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# Discontinuities and Differences among Muslim Arab-Americans: Making It at Home and School

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## **Discontinuities and Differences among Muslim Arab-Americans**

### **Making It at Home and School**

Loukia K. Sarroub

After long days with our teachers who were all, as I recall, ethnically European Christian people, the same kind of people who belonged to the culture that we watched on TV, we went back home. As soon as we walked over the threshold into our house, we walked into Yemen. In this Yemeni world, I had a certain role to play based on my gender. I was very protected and worried about. Every day before I went off to school, my mother would remind me not to play with boys because they were very bad and had nothing better to do than take advantage of girls and ruin their reputations. I believed her and stayed away from boys. ... My mother often told me that if I did not learn how to cook and keep house, my husband would divorce me. Because she was sincerely worried that I would be of no use as a wife without these skills, she began training me when I was ten years old, so that by the time I became a teenager, and was old enough to marry, I would be able to cook for my husband.

(Alwujude, 2000)

### **Introduction**

Cohen and Neufeld (1981) have remarked that schools are a great theater in which conflicts of culture get played out. The same can be said about homes and families in relation to schools. In fact, scholars and educators have attempted to understand, define, and refine the parameters and connections that bind schools and homes together. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which students' success at home and school has been conceptualized in scholarly literature, and then connect this literature to the lives of Arab-American youth and their families. The underlying premise undergirding the ideas in this chapter is that identity development as it is enacted in home and school discourses is related to socialization, learning, and achievement. I discuss cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1987; Lareau, 2000; Bowles & Gintis, 1976) and a cultural-ecological perspective (Ogbu, 1982a) to examine models of congruence and difference and to explain students' achievement in two worlds. Then, I proceed to describe and analyze the two theories in relation to data collected in Arab-American neighborhoods by situating each within the context of research conducted in education. Next, I offer an ethnographic case of Yemeni youth and their literacies and a socio-historical case of Palestinian women's lives and situate these within the afore-mentioned theoretic-

cal models. Before concluding the chapter, I offer some suggestions for teachers and schools in relation to Muslim Arab populations.

## **Two Theoretical Perspectives that Continue to Inform Public Schooling**

I turn next to an analysis of cultural-ecology as a basis for discerning discontinuities between home and school and cultural capital as a model for explaining differences in achievement based on social class. Bourdieu's cultural capital theory instantiates social class as the key factor of success in school but not necessarily at home. Bourdieu (1977a) argues that social class provides individuals with high status roles and the resources to maintain positions of power in society. The home and family contribute certain resources, such as language (and forms of discourse) and other types of cultural experiences that can be altered by social class (Bourdieu, 1977b, 1987). As Labaree (1997) observes, individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds aim at upward social mobility by using school as a necessary credential for status positions in society. However, cultural capital theory suggests that upward mobility (and the realization of credentials) are controlled by one's social class. In other words, some social class ideologies are better suited to schools than others.

For example, in her work on social class and its relationship to parent involvement in schools, Lareau (2000) maintains that the relationship between working-class families and schools is characterized by separation (parents and students think of school and education as a job which stops when the children arrive home). The relationship middle-to-upper middle-class families have with schools is characterized by interconnectedness, such that the business of school and education is an ongoing endeavor in everyday home life. Meanwhile, schools are thought to accept, reproduce, and reflect societal hierarchies. This was corroborated by Bowles and Gintis (1976), who suggest that schools are class-based institutions that often reproduce the advantages and deficits of class-based consciousness and knowledge. Deterministic in nature, Bowles and Gintis' argument proposes a one-to-one relationship between schools and other societal structures, such as the home. Fortunately, this may not really be representative of the levels of congruence and discontinuity between home and school environments. In fact, the main thrust of Lareau's argument is that although cultural capital theory improves upon other existing explanations of why middle-class families seem to be more involved in school than working-class families, it needs to be modified if it is to explain that in fact, "possession of high status cultural resources does not automatically yield a social profit [unless] these cultural resources are activated by the individual" (p. 10). The activation of resources by individuals is key to understanding why social class, although a potent and at times an accurate predictor of student success in schools, may not account for the enactment of competencies that can cut across social class barriers.

