CULTURES IN CONFLICT:
A HANDBOOK FOR ESL TEACHERS OF ARAB STUDENTS

A creative work submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
degree
Master of Arts

by
ANNE ADAMS HELMS
San Francisco, California
May 1984
I certify that I have read CULTURES IN CONFLICT: A HANDBOOK FOR ESL TEACHERS OF ARAB STUDENTS by Anne Adams Helms, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a creative work submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the Master of Arts degree at San Francisco State University.

Luis S. Kemnitzer
Professor of Anthropology

David W. Ames
Professor of Anthropology

Patricia A. Porter
Assistant Professor of English
American teachers of English as a foreign language sometimes find the behavior and attitudes of Arab students puzzling, and in turn, Arab students are occasionally offended or bewildered by American customs. This handbook explores in detail differences between the two cultures in values, acceptable behavior and expectations, with the hope that understanding of these differences will lead to more successful teacher-student relationships while maintaining the ethnic identity and individual integrity of both parties.

The information was gathered through library research into the history and culture of the Middle East, the phenomenon of culture shock, values analysis, and a review of American customs and etiquette, and through extensive interviews with Arab students and ESL teachers.
PUBLICATION RIGHTS

I hereby reserve all rights of publication, including the right to reproduce this thesis in any form, for a period of five years from the date of submission.

Signed: [Signature]  Date: May 1, 1984
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**MAP: THE ARAB WORLD** vii

**I. INTRODUCTION** 1

A. Purpose of the Study 1

B. Definitions 3

1. Arab 3

2. Culture and Culture Shock 5

3. Acculturation 8

C. Methodology and Problems 9

1. Interviews with Students 10

2. Questionnaires and Interviews with Teachers 12

3. Library Sources 13

D. Results 14

**II. STEREOTYPES OF ARABS IN WESTERN MEDIA** 16

**III. ARAB HISTORY AND CULTURE: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS** 20

A. History and Culture 20

B. Islam and Islamic Ethics 21

1. Pillars of the Faith 23

2. Islamic Morality 26

3. Islamic Sects 29

C. Male/Female Relationships 30

1. Women's Honor 31
I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

During the school year 1982-83, over 32,500 students from Middle Eastern countries were studying in U.S. institutions of higher learning (IIE 1983). Almost all of these young people found it necessary to take classes in English as a second language (ESL), and through these courses they also learned much about American customs, beliefs and culture. The basics of vocabulary and grammar are essential, of course, but beyond that the students need to develop what Dell Hymes calls "sociolinguistic competence": how to use the language appropriately, when to speak, who to speak to and how to address that person, what to talk about, and which codes to use in various settings (Hymes 1964: 269-293). There are other functions of ESL classes, including "...surrounding them (the students) with social warmth at a time when many are bereft--and providing discipline in study" (Pincus 1977:61).

It must be extraordinarily difficult to be plunged into a new environment where people often behave in inscrutable ways and where hardly anyone speaks your language. Add to that the need to learn a totally different alphabet and numerical symbols, and it is easy to understand how students can feel overwhelmed. They may feel stripped of personal status and identity by their inability to communicate facts about themselves in this new group. In defense they may ally themselves with a sub-group of other Arabic-speaking students and avoid opportunities to
speak English. Loneliness and frustration may be manifested in repressed or expressed aggression, and teachers for their part may also have some frustration and anger to deal with. It is easy to forget that behind every national or ethnic group are just individuals with their own traditions, prejudices and beliefs. With both students and teachers convinced of the correctness of their own attitudes, an enormous opportunity for misunderstanding exists. Teachers may sometimes find the behavior and attitudes of Arab students in particular puzzling, and in turn, the students are sometimes offended or bewildered by American customs.

The purpose of this study is to explore in detail some differences between the two cultures in values, acceptable behavior and expectations, with the hope that understanding these differences will lead to more successful teacher-student relationships while maintaining the ethnic identity and individual integrity of both parties. In discovering points of potential misunderstanding, we may also discover some universals in human culture that bind us together.

Getting to know Middle Easterners as people—sharing in their thoughts and feelings, their beliefs and aspirations—should help us to develop a sense of empathy, a feeling of identity, with human beings everywhere. In the end, we should know more about ourselves--indeed, we should have an expanded definition of who we are--because we will know more about the common humanity that all people share. Self-knowledge is the ultimate justification of studying about others (Clark 1975:ix).

Some of the material in this paper may already be familiar to ESL teachers, and if so, please be patient. It is hoped that by showing the background and rationale for various attitudes, behaviors that seem perplexing to Americans can be understood in the context of Arab
cultural.

Since the majority of Arab students in the United States are males, I have decided to use the masculine pronoun instead of "he or she" and "his or her," unless the use is obviously illogical.

Definitions

Arab

Webster's Dictionary of the American Language describes an Arab as (1) a native or inhabitant of Arabia; or (2) any of a Semitic people native to Arabia but now widely scattered throughout surrounding lands; commonly, a Bedouin. These are inadequate definitions for several reasons. Certainly the people who live a nomadic, desert-dwelling existence in the Middle East represent one aspect of the Arab world (and this lifestyle is said to affect the character of being an Arab), but it neglects the enormous urban and farming populations of such countries as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.

