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"When You Come Here, It Is Still like It Is *Their* Space": Exploring the Experiences of Students of Middle Eastern Heritages in Post-9/11 U.S. Higher Education

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The aftermath of September 11, 2001 complicated how students of Middle Eastern heritages are perceived, treated, and constructed in U.S. institutions of higher education. However, research and scholarship has ignored how students of Middle Eastern heritages experience higher education in the current socio-political United States context. Borrowing from Wolcott's (2001) ethnographic fieldwork methodology, I collected data through observations and interviews with 12 student and 2 staff participants to explore the experiences of students of Middle Eastern heritages enrolled in a research extensive university. Three themes emerged from the data to explain how members of this student group experienced higher education in this particular historical moment. First, students had to re/negotiate their misconceptions about *America* and *Americans* in order to navigate the U.S. higher education spaces, thus, rupturing mythical understandings. Second, these changing understandings influenced how they chose to re/construct their identities for themselves, each other, and dissimilar others, sometimes accepting and other times, resisting identities ascribed to them. Third, spaces were both claimed by students and claimed students in particular circumstances. Although described as if independent from one another, these three themes influenced each other. For example, as students re/negotiated mythical understandings, they revealed different aspects of their identities, in various spaces and for varying purposes.

Findings from this study suggest that placing the onus on multicultural/international student groups to educate the dominant campus community is problematic. Through educating others, students develop valuable skills, yet are forced to justify their existence, in this space, at this time. Universities need to take a more proactive stance to collaborate with student groups who have experienced negative identity construction on a global scale. Findings from this study suggest that both domestic and international students need more focused opportunities to engage with one another in order to disrupt their mythical understandings of one another. Thus, I propose the development of a multi-layered program through which students can gain college credit for participation in multicultural and international groups and events leading to a certification in addition to and in conjunction with their academic degree.

Introduction

Rund (2002) stated that, "[d]demographically, economically, politically, spiritually, and philosophically, college campuses have never been more diverse" (p. 5). His observations are supported by 2000 U.S. Census data reporting that foreign born persons residing within the U.S. represented 11.1 percent (or just over 31 million people) of the total population. A small percentage of that original 11.1 percent were of European heredity (15.8 percent or just under 5 million people). The Institute of International Education (IIE) (2008) also reports increasing numbers of international students, Middle Eastern students in particular, coming to study within the United States (a 25.4 percent increase in 2006/2007 and 10.9 percent increase in 2007/2008 from previous years).

Changing minority demographics globally sounded an alarm for some countries (Ben-David, 2009), giving rise to heightened security and surveillance of immigrants (Ben-David, 2009; Butler, 2009; Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003), allowing various countries to revisit and strengthen immigration, naturalization, and citizenship laws (Ben-David, 2009; Butler, 2008), and increasing emotional, mental, and spiritual violence against non-Western others (Abu El-Haj, 2007; Amundson, 2008; Bawer, 2009; Ben-David, 2009; Butler, 2008; Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003; Rhee & Danowitz-Sagaria, 2004; Tehranian,

2008). Following the events of September 11, 2001, U.S. citizens struggled with these same issues, renewing conversations about immigration, enacting legislation aimed at identifying, arresting, and detaining suspected terrorists (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT) Act of 2001 (H.R. 3162)), and implementing strategies to track international students through their academic careers (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, aka: SEVIS) (Wikinson, 2002).

Finally, hate crimes against Muslims, persons of Middle Eastern heritages, or those perceived to belong to one of these groups have been on the rise. "National anger and the increasing rise of patriotism" (Wilkinson, 2002, p. 91) provided the impetus for violence against individuals real or perceived to be Muslim and quickly gave rise to "fundamentalist Christian denominations" (El-Khawas, 2003, p. 49) on some college campuses. Data from both Hate Free Zone (2002) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Report (UCR) (2009) demonstrate an increase in hate crimes against persons perceived as Muslim, Middle Eastern heritage, or both immediately following September 11, 2001, and remaining above pre-9/11 numbers into 2007. This information confirms findings from the Southern Poverty Law Center showing a 48% spike in identified hate groups after September 11, 2001 (2008).

Purpose

U.S. higher education is seeing an increase of persons from this part of the world studying in colleges and universities. How students of Middle Eastern heritages experience post-secondary education in the current socio-political U.S. context has not been investigated and is not understood. This qualitative study explores the experiences of this student population using the following guiding questions:

1) How do students of Middle Eastern heritages experience post-secondary education in the current socio-political U.S. context?
2) How do students of Middle Eastern heritage navigate U.S. higher education?
3) How does institutional context shape the experiences of students of Middle Eastern heritages?
4) How does the larger post 9/11 United States socio-political context shape their experiences in U.S. higher education?
5) How can U.S. higher education better support/accommodate these students?

Theoretical Framework

Scholars (Osei-Kofi, 2003; Tanaka,2002; Tierney, 1992) have stated that the questions we ask center upon what is wrong with the student rather than what is wrong with the institution. Much research and scholarship has centered upon exploring the deficits of students which brings different student groups into being as somehow deviant from an imagined norm. Therefore, this paper utilizes the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory to frame the study.

