from all the professions that rely on religious knowledge, including healing professions, and from sacred space at the center of the community. At the same time, it also limited their ability to carve out and expand physical space that the community would regard as legitimate for women. With all best wishes,

**Nimat Halez
Barazangi**

I am still perplexed at Eleanor's insistence on seeing positionality as almost synonymous with a point of view or a political stance. What we are trying to emphasize is that the different world view dictates the understanding of the material before us, whether we are historians, educators, or political scientists, etc. We are not talking about merely the accessibility to the material/knowledge. That is exactly why I presented my argument to show the contrast between the world view that sees Islam as 'religion' and the world view that sees Islam as a belief system, an outlook on life.

Sherifa Zuhur

Dear Eleanor: I just have to reply. Here's the rub — a good historian should try to obtain a clear grasp of what that positionality is in relation to the written work. Yes, it might be difficult to do, but not impossible. Now, let's take my examples as I obviously did not amplify or add sufficient detail. The reviewer I mentioned writes for a southern literary journal, cannot read Arabic, is antagonistic to Nawal al-Saadawi's feminism in *Woman at Point Zero*. He explained the term "picaresque" — his description of the novel in reference to a tradition of novels in which a protagonist sets him/herself against society.

Nawal, as one could learn from her writing (or from reading lots of reviews of *Woman at Point Zero*) or hearing her speak, is essentially a third-worldist, and a socialist. She includes the systematic tearing away of each relationship the protagonist forms — her uncle subjects her to incest, her aunt marries her off to an old man, the "revolutionary" lover she works hard for in her factory job abandons her for the daughter of a wealthy man, her madam "Sherifa" exploits her, and she finally kills the pimp who would take away her right to earn her own income. There is one very strong scene with a prince from the gulf who is so terrified by her vehement assertion that she has killed a man that he calls the police who incarcerate her.

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Who is she, if not Egypt? Raped, humiliated, and turned out into the street where she can choose the highest bidder whether Gulf Arab or Westerner or local capitalist. Now why is it that I immediately understood this connotation of the novel, but you, who also read it did not. I suspect it is my teenage and young adult grounding in socialism and third-worldism, now considered passe, but definitely a part of Nawal's "world-view" and life experience in Egypt (this is many years ago, not just recently) during the years that Nawal published this book.

Now other scholars have written about and understood the frequent references to 'Egypt as a woman' (Beth Baron for ex.). But maybe it's shocking to outsiders to realize that a country could be compared to a whore — in sacrificing its people and their needs for gains from outside donors, whether Western or Gulf Arab — believing all the time as Firdaus does that she is in control & not as exploited as others. It is also a part of the world-view of the 1970s and 1980s from within Egypt and within the Middle East.

My second example concerned a man of one nationality — al-Taba'i (Egyptian) writing about a woman of another nationality, Asmahan (Amal al-Atrash a Syrian). He claims in his work to "tell her story (tarwi qissatha) i.e. in her own voice" but is not very familiar with her place of origin & claims to have gotten all the information from her directly. However, someone familiar with the events leading up and into the Syrian revolution, and the 1941 Allied offensive can tell from the specific mistakes in his text that he must have simply gleaned certain facts from other journalists. More importantly he misinterprets the purpose of her life & that, I think has to do with his gender and the writing of that period on the nature and temperament of female entertainers. But of the few biographies written of her in Arabic, his, though flawed and inaccurate is the best and most widely read. In re-writing her life-story, I had a responsibility to consider about his positionality as well as his presentation.

As for Freud, you and I may take it as a given that his view is male-centered and oblivious to Dora's personhood, but unlike al-Taba'i, Freud is still taught today as a part of the "canon" of Western thought & in the lectures I heard at AUC for ex. where he is included in the "Core Curriculum," lecturers made no mention of his male-centered views — we just can't take it as a given that everyone understands what might seem "obvious" in positionality.

Eleanor Doumato

In further response to you comments, Sherifa, you say that "Eleanor says that essentially there is no neutral voice — and if that is true, isn't it so because location (or positionality) — however blurred — matters?" My answer is "yes, of course it matters, but, as I said above, you are unlikely to have a clear grasp of what that positionality is in relation to the written work, and highly likely to open yourself to misinterpretation. That I question your critique of the reviewer of Nawal Saadawi illustrates this point. I thought women at point zero was a real indictment of the poverty and powerlessness of women but I did not see the analogy between the fallen woman protagonist and Egypt, and what do you know about my positionality that could explain such a failure on my part? As for your second example, well, I'm not sure I see the relevance to the "positionality" of the reviewer. Cultural history is all about uncovering and understanding how different people at different times interpret the world around them. In Freud's case of Dora, Freud presumed that what is normal would have been for Dora to desire sex with a man, even an old one, but do we need to know anything about Freud's life or personal relationships to see that his view-point was male-centered and oblivious to the personhood of Dora?"

Mary Ann Fay

Can I add a few comments to the discussion on positionality and insider/outsider. As a historian, I agree with Nimat and Sharifa about the importance of the historian's position in her understanding of the material she is dealing with. But Sherifa has taken this a step farther to note the importance of understanding the position of the author of the document which the historian is using. For example, in my Women in History class, we just finished reading the story of Turia, a Roman woman, whose lifestory comes entirely from what remains of the epitaph written by her husband and engraved on her tombstone. This brings up a host of questions, the most important of which is how to assess the details of her life when they are presented by a presumably grieving husband about his presumably beloved wife in the absence of other supporting evidence.