One example of the enactment of competencies that cuts across social class comes from research conducted within Latino populations where family cultural resources get played out and instantiated in school settings (Moll, 1992; Moll,

Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Moll & González, 1994). Moll (1992) defines funds of knowledge as “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). The “funds of knowledge” perspective acknowledges that social class can be an impediment to or a catalyst of learning and achievement. However, “the essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge and information that households use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive” (Moll, 1992, p. 21) are part of wider social networks and are required by diverse labor markets. In other words, Moll suggests that if schools could find a way to explicitly privilege other cultural tools, some students would be successful. Therefore, schools and teachers would do well to become familiar with these funds of knowledge simply because they represent “a *potential* major social and intellectual resource for the schools” (p. 22). Moll’s research illustrates that when schools make attempts to understand the underlying social and cultural networks of the populations they service, it is more likely that there will be congruence between what and how content is taught and students’ ability to learn, thus broadening the definitions of privileged cultures and tools to include more than just social class distinctions. It is clear that researchers who have studied and analyzed the impact of home cultures and social class on success at home and in school, have concluded that although social class (and cultural capital theory) are a useful tool, they do not always explicate the ways through which individuals learn, produce knowledge, and sustain cultural and/or social identities in multiple worlds.

Having briefly discussed cultural capital theory as a model for explaining differences in achievement based on social class distinctions, I consider next the implications of a cultural-ecological model on success at school and home. Anthropologist John Ogbu first conceptualized a cultural-ecological perspective as a framework for cross-cultural research when he studied competence and child-rearing practices from a non-ethnocentric perspective in a given population (Ogbu, 1982b). Ogbu maintains that child rearing in the family and subsequent adolescent socialization aim at developing instrumental competencies required for adult economic, political, and social roles. Furthermore, cultural imperatives vary from one population to another as do the required competencies. He defines competence as “the ability to perform a culturally specific task, or a set of functional or instrumental skills” (p. 114). Ogbu disagrees with views on human development that assumes that a child’s later school success depends on the acquisition of white middle-class competencies (and sources of cultural capital) through White middle-class child-rearing practices. He claims that there are immigrant groups in the US who do not ascribe to middle-class practices and values and whose children have still succeeded in school. This is so because “the origins of human competencies lie in the nature of culturally defined adult tasks” (p. 120). The implications of such a cultural-ecological model of society come into play when one studies populations that are considered to be “minorities” in a society. Ogbu suggests that the reason minority groups (Blacks and Hispanics, specifically) experience a continuing disproportion of school failure is due to the fact that their historical and structural relationship with the dominant groups has produced alternate competencies. For instance, generally both White middle class

students and inner-city minorities might value money, power, social credit, and self-esteem, but these two populations might differ in how to go about attaining these goals, i.e., the extent to which they believe that the appropriate school credentials will result in the desired goal and rewards.

Ogbu (1982a) elaborates the cultural-ecological perspective further when he addresses more specifically the connections between home and school. He notes that all children experience an "initial discontinuity between home and school in language use, contextual learning, and style of learning" (p. 293). For example, classroom organization, student-teacher relations, and grading promote attributes of "impersonality, specificity, universal standards, achievement norms, and independence similar to those valued and rewarded in the workplace of the corporate economy" (p. 292), while a child's socialization in the family promotes "intimacy, diffuseness, and particularism in interpersonal relationships, particularistic standards and ascription in achievement and reward, as well as a certain degree of independence" (p. 292). In addition, inherent to the home in contrast to the school is that home is an oral culture, whereas when children first attend school cognitive strategies rely very much on writing and reading (Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1979). It is clear that home life and school life are discontinuous at one level for all students.

Ogbu's cultural-ecological perspective has established that all students experience discontinuity when they make the transition from home to school. Ogbu differentiates among types of discontinuity, primary and secondary, by claiming that primary cultural differences (those experienced by what "voluntary" minorities) "result from cultural developments before members of a given population come in contact with American or Western white middle-class culture or enter American/[Western] public schools" (Ogbu, 1982a). However, the students and parents experiencing primary cultural differences are "willing to learn the culture of the school *because* of the expected material and nonmaterial rewards in [the] emerging Western-type status system" (p. 294). This occurs regardless of social class. Getting ahead requires school credentials, and non-Western and Western voluntary minorities are willing to learn new values, new rules of intercommunication, and new social competence to achieve their goals. Equally important, these minorities, even if they experience discrimination, think that they are better off in the US than in their "home" countries. Ogbu suggests that persevering to overcome discontinuities means that the new language and school culture are not perceived as threatening to individual or group identities. That is the key to success at home and school for these populations.

In contrast to primary cultural differences, which are usually experienced by "voluntary minorities," secondary cultural discontinuities "develop *after* members of two populations have been in contact or after members of a given population have begun to participate in an institution controlled by another group, such as a school system" (p. 298). These differences evolve as a response to a contact situation where stratified domination is the norm. Ogbu refers to these populations as "caste-like" or "involuntary" minorities (Blacks, Native American Indians, and Mexican-Americans). They are distinct from other populations in that they identify themselves from the cultural frame of reference of "opposition."