Understanding that "research… [is] … undeniably also about power and domination… [and the]… instruments or technologies of research were also instruments of knowledge and instruments for legitimating various colonial practices" (Smith, 1999, p. 60) means that "knowledge, particularly in social research, must be seen as actively constructed and, accordingly, as not *neutral* but culturally and historically contingent, laden with moral and political values, and serving certain interests and purposes" (Howe, 1998, p. 14). Postcolonial theory is a theory about the history, origins, and purposes of knowledge and knowledge construction (Appadurai, 1993/1995; Bhabha 1999; Giddens, 2003; Hardt & Negri, 2000; Mohanty, 1984; Said, 1979; Spivak, 1999, Willinsky, 1998). As such, postcolonial theory allowed me to hold knowledge at the axis of developing research questions, choosing and critiquing relevant literature, selecting and constructing appropriate methodologies, and analyzing the data by asking: whose knowledge is this? Who benefits from this knowledge? What are the purposes of this knowledge? What and whose knowledge is privileged and valued? Who is worth knowing and in what ways? And, what are the consequences of said knowledge?

Literature Review

The review of the literature explores three themes discussed more fully below: environments, identity and higher education, and history. Campus environment literatures provide a useful framework to explore and understand the influences of environmental factors upon students and how students operate within the various environments. As the literature points to larger societal influences, I open spaces for new theorizing about the impacts of the larger U.S. society upon students of Middle Eastern heritages who have been simplified and characterized as trouble through media and governmental laws and policies. Multiple aspects of campus environments are shaped by those who work, live, learn, and study on campus and all of these actors bring with them world views that influence how they interact with particular groups of students. These behaviors shape the environment as significantly as do laws, policies, and formal university actions, creating welcoming and/or hostile spaces (Jayakumar, 2008; Hurtado, 1996; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). To investigate or explore student experience divorced from environmental influences only provides a partial picture of the dynamic life on college campuses. Further, divorcing environment from experience silences divergent voices, oft suppressed, and minimizes larger culpability beyond the individual student, thus placing the onus for *getting along* upon students.

No research was located that describes or analyzes students of Middle Eastern heritages' experiences and understandings in U.S. higher education. Instead, most recent literature focusing on students at the post-secondary level centers largely on marginalized domestic students (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Einarson & Matier, 2005; Martinez-Aleman & Salkever, 2003; Pope, 2000; Torres, 2003) or on faith, spirituality, and identities therein (Love & Talbot, 1999; Parks, 2005; Stewart, 2002). Research that explored international students specifically explored friendships and relationships (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Trice, 2004) and student stress, supports and success (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). Rarely were international students specifically culled from the total number of participants (Einarson & Matier, 2005; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Pope, 2000; Torres, 2003). The most pertinent literature found was that related to international students as well as multicultural and multiethnic students, both umbrella terms, in which students of Middle Eastern heritages might fit. Of the seventeen articles surveyed only nine were found that peripherally attended to international students or multiethnic and/or multicultural students and their experiences.

Historical literature comprises the final section of the review and serves two purposes. The first purpose of exploring the history of education and higher education literature was to illuminate how higher education institutions grew to meet the needs of a multiculturally diverse society, how different groups became citizens and gained rights to education, and how those rights were extended, claimed, and in some cases, rescinded. Themes pertaining to international students, multicultural or multiethnic students, and cultural diversity trends and policies – both formal/legal and informal/implied were noted so as to establish historical context to situate the current research project in understanding the experiences of students of Middle Eastern heritages. In surveying these histories, postcolonial theory was used to bring the dominant taken for granted understandings to the fore in an effort to provide a more holistic interpretation of student experiences.

The second purpose of turning to this body of literature explores how history is remembered and memorialized, the legacies of the British model, and the legacies and lethargies of the German scientific model. To better think about this purpose, I drew from literature in cultural anthropology to better understand how science became institutionalized within the academy and the consequences surrounding this history. This exploration illuminates how, and in some ways, why particular groups are studied and the way in which research questions are asked, troubling dominant research and methodology paradigms.

Influencing Environments

Scholars have sought ways to understand various components of campus ecology so that environments may be purposely created to facilitate positive outcomes, such as retention

(Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Zajacova, Lynch & Espenshade, 2005). Moneta and Kuh (2005) discuss the "campus ecosystem" as a self supporting system made up of various subsystems (p. 67). Drawing from the work of Banning (cited in Moneta & Kuh, 2005) and that of Strange and Banning (cited in Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002), four common components or subsystems are said to operate in the larger campus environment: physical models, human aggregates, structural organizational models, and perceptual approaches (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Kuh, 2000; Moneta & Kuh, 2005). These components contribute to a students' sense of belonging (Barr, 2000; Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Hurtado, 1996) which affects her/his ability to persist (Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005), self-efficacy, perceptions of stress and ability to cope with adversity (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). Scholars have also explored how elements of campus environments that are hostile toward some aspect of identity can be detrimental to individual students and thus compromise the value of education for all students (Abu El-Haj, 2007; Hartley, 2004; Hurtado, 1996; Locks, Hurtado, Nichols, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Neider, 2009).

The campus environment is greatly impacted by the people acting with/in and on the university as "each type of environment reflects the characteristics of the people in it" (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002, p. 91), as such, I pay special attention to the human aggregates and perceptual approaches. I explore perceptual approaches as a way to unearth various narratives operating above, with/in, and between the various components of campus environment.