At the moment I am reading al-Jabarti's chronicle for the period of the French invasion when the positionality of the chronicler becomes quite important. However, can we move the discussion to another dimension, that of space? I am very interested in the work of Doreen Massey, the British geographer and her theories about space. What she and other theorists argue is that space is flexible not fixed which means that the borders that divide spaces are not rigid. If borders are flexible and permeable, then one can be both an insider and an outsider as the border between the two are constantly shifting depending on the relation between the researcher and others — woman/man; Muslim/non-Muslim; Westerner/Easterner, etc. For me, this makes insider/outsider not very useful theoretically. As insider and outsider are embodied in one

individual and she can be both, even simultaneously depending on circumstances, how useful is insider or outsider as a category? So I am suggesting that positionality can be de-linked from insider/outsider. Positionality is also embodied in the historian/ researcher and what is interesting to me is what particular facets of that position are the most important in any given situation involving research, interpretation, writing, etc. For example, Sherifa's reading of *Woman at Point Zero* is informed by her historical understanding of Egypt but also by her grounding in socialism and third worldism. In my opinion, her interpretation of the novel has more to do with positionality than with insider/outsider as does the reviewer who failed to see the connection between Firdaus and Egypt.

**Eleanor
Doumato**

Well, thank you for your comments, and I want to make a quick response.

To Mary Ann I want to again repeat what I have said from the outset: position is important, but there is a limit to what one can know about an author, and people change, so what you know about an author at one time in his/her writing career may not be helpful to interpreting a work written at another period. I have no disagreement with what you say, and I don't think anyone would disagree with the examples you give and would certainly present such appropriate information about an author to a classroom. Your observation about the fuzziness and limited utility of the insider/outsider distinction is also well taken: I said as much in my opening remarks, and used the example of the Egyptian Minister of Education in Saudi Arabia who can be considered either an outsider when he writes about SA or an insider, since he was a SA government minister. In the introduction to my book I give many similar examples illustrating the problematic of insisting on such distinctions when in fact most people can be categorized one way or another depending on how they stand in relation to the subject at hand.

The question of the role played by the positionality of the reader in interpreting a given text has also come up previously in this discussion, and I thank you for emphasizing this important point which the difference in Sherifa's and my interpretation of the same novel illustrates.

Sherifa, I appreciate your further explicating your interpretations of Saadawi and al-Taba'i, but now I suspect we are speaking in circles. Your interpretations are sound literary criticism, informative and insightful. Were I to teach either of these authors I would very much benefit from reading such analyses and would doubtless improve my own limited reading of the texts. Did I give the impression that I don't think serious biography, literary criticism, or studies of historical genre are valuable? Whenever extant, and wherever pertinent to the use of particular sources, these studies are the sine qua non of serious scholarship and interpretation, it seems to me. But our focus is the historian and the insider/outsider paradigm, and it seems to me that in our discussions the paradigm has been sufficiently de-constructed and its limited utility made clear.

3. "Peasant Blood Versus Hybridity and Cosmopolitanism?"

Sherifa Zuhur

I have been struggling with one of the dichotomies central to my recent research efforts in Lebanon. I've been familiar with it ever since my early studies in political economy in the center/periphery axis or rural/urban divide. Our discussion on positionality has helped me to realize that the title I gave this abstract reflects both my subjects and myself. Hybridity and cosmopolitanism - representing one end of a range of conditions, rather than "urban modernity" and "development" are current topics of scholarly interest in Europe that I have been able to discuss, albeit briefly with an Egyptian colleague, Mona Abaza, who is also working with these concepts.

The historian is an observer and recorder, and also an interpreter and creator of discourse concerning women. I believe (and have tried to demonstrate in my research methodology by obtaining oral histories and lengthy interviews) that one cannot faithfully represent subjects of study unless one enters into dialogue with them. Sometimes that means that one must shift emphasis in accord with the respondents' perceptions and in this case, away from religio-political identifications to current economic realities.

After some years of working on other projects in Egypt, I've shifted my focus back to Lebanon for now, returning to an area that fascinated me twenty years ago —the upper Biqā' valley. The civil war intervened, as did my long intellectual sojourn elsewhere. So as an outsider (but with insider roots of origin, lingering familial relationships and member of the same religious sect as the respondents) I am trying to understand the area in Lebanese terms in a peripheral zone, neglected through many administrations. The women that I have access to here are identified by their families and original villages, even if they now live in smaller towns like Ba'lbak, or Hirmil, or have now moved to Beirut.

Agenda set by research has followed and often reflects (consciously or unconsciously) a bifurcation of the

worlds of women — “pure”, rural, traditional women, supposedly cut off from the globalization process, and representing all that should be transformed according to the proponents of modernity. On the other side, we read about urban women living in a cosmopolitan and often hybrid world — which fits certain areas of Beirut (but not the areas where my respondents’ city cousins live — Nab’a, for ex.) This interesting and widely held dichotomy influences research agenda in several ways. It continues to illustrate linkages between social practice, gender ideologies and modes of production; it serves liberal capitalist development agendas and relates to the impact of “development” work “on” women.

