SCRIPT: “Cross-Culturalism: Experiences of a Saudi Arabian Egyptian”
Refan AbdelNabi
May 16, 2015
This audio documentary aims to inform the public of the reality behind cross-culturalism by
telling the story of a Saudi Arabian Egyptian family through the experiences that helped shape
their image.

Towers. [RT: 00:00:00-00:00:12]
The word “9/11” triggers “Middle East” for a majority of people, the terrorism associated with
Islam, has somewhat set the standard for the ideal Arab.

MUSIC: FADE IN: Francesco Zanellato – “Landing on Vega.” (Throughout
documentary)

Adam Bayoumi, a German-Egyptian, who was born and raised in the US was attending his
Islamic school that morning.

AB: “I remember my school was about half an hour away from the Twin Towers were.
We literally saw the smoke from the windows of the classrooms! We thought it was like a
fire or something nearby. We didn’t know at the time it was an airplane that struck the
Twin Towers and stuff.” (:15s)

I myself could not believe the news, my family and I sitting in front of the TV watching the Twin
Towers falling over and over again. We couldn’t believe it. A cousin of mine, who was in an
American school at the time, had stayed home for a good 3 or 4 weeks. I remember my cousin’s
friends planning to flee the country because the future was unclear, the Americans didn’t feel
safe.

Bayoumi had no idea how life would drastically change after that.

AB: “During that time, being in an Islamic school, at that time, I am not going to say
difficult, I am going to say strange. People would just stare at us. Not me specifically but
more my sister because of the way she was dressed. Because of the Hijab and stuff. So it
was disturbing. I mean like think of it as two young kids, a 10 and 11 year old kid
walking in the street and everyone is just starring and being looked at as terrorists.”
(:28s)

When I started planning for this audio documentary, trying to batter down this evil bloodthirsty
image of Arabs was my main goal, but when I started working on this project, things changed. I
found that tackling culture intolerance was my calling. Which lead me on this personal journey
where I discuss my Saudi Arabian Egyptian family’s experiences on identity crisis, religious
dilemmas and social tolerance.
This is the story of my family.

RENAD ABDELNABI (RA): “My dad’s Egyptian. My mom is Saudi. I live in Saudi Arabia.” (:5s)

That was my sister, Renad AbdelNabi, a doctor in King Abdulaziz Hospital. She attended Manarat International Schools, a Saudi school with a British and American curriculum. She feels in-between nationalities.

RA: “I don’t feel like I belong to Saudi Arabia, however, when I do come to Egypt and other countries, I feel like I can speak about it. I’ve lived in and I’ve interacted with their people and their culture. Especially being a doctor, you interact with them in their hardest times, almost all the people I work with are Saudis, so I deal with them a lot. So maybe that’s something I might feel a bit Saudi in. However! I don’t feel like I am Saudi. Despite being surrounded by them all the time, it’s always being pointed out that I’m a foreigner. When I come to Egypt, because of my weird accent and the fact that I live in Saudi Arabia, even the way I tie my scarf are all things that are pointing out that I’m not Egyptian.” (1:23)

I have another sister but she wasn’t comfortable participating in the documentary. However, my cousin, Yasser El-Hadari, a Saudi Arabian Egyptian as well, who felt strongly about media coverage and its role on disuniting cultures; shared his opinion.

YASSER EL-HADARI (YE): “They will always portray Saudis as guys who come with a ton of money and so on. And only come to night clubs and so on. That is absolutely not true. It is a very very unfair portrayal of Saudis. And what makes it even sadder is that Saudi media itself portrays that image. In things like Tash Ma Tash and so on. They make Saudi children feel like they are a bunch of fat kids whose parents keep spoiling them.” (1:06)

Some of these stereotypes do exist, however…

YE: “Only showing that aspect is going to make both parties feel very negative towards each other. And it’s the same thing when it comes to the opposite way. Lots of Egyptians who live in Saudi Arabia, were teachers, doctors, engineers, they were professionals. And they were actually responsible for teaching the next first generation of professional Saudis.” (:35s)

El-Hadari, a dentist at Misr University for Science and Technology, better known as MUST, believes that media coverage also affects religious interpretations.

YE: “You are exposed to a media that makes it feel weird for both cultures should be treating each other nicely. No, they shouldn’t be friends. No, they shouldn’t be together, they are at holy war bull.”(:11)
There is always a sector of people who have to demonize people from other religions.

YE: “Basically the tribalist mentality. Which is very evident in Republican politicians in the USA, for example. Where your tribe of people has to be the best tribe and other tribes have to be treated with caution or they need justification to be treated as human or people.” (:60s)

Education played a huge role in our lives when approaching new people and ideas.

SFX: YE and RA say various nationalities they have met at school. (:15s)

Renad and Yasser, like me, were exposed to very Western ideologies, even though Renad went to the US as an adult while Yasser hasn’t even been.

