GLOBAL MODERNITY AND IDENTITY AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

I was cooking dinner on Sept. 11th 2001, wondering why my wife and children were so late coming home, when the airplanes crashed into the World Trade center. Dinner was cold by the time they finally arrived, well past seven p.m. local time in Cairo, although it was still morning in America. My wife was subdued, my children crackling with a nervous energy that revealed an underlying tension. In trembling voices, with many interruptions, they told me what they had seen at our neighbor's house on CNN.

"There's one that's still in the air," my wife said. "They believe it's on its way to Washington."

Shocked, I turned to the internet. Most news sites were jammed, but I was able to find a radio webcast from Britain and we all listened, as we ate a warmed over dinner, to the fate of the aircraft that crashed in Pennsylvania. After dinner, we watched some local television coverage. Egyptian television offered similar facts but contrasting accounts: where European and American media showed Reuter footage of Palestinians celebrating the destruction of the WTC, local news also showed a local candlelight ceremony for those who died. My wife and I stayed in the computer room until well past midnight, listening to various webcast media and reading virtual editions of newspapers as they all told the same story over and over, with only slight variations.

We were interrupted only once, early on while I was warming up dinner, when Girgis called from his mobile phone about the arrangements for the Girl Scouts to go

camping on Mount Sinai. Girgis, a Coptic Christian with close ties to the monastic hierarchy, had been crucial in getting the necessary permissions from the monks of St. Catherine's monastery. I left the kitchen when I heard my wife's voice raised in argument. She had been completing arrangements with Girgis, and had commented that the tragedy might lead to a cancellation of the trip.[1] He had replied that America should expect such attacks since their foreign policies are so unfair to so many, especially in Israel and Palestine.

My wife told Girgis that attacks on American civilians, who know little about their country's foreign policies in the Middle East, are indefensible. Girgis retorted that Americans *should* know. She began questioning him about his own knowledge of foreign policy and, admitting his own ignorance of many world events outside the Middle East, he told her that as America was a superpower, the world's "elder brother," it was the responsibility of Americans to know about such things, not his. Upset and unable to continue, but unwilling to insult someone who had volunteered so much time and effort to help the Girl Scouts, she handed the telephone to me.

"Women should not discuss such things," he informed me after I'd taken the information. "They don't know how to argue. They get too emotional."[2]

"Good night," I said, and hung up the phone.

The following morning, Girgis called back and asked me to extend his apologies to my wife. He had just seen for the first time the footage of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center. He'd been shocked by the scale of the tragedy.

Girgis's telephone calls were not only the first of many encounters I had with Egyptians struggling to come to terms with the tragedy; they were also deeply

representative. At one level, nearly all the Egyptians I spoke with expressed the same struggle: the contrast between a desire to see the World Trade Center assault as a justified retribution for what they see as America's global anti-Muslim activities, and a sense of horror at the human tragedy of it. This dilemma, in turn, has consequences for emergent cosmopolitan identities. Girgis called back to apologize because his initial choice to argue about the event was incongruous with the self he wanted to present to himself, to the community of foreign guests my wife represented, and perhaps to God. Girgis's brief conversation encapsulates four things that strike me as recurrent in the many conversations I had in Egypt about the events of Sept. 11 and their aftermath:

first, the fact that all these conversations implicated the media;

second, how profoundly moral all these discourses were, that is, how concerned with working out the right and wrong of it;

third, how difficult it was for Egyptians to discuss Sept. 11 apart from the problem of Palestine;

and fourth, how deeply conflicted and polyphonic were the voices I heard as they struggled to reconstruct their identities in the face of a changed world.

The delicate balance between being fully Egyptian and fully modern is fraught at every level with the possibility that in some context a person will come to be seen, by themselves as well as by others, as too local (which is to say, provincial and backward), or too foreign (which is to say, too Westernized). To make this balancing act even more difficult, the imagined global others with whom one creates indexical links are themselves unstable. Fashions change, Consumer fads change. And the political and cultural fields that gives signs of foreignness particular values change with historical

events. Because local cosmopolitan identities are forged through indexical links to the greater world outside Egypt, they are always contingent on shifts in how that world, or parts of it, are conceived and interpreted both by those who seek to create such identities and the larger social communities in which they are embedded. Even as upper middle and upper class Egyptians seek to frame themselves as cosmopolitans by using consumption practices to link themselves with the wider world, events can transform what those links *mean*, both to themselves and others, requiring sudden efforts to repair the breaches in the frames.

In this essay, I want to look at some of the ways a handful of Egyptian cosmopolitans rapidly remade themselves in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks. I will argue that these cosmopolitan Egyptians restyled themselves through sets of practices designed either to rebalance their relationship to the West, and especially to the U.S., or to reconfigure the meanings of the indexical signs by which they linked themselves to foreign places, or both. This effort involved not only efforts to rapidly remake self-identities but required rapid reassessments of what Sept. 11 itself meant for those links, and for the global and local worlds they construct.

America's Jihad

"Life," my student Omar told me once, "is *jihad*." He was speaking not about holy war against the West, but about his struggle with his own drinking. It was an especially intriguing conversation because wearing exclusively American name brands and speaking idiomatic American English with a hint of a New York accent, Omar came off as Westernized as any young man could be. Omar had taken two classes with me at AUC,

an introduction to anthropology and a senior course on world media. He was smart, cynical and outspoken, and during the upper division course had started dropping by occasionally to visit me. Going to junior high and high school in New York City, Omar said, he had gotten into the habit of drinking and partying with his friends on weekends. Now that he was back in Egypt, he had plenty of Westernized friends he could continue this practice with. Sometimes he did, and afterward he felt guilty. He felt that he had sinned.