The framing of identity is at once both a cultural process as well as a political endeavor. Identities are constantly in flux due to the power of others to re/inscribe meaning onto our being. Those who define groups of people or particular individuals occupy privileged subject positions within United States or Western society (Barker, 2005; Bauman, 2005; Leonardo, 2004). Historically, persons occupying privileged spaces were considered the bourgeoisie and were responsible for defining, identifying, and gate keeping culture; in fact, high culture was identified as predominantly white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle to upper class, Christian, and male (Barker, 2005; Leonardo, 2004; Lesko, 2001). It is against this backdrop of ideal *American* identity that specific identities have been forged in order to fill specific cultural roles in contemporary society, often times meeting multiple political purposes (Bauman, 2005; Leonardo, 2004). For example, Leonardo (2004) highlights how the Irish, once considered and named black, became white through social processes meant to increase and maintain "the white nation state" (p. 42). Subjects are written into being (Sameshima, 2007) just as they most certainly can be created by, through, and for political purpose (Bauman, 2005; Leonardo, 2004; Said, 1979).

The media, as educational apparatus, help shape public opinion. According to Moses (2007), "print media tend to be most used by people who are trying to find information to form an opinion on a given topic…" (p. 160). As such, negative media framings of persons from the Middle East who are also Muslim (Abu El-Haj, 2007; Buck-Morss, 2003, Rajagopalan, 2008) have influenced public opinion in ways that shape, change, and run current social and public policy. Contributing to the grand narrative of Middle Easterner as terrorist, this process seems to work in a way that goes largely unnoticed and seemingly naturalized; few call into question the *othering* of persons with Middle Eastern heritages across the globe or in local communities. This taken for granted normalization of *othering* Middle Easterners in society can best occur through one of the socializing systems/mechanisms in Western society: education.

As part of the human aggregate of campus environment (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Kuh, 2000; Moneta & Kuh, 2005), teachers, professors, administrators, and peers all contribute to creating the culture of the institution. In some cases "[t]he values and norms of faculty and administrators presuppose minimal participation by minority students who have not been socialized into the beliefs and behaviors of the majority" (Richardson & Fisk-Skinner, 1990, p. 500). Just as institutional mission shapes the practice, day to day operations, values, and traditions of an institution (Barr, 2000) the values and beliefs of individuals shape their actions and behaviors. It is these actions and behaviors that contribute to

shaping welcoming or hostile environments on campus and creating or limiting opportunities for students through official and unofficial campus policies, values, traditions, and practices. Further, these actions and behaviors guide actors at the state and national policy levels both formally and informally, which in turn affects and impacts the environments and community in which an institution must operate. All these factors contribute to how students perceive themselves and others, interact with one another and the institution, and continue along their individual developmental trajectories.

Identity and Higher Education

Most literature about college student adjustment focuses on marginalized groups residing within the United States and builds upon student development theories (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Cross, 1995, Einarson & Matier, 2005; McEwen, Roper, Bryant, & Langa, 1990; Martinez-Aleman & Salkever, 2003; Pope, 2000; Taub & McEwen, 1991; Torres, 2003). More specifically stated, research about how students adjust to college has predominantly centered on U.S. citizens who are African American (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Cross, 1995; Einarson & Matier, 2005; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993), Asian American (Einarson & Matier, 2005; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993), Native American (Richardson & Fisk-Skinner, 1990; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993), or Hispanic/Latino/a American (Einarson & Matier, 2005; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Richardson & Fisk-Skinner, 1990; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Torres, 2003) with little attention paid to groups outside of these domestic racial configurations. There is a growing body of scholarship that seeks to broaden our understanding about adjustment to college by exploring bi-racial or multi-racial students, international students, and students with multiple subjectivities (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; McRee & Roper, 1998; Martinez-Aleman & Salkever, 2003; Tanaka, 2002). While the majority of the studies rely on survey or questionnaire data, all of the studies quantified the data, and many investigated domestic students rather than international students, there is a growing need for current qualitative studies to more clearly understand the present circumstances of students of Middle Eastern heritages on U.S. college campuses.

Much like the media following dominant ideological assumptions, so too has the academy in its lack of research on students of Middle Eastern heritages which allows *common sense* kinds of understandings about these students to prevail. Silencing the stories of students of Middle Eastern heritages amalgamates their experiences into either the dominant cultural group's perspectives or those of marginalized groups sharing similar, yet different, experiences. The lack of research in this area also demonstrates assumptions regarding whose knowledge is valued and privileged, who is worth knowing, and in what ways different groups can be known. In order to develop a more holistic and vivid picture of how these broadly defined groups of students experience higher education in the United States and understand how particular research practices have continued to privilege methods of inquiry, it was also necessary to explore history of education and higher education literatures.

Legacies and Lethargies: Contemplating History

It is through the remembrances of history that societies are formed (Briggs, 1996; Crapanzano, 1991; DeJorio, 2006; Friedman, 1992; Hardt & Negri, 2000; Spivak, 1999; Willinsky, 1998), citizens are brought into being (Spivak, 1999), and subjects are taught how to think about themselves and others (Crapanzano, 1991; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Hoeveler, 2002). Individuals come to learn of their position in the world through these remembrances and memorializations (Crapanzano, 1991; DeJorio, 2006; Friedman, 1992; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992); as such, these histories justify actions, inactions, and a politics of behaviors, defining domination and oppression (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Hoeveler, 2002; Willinsky, 1998).