While most Arabs are Muslims, there are also Christian and Zoroastrian Arabs. Perhaps one-sixth of the world's population is Islamic, including large parts of Indonesia and the Indian subcontinent, so the fact of being a Muslim does not define being an Arab. All Arabs aren't Muslims and all Muslims aren't Arabs.

An Arab can be brought up in a non-Arab culture (e.g., French culture in North Africa), and still be an Arab.

He may live in a non-Arab country like the United States but still maintain his Arab identity.

He may not cherish the memory of the Arab Empire because he is a
Communist, yet he may still have a belief in one Arab nation and will consider himself an Arab.

He may be the descendant of a Semitic tribe or of African slaves or of Bulgarian immigrants, and still be an Arab (Patai: 12-15).

Perhaps the best definition of an Arab is "Anyone who speaks Arabic as his own language and consequently feels as an Arab" (Jabra 1971: 174). Arabic-speaking Jews, Copts and Druze are not Arabs because they don't think of themselves as Arabs. Being an Arab involves a shared way of living, acting, thinking and feeling; shared family patterns and social relationships, traditions, art, history, and symbolic systems. Within each geographical area in the Arab World are many sub-groups with their own traditions and different dialects, yet it is safe to say that there are motives, traits, beliefs and values shared by most Arabs, wherever they live. It is the contrast of those beliefs and values with the ones shared by most Americans that is the subject of this study.

Muslims from Iran and Turkey share many of the attitudes and religious beliefs of the Islamic Arabs, but their languages are different and they do not consider themselves Arabs (and will not appreciate being grouped together in one category). There seems to be quite a bit of bad feeling between Iranians and Saudi Arabians, and they do not wish to be mistaken for one another. Incidentally, Muslims in Iran read the Koran in Arabic, a Hamito-Semitic language, but their own language is Farsi, an Indo-European language whose general structure is similar to that of the European languages. The script for Farsi is based on Arabic but includes some symbols not found in Arabic (John-
Turkish comes from another language family entirely, and the Turks have used Roman script as in English since 1928. Most Turks share the Islamic faith although the country was secularized under Ataturk sixty years ago. This paper will not be dealing with either Turks or Iranians.

The Arab Middle East includes Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt in North Africa, the northern two-thirds of the Sudan, Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, and the Persian Gulf States (known to Arabs as the Arabian Gulf). It should be noted that many Arabs do not consider themselves so much citizens of a particular state but rather people of one nation, and the division of the Arab motherland into separate countries is often seen as a temporary situation created by Western colonizers. In this ideal view, all Arabs are brothers and children of one nation. The concept of Arab unity is expressed in the constitutions of Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria, and the reality of constant bickering and fratricidal wars does not seem to tarnish that ideal (Patai 1976:204-209).

Incidentally, the term "Ay-rab" is derogatory and should never be used, even when joking.

**Culture and Culture Shock**

"Culture" is often viewed as the best of the literary or artistic tradition of a country, but in this paper the word refers to...

...the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, meanings, beliefs, values, attitudes, religions, concepts of self, the universe, and self-universe relationships, hierarchies of status, role expectations, spacial relations, and time concepts acquired by a
large group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving (Porter 1972:3).

Because of the pervasive influence of culture in forming our entire experience, both of ourselves and of the world, most of us have no other effective way of perceiving other cultures except in terms of our own values. Thus we tend to assume that our values and culture are the only correct and valid ones and are benchmarks by which all other cultures are to be judged. Even people who sincerely try to weed out ethnocentric ideas in their own minds cannot always succeed. We must constantly remind ourselves that people from other countries aren't defective Americans; they are individuals who live according to what is "right" to them, and there is much we can learn about ourselves and the rest of the world from them.

When a student is suddenly exposed to an alien society, he often experiences a disturbing feeling of disorientation and helplessness that is called "culture shock."

In general, the more "exotic" the alien society and the deeper one's immersion in its social life, the greater the shock. The outstanding features of culture shock include inability to make any sense out of the behavior of others or to predict what they may say or do. One's customary categories of experience are no longer useful, and habitual actions elicit seemingly bizarre responses. A friendly gesture may be treated as a threat, whereas a serious and sensible question provokes laughter or uncomprehending silence (Bock 1970:ix-x).

The loss of all familiar signs and symbols results in anxiety. The student doesn't know when to act in a certain way, how and when to speak to certain people, what to say in each situation, and whether to take statements seriously. Most students gradually make an adjustment
to the new society, but some reject it and leave, and others regress and see their home culture as irrationally glorified while they find nothing good to say about America. Some of the symptoms of a serious case of culture shock are excessive fear of dirt and germs, fits of anger over delays and minor frustrations, excessive fear of being cheated, robbed or injured, hypochondria, and a terrible longing to go home.

Most new arrivals go through a series of steps before they adjust to the new environment. At first they are fascinated with the new group. This may last a few days or six months, but then is often replaced by hostility towards the host country based on genuine problems with language, transportation, shopping, and other daily hurdles. Natives are seen as unsympathetic and unhelpful. After awhile resignation takes the place of paranoia and the foreign student is able to make jokes with Americans and feels more at ease (Oberg 1954 passim).