Omar's struggle with drinking wasn't a personal one. He wasn't alcoholic, nor was he overly troubled by the Quranic prohibition on drinking alcohol. God was compassionate and merciful and would understand and forgive Omar's personal sins. What made Omar struggle against the pleasure of going out drinking with his friends was his place in the family. His family had returned to Egypt from New York because his father had unexpectedly died of a heart attack. Although his uncles were helping him manage his father's estate and business, Omar was very conscious of his new role as eldest brother and head of the family. He was concerned about the image he presented to his sisters, and younger brother. "God forgives our sins, but not the sins we lead others into," he said.

Jihad means "struggle," specifically, the struggle against evil. Although the concept of *jihad* has been reformulated again and again through history to meet different exigencies in different geographical and historical periods (Heck 2004), it generally refers to both the struggle against one's sins, and also to one's obligation as a member of society to struggle against social sins. Omar can't imagine himself or his fellow citizens ignoring a mugging or rape, as he heard about when he lived in New York. Seeing

strangers step in and break up fights is a common occurrence in Cairo. This, too, is *jihad*. And, of course, *jihad* can mean the struggle of a just society against an unjust one, the claim most terrorists make to justify their actions.[3] The distinction between greater *jihad* –one's struggle with one's self to bring the mind and body into full submission with God--and lesser *jihad* –one's struggle to make society conform with God's law, including through armed warfare—is widespread in contemporary Egypt, not only among cosmopolitans but middle and working class people as well. The importance of this distinction has been the subject of much debate among Western scholars and pundits in the wake of 9/11 (see, for example, Pipes 2002, Khawaja 2003a, 2003b) but the relationship between them that Omar was drawing is often ignored. Yet the degree to which people approve or disapprove of the actions of militants who engage in violent actions justified by them as *jihad* depends a great deal on how these people understand *jihad* in their own lives.[4] Muslims like Omar recognize that there are good Muslims and bad Muslims, just as there are good Westerners and bad Westerners and they construct their own identities in part by how they build these moral categories (c.f. Mamdani 2002)

Omar's understanding of *jihad* and other Islamic concepts was largely shaped by the sheikhs whose sermons he heard every Friday for more than a decade, in New York as well as in Egypt. The mosque Omar attended at the time of our conversation had one of the most outspoken sheikhs in Cairo. In blunt language, he frequently condemned the United States for what it does and fails to do, and condemned the Egyptian government for accepting aid from the United States. "Every week, I get there expecting to hear he's been arrested," Omar said. So when he went to the mosque on Sept. 14th, he anticipated hearing a sermon arguing that the United States got what it deserves. Instead, he heard a

blistering denunciation of the attack on the twin towers, in which the sheikh articulated four principles under which a military action can be *jihad*, and showed how none of these four principles had been met in the events that occurred on Sept. 11th. Many Egyptians echoed this, insisting that the attack on the towers, "is not really Islam. Islam is about peace."

At the same time, Omar said, evil can only happen with God's permission. America has to wonder why God allowed this to happen, he said. Omar was in regular e-mail and instant messaging conversations with some of his friends from New York, one of whom had been for years trying to persuade Omar to be born again as a Christian.[5] Omar said he and his friend both agreed with Jerry Falwell that God had withdrawn his protecting hand from the United States, but Omar thought Falwell's reasoning that this abandonment was over abortion was ridiculous, an indication of America's self-absorption. Americans have to stop looking only at themselves and see the evil they are doing in the world outside their own borders to understand why God might abandon them, he said.

In this conversation, Omar was engaged in a semiotically complex simultaneous cultural construction of himself and of the terrorist attacks on the U.S. Omar's American-accented speech, his tastes in consumer goods and his personal display, in the form of American clothing and mannerisms, all drew indexical connections between himself and the U.S. These were things his metadeictic discourse posited as harmless or even beneficial, like his American education. His drinking and partying, by contrast, were bad things he'd adopted from American culture, things that needed correcting. There are clear parallels between the way Omar talked about himself and the ways he talked about

nations. Just as God will forgive Omar his sin against himself, so God will forgive the United States its sins against itself – it is sins against others God will not tolerate. His story of his personal jihad is thus emblematic of the jihad the U.S. collectively faces. In telling it, he clarifies the nature of his relationship with the U.S., suggesting that he is involved in a "struggle" to keep what is good and reject what is bad from the U.S.

Mediating Morality

Although Omar does not use Girgis's term "elder brother", the idea is implied by the parallels he draws between his own and America's jihads. Omar is perfectly willing for the United States to be the world power; he says he just wishes they'd behave justly and morally. He cites the movie *Independence Day* in which "everybody respects the Americans at the end because they lead the world. Too bad it can't be like that in real life." Omar said that in spite of the movie's absurdities (what were all those guys in turbans doing at the pyramids?), in the Cairene theater where he watched the movie men were standing up and cheering at the end as the U.S. led the remnants of the earth's military forces to take out the aliens. Leadership and justice are often characteristics the movie industry likes to portray as part of the U.S. national character, but Omar's discussion demonstrates how these can be read against the grain, as representing an ideal from which America has slipped.

Omar's use of a movie to make his moral point isn't unusual. Nearly every Egyptian I know is at some level deeply concerned with doing what is right: with giving to charity, with public morality, with scrupulous honesty. Most of the media they consume – news, movies, soap operas – are treated as morality plays and cautionary tales.

Life itself is a drama to be scrutinized for moral lessons and so are representations of events in the media (e.g. Caldarola 1993). Mediated representations of Sept. 11th were treated in this way, but the lessons were, for many Egyptians, deeply disturbing. On the one hand, the countless images they receive from the news media depicting Israeli state violence against Palestinians, using weapons purchased with United States dollars and often manufactured by U.S. companies, seem to justify the attack. On the other hand, the images of the attack itself often deeply disturbed them. It was too destructive, like something out of a movie.

That the media should play a key role in how people imagine themselves in relation to 9/11 should surprise no one. As John Durham Peters points out, "part of what it means to live in a modern society is to depend on technologically mediated representations of that society" (Peters 1997: 76). With one exception, none of the Egyptians I knew had friends or relatives who worked in the World Trade Center or in one of the rescue teams. Their knowledge of the tragedy derived, as did mine, from media of various kinds: television, radio, newspapers, telephone calls, the internet. One cannot talk about the events of September eleventh 2001, either in the United States or in Cairo, without reference to some mediating discourse.