Ogbu (1993) defines “cultural frame of reference” as “the correct or ideal way of behaving within a culture—attitudes, beliefs, preferences, and practices considered appropriate for members of the culture” (p. 490). Unlike voluntary minorities, their cultural frames of reference do not allow them to cross-cultural or language boundaries (Ogbu, 1993). This oppositional cultural frame indicates that involuntary minorities perceive schooling as a “linear acculturation process, an assimilation process, or a displacement process” (p. 501). Voluntary minorities, on the other hand, usually view their lives in the US as an improvement over their “old country” and have a positive frame of reference such that it “enhances symbolic responses conducive to academic striving and success” (p. 499). They can accommodate the system without assimilating.

In many ways, a cultural-ecological perspective goes further in explaining both structural and individual patterns of learning and achievement at home and school than does cultural capital theory. The notion that there are alternative competencies within a culture which are based on future adult tasks within a population rather than on hierarchies rooted in static social class roles, values, and knowledge means that individuals and groups of individuals who might have been deemed “failures” in school can be seen in a different and more progressive light. However, Ogbu (1982a) notes that there has not been much data or explanation about immigrant minority-group children who are successful in school and perform better than involuntary minorities yet differ markedly from their public school teachers in terms of communicative strategies, interpretation of situated meanings, rules of interaction, and literate cultural background (see Sarroub, 2001, 2002, 2005, for such an explanation). Ogbu gives the example of the Buraku outcaste in Japan who underperform in school when compared to the dominant Ippan group. However, in the United States, where the Buraku show primary cultural differences, and where they are treated like any other Japanese immigrants, they do at least as well as other Japanese and American students (see McDermott, 1974). Ogbu suggests that the lack of success in Japan is due to language, communication, and interaction differences. In the United States, these students do what they can to get ahead because their cultural frame of reference is a positive one even if they do represent low socio-economic class values and ways of learning. While Ogbu’s theory offers a way to think about home and school expectations for success, it does not account for the role and power of teachers who connect to students through formal and informal curricula.

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### *Theoretical Application: Explanations of Minority Student School Achievement*

Scholars have developed many theories to explain why minority students have, on average, historically suffered from lower school achievement than White students. Often, these theories focus on the ways that schools disadvantage non-White, non-middle-class students by privileging the cultural resources (beliefs, values, knowledge, speech, etc.) of the prototypical White middle-class student and ignoring or denigrating those of minority

students. However, this perspective does not explain why some minority students succeed in school. As discussed in this section, Ogbu's ideas provide an important extension of such theories. While Ogbu did not necessarily challenge the idea that schools may be less hospitable for minorities than they are for White students, he shifted the focus from the school to the students' and their families' response to the schooling process, suggesting that families and children respond in one of two general ways. Some families and/or children respond in an oppositional manner to schools that they perceive as biased against them and thus reject the values associated with schooling and school success. Thus, these students may actively participate in their own failure because they view school success as requiring a rejection of their own cultural identity. In contrast, Ogbu's "voluntary minorities" see difficulties in the school process as normal challenges to be overcome. These children do not see schooling as an attack on their traditions and identities and often succeed in maintaining a strong sense of cultural identity at home while simultaneously taking on school-valued dispositions and behaviors when in school. While this book aims to help educators make schooling more hospitable for diverse students and families, Ogbu's theory stresses that families and students must also move toward less oppositional responses to schooling. Have you known minority students who demonstrated resistance to schooling and seemed to reject the idea of school achievement? Why did (or could) this occur? What specific strategies might teachers use to help students from developing an oppositional attitude toward school? How can diverse students learn to acquire dispositions and behaviors that enable school success while also maintaining a healthy sense of cultural identity?

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### **Ethnographic and Historical Perspectives of Arab-American Populations**

Having described and analyzed how scholars in education have conceptualized cultural capital theory and cultural-ecology as models for the ways in which students meet the expectations of both school and home, I consider next the implications of these models within a specific population, Muslim Arab-Americans. First, I lay out the historical context within which this population exists and identifies itself. Then, I examine identity and identity development by focusing on a couple of specific segments of this population, Yemeni and Palestinian women because most of the research on Arab Americans has concentrated on these subgroups. In the US, unlike countries such as France and Britain, research on education and Muslim Arabs has been minimal (see Sarroub, 2005).