American teachers of Arab students may find themselves experiencing their own type of culture shock, even though they are the ones in control of the situation and embedded in their own social system. They are bewildered when innocent questions cause offense or when serious statements are treated lightly and when jokes are misunderstood. They may feel uncomfortable with students who stand too close or gaze too intently. They will certainly experience frustration when long-standing teaching techniques are ineffective or misinterpreted. If teachers can learn more about the history and customs of Arab countries and the different values held, and how those customs and values make sense in the Arabs' world picture, then the teachers may find themselves both more aware (and perhaps more critical) of the American
emphasis on practicality, utility, impersonality, and competition, and more sympathetic to Arab values of leisure, family, loyalty, etc. Confrontation with another society is the best way to gain perspective on one's own culture. Both teachers and students can learn that customs that seem strange to them have meaning to those who practice them, and that other perceptions of reality are just as valid to those who live according to them as our own are to us.

It is interesting to note that students who have spent several years in the United States often experience "reverse culture shock" when they return to their own countries, and they may go through a period of disequilibrium and discomfort before readjusting to their former homes.

Acculturation

Acculturation is "the process of learning about, accepting and identifying with the people, customs and elements of ordinary life in a new culture" (Rathmell 1970:2). Not all Arab students will go so far as identifying with American culture, and some may never accept many aspects of it, but certainly all students will be exposed to it and will learn a great deal about it through their classes and interactions with Americans. The acculturative process often includes long-term modification of attitudes and behavior, and those modifications include not only the addition of new material but also the elimination of certain previous elements and the modification and reorganization of others (Linton 1963:501). ESL teachers may be able to guide their students towards adopting the positive elements of American culture and rejecting
the negative. For instance, foreign students will sometimes emulate their American peers and carry certain behaviors to extremes. A young man may interpret movies or his friends' anecdotes too literally and may assume that all Americans have sexual intercourse on their first date, or he may pick up obscene language in the locker room and use it inappropriately in another situation. Some formerly devout Muslims may adopt American college students' patterns of drinking, drug use, and sexual behavior while they are in this country, yet their fundamental attitudes about these things may remain unchanged and they may suffer anxiety and guilt over these conflicts.

Some students experience an extreme sense of ambivalence: they are anti-West politically but pro-West culturally. They want to acquire Western culture and technical knowledge but eliminate Western influence in other parts of their lives. They love their own country but may hate its backwardness. They admire the Bedouin ethos of courage, hospitality and honor, but they don't want contact with it. They admire classical Arabic but feel it is inadequate for modern communication. They see the importance of increased production but refuse to do physical labor themselves. They may become so familiar with American culture that they cease to feel at home in their own country (Patai 1976:188-201).

Methodology and Problems

Information in this paper has been gathered from three categories of sources: extensive personal interviews with 19 students from various Arab countries; interviews, questionnaires and informal conversations with teachers and friends of Arab students; and numerous library
Interviews with Students

Nineteen students were interviewed. The breakdown by country and sex is as follows:

- Saudi Arabia: 7 males, 3 females
- Lebanon: 2 males, 1 female
- Jordan: 1 male
- Dubai: 1 male
- Syria: 1 male, 1 female
- Iraq: 1 male, 1 female

Most interviews were arranged by teachers who mentioned my study to certain students who then agreed to meet with me. Some of these students then introduced me to their friends. I also put a classified advertisement in the San Francisco State University student newspaper and received a few responses from that. The students were therefore self-selected volunteers for the project, and for the most part were articulate and valuable subjects who were eager to talk to an American.

At first I attempted to use a standard questionnaire that I had developed, but it soon became apparent that that made the conversations stilted and unproductive. Also, I learned that a greeting ritual is important to Arabs and that my attempts to get right to the meat of the problem was mildly offensive to them. I then allowed time for an extensive exchange of pleasantries and small talk before bringing up the subject of the study. I explained that I was attempting to find out
what sort of problems they had had in adjusting to a new environment so that I could write a handbook for ESL teachers with the hope that teachers might then have a better understanding of the students. I asked permission to take a few notes during our conversation. The students described certain situations that they had found troubling, and if they didn't volunteer information on how a similar situation would have been handled in their native country, I asked. Sometimes it was necessary to say, "If a teacher or student did that in your country, what would people think?" If it seemed appropriate, I would try to explain why Americans acted in a certain way, but I often found that I didn't have an explanation; that was just the way Americans did things.

The interviews lasted from one-half hour to several hours, and in some cases we met many times over a period of four years. The interviews attempted to identify regularities and variations in responses to different social contexts, and the results of each interview created new questions for the next. I was amazed at the trust and openness of some of the female students in describing personal experiences.

The interviews revealed that there are enormous differences between the various countries of the Middle East regarding their degree of modernization, wealth, and exposure to Western influences. Added to these are class differences within each country, rural versus urban environments, and individual differences in personality and educational background. Therefore, none of the comments in this paper will hold true for all Arab students at all times.