If all women are now hybridized and globalized to some extent (if not cosmopolitan) then I want to look at common meeting points of their worlds. But to do that, the structure of my research impels me to return to the village/small town vs. city divide

My account is hardly neutral. I have naturally romanticized the area that I am studying, and compare it favorably or unfavorably with Egypt. I am an urbanized person with rural roots — not too many of my colleagues were taught to shoot a rifle at age five as I was. I know enough about agriculture to understand the dilemmas of dry farming, and to appreciate my informants’ distress with the low prices on produce levied because of the Lebanese-Syrian agricultural agreements. But I cannot simply characterize the area as “timeless” or unchanged, now that I’ve seen the Atari club in Hirmil, the current fashions of village girls (like teenagers in Cairo), the Imam Khomeini hospital outside of Ba’lbak, and the ruins of Shaykh Tufayli’s stand against the government in his “revolt of the hungry” in 1996 (Norton, 2000) — not so far from remaining black tents of the “timeless” *nawwar* (gypsies) — these being respectively features of globalization, and Islamization.

The rural/urban divide is supposed to affect gender ideology. It is taken as a given in both Egypt and Lebanon that country folk are more “conservative.” In terms of profile, rural women are expected to marry and bear children at a younger age. In the upper Biqa’ valley, women are more often party to an arranged marriage than they might be in Beirut. They may be “kidnapped” in order to be married (meaning that a young man takes off with a girl, and several of his friends. Once a night has gone by, the two families must meet, arrange a marriage and often bring in a mediator if there was opposition to a match in the first place). Disputes are more likely to be mediated by a family member (or Hizbollah [Hamzeh, 1993]) than brought to court.

The women that I interviewed understand the importance of their historical and political context, but it was more difficult for them to understand my interest in the gendered aspects of their lives. I found that the most articulate respondents were not more conservative than their urban counterparts, moved between town/village & city, and had reinterpreted supposedly “negative” gender practices (like polygamy) rationalizing them in terms of their own needs. (During the war, rural women resettled in Beirut, but also, some Beirutis with rural roots stayed in Hirmil or villages where it was safer, and this interrupted the process of alienation from the countryside that could have occurred in those years).

These women don’t see themselves as the “oppressed” in the language of Hizbollah (although they admire the party) or as the lowest stratum in society. Their air is clean and fresh, their diet and human relations with neighbors are preferable to those of the city poor. Those with the least income or “*wasta*” to the political representatives of the district and those experiencing downward mobility do see themselves as “neglected” by the central government, as indeed, they are. They attribute many of their economic problems to the enforced switch in crops and to the presence of Syrian workers and domestic laborers from rural areas of Sri Lanka and the Philippines (employed by their city sisters), and the lack of work for young men of the villages since the end of the war.

In the end, their location in space and history matters, which has simultaneously defined, and been defined by their Shi’i identity, tribal roots, and peasant farmer base. They are less hybridized and less cosmopolitan than their sisters and cousins in Beirut, but those adjectives do not aid in formulating solutions for improving the quality of their lives - if that could be the application of my research.

Responses

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On rural/urban divide and gender

If we are to understand urban/rural differences, we need to be very specific and not fall into facile generalizations.

1. The existence of rural/urban distinctions cannot imply that rural women and men are not affected by globalization. TV is everywhere, as are imported goods. We also need to remember that there is more to any society than “tradition” vs. “cosmopolitanism”. One society’s traditions can vary radically from another’s, as does the face of globalism.
2. In the Arab world, rural women (agricultural and/or herding economies) have historically had more

freedom of movement and easier access to public life than their urban counterparts. If we are to characterize them as more “conservative”, we have to be very specific how we define the term. It would also be useful to trace the history of this “conservatism”. Can it be traced in any way to responses to global influences?

In one rural community in Yemen, for example, women traditionally celebrated weddings by dancing all night (till 3 or 4 a.m.) for several nights. (Men also danced but in separate locales). Those with young children would negotiate with their husbands or mothers-in-law to baby sit. Sometimes male musicians played at women’s parties. This pattern began to change when professional musicians began to charge more (because they had the option of emigrating for work), thus cutting down the number of days of celebration. But the most radical changes were the direct results of urban and global influences. People who spent time in Yemen’s towns came back criticizing the presence of a male musician at women’s parties, and women’s celebrations from that time on employed only women musicians. Those who had spent time in Saudi Arabia as migrant laborers returned feeling that it was not “proper” for parties to last longer than midnight. My “Western” bias would call these trends increasing conservatism.

I guess the point I’m trying to make is that the terms “conservatism” and “liberalism” are loaded terms that do not necessarily help us understand what is going on on the ground.

Amal Winter

I have to say that the issue of rural/urban differences is very confusing to me. For example, I found that male/female relationships in the countryside in Egypt are more open and somewhat more egalitarian than those in the city. On the other hand, the rate of female circumcision, early marriage and high births are higher. In the bedouin tribes, women participate politically. There is a female mayor in the south of Jordan, for example, an area dominated by tribal interests, while women in Amman could not garner enough votes for election to parliament even with ethnic set-asides (Christian and Circassian) that favored them. I wonder if there is a model that can describe these amorphous (at least they are amorphous to me) phenomena?

Sherifa Zuhur

Now returning to Najwa’s comments on my abstract which concerned the terms used within it— I don’t see how one can drop references, or ignore the dimension of “liberalism” vs. “conservatism” with reference to women’s gender ideology (or men’s) when analyzing research data. Even if one could miraculously avoid the use of these terms in discussing women’s sexuality or degree of freedom of movement, for ex., those who “use” our work — students, publishers, editors, etc. would no doubt, re-introduce them. I mean that the rural-urban divide has acquired a life of its own.