Muslim Arab Americans have a long history in the United States and elsewhere in the world (see Raissiguier, 1994). They represent all social classes, and because they are representative of a variety of Arab countries, they do exhibit internal cultural differences even though as a population, they have religion,

language, and a vast array of traditions and customs in common. Specifically, one common characteristic of most Arab societies is that the role women play in this population is key to understanding their cultural frame of reference. A case in point is the evolution of the Arab identity. In the early twentieth century, hundreds of Syrian and Lebanese Christians (mostly peddlers who came to realize the "American Dream") immigrated to the US. By WWII, for these "Arab" communities (they did not identify themselves with this term), integration into US society was nearly complete and witnessed the near extinction of Arab ethnicity (Suleiman, 1994). In fact, the Arabic language ceased to be spoken simply because these traders traveled so much in order to sell their wares that they learned to speak Standard American English and follow the predominantly Protestant cultural norms faster than any other immigrant population in the US at that time (Naff, 1994). Arabs who immigrated to the US after WWII and the late 1960s were comprised of mostly well-educated Muslims. According to Suleiman (1994), ethnic unity, no matter from which Arab country these immigrants originated, was of special importance to these immigrants. This was due, in part, to the creation of the state of Israel and to the displacement of many Palestinians and, second, to post-independence ruptures in North Africa and the Middle East (p. 46). Furthermore, the strong anti-Arab sentiments that pervaded the US media in the 1970s and 1980s, 1990s (and recently) also became the subject of study and analysis by several Arab intellectuals such as Edward Said (1979), thus further grouping many nationalities within "Arab" and further politicizing cultural identity.

On the one hand, as this identification forged it took on a visibility that made it more easily the target of prejudice and hatred. On the other hand, Arab-Americans found security through belonging to a group and having an identity in which they could feel a common sense of pride.

(Haddad, 1994, p. 80)

Arab identity has developed over time through internal and external pressures. It was not until the 1980s that Arab-Americans became politically active in seeking to be heard on political matters. This identification with becoming American and at the same time maintaining ethnic roots has been a painful one, just as it has for other immigrant populations such as Latinos, Jews, Eastern Europeans, Asians, and Africans.

The relationship between ethnic identity, whether it be religious and/or cultural such as Islam, is connected to the intellectual and social self-definition for young Muslim "Arab" women in the US. According to Suleiman (1994), "for Christians, Muslims, and Jews from the Middle East, one's religious affiliation determines one's identity. A person is born, grows up, and dies in a specific religious community" (p. 65). In the United States, identity development is further complicated because other factors such as social class, educational background, and gender relations among men and women play a role in people's self-projections. Arabs fear that the fabric of U.S. society and its moral and ethical underpinnings are undermining and eroding their cultural values, and in differing ways they rely on their own communities to provide the structures in which to relate

socially as individuals and as families, and in which they can feel comfortable raising their children" (Haddad, 1994, p. 78). Whereas these Arab communities may at one time have felt powerless politically, they currently understand that acceptance by the dominant society has moved to a deeper level in which individuals do not have to renounce their own culture but can actually share it (p. 78). This resembles Ogbu's observation of primary cultural differences—one accommodates without assimilation. In other words, identification with the host culture need not obliterate identification with the home culture because *identity* comes to encompass affiliation with both.

### **Yemeni American Girls' Literacies In and Out of School**

Yemeni migration to the United States is part of a larger historical trend of Arab immigration to North America. Many recent immigrants moved to the Detroit area because they could find work in the shipping and auto industries, and since the 1970s, southeastern Michigan has had the highest concentration of Arabic-speaking people outside of the Middle East, an estimated 250,000 residents (Sarroub 2000; Zogby 1984). Unlike earlier Arab immigrants, recent arrivals from northern Yemen have persisted in preserving both their Muslim ways of life and their Arab identities. These immigrants have kept strong ties with their motherland, buying land in Yemen with the intention of going back, visiting for long periods, and sending their children there to marry. Consequently, in the United States, the children of these immigrants straddle two worlds, the literate world of school and the home world of religious and cultural values where the text of the *Qur'an* sanctions behavior and social norms (Sarroub, 2005).

Yemeni American high school girls or *hijabat* (what the girls called themselves— from the Arabic feminine plural for girls who wear the head scarf) live in the Detroit working-class suburb of Dearborn. While their experiences are unique, they are also instructive in understanding the roles of religious oral and print texts among other Muslim women immigrants—and their daughters—in contemporary North America. The Yemeni community of Dearborn, Michigan, lives in a neighborhood called the "Southend" where they have formed their own social and linguistic spaces. Girls leave the Southend only to go to school or during family outings. Living in two worlds can be difficult for all of the residents, but especially for young women who struggle to negotiate their Yemeni and American identities as well as to meet their families' expectations of being good daughters. Their responsibilities are three-fold: uphold the transnational honor of the family; become good mothers (most are engaged or married by the ages of 14 or 15); and succeed in school. In their daily efforts to meet these responsibilities, Yemeni *hijabat* rely not only upon a variety of religious texts but also on the process of discussing these texts with their peers in school, home, and community spaces.