And yet, what profoundly different worlds our respective media give us access to. In the United States, the media are controlled by large corporations. In pursuit of profit, media in the United States make a spectacle of tragedy, giving viewers what ratings measurements suggest they want to see. What they want to see may not always be good for them, of course. Several studies strongly suggest that for many people, the more television news they watch, the more frightening they find the world (Gerbner et. al.

1980, Signorelli 1990). Coverage of Sept. 11th, with its endless repetition of the destruction footage, pushed this envelope even further. Indeed, several studies found that high rates of media consumption in the weeks after the 9/11 events produced higher stress rates than did actual proximity to the towers in New York (Schlenger et. al. 2002, Bernstein et. al. 2007, Propper et. al. 2007). Alcohol and drug consumption, both legal and illegal, increased at least in the short run (Schuster et. al. 2001, Hasin et.al. 2002, Druss and Marcus 2004, Hasin et. al. 2007).[6] American media has generated a common set of media narrative structures, "myths" if you will,[7] in which a hostile and violent Muslim world beyond our borders threatens us, just as the yellow peril, fascism and communism mythically threatened us in the past. There are good Muslims, who consume like Americans, have no accents and keep their religious practices out of the public eye (Mishra 2008), but these communities may still conceal evil saboteurs and spies who seek to destroy us from within.[8]

In the Middle East, media are generally under the control of one or more powerful regimes (Kalimpour and Mawlana 1994, Napoli et. al. 1995, Campagna 1998, Najjar 1998, Ghadbian 2000). In Egypt, for example, even the opposition papers, although independently owned and operated, were ultimately under jurisdiction of a press board whose appointments were controlled by the Mubarak regime.[9] As a result, only the most oblique criticisms of the government are usually allowed, while criticism of foreign countries, including allies in the Gulf, or major trading partners like the U.S. is tolerated, often even when it becomes grotesquely abusive.[10] The complexities of the Palestinian question in particular are often as completely lost in popular Egyptian media as they are in Western media. For example, if protests by Israeli citizens' groups against the Israeli

government's actions are rarely heard in American media, still less are they heard in Egyptian media. The possibility of Jews moved by the plight of the Palestinians, angered by the unilateral actions of the Israeli government, and working for peace with and alongside anti-violence Palestinians, does not fit the simple black-and-white image of regional politics the news media usually to portray. When I would show examples of such category-crossing groups to my students, they were flummoxed. These examples contradicted the drama of a U.S.-backed, irredeemably evil Israel battling suffering, childlike Palestinians that is a master narrative of Egyptian news media. This narrative, and images framed by it, formed one important lens through which Egyptians viewed the events of Sept. 11th.

But people do not simply absorb the opinions of their televisions and newspapers. While many studies focus on how journalists frame the news, with the implication that such frames determine how audiences interpret the news (e.g. Iyengar 1991), contemporary studies of media increasingly recognize that news consumers bring pre-existing personal, social and even situational frameworks to their interpretation of news texts (Gamson 1996, Scheufele 1999) Framing is thus an active process involving "the interplay of media practices, culture, audiences, and producers" (Reese 2003: 7). Because of this, when Egyptians watch U.S. news or Americans watch Egyptian news media, their interpretations strongly reflect their different social and geopolitical situations. These frameworks are derived from their personal life trajectories within socially organized class, gender and ethnic positions, and act as filters and guides for interpreting news texts (Peterson 2003). Perhaps more significantly, interpretation of news is rarely something that happens in a private personal encounter with a text, but is shaped by social

interaction. Most people weigh what they learn from television, the press and radio against what they are learning in other social fields equally crucial to their lives: homes, neighborhoods, peer groups, mosques, and schools. The manner in which people learn from news media tends to be a complex process in which "guiding motivations" (Fisherkeller 1997) from peer, institutional and family cultures help them define themselves in relation to the pre-framed events they see and hear about in the media (and they often consume these media *with* people from these social domains).

In Omar's case, his intimate past relationship in and with the U.S. shaped his tastes and dispositions; on his coming to Egypt, these tastes together with the affluence necessary to indulge them, allowed him to easily fit in with the most Westernized of AUC students. In addition, the American anti-terrorist rhetoric he heard in the first shock of the tragedy was scarcely distinguishable from anti-Muslim rhetoric.[11] But his own metadiscourse constructs his relationship with the U.S. as *jihad*—a term chosen after 9/11 presumably with deliberate irony; that is, as a struggle to find balance by abandoning what is bad about the U.S. and keeping only the good.

Situating Discourse

But, argued some of my Egyptian students when I shared these observations with them, not everyone says the event was both tragic and righteous. Many say it was only righteous. Yes, I answered them, but not to *me*. To me, even complete strangers on the metro never say, "Finally America is getting a taste of its own medicine." To me, they ask: "Was anyone in your family in the World Trade center? Anyone you know? Oh thank God." *Then* they add: "But, of course, it isn't surprising that this should happen."

When I am silent, they hurry on into extended efforts to explain, evaluate, and sometimes explain away the tragedy.

I want to insist that this is not a mere matter of politeness conventions leading them to conceal their "true" feelings. . It is pointless to worry about which of these articulations represents the "real" feelings or thoughts of the speaker. Such a concern imagines human beings are containers of coherent messages that could somehow be extracted if we had a sufficiently "neutral" instrument. But our own experiences undercut such a simplistic model of the self. Even a cursory review of the vast literature on Sept. 11 shows how difficult it has been for people to express the full range of their thoughts and feelings. The self is never fixed but is always in a process of formation. Faced with a tragedy that can't be easily fit into our normal everyday ways of thinking about things, we offer ourselves tentative formations, challenges, inarticulate expressions as we seek to rethink who we are in the aftermath of shock. We express certain thoughts to our parents, others to out peers, and our thoughts change as we hear theirs and sort through them.