Some of the problems encountered doing the research were:

1. Finding subjects with both the time and inclination to be
interviewed.

2. Establishing rapport. Later it occurred to me that some newly-arrived male students were uncomfortable with the interview setting: a small room with a closed door. Despite the difference in our ages, this might have been interpreted as an inappropriate interaction.

3. Timing of interviews. I tried to find newly-arrived students whose experiences would be fresh in their minds.

4. Language limitations.

5. Mutual avoidance of Middle East politics. Only one of the subjects, a young woman from Lebanon, was outspoken politically. I now regret avoiding the subject with other students since it would have been interesting to know their views and involvement.

6. Equivocal answers. Sometimes I felt I was being told what the students thought I wanted to hear. Other times I felt they were trying to be polite and avoiding criticism of the host country.

7. Loss of some subjects who returned home or moved on to other schools.

Questionnaires and Interviews with Teachers

A questionnaire was distributed to ESL teachers at San Francisco State University in February 1984. The protocol and the most helpful responses appear in Appendix A. It became apparent to me that while teachers for the most part enjoyed having Arab students in their classrooms, many students had adjustment problems that the teachers didn't recognize. Perhaps the information in this study will help.
Library Sources

The Bibliography at the end of this paper lists the sources actually used. For more detailed information, an annotated list of suggested readings appears in Appendix B. The categories included are (1) Arab culture, (2) teaching English to Arab students, and (3) guides for foreign students.

Results

The same themes occurred in almost all of the interviews with students: the discovery that American women with their make-up and friendly manners were not all prostitutes, the difficulty of maintaining one's religious practices in a secular situation, the shallowness of many friendships with Americans, and the shock of being exposed to unheard-of freedom of action. Many students expressed their anxiety over filling out applications, using public transportation, eating American food, finding housing, etc., but none had heard of the various publications put out by the Asia Foundation, the Institute of International Education and other organizations. The Saudi Arabian Educational Mission created a film for prospective students but didn't succeed in finding an audience. Perhaps the lack of preparation on the part of students before they come to this country is an expression of fatalism and trust that everything will work out according to God's plan. (A discussion of the ramifications of this attitude appears later.)

The following comments are generalizations but indicate some of the differences between students from various Arab countries.

Lebanese students are the most Westernized and cosmopolitan. Most
already speak English when they arrive since they have attended bilingual schools often run by American church groups. These students are used to Western dress, co-ed schools, and active political participation of students, and their adjustment to American college life is not too difficult.

The Palestinian and Jordanian students seem to occupy a middle ground between the Lebanese and the most conservative Saudis. Their secondary schools are not co-ed, but their clothing is Western and they have been exposed to many Western ideas. However, according to an informant from Jordan, a Jordanese man would not walk down a village street with an unrelated young woman, even in broad daylight. Both of them might well be killed by outraged villagers who would view such an act as a disgrace to the woman's family and therefore to the entire village. (A discussion of male/female relationships in Arab countries appears later in this paper.)

Interviews with students from Syria and Iraq reflect experiences similar to those of the Palestinians and Jordanians. No first-hand information was gathered about students from Egypt or other North African countries.

The most productive interviews were with Saudi Arabians. My best informant was a young married woman from the resort area in the mountains of Western Saudi Arabia. Her experiences as the sheltered yet well-educated daughter of a conservative and wealthy merchant revealed a great deal about Arab life and values. Apparently the single young men from Saudi Arabia who belong either to the royal family or who are sons of very wealthy men in Jeddah or Riyadh have very different life
experiences, yet their basic values are similar to those of this young woman.

In general, the information generated by these interviews served the purpose of identifying those areas of experience that were problematical to students. The library sources then provided the background to understand the cultural meaning of different values and behaviors.

Much assistance was received from Miss Leila Kellow, the Syrian Director of the World Language Institute at the University of San Francisco, and from Miss Rita Wong of the American Language Institute at San Francisco State University. I am also grateful to Dr. David Ames of the Anthropology Department of San Francisco State and to Dr. Patricia Porter of the English Department for their support and helpful criticism.
II. STEREOTYPES OF ARABS IN WESTERN MEDIA

Popular stereotypes of Arabs have a long history. Most nineteenth century writers who traveled to the Middle East commented mainly on the poverty and disease they encountered to the exclusion of other, more positive aspects. They saw Islam as a false religion that kept the Arabs "savages." They used such descriptions as "fiery tempers," "wild and restless," "lawless," etc., and these images have important political implications today. The Turkish massacres of Armenians in 1895-96, 1909, and then again in 1915 increased the antipathy towards all Muslims in general. This lumping of Turks and Arabs together stopped when T.S. Lawrence romanticized the Arab Revolt against the Turks and promoted an image of Arabs as undisciplined yet proud and brave fighters. This new romantic image culminated in the popular 1920's novel, The Sheik, which was turned into a movie starring Rudolph Valentino as an intense, attractive, virile desert man with a sinister cruel streak. Songs like "The Sheik of Araby" and "The Desert Song" presented the desert and its inhabitants as romantic but dangerous, and this is one of the stereotypes that persists today.