As I considered the history of education and higher education, I attempted to uncover the many layers of meanings bound up in the literature. One layer addresses the rights and privileges of citizenship as that relates to education in terms of who gets educated, in what ways, and whether they can stake legitimate claims to that work (Abu

El-Haj, 2007; Spivak, 1999; Spring, 2006, 2007, 2008). A second layer is the history of how education and higher education developed, expanded, and contracted in the United States through exploration of the British model and German scientific legacies in higher education (Lucas, 1994; Rury, 2002; Thelin, 2004). The third layer is the social construction of the history of higher education. Although the dates, people, and events in the history of higher education presented by Lucas (1994), Rury (2002), Thelin (2004), and others (Bok, 1982, 1986; Bowen, 1999; Geiger, 2000; Graham & Diamond, 1997; Levine, 1993, 1999; Rosovsky, 1990; Trow, 1999) are technically accurate, they all convey particular re/presentations of this history and demonstrate lethargies in who is studied and how studies are operationalized.

As the Middle Eastern student population is on the rise in recent years it is important to begin to learn about and document the experiences of these students, particularly as these experiences relate to how environments on college campuses are shaped for learning for all members of a university community. In constructing this history of the present, student voice needs to be re/presented. There have been several recent national and international events and policies that also need to be used to situate particular students and experiences within the reading of current higher education history. Theoretical perspectives that allow for more holistic re/presentation of student voice need to be used to more fully interpret and contextualize student experience. All of these observations call for the need of more narrative and descriptive work to both accurately illuminate and honor the stories of student experience.

Research Methodology

This study is situated within a qualitative methodology emerging out of a postcolonial theoretical framework (Appadurai, 1993, 1995, 1999; Bhabha, 1999; Briggs, 1996; Crapanzano, 1991; Friedman, 1992; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Leonardo, 2004; Lesko, 2001; Meyer, 2004; Mohanty, 1984; Said, 1979; Smith, 1999; Spivak, 1999; Willinsky, 1998). A postcolonial framework is concerned with who creates the knowledge, whose knowledge is privileged, the consequences of said knowledge, and for what purposes the knowledge has been created and will be used (Briggs, 1996; Crapanzano, 1991; Friedman, 1992; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Leonardo, 2004; Lesko, 2001; Smith, 1999; Willinsky, 1998). Since I am not a member of the group whom I have chosen to research, these questions have been re/located to a more central place/space of prominence within this research study.

This qualitative study borrows from an ethnographic study design (Wolcott, 2001), using interview, observation, and critical self-reflection methods of data collection. These methods allowed me to interrogate knowledge construction and ensure validity and reliability (Angrosino, 2005; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Saukko, 2005). Data is centered upon 12 student (see Table 1) and 2 staff interviews, observations of student interactions in public spaces for one complete cycle of activity, one semester (Wolcott, 2001), and researcher journal data.

Table 1

Student Participant Demographic Data

Gender (m/f)	Age	U.S. Citizen (y/n)	Country of Origin	Ethnicity	Nationality	Academic Level	Academic Program	Length of Time in U.S.
M	19?	N	Palestine	Palestinian-Emirati	United Arab Emirates	Bachelor's	Architecture	less than 1 yr.
M	25	N	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabian	Saudi Arabian	Master's	Agricultural Economics	7 mo.
M	23	N	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabian	Saudi Arabian	Bachelor's	Architecture	1 yr. 2 mo.
F	29	N	Jordan	Jordanian	Jordanian	Ph.D.	American Studies	4 yr.
F	40	N	Armenia	Armenian-Jordanian	Jordanian	Ph.D.	Special Education	1 yr.
M	26	N	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabian	Saudi Arabian	Ph.D.	Economics and Natural Resource Sciences	5 yr. 3 mo.
M	24	Y	Qatar	Palestinian-American	American	Bachelor's	Business	life
F	20	Y	Libya	Libyan-European-American	American	Bachelor's	Political Science	2 yr.
M	21	N	Qatar	Jewish-Qatari	Qatari	Bachelor's	Architecture	2+ yr.
M	25	N	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabian	Saudi Arabian	Bachelor's	Architecture	1 yr. 5 mo.
F	26	N	Libya	Libyan	Libyan	n/a	n/a	5 mo.
F	21	N	Libya	Libyan	Libyan	n/a	n/a	4 mo.
M	24	N	Jordan	Palestinian	Jordanian	Master's	Civil Engineering	2 yr. 7 mo.

Fieldwork was conducted on one Northwest, Comprehensive Doctoral granting, Land Grant university campus (Carnegie Classification, retrieved, 09/27/2009). Participants were identified and selected through time in the field with campus student groups (the International Student Center, the Middle Eastern Student Association) organized to meet the needs of students of Middle Eastern heritages.

Analysis of data followed a constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) and unrestricted coding of the data (Strauss, 1987). Axial coding (Strauss, 1987) allowed further interpretation of the original 19 codes which developed around 5 axis points. Through these methods, regularly returning to the postcolonial theoretical questions about knowledge, utilizing a recursive funneling process (Miles & Huberman, 1985) and reflexive practice, 3 themes emerged from the data: rupturing mythical understandings, complicating identities, and claiming spaces.

The Data

The three themes are all highly interconnected, each reliant upon the other, similar to a three

pronged spirograph with no clear beginning or end.