Also, even in Najwa’s own work (in your 1999 piece, “Dance and Glimpse” and also in Zussman’s work on Tunisia), I noted the very clear distinction made in these societies (Yemen and Tunisia) between rural and urban personal qualities, diet, state of health. Similarly in Lebanon, peasants/farmers as well as urban scholars see a clear divide — it is reflected in food preferences, differences in dialect, musical and poetic styles, areas of knowledge, etc. So, if the dichotomy is false — it is also very much a source of insider discourse.

Moreover, degrees of hierarchy (and power) resting to some degree on a relationship to capital seem to be even stronger in the countryside than in the city (as in Gilsenan’s work on the Akkar region of Lebanon). So, the distinctions are important in trying to gauge the degree of women’s mobility. Yes, Amal, sometimes women seem to be “more free” in the countryside — but often this is when they have acquired status through age, marriage, or a reputation for assistance through network structures.

I did try to mention certain customs that have continued despite globalization — marital kidnapping and polygamy, and beyond the gender divide — serious feuding between families, and also sometimes, between villages. Amal, as with the issues in which you noted less change (less transformation) for women - I think that these continue because the basic rationale is rooted in the local patriarchal systems and that economic factors have not affected the family bases of power sufficiently to disrupt these practices.

4. Feeling Insideout on the Homefield - The Voice of “Third Culture” Kid

Growing up as a US citizen (and the child of European Americans) in Beirut, Lebanon of course had a great influence on my world view and my identity. In my comments I would like to follow up on some of the issues raised earlier, while bringing in the perspective of a ‘third culture kid’ (or TCK, a label used by some sociologists studying children of ‘ex-pats.’ While such a label may be somewhat odd, suggesting a third culture, rather than the straddling of two cultures, which might be more accurate, I use it in part because this is the label chosen by researchers working in this field and also out of convenience,

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as it provides a useful shorthand for describing some commonalities those of us straddling multiple cultures might feel.)

I guess it is pretty clear from this discussion, as well as earlier writings, that the dualism of insider/outsider, particularly along the lines of national identity, should be challenged. My own experience certainly reinforces this conclusion, as I consider myself in many ways as an 'outsider' both in the US and the Middle East. In my comments I want to follow up on a couple of threads raised in the discussion so far as well as introducing what I hope are some new ideas. I will start by following up on Eleanor's question about 'the value of investing energy into determining the personal background of the author of any particular source.' As a political activist who cringes when listening to the 'objective' news in the US and a scholar who works in a field where most of my colleagues still believe that they can carry out 'value free' research, I think it is still important to identify the positionality of an author/commentator, etc..

But that is not the major point I want to make. Instead, I want to point out that identifying someone's positionality may be used for various purposes: to provide context or reflection, but also to discredit or challenge someone's view; it can also be an act of empowerment. It was only after I came in contact with a colleague doing research on 'TCKs' that I had a better understanding of my own positionality. This researcher asked me to complete a survey, and through this survey and conversations with her which followed, she helped me both to understand some of my feelings of alienation and my unique perspective as a 'TCK.' This in turn helped me feel empowered, rather than marginalized. In our conversations my colleague pointed out to me that psychologists have viewed children who grow up outside their 'home' culture and then had to reenter that culture, as 'abnormal' and as having suffered a trauma as a result of this transition. Part of her motivation then was to focus not on the trauma of switching cultures, but on the positive outcomes of experiencing multiple cultures during one's childhood. Some traits which she felt 'TCKs' often exhibited included: ability to empathize, ability to pick up subtle cultural clues that others might miss, ability to be diplomatic. Given that we are becoming an increasingly global society and world, these traits, she argues should be valued and better understood.

While TCKs may make up a very small percent of the world's population, other groups, for instance immigrants and minorities, who are often also viewed as 'abnormal' for similar reasons, may also develop better abilities to pick up cultural clues and empathize with others, as they try to make sense of their multiple and often conflicting identities. (Of course the opposite also happens as individuals facing discrimination and attacks on their culture retrench and become less tolerant.) Anyway, I think understanding such experiences and how individuals react to them is becoming increasingly important as the world shrinks. Understanding positionality is I believe part of this process. Which leads me to my second, point, to revisit Sherifa's suggestion that 'all women are hybridized and globalized.' Yes, the economy is now global and technology is certainly making the world and as such our cultural experiences and exposure more similar, but I think that individuals throughout the world (but particularly in the US), remain quite closed in their ability to recognize the value of 'others.' As such, the traits of those who by their lived experience have gained a better understanding of crossing cultural and other types of boundaries may be even more valuable and should be recognized.