The debates in Congress during the 1920's and 1930's regarding the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine characterized the Arabs as backward, poor and ignorant, and Palestine itself as a desolate land ravaged by centuries of Turkish misrule. Very little was known about Arab culture or literature, or about recent history in Arab countries and the causes of rising nationalism. Americans looked at Arab lands
in terms of British and French colonial interests until the discovery of oil, and then they began to see the area in more global terms and with reference to American national interests (Lydon 1969:3-14). The stereotypes of Arabs as ignorant and backward nomads or outrageously wealthy oil sheiks prevail and hide the reality of a group of people important to our understanding of the world as it really is. Most Americans are woefully uninformed about the Arab world and accept stereotypes and racist jokes that they would never tolerate about other groups. Popular culture in songs, jokes, television, cartoons, comics and movies has reinforced these stereotypes.

Jokes tend to show more racism than wit, as is shown in the collection of ethnic jokes about Arabs stored at the Folklore Department of the University of California at Berkeley. In these jokes Arabs are described as stupid, cowardly, filthy and repulsive, to a degree not shared by any other scapegoat group (Michilak 1984:5).

Street" used an Arab figure to illustrate the word "danger" (Michalak 1984:5).

Political cartoons are perhaps the most vicious in their portrayal of Arabs as hook-nosed, fat, bearded and snaggle-toothed villains. Such cartoons are as obnoxious and potentially dangerous as the ones that appeared in German newspapers in the 1930's depicting fat Jewish bankers with a stranglehold on European business. One of the most appalling recent cartoons showed a fat Arab run through with a skewer and called "Sheik Kabob" (Meyer in the San Francisco Chronicle, March 14, 1982).

Recent movies tend to present all Arabs as terrorists or evil financiers. In Rollover (1981) Arab money causes the dollar to collapse and the world's financial system is destroyed. Wrong is Right (1982) involves an Arab king who tries to blackmail the American president into resigning by threatening to blow up New York and Israel with atom bombs. Other movies with negative stereotypes of Arabs are Trench-coat (1983) and Raiders of the Lost Ark. The Black Stallion has a nasty Arab who mistreats the horse (Shaheen 1983:24-25).

Even the United States Government promotes negative stereotypes of Arabs. How many Americans know that there were not real Arabs involved in "Abscam?" One can imagine the outrage if that sting operation had used a fictional Israeli financier and had been dubbed "Jewscam!"

James E. Akins, a former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, attributes the generally negative image of the Arabs held by a broad section of the American public to two reasons. The first is what he describes as
the very extensive anti-Arab campaign conducted by the American press, radio and television since the mid-1940's, which plays on the basic misunderstanding of what Palestine and Israel are. That misunderstanding is combined with a profoundly bad conscience on the part of most Americans as to what happened to the Jews in Europe during the Second World War. Many Americans realize that their country could have opened doors to Jewish immigration during the 1930's and stopped the Holocaust, but did not. Thus, any criticism of Israel is interpreted as anti-Semitism, and Americans do not want to be accused of that. The second reason is the lack of information about Arabs and the Arab world in the United States. The Arabs have failed to explain their case to the American public. For instance, the Arab states are blamed for the escalation of oil prices, but Americans don't realize that the leaders of the price increases of this non-renewable resource were the non-Arab members of OPEC. (Atkins: Interview in Arab Perspectives 1(4):22-26, 1980.)

Recently several Arab-American organizations such as the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), the National Association of Arab-Americans (NAA), and the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG) have been actively involved in challenging negative stereotypes and propaganda in the media. As the American public becomes more informed of the Arab perception of world events, we can hope that negative images like the ones described above will become rare aberrations rather than the norm.
The written history of the Middle East goes back more than 5000 years to the Sumerians in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley in what is now called Iraq. Europe was still in the midst of the Dark Ages when Mohammed was born in Mecca in 570 A.D. Barbarians had destroyed the Roman Empire, and the Byzantine Empire was on the point of collapse. The message of Islam spread rapidly across North Africa to Spain and across the Middle East to India. The Golden Age of the Arab Empire (750-1258 A.D.) was a time when the Arabs were known throughout the world for their culture and military achievements. Much of our knowledge of astronomy, medicine, mathematics and philosophy either comes from the Arabs or was saved by them in translations from the Greek into Arabic. This peak of Arab civilization was followed by political decline and what is generally accepted as a period of stagnation. Only recently has there been a reawakening of Arab pride and hope for unity. A growing awareness of the superiority of Western technology, as well as Western-introduced information about Arab history, has spurred the search for modernization and progress, as well as for information about past glories. At the same time, there is a great sense of hatred for many aspects of Westernization: the loss of spirituality and increase in materialism, the loose sexual morality and weakening of the family, the downgrading of Arab history, and, of course, the effects
European colonialism and what is interpreted as political betrayal. Young students from the Middle East are in a bit of a bind: they have been sent here to bring back to their countries the technology and business systems of the West, and at the same time there is the suspicion that these same values and knowledge will destroy what is important in their own heritage. Some feel that the West has selfish motives for dealing with Arabs (we want their oil), or that we want to weaken them by turning them away from traditional values. Others suspect that American scholars are encouraging Arabs to concentrate on their spiritual heritage in order to keep them in a state of intellectual torpor (Patai 1976:296-301). Western technology is resented yet desired. Perhaps some of the ambivalent feelings are due to the awareness that Arabs contributed to the cultural development of the West and that they had long historical contacts with the West and at one time had military superiority. Now they are in a less advantageous position, and it hurts their pride and sense of self-worth.