Rupturing Mythical Understandings

This first theme explored sources of foundational knowledge each student held before coming into the United States and the mythical knowledge constructions of groups or challenges to those mythical assumptions. This theme explored how students came to understand themselves within the world, how they understand themselves in relation to others, and how myth is constructed for individuals from these foundations. For example, many student participants believed in the mythical *American* as being tolerant of multicultural others and the U.S. as a melting pot, where race, ethnicity, and religion blend together in harmony. The assumptions held by students was a result of their relationship with the governments of their countries of origin – in some cases, the country was the United States. These myths were also challenged as students came face to face with instances of intolerance and ignorance which was, in part, due to mythical constructions of the Middle East and those of Middle Eastern heritages. One participant recognized these tensions in two comments he made:

> It's just the culture, the type um…it's just there's not a lot of diversity in…not as much diversity in other countries as in the United States…Here a lot of peoples are from different backgrounds and that kind of makes them understand each other. They've been in the same country for so long and they've finally been trying to…as much as they can, to understand each other.

He later stated that although "everyone, most of the guys [in the dorm] are really nice. But umm…I still have to be careful, that's I believe that people of that age umm…they're not, they don't understand a lot about people." Constructing *Americans* as multiculturally aware while also noticing that one still has to remain cautious against different forms of racism was a concern for this student participant. His quote speaks back to much of the literature (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Trice, 2004; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005) by addressing underlying or covert hostilities that Hurtado (1996) alluded to when she spoke of racism on campus taking on "a sophisticated guise" (p. 488).

A few students mentioned how by being in the U.S. "you have seen the world" without having to travel all over, further supporting and more deeply entrenching the mythical multicultural *American*. In fact, the Palestinian Emirati student I observed was identified by the Middle Eastern Student Association adviser as seeming the most "*American*" in the group of all domestic students – some European American, some of various Middle Eastern heritages, and others from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The observation seemed surprising for a student who'd never travelled to the United States before attending university. However, he had lived in two of the world's largest metropolises, Singapore and Dubai. His appearance of *Americaness* complicates ideas of what it means to be *American* but also speaks to DuBois' (1903/1996) "double-consciousness" and Trice's (2004) work which implies that those international students who could more easily pass as European American were more quickly adapted, accepted, and thereby assimilated into the dominant culture of the university.

As more people relocate and cross borders, this movement of people complicates situated understandings of the world for those moving about as well as for those residing within the physical locations to which people relocate. Notions of *Americanism* are troubled by how those coming to study in the U.S. perceive the culture and feel accepted within the borders and boundaries of a U.S. context as well as what constitutes an *American* and under what circumstances a person might be thought to demonstrate *Americaness* (Abu El-Haj, 2007). Multiculturalism is touted by both those residing with/in the U.S. as well as those coming to the U.S. as a benefit of living within this context, however, student participants' experiences also troubled how domestic students, and at times professors, negotiated the multicultural spaces, which is further discussed in the spaces theme. Historical understandings of the world affect how individuals construct the self and are constructed by others (Friedman, 1992; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992), as well as how one behaves within it and the experiences in which one chooses to participate (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Hurtado,

1996; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Jayakumar, 2008).

Complicating Identities

This second theme centers on identities and complications in re/constructing self and each other as well as re/constructions by others. As students worked to navigate particular spaces and situations, they re/constructed their identities and the identities of each other in ways that preserved their sense of self and community, and sometimes challenged how their group was constructing them. Students were also actively being re/constructed by others to fit particular subject positions for different and sometimes divergent purposes. These re/constructions were context bound, which lead into the third theme.

Constructions of the self often were employed by the student participants as a method to re/situate or re/position their own identities in ways that they could re/claim ownership over the constructions. The act of constructing their own identities was most active when they were faced with constructions they found inadequate or unacceptable. At times the constructions of identity came from members of the Muslim or Middle Eastern community and at times from members outside of it. Regardless, student participants sought agency in constructions of the self which both resisted and supported constructions placed upon them. There was also a third space, a neutral space, or space of chaos and freedom (Scheurich, 2001), where the student participants' identities were a construction of the self, by the self, and for the self.

Finally, student participants were also actively being constructed by others. Since this paper focuses, in part, on perceptual approaches (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Kuh, 2000; Moneta & Kuh, 2005) that operate in the larger campus environment, exploring the ways in which students of Middle Eastern heritages are constructed by dissimilar others on the college campus is a salient subtheme. For example, students experienced covert re/constructions of identity by other students, faculty, and staff. An example of this occurred during a MESA meeting one evening in September:

> A young man comes in to the MESA meeting at the end of our introductions. The advisor finishes up the activity before asking the young man to introduce himself. He is a tall thin white male, dark hair, wearing glasses and carrying a back pack. He does the activity and after his introduction, before anyone else has an opportunity to speak, he announces that he is an undergraduate in Business and is researching Bahrain. He needs to make contact with someone with business experiences or knowledge of Bahrain. His intro takes 2-3 minutes and it seemed weird, out of place, and an aggression of white male privilege as the meeting was already going on. The meeting moves on with a little bit of acknowledgement about his request/demand. As we collaboratively construct the agenda he chimes in again about his research needs asking that this be put on the agenda...again weird that he would assume that his individual need would outweigh the group/communal need...his item is written on the agenda. (Observation Notes, 9/24/2008)