RA: “I was, you could say westernized because of school, with all the western cultures and ideas. When I got into college, now that was a different culture shock! For them, “you’re speaking English all the time. You’re Egyptian.” When I was not wearing a scarf. “Oh! You don’t wear a scarf! You hang out with boys!” For them it was so different!” (:19s)

YE: “I went to school in two stages: elementary school was in Manarat Jeddah, it was more of an Arab-run school, even though it had a British System of education. And we had a more Arabic and Islamic kind of upbringing. And we didn’t really feel like there was much difference between nationalities. High school was in The British International School of Jeddah. Now that was a melting pot of cultures! And we were able to interact and so on and therefore I was able to get a taste of every culture. I’ve never had this feeling that... since you act that way you’re Egyptian but if you act that way, you’re Saudi. However, if you act that way... no, no, no, that’s being Lebanese. I don’t have that kind of prejudice. I don’t have that kind of cognitive dissonance.” (1:33)

I talk to my father, Emad AbdelNaby, on the phone but I wanted to record our conversation. Since he was in Saudi Arabia at the time, my sister, Rana, helped record the conversation on WhatsApp.

EMAD ABDELNABY (EA): “the first time I went to Saudi Arabia was to do Hajj. This is the first point. The second point was to know the relatives of my wife because she is Saudi Arabian.” (:21s)

This reminded me of the example Yasser gave.

YE: “If I was born in Egypt, raised my entire life in Egypt, never went to Saudi a single time in my life and basically only have the main stream view of Saudis that’s shared here in Egypt, I wouldn’t think of going to Saudi Arabia unless to do a Umrah or Hajj or something like that.” (:21s)
Which lead me to ask my father if he agreed.

_EA:_ “Well I met many Saudi Arabians in my country, but I used to treat them as foreigners. But when I went to Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabians become more familiar to me.” (_:13s)_

_MUSIC:_ _FADE IN:_ AKAJULES – “Sun!” [RT: 00:08:26 – 00:08:40]

_EA:_ “Actually, my wife was my student in the faculty of medicine. She was very hard worker, very intelligent. I don’t know whether he... whether she had chosen me or I had chosen her and maybe this is a part of her intelligence.” (_:17)_

My mother Hayam Allagani studied dentistry in Cairo University because there weren’t any universities for women in Saudi Arabia at the time.

I am curious to know how my grandparents approach my father, as an Egyptian, marrying a Saudi Arabian woman.

_EA:_ “They were astonished at first and maybe they were shocked. But after years and years of marriage and we have our daughters now. My wife, they treat her like one of their daughters.” (_:17s)_

As if that wasn’t grueling enough! The marital process wasn’t any different.

_HAYAM ALLAQANI (HA):_ “In our country we must take permission, male or female, form our government. I take...I go to the court and my husband send to his friend authorization. And I go with my father...my brother because my brother is the sponsor, because my father is pass.” (_:31s)_

I’m sure many of you have heard of this sponsoring system. In Saudi Arabia, foreigners, women and children need someone to represent them as a guardian and benefactor with matters like paperwork.

_MUSIC:_ _FADE IN:_ Epic Soul Factory – “Creo En Ti.” [RT: 00:10:05 – 00:10:18]

My mother, Hayam Allaqani was exposed to Egyptian culture from a young age.

_HA:_ “When I came to Egypt, first time, I didn’t find that it is unfamiliar for me, ‘cause our teacher in the school Egyptian, Palestinian, Syrian, Jordan. Many country. I didn’t find that it is unusual for me. Also, we have maid, always there is party for Abdel Halim, Farid, Om Kalthoum. She hear it with radio, I hear it with her.” (_:42s)_

Like me, she lived a very dependent lifestyle in Saudi Arabia. So of course she enjoyed the same exact thing I did when I first came to live in Egypt!

_HA:_ “EL-FREEDOM!” (_:2s)_

Yes! I don’t even know where to begin! Walking around! Not having to wait for someone to drop me.
HA: “In Saudia, everything my mother, my father do it for me.” (:6s)

MUSIC: FADE IN: Epic Soul Factory - “Creo En Ti.” [RT: 00:11:37 – 00:12:06]

Defining your cultural identity is tough. Individuals may obtain their own personality in a culture while others might be handed their identity.

So, you are somewhat shaped by how others see you, how society defines you and how you recognize yourself.

The problem with being bicultural or multicultural, is that it is inconsistent in helping you find out who you are.

Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson says it's important to think seriously about societal roles in your teens so that the path you embark on in adulthood is one that you have knowingly chosen.

MUSIC: FADE IN: Francesco Zanellato – “Landing on Vega.”[RT: 00:12:07 – 00:12:51]

Media exposure, interracial marriages and migration have merged worlds apart, together. People have taken part in this dance and generations are shading in their roots.

This audio documentary was produced by Refan AbdelNabi for the audio production course at The American University in Cairo taught by Professor Kim Fox in spring 2015.

A big shout out to my interviewees Renad AbdelNabi, Yasser El-Hadari, Emad AbdelNaby, Hayam Allagani and Adam Bayoumi.

Closing facts from Psychology Today.

Sound effects gathered from YouTube, Jamendo.com and myself.