So if my person inhibits certain kinds of expressions which might more freely be uttered in the presence of fellow Arabs, Egyptians or Muslims, my person simultaneously invites thoughts, expressions and articulations that might in turn be inhibited when talking to ones friends, family and fellow citizens. I am at one level a sign, a token of the symbolic type, "American." Yet I am at the same time, a real person confronting them with my humanity. As a teacher, a mentor, a customer, or just a fellow traveler on a train valiantly struggling to make myself understood in grammatically weak Arabic, I transcend my tokenness. I become someone as real as anyone else, without ever ceasing

to represent "Americans." As an American living in their social space, I stand to these Egyptians as a representative of the human face of the tragedy, someone they can imagine suffering as they might suffer in like circumstances.

This has important implications for ethnographic practice. One of the conundrums of ethnography is that it not only brings practices into view for the ethnographer but, through the ethnographer's questions, invites practitioners to reflect and comment on these practices, thus inevitably bringing the ethnographer into the system he or she is describing. On the one hand, intimate, descriptive, empirical research is the great strength of anthropology. "One cannot grasp the most profound logic of the social world unless one becomes immersed in the specificity of an empirical reality, historically situated and dated, but only in order to construct it as an instance …in a finite universe of possible configurations" writes Bourdieu (1993: 274). On the other hand, because the instrument of research is our own human persons, who we are to those we are studying shapes the nature of the data we gather. Schatzki (1996) calls the activities ethnographers encourage in with their hosts—including "describing, …explaining, questioning, reporting, examining, and imagining" (1996: 91)—"dispersed practices," because they can occur within and across many different domains of social life. The situated knowledge we derive from ethnographic work, whether participant observation, surveys, interviews or other techniques, often involves an intervention into their everyday practices by the ethnographers' acts of asking their hosts to reflect on their practices. When my Egyptian students and friends spoke to me about 9/11, my questions provoked metacultural and metadeictic discourses as people reflected on, defined and redefined international places, themselves and me in the light of these events.

Tit for Tat

The most widespread answer, the easy answer to such questions, is that America deserves what it got because of its support of Israel in Palestine. This idea was graphically and eloquently captured in a political cartoon by Mahmoud Hussein that ran in the magazine *Caricature* shortly after Sept. 11th. In the cartoon, a black airplane bearing a six-pointed star, the symbol of Israel, crashes into a tall building. The building itself is not drawn; it is constructed of a photomontage culled from news photographs. These include the Dome of the Rock, a man and his son cowering before Israeli gunfire, Israeli troops arresting a Palestinian man, an Israeli soldier with a headlock on a Palestinian man, Arab children dead in the street, a Palestinian woman lying wounded in the street. Each of these images has played over and over in the Egyptian media just as the twin towers destruction photos have in the United States media. The implication of the cartoon is obvious: what happened to the United States is equivalent to what has happened, and continues to happen, to Palestinians in Israel.

There are softer versions, like Girgis's, that do not quite claim the U.S. deserved what it got, but insist that it should come as no surprise to anyone that someone struck back at the U.S. for its policies in the wider world. The Egyptian newspaper *Al-Akhbar* wrote that regardless of who did the bombing, "Israel is responsible" because it is for Israel that "Washington has sacrificed all its interests, all its ethical principles, and [broken] international law and international resolutions." This politicalization of the tragedy was assisted by Washington's own rhetoric, which many students took to be aimed not merely at the culprits but at all America's political opponents. For example, in

a story in the AUC student newspaper *Caravan* one student seized on President Bush's statement that "freedom has been attacked and freedom will be defended" to argue that "people in the Arab-Islamic world have been accumulating hostile feelings towards the American attitudes… On Tuesday, September 11 freedom was not under attack, it was the unfair American politics which was under attack" (*Caravan*, Sept. 30, 2001). The politicization of the attacks by U.S. politicians who constructed the only choice as being "with us or against us" placed many of those who were highly critical of U.S. foreign policy but sympathized with American ideals and wept for the American victims into the "against us" category.

For many students at the American University in Cairo, this dichotomy was played out through institutional practices that forced them to rearticulate their relations with the university. AUC closed Wednesday Sept. 12 until Sept. 16 while the administration considered what to do in the wake of the crisis. AUC's declaration of an emergency, increase in security procedures, and particularly the mass e-mails the administration sent to students and faculty made many students feel AUC was emphasizing its American character over its Egyptian character. Most Egyptians saw the attacks as an American problem; AUC's actions implied that the attacks were somehow also an AUC problem. The administration sent some 15 e-mails emphasizing its close monitoring of events in the U.S., changes in security procedures at AUC, and discussions with the U.S. embassy and the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior. Because it was AUC's policy to be inclusive and treat its multinational student body equally, the administration had no quick way to tease out which students were U.S. citizens and which were other nationals, so messages went to all students. These included recommendations that faculty

and students who were U.S. citizens "avoid public places and large gatherings" (Sept. 1, 2001) or explaining that the university has created sessions of "debriefing for trauma and tragedy" (Sept. 24). These messages were clearly aimed at allaying fears among U.S. and international students and faculty, but they had the effect of alienating many Egyptian students, who saw them as hyperbolic and irrelevant to their needs and concerns.[12] Many Egyptian students were receiving messages that were clearly not addressed to them or their concerns, and read these as a commitment by the university to its *American* identity and an erasure of its Egyptian identity.

Increased security measures elicited similar expressions of feelings. The university hired several additional guards, and installed metal detectors at all gates. Because AUC has two campuses located one block apart, these measures severely inhibited movement on the part of students, especially those rushing from one class on one campus to another class on the other. "It's so annoying to have my bag opened twenty times a day," complained Omneya during a class discussion of the changes. She echoed voices heard in other public AUC forums: "It takes a long time to do anything [now] for no good reasons" (*Caravan*, Sept. 23, 2001). But the discourse moved beyond mere complaints about inconvenience. Several students emphasized that the security procedures marked the university's commitment to its American identity at the expense of the Egyptian and Arab students. Khaled, a mechanical engineering junior, said that "the security procedures actually protect [the university] and the foreigners [but] there is nothing to be frightened of, the fear is only inside them." As the year stretched on and the security procedures remained in place, several students compared them to the experiences Arabs were increasingly faced with as they traveled abroad. "It's bad enough that we are

targeted by these practices at airports," complained Adham, a senior chemistry major. "Now we are going through it here."