#### ***Religiously Motivated Textual Categories***

The public high school is a key cultural intersection and where Yemeni American girls adapt to American life by organizing behaviors into three categories

which stem from the *Qur'an* and religious teachings: *haram*, meaning forbidden; *halal* meaning lawful; and, *mahkru*, meaning not written as forbidden in the *Qur'an* but condemned by the Prophet Muhammad. The young Yemeni American women said that all things *haram* are written in the *Qur'an*, such as drinking alcohol. Things *halal* are good deeds, which include learning and being learned. Things *mahkru* include wearing make-up before marriage or listening to music. Indeed, many of the *hijabat* wore nail polish or eyeliner and listened to popular music even though the Prophet forbade it. However, because nothing is written in the *Qur'an* about such things, Islamic scholars and ordinary Muslims debate these issues constantly. At school, the *hijabat* used *haram* and *halal* liberally, especially when one's modesty was in question. The students argued about what was *haram* when something was called into question, and advice was often sought from peers who were respected for their knowledge of the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* (recorded words, actions, sanctions of the Prophet Muhammad). Girls who were pious or wanted to appear pious did not do or say anything that was likely to be considered *mahkru*. In fact, except for some girls who studied and read the *Qur'an*, the category *mahkru* was not known or well understood by most girls and boys. For the *hijabat*, most of life fell under *haram* or *halal*, and when scripture did not provide an answer, there was always what they called the Yemeni "folk Islam," that is, occult beliefs or superstitions that helped explain and remedy problems.

Arranging life into religiously motivated textual categories gave the *hijabat* the opportunity to maintain Yemeni social status and norms within the confines of school. Yet, school also gave the girls the chance to stretch home and community-imposed limits. For example, unlike most teenagers, the *hijabat* were often not allowed to listen to American popular music, which was in the *mahkru* category, and they were also not allowed to read teen magazines, or anything that might be sexually explicit or imply sexuality. At school they created a private space for themselves in their cafeteria cluster of tables, buffered by the non-Arab students against the Yemeni boys, whom they called "boaters," and who would often report back to the Southend on the *hijabat* if they did not maintain a proper social performance of modesty, thus damaging the *hijabat's* reputations. Here the girls brought forth their contraband: teen magazines, yearbook pictures which could only be seen by them, and fable-like poems and stories, especially about girls who misbehaved. They gossiped around these texts, sharing personal information about their marriages, their families, and the men they would like to marry (often in opposition to the ones to whom they were betrothed). They argued about the difference between culture and religion, an important distinction for these girls because it meant that while their religion and their Holy Book could not be questioned, their culture and cultural acts could. Thus, when the *hijabat* were upset with family decisions about education or marriage, they were very careful to blame it on Yemeni culture and not on Islam.

The significance of the relatively safe crowded cafeteria is that it offered a haven for sharing secret texts, including texts which were American and which represented American values that differed from Yemeni ones. For example, a poem written in English about a girl who secretly goes out on a date with a drunken boy, who inadvertently kills her parents in a car crash, was down-

loaded from the Internet and was passed among the girls. The girls reacted to this poem with loud exclamations of “*haram!*” and said that although they admired the girl for taking a risk, that disobeying and hurting their parents through her actions are forbidden.

### *Religious Instruction and Practices*

Daily reading of the *Qur'an* was as symbolically important in the *hijabat's* lives as their modest form of dress. Reading the *Qur'an* led to three distinct results: being more knowledgeable about the contents of the *Qur'an* and therefore more respected by one's family and community, reaching a state of grace by virtue of the fact that reading it endows a spirituality or holiness, and empowering one's self against culturally-biased acts against Muslims. Parents were proud of their sons and daughters, but especially their daughters who read the *Qur'an* and prayed. At a parent/school meeting about school violence, one father praised his son's high grades but chose to describe his daughter's success at being prayerful, noting, “She prays more than I do.” Although most of the Yemeni families desired both their male and female children to know the *Qur'an* and to pray, these characteristics were especially valued in girls because they reflected on the family's honor. It was the girls' responsibility to maintain religious values, thus reinforcing a gendered notion of religion. The girls knew this and were genuinely involved in their religious practice, but they were also cognizant of the power one assumed with the thorough knowledge of the *Qur'an*. Consequently, the *hijabat* also attended Arabic school at the mosque, classes that were gender segregated, included grades K-7, and met on the weekends from 8:30 AM until noon for instruction, after which lectures were scheduled. All of the instruction revolved around reading, writing, and the *Qur'an*. The oral and written texts with which the *hijabat* engaged allowed them to connect their religious practice to their identities as teenagers, but they also positioned them as pious girls for whom reading the *Qur'an* and chanting verses presented an antidote to the influences of the outside world.