The student brought up his need three times during the meeting. Finally, after the third time, a Saudi student said, "I know somebody. I'll put you in touch with him." At that point, the meeting continued with normal business. That this student did not apologize, was demanding (although not overtly disrespectful), and did not attend another MESA meeting indicated that he felt he had the *right* to come to a multicultural student center, assert his need, and divert attention from the business of the group until his need was met. His actions further support statements made throughout this paper about which aspects of a Middle Eastern heritage are determined as worth knowing, for what purpose, and by whom. When European Americans approach members of the group, it is frequently for a particular first hand knowledge that can easily be appropriated and used in unintended ways. Coming to a group to find a Bahraini so one can write a term paper, demonstrates what various actors on campus determine is worth knowing about the Middle East and those of Middle Eastern heritage (Lesko, 2001; Willinsky, 2001). How others construct the identities of students of Middle Eastern heritages determine accepted interactions and behaviors by those in the dominant group towards those of Middle Eastern heritages. Once again, these sub-themes do not work independently within this

theme or between the larger themes of myths and spaces; instead they are intertwined like a thread through fabric.

Claiming Spaces

How, when, and under what circumstances a student could claim any particular space or be claimed by that space was influenced by a variety of forces. The depth of students experiences were impacted by a variety of occurrences happening outside of physical spaces, as well as at the international, national, and local levels. The spaces are real, imagined, virtual, and physical. Individuals can make choices to occupy or enter into spaces and at times spaces may enter the person. In this definition it becomes increasingly difficult to identify the parameters of a space; rather the borders and boundaries are permeable and fluid. One space can leak into another space influencing the feel, the climate, the size, and the power of that space to influence other spaces, indicative of campus environment literatures (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Kuh, 2000; Moneta & Kuh, 2005; Richardson & Fisk-Skinner, 1990). Therefore, a space can exist along a continuum, from the tangible to the intangible, impacting identities and at times intersecting with myth.

This theme explored the various spaces participants operated within, which spaces they could lay claim to, and in what ways they could claim a space. I expand upon the definition of campus environments to include spaces outside of a campus that still impact the actors within a campus (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Kuh, 2000; Moneta & Kuh, 2005; and Richardson & Fisk-Skinner, 1990). Each space seeps into the next with some spaces felt throughout all the spaces described. Four spaces are presented: global, international, national, and local. I've envisioned these four spaces along a spiraling funnel-like continuum with global at the wider opening because it operates with/in each of the other spaces and hovers above. As the funnel spirals downward, more finely nuanced interactions occur between participants and spaces. Through this, a more complete picture of how students of Middle Eastern heritages experience higher education in the United States is illuminated.

One participant spoke of one experience he had in England while at boarding school, the implications this experience had on other parts of his life, and how he chose to claim other spaces.

> *Participant:* Okay, well um…I um…there's ahh…um…a story that I've never, I didn't tell a lot of people, it's kind of something that I just don't want to like think a lot about and 'cause it happened a long time ago. When I was younger I used to be in a boarding school in England. It was right after the 9/11 thing that…it's just I saw how people um…instantly changed the way they think about people from the Middle East. We went from being respected to being hated you know. And um…there was a time that I was um…assaulted um…and I was um…someone tried to beat me with a cricket bat…And I had um…a few…fractured bones in my face, yeah. That's why people should be more careful when they go out.
> *Interviewer:* Yeah,…but…yeah, but people shouldn't have to be careful…
> *Participant:* Yeah, you're right I just um…I thought about this a lot and I don't think it's something that will change in my lifetime it's just something that um people have to live with and people have to live with. You have to know how to deal with situations like this.
> *Interviewer:* Sure…So does that event in your life, does that change how you choose to participate in things on campus? Like maybe what events you might go to or what groups you choose to join?
> *Participant:* It does, I mean I try to be…nice to everyone and I think for the most part I am…in the beginning I try to stay away just to kind of see what kind of people they are and then maybe get closer and join…I just…it's hard to just um…put yourself out there and just you know join everything quickly and...

This story confirms and is reminiscent of what persons of Middle Eastern heritages around the globe have experienced as documented by multiple scholars and authors (Abu El-Haj, 2007; Amundson, 2008; Bawer, 2009; Ben-David, 2009; Butler, 2008; Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003; Rhee & Danowitz-Sagaria, 2004; Tehranian, 2008). This student learned through his experience that his relationship with a host country of which he is not a citizen, is tenuous, at best, and potentially dangerous. He came to understand that he may face varying levels of hostility within

spaces. As such, this incident educated him about how to claim certain spaces, as well as, when and how to claim and construct his own identities for those spaces, speaking to the interconnected fluidity of these themes. His experience highlights the global space by way of the actions and behaviors of those who assaulted him. Their actions exemplify how people are influenced by larger social forces, such as media and politics, which hover above any particular space. Since this student's experience occurred during his studies abroad from his own country, it is indicative of occurrences at the level of international spaces. This assault left him feeling that he had to carefully negotiate the U.S. national space and remain conscientious of his surroundings at the level of local spaces.

A second participant recognized the power laden in a U.S. space. She said:

> It's also about the space if I can say it like that. When you come here um…It is still like for me like it is "their" space, by their, I mean like white Americans. You still feel that because you go there, they're everywhere like when you go to Starbucks it's definitely theirs. Because you know as a student, I'm here because of the university so when I come to the university I feel like I have a claim here. At least I'm paying, you know.