The atmosphere at AUC was already highly politicized as a result of the increased Israeli-Palestinian tension in Oct. 2001 and the declaration of the al-Aqsa *intifada* (uprising). The previous Fall semester had been one of strikes, sit-ins, mourning vigils, political speeches on pan-Arabism, and the burning of Israeli and U.S. flags. Although things had died down a little during Spring semester, and many of the leaders of the activities had graduated, most of the pro-Arab political and social networks created the previous year remained partially intact, able to be quickly mobilized.

The idea that there was split between a US-identified administration and an increasingly Arab-identified student body became particularly controversial when the administration asked the Student Union to hold a memorial in sympathy for those who died on Sept. 11. Many students protested, arguing that their student fees should not be spent on such an effort.[13] The candlelight vigil was held, and more than a hundred Muslim and Christian students offered prayers for the dead and sympathy toward the families of the victims. The intention of the students who organized the event was to demonstrate that they mourned equally the victims of terror in the United States and of state terror in Israel. This was itself controversial, because the event was organized at the direct request of, and with the assistance of, the university administration. Students pointed out in the *Caravan* and public discussions that the university had never requested or involved itself in protests against Israeli actions; these were spontaneously put together by student organizations. "Students always have the ability to lend their solidarity to whom they want, it is not a matter of orders from someone else" argued Zein, a sociology

major. And Salma, a computer science major, argued "The university should have asked the students before closing the university. Why didn't they ever close the university for the Palestinians who get killed every day?" Even one of the participants in the vigil said that "while it was a great event, it would have been more meaningful if organized by students" without orders from the administration (*Caravan* Sept. 23, 2001).

One student who did not attend the 9/11 vigil was Ahmed. Ahmed told me he had an uncle he never met, because he was killed in 1982 in a hotel in Lebanon. Ahmed was told by his father and uncles that Ariel Sharon, then Minister of Defense, ordered the hotel bombed because he thought Yasser Arafat might be hiding in it. Arafat wasn't there, but many other people were, including Ahmed's uncle and his new bride, vacationing in the land of the cedars. Some of the accounts Ahmed has read about the incident emphasized that the weapons were of American manufacture, bought with aid money given by the United States

"I don't hate Americans," said Ahmed, who hopes to work in Canada or the United States some day. "But I'll be damned if I'm going to light a candle for American victims. Where were the American candlelight vigils for my uncle and aunt?"

Ahmed's tale, like the comments of the other students, is embedded in a metadiscourse that constructs American and Arab identities in contrast to one another. The e-mail messages, the new security procedures and the vigil served as polarizing signs. The messages split students receiving them into those to whom they were addressed and those to whom they were irrelevant. The security procedures involved bodily activities that were experienced as iconic with similar bodily practices encountered at airports post-9/11, and which is understood by many to be a form of

racially singling out "Arabs" from among the world's populations. Finally, the vigil offered evidence that the university administration was treating Sept. 11 as something profoundly different from other occurrences of international violence, which many students viewed as siding with the U.S. in ways that marginalized those who did not accept America's exceptionalization of Sept. 11.

Being Egyptian and Being American

But the distinction between Arab and American is not always as easy to tease apart as these student discourses might suggest. Ingy's father worked in an office on the 72nd floor of one of the World Trade Center towers. Watching the plane crash into the building on television with friends, she screamed "Oh my God, my father's in there." The room fell silent as everyone turned to look at her. "I went into complete hysteria, as you can imagine," she wrote me later. "My fellow students witnessed my moment of insanity and never let me forget it. The street I lived on knew how upset I was that day, but people made terrible comments. People were mistreating me, labeling me as the American girl who should be taught a lesson."

Ingy was an AUC sophomore majoring in accounting whose father worked for an international banking firm with offices in the World Trade Center. Her father lived in an apartment in New Jersey while Ingy and her mother lived in Egypt, with Ingy's maternal grandmother, visiting each other on holidays and school breaks. At the time of the attacks, Ingy's mother was in the U.S. with her husband, while Ingy was staying in the AUC dormitories in Zamalek. Ingy expected to move to the U.S. when she finished her degree and either find work as an accountant or pursue an MBA. Ingy was strongly

critical of U.S. policies in the Middle East but did not see this as creating tension between her Arab and American identities. Like Aline and Khaled, she learned that she is not in complete control of her identity.

The attacks on Sept. 11 changed Ingy's sense of cosmopolitan balance because it changed the ways other Egyptians responded to her links to the U.S. Whereas I fit neatly into the American side of the increasingly opposed categories "Arab" and "American," Ingy stood as an uneasy reminders that these identities are not so easily distinguished, that one *can* be American and Egyptian simultaneously. Her father's work in the World Trade Center may have also stood as an uneasy reminder to many AUC students that their own parents' fortunes are all, at least indirectly, linked to the billions of dollars the United States pours into Egypt each year, of the fact that most of them wear clothes made in the United States and many speak American-accented English learned at expensive, private American schools. Rejecting Ingy was, in part, a rejection of these American aspects of themselves at a moment when they wanted to be Arabs and not Americans. The treatment of Ingy by her neighbors and classmates, was an effort to ritually maintain the distinction between Arab and American at a time when that distinction had become crucially important.

Ingy's experience was scarcely unique. Several Americans studying abroad at AUC, who were largely sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and active in social and political activities on campus suddenly felt themselves alienated. An American graduate student told the *Caravan* "I attended and participated in the demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinian victims last year. Are not the Americans on Black Tuesday considered victims? What is this silence? Actually, I heard in the cafeteria that some of

the students were pleased with the news of the attack… I was shocked!" (*Caravan*, Sept. 30, 2001).