Some girls also attended *muhatara* (lectures) and discussions organized by women in the community that took place either at the mosque or in a private home. The ones at the mosque were talks where a woman speaker addressed women's issues in front of an audience with discussion at the end, but the *muhatara* held in someone's home were different, more private and informal. The *hijabat* noted that they could talk to the woman who was hosting it and respected her because, unlike many of the women in the local community, she could read and write in Arabic and recite the entire *Qur'an*. She had achieved the state of grace and power into which the girls wanted to enter. After the evening prayer, each of the women brought something specific to read from the *Qur'an* or from a book on Muslim religious conduct, followed by a lecture on morality. The conversations during *muhatara* were characterized by the girls as more intellectual and religious and they saw the reading of the *Qur'an* and the conversation which ensued around the readings as knowledge to be learned rather than just talk among friends or “stuff you learn at school.” These groups of girls grappled with reli-

religious and moral issues for a purpose: to stay true and pure to Islam, to show their community that they were good Muslim girls, and to vocalize potentially risky topics that they could not openly discuss in school or elsewhere.

The Yemeni American *hijabat* from the Southend shoulder a great deal of responsibility at a young age. They must excel in all domains of their lives— school, community, home, and housekeeping—in preparation for marriage, their adult roles, and the possibility of more education in university setting. For them, religious texts provide meaningful and relevant maps for navigating their complex personal, social, and cultural realities.

### **Palestinian Women's Experiences in Historical Perspective**

Are Arab women able to participate in their identity formation by actively integrating their ethnicity and the dominant host culture of the United States? Cainkar (1994) points out that studies on "Arab" women immigrants are sorely lacking even though many more women than men have immigrated to the US since 1930. Cainkar argues that Palestinian women bear more of the anti-assimilation burden than men because they must maintain a strong attachment to their native culture in the home. Whereas Palestinian men often immigrated on their own as individuals, Palestinian women always immigrated as sisters, daughters, wives, or mothers. This means, according to Cainkar, that women, similarly to the young Yemeni American women I studied, were not free to determine how they would interact with their new host society and that the roles they held in their families carried over when they immigrated (p. 88). Their identities may have developed from an "oppositional" frame of reference, thus pointing to secondary cultural differences in Ogbu's framework. The excerpt from at the beginning of the chapter illustrates this opposition by highlighting the possibility of resentment toward male authority over life and death. In addition, certain social values such as "the primacy of the extended family, collective responsibility for kin, hospitality, respect for status superiors, and control of women's sexuality" (p. 88) are highly respected and are commonly held among other "Third-World" immigrant populations such as Latinos (Carger, 1996).

Although there may be many similarities among Palestinian women, there are also significant differences based on socio-economic class values. Cainkar (1994) explains this phenomenon by referencing Gordon's (1964) *ethclass* concept, that people have two types of identification simultaneously: historical identification and participation identification, i.e., shared values and behavior patterns (pp. 89-90). To exemplify this dichotomy, Cainkar compares middle-class Palestinian women who immigrated to the US prior to 1967 to the "peasant" class Palestinian women who immigrated later. The middle-class women, although somewhat culturally traditional, wear Western clothing and simply exclude short skirts, shorts, and sleeveless tops. Their homes are filled with Palestinian artifacts and are well known for their hospitality, but the women tend to forego making elaborate Palestinian dishes and usually prepare American foods. Mothers usually speak English, so their children do not speak Arabic. These women are not highly educated because university education was not available to them in their home country

prior to 1980. However, they expect their daughters to have a college education in order to take better care of themselves and their families after marriage and in case they must work outside the home. In this subgroup of Palestinians, women are generally not allowed to date, and marriage to non-Muslim Arabs is frowned upon. However, within the middle class, exceptions are made to some traditions. For instance, women are often allowed to choose which Arab-Muslim men they wish to marry. Of course, none of these rules apply to the men. Men may date publicly and marry whomever they wish. This often makes it difficult for Palestinian women to find eligible Palestinian men. Cainkar also notes that gatherings such as weddings and parties are not separated by gender as they traditionally once were because it is understood that men and women can interact socially without expressing or inviting sexual interest. This is not the case among Yemeni Americans in the United States (Sarroub 2001; 2002; 2005).