Coming to understand one's positionality in the world is a process of interactions with people, places, memory, and myth, which contribute to an overall sense of comfort in various spaces. As students negotiated the often complex identities ascribed to them, they learned how to navigate particular spaces at a variety of levels. Each space impacted the next space and individuals' behaviors within subsequent spaces. Students travelled the world through ethnoscapes learning about which spaces they could claim and how those claims would be met in sometimes violent ways. Although efforts were made by the International Student Center and many interactions were often positive, some had racial undertones, expressed anti-Muslim sentiment, and continued to trouble the grand narrative of U.S. multiculturalism. Students' participation in local spaces reflected the sometimes contradictory nature of their relationship to U.S. laws, policies, and practices in terms of what rights are afforded them, in what spaces, and how the rights are often unevenly applied.

Whether by intent or purpose, political or economical, experiences in spaces had consequences for the individual students and contributed to their sense of being comfortable and moving about within the world. Spaces are constructed by who can claim any particular space, at any particular time, and in particular circumstances. Much like a spirograph, these themes interconnect and cycle through and between themselves and the other, creating clarity and distortion. As Patti Lather (2007) has stated, qualitative research is messy and these data exemplify that idea. Knowledge and knowledge construction is a common thread which ties these themes together by asking three key questions: whose knowledge, who does the knowledge serve, and for what purpose?

Conclusions

Much of the campus programming about the Middle East and Muslims is organized by student groups. The advantages of student-led programming are the benefits that are gleaned by the student organizers who gain valuable professional, networking, and leadership experience. The campus benefits by being able to offer wider diversity of programming for little to no cost. Domestic students benefit from hearing the voices of those who occupy particular subject positions. Opportunities for a broader education are presented to other international and domestic students, although when domestic students are reticent to interact with students of Middle Eastern heritages, they are less impacted by this programming (Jayakumar, 2008). Or if they attend the events, one has to wonder how often misconceptions go unchallenged.

There are also disadvantages in placing the onus of education upon the students who have been marginalized through the media, popular discourse, politics, and Western understandings of history (Richardson & Fisk-Skinner, 1990). It contributes to creating a heightened awareness of identities, and forces students to justify their own experiences and knowledge of the world, similar to Tanaka's (2002) assertions. As with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, issues pertaining to the Middle East and persons of

Middle Eastern heritages may have difficulty gaining legitimacy among a larger audience until the dominant group can claim some ownership or interest in the issue (West, 2001). Many scholars (Ladson-Billings, 2003; hooks, 2004; West, 2001) recognize that civil rights and other social or equality movements only gained momentum when the issues involved could be shown to have connection with issues of oppression impacting some European Americans, such as white women.

A heavy emotional toll as well as the time and energy that go into organizing campus events may be detrimental to students' academic health in ways yet unknown and beyond the scope of this study. By allowing student groups to do the educating, the burden is placed upon the oppressed (Abu El-Haj, 2007; Richardson & Fisk-Skinner, 1990). Resting the onus for education upon marginalized groups also more deeply entrenches the perception that the oppressed must make a case for themselves and justify their existence and legitimacy to the dominant groups (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Osei-Kofi, 2003; Tanaka, 2002; and Tierney, 1992). Until such a time that domestic students make the Middle East their own issue, these educative events may continue to educate those who are curious and international students, who are willing to immerse themselves into a dissimilar cultural context rather than those who may be less knowledgeable and more comfortable allowing their perceptions to be guided by myth, miseducation, and misunderstanding.

Implications for Policy and Practice

As several participants pointed out, U.S. higher education is one place where people can have an international experience without leaving the country. Data from this study suggest that these international student participants have benefitted greatly from their study abroad experience, expanding upon their perceptions of the world by challenging myth and learning to re/construct and leverage different aspects of their identities in an effort to claim particular spaces. The possibilities that this international space implies, strengthen and extend the meaning and applicability of Jayakumar's (2008) findings which "suggest that college exposure [for European American students] to diversity is more important than precollege or postcollege exposure in terms of developing pluralistic skills that reflect the highest stages of moral and intellectual development" (p. 641).

The international community on any college campus is a tremendous resource for all students, as well as faculty, staff, and local community members. International students benefit by nature of immersion in a different culture – once here they have little choice but to adapt to some degree and learn from their experience. International and multicultural experiences need to be constructed more purposefully on college campuses to benefit all students. Therefore, I ponder the possibility of constructing a domestic study abroad program for domestic students who want/need an international experience and for whatever reason are unable to participate in traditional study abroad programs.

What would happen if a program were implemented in which students could gain an extra credential or certification in cross-cultural or multicultural competence? Would it be feasible or possible to open this certification to the entire university community and local community members? What might such a certification program look like? Based upon data from the student participants and the MESA adviser and International Student Center staff member, such a program needs to be multi-faceted. I suggest three components to such a certification which include academic coursework based in both liberal arts as well as in the major, involvement with multicultural events, and interaction with individuals. This program could be structured in such a way that students could select either a basic or an advanced certification option. Such a program could be included in the cost of tuition for students, for an extra nominal fee, on a fee basis for local community members, and part of the continuing education that is usually afforded to employees of the university. Certification could account for elective coursework for students pursuing a degree which would not lengthen their time to degree and it would show up on transcripts for verification by employers. The following paragraphs more thoroughly explore the three components to certification in cross-cultural or multicultural competence.