To expand on points made by Amal and Manal, I think it is important to recognize the positionality of individuals who do not come from a monocultural background (another term used by some studying TCKs), be this diversity based on race, religion, ethnicity, etc. Such individuals include 'TCKs,' immigrants, children of immigrants or mixed race parents, and many others. These individuals are likely to share some common traits as well as considerable differences. For instance, while as a TCK I was immersed in aspects of Arab culture, unlike most immigrants, I did not experience racism or anti-immigrant feelings. So my experience of crossing cultural boundaries was in many ways more positive than the experience of some. Anyway, this is by way of introducing some of my thoughts on these issues. I am afraid I am not really addressing the gender aspect of all of this, but these are the thoughts which come to mind as I read through what others have written and mesh them with my own struggles to gain an understanding of my own positionality and how that influences my experiences. I am also somewhat new to some of these debates and hope I am not simply rehashing material others have already gone over. Anyway, I am very interested in exploring further these questions, and in particular in trying to relate how my experiences and the experiences of other TCKs might be similar or different than those of immigrants, the children of immigrants, and others who have crossed one of the most obvious (physical) markers of identity - national borders.

Responses

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I have enjoyed the thematic discussion and learned from all the contributions. Sherifa booted me to join in. I find myself somewhat hesitant as much of such intensely complicated discussion so dense with personal experience that the thought of trying to engage by email to an audience whose eyes I can't see and whose body language I can not read is rather overwhelming. As I do know so many of you, perhaps, I will venture in.

Having grown up multicultural before such experience had a positive label, and now submerging my daughter in deeply in the waters of the world, I find myself always struggling to find the self. For some-time, I have thought to myself that the hallmark of Western culture, of capitalism, of contractarian liberalism, of the rational market, of private property, must be the idea of boundary. Boundaries are everywhere in these domains — boundaries around cultures, nations, states, institutions, cities, property, and ultimate, and most profoundly, around the self.

I have come to experience that not only is there nothing natural about boundaries, and not only is their invention and imposition constructed, in time and place [and thus always shifting], but also that boundaries must always do violence to invent and impose themselves. Whether that violence is symbol, material, physical, emotional, — there is a coercive process entailed.

The outcomes of boundaries, we have come to accept, or hope, are, in many instances, liberatory. In other instances, for me, the jury of life is still out.

I have read a number of articles recently about “global kids” — western kids raised in other countries — perhaps this literature has been around, and is catching my eye now because I have brought my daughter to Egypt and to Lebanon for extended stays. It is a literature which raises complicated questions — but is also based on some rather problematical assumptions. For one, some of that literature assumes there is a place in the world that is “a” [read singular, unitary, whole] culture. Can someone give me directions? Maybe I’ll retire there. Yet that literature is evocative and compelling.

Sometimes, I think the compelling notion of culture is a nostalgia for a time we never had, not at least in my memory. Was Lebanon in the 1940’s when I was born and lived there “a” culture? Was upstate NY in the 1950’s, when my parents moved us there “a” culture? Was California in the 1980’s when my daughter was born “a” culture?

I wonder, I wonder what I yearn for when I harken to history, to the past, to re-memberings? What is it about the present that eludes me? What is it about the complexity that we are that slips through our hands? Is it that it is too complex to behold? Why do I see complexity as fragmentation rather than its own wholeness?

I sometimes wonder whether the slipping through my hands is not only about my own incapacity to sustain the threads or whether the threads are being pulled away. If we look up, look out, what is out there for us to see? And I wonder whether the pull is not the demand of the political, the demand of power, the demand of organization to move, shift, control, manipulate, negotiate...

My apologies if this has been too abstract. Email is not my medium for reflection on those densely personal situations.

Manal

As I mentioned before, this particular topic of bi-cultural individuals is of interest to me - mainly because of my own attempts to understand what it means to me as an American Muslim woman of Palestinian heritage. Although I am probably considered among the “youth” or younger generation (I am 25), I feel that the generation after me has a greater challenge than the one that my peers and I faced. Most of the Arab-Americans I know grew up in secular homes, where religion was more of an identity than a way of life. The children of these families found a way to come back and embrace their religious and cultural backgrounds with pride. This has been my own experience, and as an activist in the community I find it quite common.

However, I feel that we had also learned to be critical of negative practices, and to understand the need to be realistic of the gap between theory and practice, rhetoric and reality. This is particularly true in the case of gender. There is a growing generation of American Muslim women who have entered professional fields; we have intricate networks among female lawyers, journalists, and workers in development that have probably not been seen before.

However, my tours of college campus, speaking on the issue of women and Islam has been met with significant criticism from young Muslim women who feel that I am adopting a “feminist” perspective. I find the comments amazing, because as a woman who chooses to cover and examine gender roles from an Islamic context, I have always rejected the “f” word. I have realized that the tendency to slap a label on women who speak out has caused many of the younger generation to withdraw from discussing women’s issues, and to do anything to disassociate themselves from gender issues. I think this trend is not only in the Arab or Muslim community. Recently, I was reading a book called Daughters of Feminists, that expresses the same de-linking. Many of the younger generation seem to be grasping on to Islamic values

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as they are taught to them by older leaders (mainly male), and losing the critical element and ability to question that I feel are the benefits of being a bi-cultural individual.

There is a greater need to emphasize that women who question roles, or seek to understand them are not challenging religious and cultural values. Many people feel that talking about women's rights is a "past fad" or at worst, some people believe it to be out of the lines of Islam. It is easy to dismiss these people, and to focus on the intellectuals or the other groups who have moved beyond questioning, addressing women's issues. But these are often the same audience that can make a change simply by shifting their views on gender roles. Women from Arab or Muslim backgrounds need to understand that they are fulfilling a long legacy of women who have done that in the past. I often emphasize that we do not question Allah but question humans. The Prophet Abraham stood apart from the others in that he was a 'nation in himself.' He was a 'nation in himself' because he dared to question the 'system' in his search for truth. More importantly, his questioning was not a questioning of Allah Almighty, but of fallible beings. In fact, Abraham questioned the system during his day precisely because he knew that Allah is just and therefore the injustice he saw was incommensurate with what pleases Allah.