In contrast to the middle-class Palestinian women, women who immigrated to the US after 1967 and especially after 1975 uprooted themselves from traditional peasant life in West Bank villages. For these women and the men who accompanied them to the US, "traditionalism is a badge of honor" (Cainkar, 1994, p. 97). The women spend most of their time at home doing housework and preparing elaborate Palestinian dishes. Guests are often separated by gender and the families speak Arabic at home. Parents usually send their children to the Middle East during the summers so that they will be immersed in Palestinian culture and language. Although these people are voluntary minorities, unlike Ogbu's examples of the Japanese, the home country is perceived as better than the host culture. Going "back home" is often the underlying goal for maintaining strict enactment of cultural and linguistic separation from the host culture. For example, these Palestinian women rarely work outside the home (and therefore have very little contact with the host culture) because it might be interpreted that the husband does not earn enough. They are usually not highly educated, and although they do think that a college education is valuable, because of "concerns over women's sexuality and virginity, members of this subgroup tend to want their daughters married shortly after high school" (p. 99). Cainkar points out that this is not necessarily the case in the Middle East, but Palestinian parents are especially afraid of the freedoms U.S. women have and the preponderance of premarital sex. Consequently, self-control is highly valued in these Palestinian women. "Lack of self-control invites sexual innuendo, [and] a woman repeatedly lacking self-control is seen to be sexually untrustworthy" (p. 99). Lacking self-control is evidenced by aggressiveness in front of one's elders and around men or being too outspoken. Dating, of course, is completely forbidden and attending community gatherings or parties without family supervision and in the presence of men is also a taboo. Marriage is usually offered by a Palestinian Muslim to the family and only after the family approves, does the daughter meet to speak with her suitor. Only after the engagement has taken place, which in Muslim tradition is actually the signing of a binding marriage contract, will the couple go out together alone (p. 99). Consequently, women of Palestinian lower socio-economic background are closely scrutinized for possible violations, and "in a milieu where socializing is confined to family and local women, and women are chosen for marriage based partly on

their reputation, social ostracism is a heavy price to pay" (p. 100). Again, men do not have to abide by any of the constraints imposed on women.

In summarizing her interview findings about the middle-class and lower socioeconomic class immigrant Palestinian women in the US, Cainkar makes the following observation.

While middle-class Palestinian women see the United States for all the opportunities it affords them, lower-middle and lower-class Palestinian women see it merely as a place to live for a while, devoid of the land, family, customs, foods, and community life that gave their lives meaning in Palestine. These women have little in common with each other aside from their ethnic background, continued respect for certain cultural values . . . which requires that they maintain their Palestinian identity and avoid full assimilation.

(p. 101)

The Palestinian women are actively negotiating their roles in American society and doing it in different ways depending on their social class locations. It may very well be that lower-class Palestinian women are not negotiating a role in American society—they are just there living their traditional Palestinian roles. Their identification with the host culture is limited. An example of this is brought out by Zogby (1984) of Arab women actively negotiating their roles in Muslim culture through their involvement in mosque life where they attend Sunday school with their children and plan community gatherings. Recently, however, in the case of Muslim women in the US, the negotiation and shifting of identity and social position within their religious practices have not been easy. Much of these women's participation in formal religious life has been curtailed by a coalition of traditionalist print-illiterate rural men and highly educated young students or immigrants committed to a strict Islamic order with the end result being that the mosques can pattern themselves after those of Arab countries. Women are expected to stay out of the mosques (Zogby, 1984, p. 104). For the middle-class women, identity formation is more flexible and at times more of a struggle than that of the lower-class women because they constantly attempt to maintain a balance between both the United States and their own cultures even when they are told to sustain a more traditional woman's role by the more conservative elements in their communities.

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### *Theoretical Application: Negotiation*

While the idea of negotiation is a familiar one in the contexts of business and politics, when applied to diverse students' lives inside and outside of school, it highlights the complexity of the issues that they frequently face. The previous sections on Yemeni and Palestinian girls and women suggest the range and intensity of challenges that culturally diverse adolescents con-

front as they actively negotiate their identities, relationships to home and school cultures and languages, gender roles, religious faiths, etc. How might this engagement in complicated negotiations of identity, culture, gender, and values affect diverse adolescents' school experience in general and participation in classroom activities in particular? How might an awareness of the kinds of issues that such students face affect your teaching?