Islam and Islamic Ethics

An awareness of some of the basic tenets of Islam is fundamental to understanding the Arabs, since it affects their culture, history, politics and attitudes.

According to Muslims, Mohammed was a prophet like Moses and Jesus, but the messages of those two great men were misunderstood and therefore Judaism and Christianity are somewhat in error. Mohammed was the final prophet who cleared up the remaining misunderstandings. Even though there were holy wars in resistance to the Christian
crusaders (whose motives were not entirely religious!), Muslims consider Christians and Jews to be "People of the Book" and within the same religious tradition, so they are amazed to discover that Christian Americans think of them as "Unbelievers." Many beliefs in Islam are remarkably similar to those propounded by Christian fundamentalists.

(In addition to the monotheism preached by Mohammed, there are folk beliefs in charms, vows, the evil eye, and the like. These should be understood as comparable to such common American practices as "knocking on wood" or blessing someone who sneezes, differing only in the degree to which a traditional culture—as opposed to a secular culture such as ours—stays near the folk origins of such beliefs or practices.)

We need to be aware that for Muslims, religion permeates life. It is not a one-morning-a-week observation. Islam is not just a religion; it is also a civilization and an orientation to the world. All aspects of individual and social life are expressions of Islam or the working out of its implications. Some of its strongest aspects are traditionalism and conservatism which may obstruct attempts to change.

According to Western belief, Islam was spread by mass conversion at swordpoint. It is true that there was a militant, aggressive element in Islam, and that all military adventures involve massacres of subject people to various extents, but the survival of a wide variety of Christian sects and Jewish communities in predominantly Muslim lands disproves the idea that all who refused to convert were slain in a fanatic "holy war." During the early spread of Islam, subject peoples had three choices: accept Islam, surrender and pay tribute, or die. Christians
and Jews, as believers in pre-Islamic monotheistic religions, were allowed to follow their own religions if they accepted Muslim overlordship. Since Islam is not a complicated theology to learn (there are no concepts like the Trinity or transubstantiation), and since converts were not required to make drastic changes in their lifestyles, it is probable that many people chose conversion. Islam, like Christianity, has actively sought new members, in contrast to Judaism which discourages conversion.

Pillars of the Faith

There are five "Pillars of the Faith" in Islam which are the five primary duties required of a Muslim. These are described because of the possible effects on the behavior of Arab students.

The first is a confession of faith in God. "I witness that there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." The name of Allah appears in conversation and literature with great frequency. Speeches and letters by Muslims will start out, "In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful." Arab conversation is sprinkled with the phrase "Insha'allah," which means "If God wills it." Since God is the primary cause and all-powerful, a Muslim doesn't make any plans without adding the restriction "If it pleases God." From an American point of view, this resignation to the will of God may look like an unwillingness to exert extra effort and a generally passive attitude towards life, but on the other hand it is not so different than Calvinist predestination or Jesus's prayer, "Thy will be done." It is not that Muslims don't take responsibility for their actions so much as an awareness that no matter
how hard one tries, if God doesn't want something to happen, it won't. This attitude may make it easier to accept disappointments and reverses in life.

The second Pillar of Faith is ritual prayer. Muslims are supposed to pray five times a day at specific times and using specific words, physical positions and artifacts, such as a prayer rug and, for women, a completely enveloping veil. In Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, the work day is interrupted two or three times for ablutions and twenty to thirty minutes of group prayer plus a sermon on Fridays. Obviously there are difficulties in maintaining these observances in an American university. Some schools have found a room that students can use to get together and pray. Most students simple postpone the midday prayer and double up in the late afternoon. A devout Muslim may automatically wake up about 4 A.M., wash and pray before returning to bed, then pray again before school, twice at 5 P.M., and once more before retiring. Interviews seem to confirm that some students drift away from praying at all, and they may suffer guilt pangs for this as well as for their use of alcohol and drugs. Some become so enculturated as to forget their religious obligations while they are in this country but become devout again when they return home. One interviewee suggested that some people are more concerned about the appearance of piety than the actual practice, and since no one is watching them here, they don't worry about it.

All this praying may sound like a great deal, but a similar program exists in most Catholic boarding schools in this country.

One can see that these ritual practices and infusion of regular
prayer into the entire life of a society would keep people aware of reli-
gion as a part of daily life. One can also imagine the difficulties of try-
ing to set up a Western-style production line in Saudi Arabia, with
start-up and shut-down penalties eating into the profits while the Mus-
lims go to pray.