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I don't actually know if I'm allowed to contribute, or if this is open to everyone. I wanted to mention that there is an excellent article (perhaps 2-3 yrs. ago) in the Atlantic Monthly by Pico Iyer in the first person on the increasing number of people with several identities, countries, affiliations, loyalties, etc. - people whose parentage may be mixed, have parents involved in academic research, who were born in one country, live in another, may go to secondary school or college in yet another place, etc. They are independent, comfortable with travelling and have a global cosmopolitan disposition. I see this as positive. What I have seen however, is that this is distinct from what we call 'ex-pat' kids. Having lived in ARAMCO in Dhahran for 5 yrs, I can attest to many of the kids, regardless of their nationality having identity problems, and also that the American minority has a kind of 'closing of the wagon trains' mentality, which is opposed to learning about the very environment they are in. Ironically, this includes outrageous discrimination against other ethnic Americans and nationalities, which would not be allowed in the U.S. Unfortunately, their children learn to adopt their parent's attitudes and eventually return to the U.S. not any more enlightened than if they had stayed in small town America.

Mary Ann Fay

I'd like to comment on the discussion of TCK's and agree with what Aisha has said. I think we should be careful in discussions of TCK's not to assume that they will become, by virtue to their living abroad, open-minded and tolerant. My son is on the way to becoming a TCK — he spent kindergarten at the Cairo American College and is now in his third year as a student at Sharjah English School where he will be finishing elementary school. He has actually had more of his schooling abroad (4 years) than in the U.S. (2 years). However, I can't say that the expat experience in and of itself fosters tolerance of diversity or even respect for the local culture. I am constantly shocked by the casual prejudice and racism I encounter among parents at my son's school as well as among his classmates. A few days ago, one of his friends said to me, "Don't Indians just annoy you?"

My response was to say no, not more than any other kind of people annoy me and to ask him why specifically Indians annoyed him. Of course, he couldn't be specific. Last year, my son, who is African-American, was being taunted by a boy in the class above him who was using the N-word in his taunts. Fortunately my son's friends stood by him and after he told me of the incident, I reported it to the headmaster who reprimanded the child and the taunting stopped immediately. This is in a school, although with a majority of British students, that reflects the expatriate community in the Gulf, with many Asian families as well as mixed families, i.e., Arab men married to non-Arab women. Although I found that Cairo American College was more active in promoting tolerance, respect for diversity and understanding of the local culture than the English School here, even at CAC there were many parents who objected to their children's learning about Egyptian culture. I think that expat communities can sometimes be enclaves of narrow-mindedness, prejudice and racism that promote a belief in Western superiority. It takes more than exposure to different cultures to foster tolerance and respect for difference.

Marilyn Booth

Hi, Sherifa, after some hesitation, I'm sending this for the conversation ... I'll add my voice here, to strongly agree - I wish I didn't have to - with Aisha and Mary Ann. Having taken my kids to Egypt for a year, and, as you'll see if you stay with me for a few minutes, having gone through a bit of this myself, I agree that expat experience in itself doesn't do anything and that in fact it can rigidify some lines. Yet, I also think it is worth emphasizing that often - not always, of course - when kids are exposed to different cultures, it opens up a lot of productive lines of thought, discussion, etc., and some of the most productive stuff comes out long after the experience. Of course, so much has to do with how it is all processed.

I wrote the passage below two days ago, I think, right after reading Jennifer's and Suad's comments. I then hesitated to send it: it seemed self indulgent and, because it is highly personal, it made me feel vulnerable (it opens some of those selfed boundaries) and also wonder whether it could be useful. (Let me rush to add that I do feel strongly that the highly personal is intrinsically part of responsible scholarship!! Something we've been saying in various ways, here, I think.) But now, I think I will let it fly through cyberspace, just to offer up one more voice on this.

Let me say, too, that I find it interesting that in this conversation we seem to have gotten away from the terms "insider" and "outsider." I think that is significant.

As the recent horrors have unfolded in Palestine, and with the generally awful coverage thereof in the US media, or that small part of it that I follow, I have been thinking back to my own short but very, very significant TCK experience, which shaped my life in ways that only gradually became apparent. Much of that shaping had to do with the kinds of boundary crossings that Jennifer talks about so feelingly, and with the questionings about what those boundaries and crossings meant to me and others, and how - thinking through Suad's passionate questionings, too - they get made and remade into differently defined boundaries by our selves and by others, imagining us. Taken to Beirut for one year at the age of twelve, and also that year spending a bit of time in al-Quds and Ramallah, I found a world that appealed to me, that troubled me, and that I wasn't sure I wanted to leave. But we did leave - on June 7, 1967, from Beirut harbor as the Shell depot burst into flames. What turned out to be even more important, I think, or which made the whole year even more of a shaping one for my future, was returning to the US so suddenly, now a thirteen year old, and talking to peers and older friends of the family and new acquaintances about Palestinians and about the war that had raged as we sailed toward New York. "Palestinians? Who are they?" was almost always the response, and it shocked me, over and over, leading me to question many things as well as to try, from that age, to deepen my knowledge so that I could respond quietly and at length. And then, later, as a college freshman, starting as a government major but unable to take the attitudes of those who taught me.