In a parallel way, the American expatriate community was quite capable of rejecting "Arab" members who suddenly became uncomfortable signs of alterities. Dina—Mrs. Hassan to her students at ASC—told me that the school closed for the week following the attacks. During this time, an in-service was held to discuss how the community should respond. Several Egyptian faculty members said that tragic as this event was, it provided a perfect opportunity to introduce the students to the consequences of U.S. policies in the Middle East. As the mother of two, Dina felt this was exactly the wrong way to handle children. She rose, politely thanked her colleague, but said she felt this was not the time or place to raise politics. What the children needed was for teachers to give them a chance to talk about their fears, not to have those fears exacerbated by a discussion of political problems. Afterward, several of the American teachers spoke to her harshly. One old friend said, "I never expected this from *you*, Dina." After a few terse and confused exchanges, she realized with alarm that her American colleagues believed that she, too, had been defending the idea that the attacks were at some level justified. She felt deeply betrayed. "Dr. Peterson, they heard my accent and not my words," she told me. "Some of those people I've known for ten years. I thought we were colleagues together, Egyptian, American, British, that didn't matter. I'll never trust them the same way again."

Dina and the American graduate student had both constructed identities rooted in social networks they construed as having a horizontal inclusiveness on the basis to common commitments to support for victims of political violence, on the one hand, and

education of children, on the other. Like Ingy, they discovered in the wake of Sept. 11 a re-categorization by others in their social fields that shifted the nature of what could and could not be said, and suddenly felt excluded from these social fields.

As soon as airlines reopened, Ingy fled Cairo and joined her mother in New Jersey. Unable to get through using jammed telephone lines, she only learned when she arrived that her father, although still hospitalized, was one of the fortunate survivors. When we last corresponded, she had enrolled in an American college and was spelling her name "Angie." Like many children of two cultures, she had grown up feeling Egyptian in the United States and American in Egypt. After 9/11, with her neighbors' and fellow students' refusing her Arab identity, she reconstructed herself as American, and only American. In the wake of Sept. 11, however, she found her Egyptian identity as difficult to erase in the U.S. as her American identity was in Egypt. In her last e-mail, she indicated "some problems" with "ignorant people" at her U.S. school and in her neighborhood in New York.

The Myth of Bin Laden

"Do you really believe Osama bin Laden did this?" Mourad asked me shortly after Sept. 11th. "I have no idea," I said. "If the United States has any convincing evidence, they haven't released it yet. Give the investigation time."

This did not satisfy him. "But how could he have done this? How would Arabs have the ability?"

"That's a disingenuous argument," I said. "You're getting a degree in engineering from an Egyptian university. Do you know less than someone with an

engineering degree from the states? Or are you endorsing the American stereotypes of the Middle East as a backward land of sand and camels?" Mourad was a senior majoring in petroleum engineering who had once told me he would have rather majored in sociology or political science but for family pressure. After taking his liberal arts seminar with me he used to drop by from time to time to talk about current events. He shook his head, frustrated with my apparent obtuseness.

Mourad did not want Osama bin Laden to be guilty. For him, as for many Egyptians, Osama bin Laden was a kind of folk hero. As they saw him, he was a millionaire from a family of millionaires, who'd risked – and lost – his wealth in a struggle for independence and democracy against a despotic Saudi monarchy. Fleeing to the Sudan, he'd rebuilt his fortune by helping build this ravaged country, only to suffer further persecution at the hands of the Saudis and their American allies. Instead of retiring to some quiet place to live off his wealth, he'd used that money to help one of the world's poorest Muslim countries fight for freedom from atheistic Soviet invaders. This Bin Laden is the kind of man many upper class Egyptians wish they had the courage to be. Even Ronald Reagan had called the *mujahideen* led by the likes of bin Laden heroes, Mourad pointed out.

If bin Laden were truly guilty, it meant two things. First, it meant Mourad would have to find a way to fit the killing of thousands of innocent people into his assessment of his hero. Second, it meant Osama bin Laden lied, not only to America, but to Mourad and to all Muslim people, in his Sept. 16 statement broadcast on *al-Jazeera*. The first is almost easier to deal with than the second. As Mourad understands them, Osama Bin Laden and other contemporary "jihadists" have offered a justification for attacks on

Western civilian targets based on the widely accepted notion that military jihad against unjust military and political targets is legitimate: America is a democracy. It elects its leaders. Therefore, American citizens are themselves political actors, and must expect to pay the price for what their leaders do in ways citizens of monarchies and dictatorships do not. It is not an acceptable justification among educated Muslim clerics, but it made sense to Mourad, even if he wasn't sure he agreed with it. But if bin Laden planned the deed, then lied about it, he committed an act of moral cowardice that contradicts the character his Egyptian supporters admire about him.

In calling Mourad a supporter of Osama bin Ladin, I do not want to imply that he wished to live under the revived "caliphate" called for by al-Qaida. Like most people in the Middle East, according to public opinion polls, he preferred democracy to dictatorship and freedom to repression, and valued human rights (Pew Research Center 2003, Tessler and Gao 2005). But like Omar, and many other Egyptians, Mourad does not necessarily imagine that the U.S. stands for these lofty goals (Aysha 2005, Woltering 2007). On the contrary, while admiring the ability of the U.S. to largely realize these goals within its own territory, he sees the U.S. overseas as supporting repressive dictatorships, violating the sovereignty of foreign states and encouraging the violation of Palestinian human rights by Israel. For him, and many others in 2001, al-Qaida stood for resistance to this kind of U.S. aggression abroad.

The paucity of real evidence was important in maintaining a refusal to believe Osama bin Laden was behind the terrorism. In the first year or more after the events, many Egyptians refused to believe the scant evidence the United States offered. Mourad subsequently pointed to the strangeness of the supposed al-Qaida videotapes – especially

some of the phrasing, which in several places did not at all fit the way most people speak Arabic. Mourad, like many others, is convinced the evidence is faked.