Since universities are places where academic knowledge is created, disseminated, and taught, it would be necessary to have one component

include academic coursework. As I consider the coursework that would be necessary to prepare students in their chosen academic fields to be leaders within the world, I believe there are two parts to this portion of a certification. One part of the academic requirement would consist of two courses in liberal arts: History, Sociology, American Studies, Cultural Studies, Education, Comparative Ethnic Studies, anywhere students can gain a broad purview of a culture unlike their own while learning about the realities of the social lives of members of that group. The second part to the academic requirement would consist of two courses in the major that explore the experiences, history, and/or knowledge that non-European groups have contributed to the students' chosen major.

A second component to certification would incorporate first-hand knowledge of a group unlike themselves that students chose to learn more about, this might be called "Domestic Study Abroad." Individuals on the certification track also need to learn about a group from the group themselves. During one semester, students could sign up for 3-6 credits of independent study – or domestic study abroad credits. The advanced certification track would allow for students who chose a more in depth path to gain the experience and credit for being more deeply engaged with a group. This second component would require the students to become involved with a group unlike themselves. For example, for three credits, students could attend two multicultural events per month during the semester when the independent study was taken; this would constitute the basic certification. Students opting for the advanced track, would need to attend two multicultural events per month and become involved with a multicultural student group for a minimum of two hours per month. Students would register for six credits.

The final component involves one on one contact with multicultural individuals. For the purposes of this study, my suggestion is that domestic students gain experiences with non-English speaking, non-European, international students by becoming a mentor or English speaking partner, a "Cultural Exchange." On the campus where this study was conducted the International Student Center regularly recruits English language partners, domestic student mentors, and facilitates English Conversation Tables that operates weekly. Frequently, the Center has unmet needs in pairing domestic students with international students. This type of experience would be beneficial for both the domestic and the international students. As Trice (2004) and others (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005) have indicated, acculturation and English speaking ability help international students more quickly adjust to campus life and aids in their academic success. Although, much of this research can be critiqued for the types of questions asked and the assumed positionalities of the students, language and difference is still a mechanism by which non-European international students are othered or ignored on college campuses by domestic students. Further, as was evidenced by the international student participants in this study, interacting with their *American* counterparts on an individual level helped them challenge their own mythical understandings of the West and the United States. The same would likely hold true for domestic students who have little experience with persons unlike themselves (Jayakumar, 2008). Again, students could register for 3-6 credits of independent study, depending on which track they chose, and gain credit for their involvement with this certification program. Three credits would be indicative of 3 hours per week in the cultural exchange, while six credits would be indicative of 6 hours per week. At the end of these experiences, students could write a paper, much like students who participate in study abroad opportunities, where they apply their academic knowledge with their experiences within the groups. These ideas are by no means, all inclusive, they are but one possibility to a problem that continues to persist.

As scholars (Richardson & Fisk-Skinner, 1990) have demonstrated, when multiculturalism is valued at the state policy level, that priority translates to university level practices. If European American students are to benefit more fully from the international or multicultural communities on college campuses, perhaps such interactions should be purposely facilitated rather than left to chance. As campus programming is currently structured, those who already have the curiosity, some knowledge, or some sort of connection with the culture participate more regularly. Establishing

certification programs, like the one described, might encourage individuals to gain knowledge of groups unlike themselves beyond the media sound bytes that typically ignore complex histories of the stories that are presented. This is necessary because, as Friedman (1992) states,

> [t]he common understanding of history, peculiar to modern Western society, is one that consists in a stream of events, a temporal continuum whose empirical existence is unquestionable…It is only necessary to point out that exercises in the deconstructions of events that turn out, on closer examination, to be heavily interpreted (e.g., the French Revolution and other revolutions) demonstrate the degree to which they are integral parts of the way in which we forge and reinforce our own identity. (p. 206)

Similarly, data from this study also suggests that it is through history that we come to forge and reinforce the identities of others.

Future Research Directions

Through the background, theoretical framework, literature review, and the data analysis, I was able to more fully explore and expand upon how knowledge was constructed about members of this particular group and the consequences of that knowledge. I will continue to explore the origins and evolution of knowledge and how that impacts perceptions and interactions between people in society. Therefore, I will continue working with critical theoretical frameworks to unearth the systems of power and subordination that permeate society, influence interactions, and impact higher education as higher education is a conduit through which members of society come to learn about the world and others. Also, since it is becoming more important for all students to be able to communicate across cultural and ethnic differences (Jayakumar, 2008), it would be useful to explore how European American students learn about, engage with, and internalize ideas of multiculturalism and shape their ideas of difference.

To fully understand the experiences of a particular group of students or any of the other university actors I mentioned above, it is necessary to situate them within their own time, context, and history. It is necessary to gain an understanding of how they have been created by representations of history, policy, media, and peers. I agree with Tanaka (2002), Osei-Kofi (2003), and Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2003), that educational research can no longer pretend to be neutral. Instead, educational researchers must account for cultural, racial, and ethnic differences, unearth the systems that have created and sustained these differences, and open spaces for new imagining. My future directions for research will continue to make use of and develop the tools presented and utilized within this study to interrupt the hegemonies of research and scholarship that shape understandings of how universities work.

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