Obviously, the year in Beirut was an experience that impelled my later professional work, even if I have moved so far away from specifically public political interests (in terms of career though not, I trust, as a concerned, and angry, individual.) Yet, more intangible, harder to define, and closer to the bone are those questions of emotional linkages and what they mean; what they make possible and what they may also preclude. Many times I've asked myself - and no doubt, many times I've avoided the question - whether I draw on that experience, brief in time and much less brief in life implications, to validate things about myself, and if I do, whether thereby I'm exploiting it. What does it really mean for my larger political and intellectual commitments? Why do we do the things we do? Where are the lines (always shifting, of course, but that isn't always easy to see) between boundaries of self and world and how do they relate to our motivations? And, "insider" with regards to what? When asked that by-now very tiresome question "what made you decide to study Arabic?", I find that I avoid mentioning that Beirut time. Am I afraid it gives me too much credit? Or has it receded behind so many later factors and experiences? I do think it has significance for some basic empathies that, I hope and believe, underlie what I try to do; but talking about it to others can too quickly misrepresent what it means, or might mean, to me. In a not-very-connected way, I think - or hope - that this relates to some of the points that other participants have raised. Since I've already been self-indulgent here, I'd like to end with something perhaps more self-indulgent, a poem that more or less came to me as I sat on the porch yesterday thinking about Suad's questions to herself, and to us.

A still, orange morning
Of wings, calling out morning greetings
To other still forms, before the autumn
Forces emigration.
A tiny spider
Weaves a connection from the glistening table edge
To my teeshirt.
Fragile links to places and moments.
And I must leave, too, the strands clinging
To the rise of my skin.

Najwa Adra

In support of Mary Ann Fay's comments, my worst experiences of discrimination as a child occurred in the British Army School in Lybia, from English army brats (mid 1950's). They didn't know that Syrians and Palestinians were Arabs, but they knew that Arab was bad.

Manal, Anti feminism among youth is a national crisis. My fifteen year old son was trying to tell me last week that I was not a feminist, and I had to explain that feminism in our family goes back to his great grandmother who founded a secondary school for girls in Sulaymania in 1930.

Jennifer Olmsted

I understand that the format is that I now respond to the various posts that have been made following my initial post, so here goes... I am afraid I won't be able to address each post individually (not to mention that since I drafted this more have come in...), but I will do my best to address the various issues raised.

First, thanks to all who responded. I am particularly grateful to Marilyn Booth. When I first posted I too debated whether I was being too self-indulgent, while at the same time feeling far more vulnerable than I usually do when participating in such E-mail discussion lists, I guess because I was laying myself open to a discussion of my identity and my understanding of my identity. It wasn't until I read Marilyn's post that I recognized where some of my uneasiness was coming from.

I agree with Suad that some of the discussion of TCKs has been problematic, by reifying a dualistic notion of culture. And yet, while there is no denying that we live in a world where cultures blur and mesh, there is in my mind no doubt that we also experience 'culture clash' and 'shock' when we move between communities and this is something it took years for me to understand about my own experience of reentering the US as a teenager. Even knowing the boundaries are false, one cannot escape the feelings of culture as a dualistic construct at times. I also wonder how much of the construction of 'others' can be blamed on capitalism and how much is unfortunately, human nature (if such an essentialist concept does exist...)

In response to Aisha, Mary Ann and others, I never thought I would be defending expat communities... My parents certainly recognized the stifling nature of much of the expat community in Beirut, which is why they didn't send me to an American school. And at a more general level, the ties of many of these expat communities to colonialism and neocolonialist ventures (not to mention the aura of cultural superiority) cannot be denied. Still I think it is important to ask not are expat communities a panacea, but rather on average, do children who spend part of their youth in another culture (whom I am defining as the children of expats) become more openminded as a result. I am still hopeful that they do, and I believe that one of the goals of the TCK literature is to try to document that. I also think that the communities that some of you may be comparing these expat communities to (in assuming that they can get away with more prejudice) may not be very representative of the US experience. I think still today there are only pockets in the US (and many other places) where difference (in terms of race, ethnicity and sexual identity, in particular) are tolerated (and occasionally accepted). For instance, friends in a mixed race marriage (Asian/White) told me they returned to California because they felt it was one of the few places in the US where they felt comfortable raising their mixed race children.

Thanks also to Manal and others who raised broader questions about dealing with multiple and sometimes conflicting identities. Perhaps another strength of 'bicultural' individuals is their heightened ability to be critical about their own cultural experiences and to challenge the status quo. At least that is what I hope.

I know Sherifa is anxious to receive my comments so she can post them, so I will end by saying, thanks again for all the posts. And I will try, as Sherifa suggests, in the meantime, to think a bit more about the gender aspect of some of these questions.

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I've been interested in what was being said here over the past few weeks, but I've hesitated to say anything myself since I'm not a specialist on gender nor one on woman's history, although I am beginning to publish a few things on women's history in the Middle East almost as the natural course of things; I work on various aspects of the history of modern and contemporary Syria.

But, what I have to say is personal and I've hesitated because I'm not sure that my personal reflections would be appropriate here. Still, some friends have encouraged me to post the below remarks since they may go beyond a personal and individual experience. I do feel somewhat uncomfortable, however, giving these thoughts and ideas across cyberspace!!