What Mourad *wanted* to believe is that the twin towers were destroyed by Israel, then framed on al-Qaeda as a way to mute criticism and build American support for Israel's continued attacks on the Palestinian people. "Arabs don't have the know-how to do something like this," Mourad finally said to me. "Israel does." It was a belief shared by many of Mourad's fellow students. A special section of the AUC *Caravan* a week after the attacks asked students "Who was Responsible?" "It is international terrorism or the Mossad did it, using the Arab to create a discrepancy between Arabs and the U.S." said a business administration major, and a mass communication student said it was an Israeli conspiracy. "Israel is looking for a state of war between the East and the West. Through that, Israel will find opportunity to occupy all the Palestinian land."

These convictions are not unreasonable given the frames through which Mourad and his fellow students select what to pay attention to and how to interpret it. The evidence against bin Laden that was released *was* scant, some of the tapes *are* strange, and Mourad has no particular reason to trust the integrity of U.S. government institutions. The local media Mourad reads have convinced him that no Jews died in the twin towers, that they were secretly warned in advance. This claim is treated as an irrefutable fact by many Egyptian newspapers, and seems to be firmly believed by millions of people in the Middle East. Nothing seems likely to convince Mourad differently.[14] Even as late as 2005, Mourad pointed out to me that the FBI most wanted list identifies Bin Ladin as the villain behind the 2008 embassy bombings but not the Sept. 11 attacks, "because they have no hard evidence connecting him to them."[15]

The desire of Mourad and some other students to see the Sept. 11 attacks as an Israeli conspiracy rather than a retaliation for unjust U.S. policy in the region stems from a deep discomfort with the way the attacks changed the master narrative through which regional conflict is framed for most Egyptians. In the traditional narrative, Palestinians and, metonymically, Arabs generally, can be seen primarily as victims of aggression by the most powerful nation on earth and its allies, especially Israel, but also Western-backed dictatorships in the region, such as the Saudi monarchy, the kingdom of Jordan and the Mubarak regime in Egypt. Some Arabs fight back violently, but the small scale of their retaliations—irregular suicide bombings in Israel, mostly off-target rocket attacks from Gaza, even the bombing of a U.S. embassy—seemed hopelessly out of proportion to the scale of the injustices perpetrated against them by these powerful Western, and Western-backed, states. The sheer scale of the Sept. 11 attacks transform this narrative. If Arabs can fight back, and on such a scale, it forces a thorough rethinking of the morality of retaliation. In many discourse supporting pro-Arab causes, not only in the region but in Europe and Asia, Arabs occupy the high moral ground because of the apparently casual attitude of the U.S. and Israel to civilian casualties, what the U.S. military sometimes labels “collateral damage.” But the Sept. 11 attacks were aimed at civilians on an unprecedented scale; if this was the U.S. “getting a taste of its own medicine” it puts the Arabs into some of the same moral categories as the U.S. and Israel.

Mourad’s desire to deny Arab involvement in favor of a conspiracy theory is therefore not so much (or not merely) an act of ignorance or prejudice as it is an effort to interpret events in a way that salvages the master narrative of Arab innocence in the wake of Western aggression in the Middle East. Mourad’s version of events first denies the

possibility of Arab involvement in the Sept. 11 attacks, then ascribes agency for the attacks to Israel. This maintains the interpretive framework of Arabs as victims of Western-supported repression and aggression, and Israel as the key source of conflict in the region. But this has consequences for Mourad's cosmopolitan identity. By constructing Arabs as incompetent to conceive and carry out such sophisticated transnational activities, he calls into question the validity of Egyptian cosmopolitan claims to equality with other global elites.

Making Sense of the U.S.

Five months after 9-11, I taught a class on "Peoples and Cultures of the United States" at AUC. Shortly after the class began, Israeli tanks rolled into Ra'mallah, in Palestine. The course suddenly became highly charged. "What good is cultural anthropology," Omneya complained, "if it can't explain why Americans support Israel as they do, even after nine eleven."

So we tackled it. I showed clips from the film *Exodus* as a sample of American myths about the origins of Israel (some laughed aloud at the irony when Paul Newman, as a Jewish leader, tells his Arab friend, "We have to show the world we can live together in peace. Otherwise, Britain is right and we *can't* govern ourselves"). We examined the content of several American newspapers and discovered the disproportionate focus of feature stories on families of Israeli victims over families of Palestinian victims. We talked about the histories of ethnic groups in the United States, and examined stereotypes of Arabs in contemporary films. Then I turned the tables on them. Anthropology is not only comparative so we can see what others believe, I told them, but to understand

ourselves through the detour of the other. So we looked at the disproportionate coverage of Palestinian victims over Israeli victims in local Egyptian media. We looked at some of what was missing from Egyptian newspapers: groups like the Jewish Women for Peace in Palestine, Gush Shalom's collection of evidence of war crimes against Israeli soldiers, outspoken professors and students at Israeli universities and more. We also looked at the lesser degree of attention to Palestine among South Asian and Indonesian Muslim media, the very different tenor of media in these countries. And we looked at transcripts of Osama bin Laden's statements to show how little emphasis he initially put on Palestine. My goal was to make them understand that all systems of knowledge are partial, and shaped by local interests and values.

"But we don't want to know all this," protested Omneya. She had been a leader in the campus protest movement against Israel and the United States over Ramallah and Bethlehem. "It just makes it harder to know what to do."

"Then you have a moral dilemma," I responded. "How do you justify your own ignorance and still condemn the ignorance of Americans?" It was the same dilemma my wife had posed to Girgis.