The third Pillar of the Faith is fasting. During the month of
Ramadan (which recently has been in the summer), no food, water or
tobacco is to be taken between sunrise and sunset. Exceptions are made
for illness or traveling, but the pious Muslim is expected to make up the
missed days later. A person is also expected to abstain from sexual
intercourse, lying, evil talk and false oaths. The heart must be pro-
tected from all uncleanness while the body is deprived of all nourish-
ment. The intent is to make rich men appreciate the suffering of the
hungry. It is hard to imagine the amount of self-discipline this fasting
must require, particularly in a desert climate at the hottest time of the
year! Shops stay open but restaurants are closed during the day
during Ramadan. Many people feast after sunset and stay up late, the
better to sleep during the heat of the day.

According to a Saudi informant, a youngster of 11 or 12 is expected
to fast, and the social pressures to conform are enormous. I was told
that if someone in Saudi Arabia refused to fast or pray, the government
would punish him. Rebellious young men would be considered the re-
sponsibility of their fathers, and if they were irreverent, it would
shame the entire family.

Teachers have observed that during the fast some students may
become irritable, lethargic, or simply absent, although students claim
that fasting makes your body feel good and rests your stomach.

The fourth Pillar is tithing, or almsgiving. It is a duty to give regularly to the needy and to the religious foundations that finance schools, hospitals and pilgrimages.

The fifth Pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca and to other holy cities. This is not obligatory but is highly recommended, and all Muslims hope to make the journey at least once in their lifetime. Those who do get an honorific title, Haji. Americans are often not aware that after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia, Jerusalem is the third most important holy city to Muslims, and that is why they don't want to give up their claim to part of it.

Up to five million Muslims go to Mecca every year during the holy month of Ramadan. They speak many different languages but have a sense of unity and brotherhood because of the shared religion. Class differences are eliminated because everyone wears the same white sheet-like garment. The pilgrimage places the believer in an atmosphere of universal Islamic brotherhood and equality, and draws him away temporarily from national and regional concerns.

**Islamic Morality**

The Five Pillars of the Faith don't deal with everyday ethical issues. Rules for behavior are found in the Koran, the Sunnah (sayings of the Prophet), the Hadith (the collection of Muslim traditions), and in the Shari'ah, or sacred law. Some of these rules are:

1. Divorce is legal, but wrong.
2. There should be no picture of any living being, especially Allah or man. (That is why Islamic art has developed such intricate geometric patterns rather than representational scenes. However, this rule is often disregarded.)

3. Be kind towards kinfolk, orphans, the poor, wayfarers, fellow workers, and slaves.

4. No monkery, by which is meant a celibate clergy.

5. No usury. (Businessmen have gotten around this restriction by organizing insurance companies and savings banks like joint-stock companies, and they pay up to 50% interest legally.)

6. Circumcision of boys (not necessarily in infancy).

7. No pork, no alcohol, no gambling, no homosexual intercourse.

8. Be chaste, except for lawful intercourse with wives and concubines.

In general, Islam is not humanistic. It is not interested in developing men's potentialities but rather in guiding them to heaven, and many of the ways to get to heaven are passive. There are five categories of Islamic morality: obligatory acts (like the Five Pillars of the Faith), approved or commended acts, neutral acts, disapproved acts, and prohibited acts.

The heavy emphasis on avoiding disapproved and forbidden acts (taboos) is typical of traditional societies but does not mean that doing good is not also emphasized and ritualized. All Muslims know they will eventually go to Paradise, but those who have sinned will suffer some punishment first. This punishment gives a good reason for not sinning, and final redemption brings the relief of mercy to the guilty.
Islam doesn't set up an ideal impossible to attain in this world. Unlike some other religions, preparation for the next world doesn't exclude the notion of happiness in this one in the shape of material welfare, and one doesn't have to be superhuman to be righteous. Islam doesn't try to suppress natural tendencies but to moderate and regulate them. For example, charity is a virtue, but no one has to seek poverty to gain salvation. Self-restraint is recommended in dealing with someone who has wronged you, but it is acceptable to retaliate in just measure. It is better to forgive, but not required. There is no monastic renunciation and self-abnegation in Islam, and celibacy is not admired.

Some standards of right and wrong differ from Western ones. Bribery is acceptable (but theft is not). According to informants from several countries, one always bribes the examiner when getting a driver's license, even though one's score might be perfect. (Teachers should warn students that this is not done in America.) One bribes a policeman to stay out of trouble after a car accident, and if a person is thrown in jail, money and connections are almost the only way out. In the business world, receiving money for services to be rendered is seen as a form of commission and not corruption (Muna 1980:76-77).