For at least the past 15 years, I've been voicing my opinions in public forums in France in order to try and pass more correct information and give a more balanced view of the Middle East, not just the present situation but the whole history of the region (many years ago while I was a student, I began doing this in an outreach program).

And as Marilyn and Eleanor and others have said, I count myself also among the angry individuals who have felt caught up in a spiral of control (mostly political and social) and, for years now, I've been resisting, sometimes with success and sometimes without, even now. Yes, even now, I'm still amazed by the mis-information and vicious personal attacks, manipulations and all the rest that goes with it when, in some circles, ones dares to question the received wisdom.

About personal convictions being part of our scientific engagements, about the ex-pat community experi-

ence - I know about it not only from the adult's point of view but also for the fact that my two children spent over 3 years in the French elementary school in Damascus in the early 1990s. Albeit, I think that the atmosphere was a bit better than the American ex-pat and diplomatic one but it was still very colonial and mostly "let's be as French as possible"; most of the foreign community wasn't interested in the host country of Syria nor did they want their children's time "wasted" in the curriculum by studying Arabic and the history of Syria!! But, luckily, not everyone felt that way and there was genuine interest in Syria and the Arab world on the part of some non-scholars in the French community (even some scholars though took haughty attitudes about who they supposedly were and who the others were).

How did I get to this point. The story is long, I can't go into it all here, of course, I'm writing it down though, if only for my own clarification and understanding. I remember, as a 13 year-old girl living in NJ during the 1967 war, that frenzied atmosphere and the feeling of siege that the media and community groups were giving. And the screaming of victory over the enemy, but who was that enemy? And I didn't understand all those racist jokes and comments about the Arabs. It just instinctively felt wrong to me. I remember feeling very confused and somehow that this was some terrible show and that things were being hidden. Still, it took me many many years before I began to unravel it all and find my way and understand. It was only in 1974, despite dire warnings not to go there, that I visited just briefly the occupied territories and saw the terrible situation of life there and the enormous contrast with life on the Israeli side.

I know the history of both sides. I know about Palestine during the Ottoman era and before and the historical presence of different communities there. I also know about the Holocaust, its horrible truth that it happened but I also know about it being used to scare new generations of young American (and European) Jews and its use as a justification to wield misery in the Middle East.

This, by the way, is not just limited to Jewish communities. Shortly before I left for my first extended research stay in Syria in the early 1980s, I mentioned to an older Italian acquaintance in NYC that I was going to Syria. She was more than astounded, saying "why are you going over to the enemy (sic !), why would anyone want to leave the U.S. to go there, of all places", she said. In turn, I was astounded by these remarks. "The enemy", that was the way that people saw Syrians. The media saw to that. I hope that I've been coherent. There's so much more to say, that's why I've decided to write it down.

Endnotes

1. Sherifa Zuhur is an historian, previously Associate Professor in the Departments of History and Arabic Studies at the American University in Cairo. She published a book on the Islamist movement in Egypt and its import to gender ideology there (*Revealing Reveiling*, SUNY 1992), is contributing editor of two volumes on contemporary arts in the Middle East (*Images of Enchantment*, AUC Press, 1998 and "Colors of Enchantment" contracted with AUC Press for 2001). Her biography of a singer/cinema star, *Asmahan's Secrets: Woman, War, and Song* is currently in press at CMES, University of Texas and Al Saqi in London. She is the President of AMEWS, and has been involved with various free-speech, anti-censorship, political, and women's rights campaigns.

2. Sondra Hale's best-known work has focused on women in political movements in the Sudan. She has also worked on women in the Eritrean liberation movement and art in the Sudan. She has devoted herself to humanitarian, and liberatory efforts for many years. She is currently Adjunct Professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies at UCLA, and Past-President of AMEWS.

3. Jennifer Olmsted is a 'European American' citizen of the US who grew up in Beirut, Lebanon. She is currently a visiting Assistant Professor of economics at Occidental College. Most of her research has focused on the economics of Palestine, and more specifically on education, migration and employment patterns in Palestine. She has published in various journals, including *World Development* and *Feminist Economics*. She is currently the editor of *Middle East Women's Studies Review*, AMEWS' quarterly publication, and *Research in Middle East Economics*, an annual published by the Middle East Economics Association.

4. Eleanor Doumato is an historian and Adjunct Professor for International Studies, Watson Institute, Brown University, a past President of AMEWS, and former editor of the *Middle East Women's Studies Review*. Her new work is *Getting God's Ear: Women, Islam and Healing in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf* (Columbia, 2000). The book focuses on women's limited access to religious learning, sacred space and ritual performance, and the effects of these limitations on women's spiritual, mundane, and professional lives, particularly for their credibility as teachers and healers and for their ability to appropriate public space as women's space. It contrasts the Sunni and Shia towns of the Gulf with the Wahhabi Najd, and looks at ways women strive for agency and sacralize their own space in an effort to create a sense of community, to heal and be healed, and to find ways of getting God to hear them. Doumato has also written articles on gender, economy, Gulf politics, missionaries, Christian sources for the study of gender in Islam, and Arab communities in America, and has edited two volumes.

5. Najwa Adra is an anthropologist who has conducted fieldwork in rural Yemen and has just received a grant from the World Bank to conduct a pilot project on teaching literacy to rural women using their own traditions of oral poetry.