The class ground to an end with the students and I all exhausted and drained. The cycle of retribution between Israeli state terror and Palestinian insurgent terror continued. The students wanted closure, but I could not give them any. Nor can I offer closure here. However settled cosmopolitan identities may seem to be, they must always renegotiate the indexical links that connect them to local and transnational spaces and places in times of international crisis. The attacks of September 11, 2001 highlights the extent to which Egypt's elite cosmopolitans live in a contingent, shifting world as they try to balance

multiple identities across multiple and shifting social terrains. Theirs is a cosmopolitanism of privilege but it is maintained at the expense of uneasy relationships to both the local and the global, and it must be maintained, reinterpreted and negotiated in response to changes in the international domains to which cosmopolitan identities are linked, as well as to changing local understandings of what "global" means in the practices of everyday life.

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[1] It did not. In spite of hyperbolic alerts from the U.S. embassy, security conditions for most foreigners living in Egypt did not substantively change.

[2] Unlike the previous chapters, none of the conversations in this chapter were taped, or even taken down in notes, because at the time I did not connect them with my wider research project. Most of the paraphrases were not written down until nearly one year after the events. The exception is material in quotations, which I recorded from memory in personal journals within a day or so of the conversations because they struck me as particularly interesting.

[3] The debates over whether *jihad* "primarily" means the personal struggle with one's sins (Esposito 2005) or militant action in defense of the Islamic social order (Cook 2005)

seem to me utterly sterile. Most people who've done fieldwork among Middle Easterners engaged in the practices of everyday life tend to have data that emphasizes people's use of the term in everyday struggle; those who focus on the historical utterances of political actors and theologians commenting on their actions tend to understand *jihad* primarily in a militant sense. As a term for the struggle to uphold the moral order, it seems to me self-evident that *jihad* is a "summarizing symbol" (Ortner 1973) whose specific meaning shifts with every context, without ever losing the metaphoric valence of all those other possible meanings present as entailments. Claiming "primacy" for one set of meanings over the other for a billion Muslims around the world and across history without regard for specific contexts of use seems to me useful only as a political exercise in apologetics.

[4] And those who work out ideologies of *jihad* that justify militant action against the West, far from simply adopting some simple, aggressive, bellicose "*jihad* in the raw" (Pipes 2002) often engage in extremely subtle and complex theological reinterpretations of *Qur'an*, *hadith*, and the theological writings of predecessors, to make arguments justifying violence against particular groups or in particular ways. While it has been argued that the majority of militant Muslims do not care for such subtle distinctions—a position I do not hold having had interesting theological discussions with Muslim Egyptians from many walks of life from learned sheikhs to optometrists to tourist touts—there is no question that many militants place importance in the fact that scholars with solid, orthodox credentials like 'Abdullah 'Azzam have worked out such justifications (McGregor 2003).

[5] Friendships between practicing Muslims and evangelical Christians were not uncommon among Egyptian students who'd lived in the U.S. and attended public schools

there. One of the cultural consequences of the U.S.'s particular configuration of separation of church and state is that religion becomes domesticated, a personal matter not to be asked about in public. For Muslims living in the U.S. who are not integrated into a Muslim expatriate community, Evangelicals are often the only friends with whom they can have serious conversations about God and the consequences of the supernatural in everyday life. My (admittedly limited) contact with Egyptians in Ohio suggests that Islamophobia after Sept. 11, 2001 may have limited this.

[6] The increased use of antidepressants and prescription sleep aids may also be related to the fact that both Pfizer and GlaxoSmithKline dramatically increased their advertising and marketing of these drugs in the months immediately following the attacks, anticipating increased demand (Rosack 2002)

[7] The notion that news operates as a kind of myth for contemporary people has become commonplace among many sociologists of media (Bird and Dardenne 1988, Berkowitz 2000, Kitsch 2002; Coman 2003, Osorio 2005) including some former journalists (Lule 2001). While some prefer to speak of news as "ritual" (Dayan and Katz 1996, Couldry 2003, Lardellier 2005, Shinar 2005), the insistence that the meaningfulness of these rituals depends upon "broad, even transcendent values" (Couldry 2005: 60) reveals their primary interest in the mythopoeic aspects of ritual. Indeed, media sociologists' claims on myth and ritual as tropes has led to a cautionary note from Elizabeth Bird (2005: 227-228) reminding us that these terms, though frequently credited as borrowed from anthropology, are not always employed in ways consistent with anthropological use. See also Gaye Tuchman (1978) for an early discussion.

[8] On changing master narratives of the Middle East in the U.S. media, see Said 1997, Berkowitz 2005, Peterson 2007.

[9] On Feb. 27, 2000 the Egyptian government issued Decree 411, allowing a conversion of state-controlled media to the private sector. As with the privatization decrees discussed in chapter six, the actual effects of this decree should not be exaggerated. For a discussion, see Black 2008, Cooper 2008.

[10] There are exceptions. During the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan media criticism was muted because "there is no denying that the Egyptian government came out financially ahead in the 1991 Gulf War against Saddam Hussein and President Mubarak's regime was certainly not going to permit an anti-American media blitz...." (Jasperson and El-Kikhia 2002)

[11] Many Egyptians were caught by President Bush's use of the word "crusade," a term that inflects very differently in the Middle East than in the U.S.

[12] In some cases, the administration was forwarding messages from the U.S. embassy and "Warden messages", a communications network aimed specifically at U.S. citizens living in Cairo.

[13] A creative alternative suggestion, unfortunately (in my opinion) voted down by the student representatives, was to offer a relief fund for Palestinians hurt in the *intifada,* in the name of the victims of the twin towers.

[14] Not even the repeated efforts of my colleague, political scientist Curtis Doebblar, who told students in his classes, and in an interview with the school newspaper that he had Jewish friends who died in the attacks (*Caravan* Oct. 21, 2001).

[15] The FBI stated that in 2002 that "evidence linking al-Qaeda and bib Laden to the attacks of September 11 is clear and irrefutable" (Watson 2002). They have not, however, brought that evidence to a grand jury, as they did evidence of bin Laden's involvement in the U.S.S. Cole bombings. Conspiratists like Mourad seize on such discrepancies to construct their alternative accounts of events.