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I have described some provocative aspects of a population rich with cultural capital that remains relatively unknown in schools in relation to students' education or social advancement in the larger society. The cultural capital preserves the status quo of the home culture by taking advantage of the cultural resources (language, tradition, customs, religion) from the "old country," even to the extent that people travel "back home" to do so. Social class and primary and secondary cultural differences are intertwined such that it is not at all clear whether this rather diverse population of Muslim Arabs can in fact be called either voluntary or involuntary minorities. Unfortunately, so little research has focused on the education of this population and their successes or failure, that it is impossible to suggest one classification or the other (see Haw, 1998, for a rich analysis of Muslim women and schools in Great Britain). Unlike European education scholars, U.S. scholars in education tend, for the most part, not to focus on issues such as religion and its impact on education and schooling, although a notable exception is Peshkin's (1986) work on schools and Christian fundamentalism. Research conducted in France, where the largest minority population constitutes North African Muslim Arabs, shows that Muslim Arab students, especially female students, spend a lot of time negotiating possibilities for themselves within the existing French cultural boundaries of appropriate behavior, and in the process, they stretch the limits of those boundaries. School socialization in France is regulated and differentiated on the basis of ethnicity and gender, a process that is conducive to the hegemonic goals of the French state. The research on Arab Muslims in the United States and elsewhere illustrates that there are tensions between Western and non-Western goals for learning and achievement at home and at school, even though, as Ogbu observes, students do succeed in both places. As the world grows smaller and as cultural differentiation and identification increase, more accurate portrayals of these differences and discontinuities need to be documented and resolved so that congruence among previously irreconcilable contrasts can become possibility.

### **Suggestions for Teachers and Schools**

Perhaps the most significant goal of teachers and schools' proactive roles with regard to Muslim Arab populations is a mindfulness of the connections between cultural and religious differences and socio-economic status and an understanding that the two combined make possible a more thoughtful and inclusive academic and social curriculum in schools. Second, a greater knowledge of

the transnational experiences of youth and families and an acknowledgment of its global presence in school is key. Third, in addition to scholarly research, there are resources available to teachers that may be helpful for accommodation. Examples include:

- Classroom Windows 06/17 Episode 05: Culturally Responsive Teaching: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6066894268476055581>
- Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, Dearborn, Michigan: <http://www.accesscommunity.org/site/PageServer>
- Arab-American Association of New York: <http://www.arabamericanny.org> ;
- *The middle of everywhere: The world's refugees come to our town* by Mary Pipher (2002).

Fourth, garnering a sense of a student's biography or an ethnic group's history in and out of the United States is immensely helpful in enacting transformative learning experiences. I learned that youth such as the young Yemeni American women in Michigan had great respect for their teachers. In their teachers, they saw possibility in education and in life in the United States, no matter how difficult it was to negotiate being Yemeni and American at the same time. As Florio-Ruane (2001) suggests, teachers who dare to imagine culture in relation to their selves are more likely to share common cultural spaces with those they teach.

## Conclusion

In the US, media representations of Muslim Arabs have also not been positive. In light of the fact that the US allowed Muslim refugees from Iraq to make new lives in this country (currently between 3,000–5,000 are residing in the state of Nebraska and 12,000 were expected to arrive in the United States in 2008) and that there are over three million Arab-Americans in the southeastern Michigan alone, it is imperative that researchers and teachers begin to understand how their cultures and social classes will impact the transition into becoming "Americans." A cultural-ecological model that also accounts for social class practice distinctions is helpful because in laying out the links between education, home, and school, the model allows for a non-ethnocentric basis of differentiation for understanding school achievement without minimizing the impact of historical, political, social, and contextual situations. It also has the further advantage of incorporating a social class lens of cultural capital theory, thus permitting other lenses and factors to emerge as powerful explanatory tools. The two cases I highlight among Muslim Arab Americans shed some light on the rather complex problems Western societies deal with today as many non-Western peoples continue to cross geographic and ideological boundaries and as they attempt to identify with home and host cultures.

By analyzing two historically pervasive perspectives used in education research, cultural capital from sociology and cultural-ecology from anthropology, as models of how to ensure that students succeed to learn in the worlds they travel, I suggest that social class *and* cultural difference have often explained why

people fail or succeed, but most scholarship has involved doing research by looking at one or the other of these lenses. In my own research, I have examined how identity development as it is enacted in home and school discourses is related to socialization, learning, and achievement, and have illustrated that it may be necessary to employ interdisciplinary perspectives in order to probe more fully the complex and complicated continuities and discontinuities between home and school. Only then will we understand how to enable both the pragmatic and aesthetic goals families and schools undertake to achieve. We have much to learn from populations of youth and their families who simultaneously live in the United States and elsewhere.

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### Ideas for Discussion, Extension, and Application

1. Imagine that you have a group of Yemeni girls in your high school class. Make a quick list of the ways that their life experience will likely differ greatly from that of their peers. Discuss these differences and the effect that they might have on the groups' participation in classroom and school activities.
  2. Ogbu suggests that some diverse students, particularly those from African American, Latino, and American Indian communities (in his terms, "involuntary minorities"), develop an oppositional attitude toward school and school success. Discuss why this might occur and any specific cases that you have experienced. Brainstorm specific ways that schools, communities, and families might prevent this oppositional development.
  3. Examine the notion of accommodation versus assimilation. What are the pros and cons of each process? How does each impact one's sense of identity and ability to successfully negotiate host and home languages and cultures?
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