The Koran stresses chastity, guarding trusts and covenants, honest testimony, no cheating, kindness and gratitude towards parents, kindness to others, worship, perseverance, modesty, forgiveness, and patience. These goals do not seem to be very different from those valued in American society.
Islamic Sects

Western tradition looks on Islam as a monolithic structure, but actually there are many sects within Islam, with major clusters in various countries. Sunni Muslims are the major sect in the Arabian Peninsula. They are the followers of the original caliphs (successors of Mohammed). As different schools of Koranic interpretation developed, new sects appeared. The most important of these are the Shi'as who claim that Ali, the son-in-law of Mohammed, should have been the first caliph and that only his direct male descendants were rightful heirs to the caliphate. They believe in a sacred mother (Fatima) of a sacred son (Husayn) who was martyred, which is a familiar theme to Christians. Today Shi'as are the majority in Iran and numerous in the Fertile Crescent. Sufis are another, more recent sect that promotes spirituality and ascetism. The Druze are descendants of Muslim Arabs who in the eleventh century seceded from the main body of Islam. They live mostly in the mountains of Southern Lebanon and are known for having secret rituals and a reputation for fierceness. They do not consider themselves Arabs (Patai 1976:44). Other sects are Ismailis, who have a revolutionary character and are found in Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan; Zaidis (in Yemen); Assassins (users of hashish); Alawites of Syria; Sanusis in Libya; and Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia. It is not the purpose of this study to describe the differences between different sects, so suffice it to say that most of these sectarian divisions are based on disputes about who the rightful Iman (religious authority) was at any given time, and whether that person was divine. Some sects have become secular, political movements as well as religious forces.
(Gulick 1976:164-171).

Male/Female Relationships

An important theme in understanding Arab behavior is the relationship between men and women. Certainly to Westerners this is the most talked-about and misunderstood aspect of Arab culture. Fanon, in A Dying Colonialism (1967), suggests that the idea of the "oppressed Arab woman" has been exploited to increase the gulf between "civilized Westerners" and "backward Arabs." Arab males are accused of being heartless tyrants who lock up their wives and daughters, as opposed to Westerners who see themselves as chivalrous champions of female rights. One might ask why Western women should be used as the standard. Long before Western women considered themselves as a group, let alone a group deprived of their rights, the Islamic woman had begun her emancipation. While the Christian church was still debating the existence of a woman's soul, women in the Islamic world knew they had one. Fourteen hundred years ago Islamic women had the right to run their own businesses and to be educated and to keep their financial autonomy after marriage. The position of Arab women rose and fell many times during the history of the Middle East. Now, the Arab woman knows "that she must go at her own pace, on her own terms and within the finite reality of her own culture in its particular historic moment" (al-Hegelan 1980:7).

A recent event has reinforced the Western view of male/female relationships in the Arab world. In 1980 a British film called "Death of a Princess" dramatized the execution of a Saudi Arabian princess and her
lover for committing adultery. The event had actually taken place in 1977, when the Princess Misha'il, bored with her elderly husband, had a flamboyant romance with Khalid Muhalhal, the nephew of the Saudi envoy to Lebanon. The couple tried to elope, were caught, and were tried and sentenced in a court of law according to Islamic justice. When the television special was broadcast a few years later, the ruling family of Saudi Arabia was outraged that a personal, shameful family tragedy and infraction of religious law was publicized that way. This ancient law of the tribe places the purity of the woman at the heart of the family, and for a married woman, especially one of royal blood, to shame her family in front of the world was too much to bear. Private family things should not be made public. Not only had the family been disgraced by the original transgression, but then a British filmmaker reexposed that dishonor with a fictionalized dramatic account and brought additional shame to the House of Sa'ud (Lacey 1982:458-459).

Women's Honor

In reality, the strict seclusion of women in a male-dominated society is not universally practiced in Arab countries. Even in countries like Saudi Arabia where women are segregated and veiled, they are not helpless slaves. They have important roles within the extended family, and these families have such large political, social, economic and cultural functions that being subordinated in them does not have the same meaning it would have in Western industrialized societies. As in most cultures, the work of maintaining community social relations falls on women, and they are mainly the ones who give help to others in time
of need, who store family genealogies and community histories, and who keep labor migrants (to Turkey, Kawait, etc.) attached to the homeland. If Arab women were truly the secluded, passive, domesticated beings presented in Western literature, it would be hard to explain their successful participation in national liberation struggles (e.g., in Algeria and Palestine) (Sayigh 1981:268-274).

It is true that women in Arab countries are much more protected and restricted than women in the United States. There are large differences in acceptable behavior in different subcultures. The coeducational schools and Western dress of Lebanon are in sharp contrast to the isolation and veiling found in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States. In Saudi Arabia a woman doesn't go out of the house or even into the presence of her male cousins without a chaperone and a veil. Behind these restrictions are basic assumptions about honor and shame, women's enormous sexual appetite and inferior moral sense, and the belief that the attraction between men and women is so intense that it would be impossible for them to be alone together without succumbing to temptation (Berger 1962:99-105). Hence women must be protected from any contact with men other than their fathers, brothers, uncles, or husbands. A woman's reputation is so fragile that she must constantly be on guard, and if she brings shame to her family, she may well be killed. A girl who becomes pregnant outside of marriage (an unlikely event, given the restrictions on her behavior) ruins not only the reputation of her family but that of the entire village. An interesting aspect is that an adulterous woman disgraces her father's line even more than affronting her husband, in contrast to the Western view.
The honor of the family can be lost through a woman's single illicit act (or even the suspicion of such an act), and may take generations to restore. A man's actions independent of a woman's actions may bring about loss of honor to the woman's family, even though the woman is completely innocent of any wrong-doing. A Saudi woman informant described her consternation when a male American teacher put his arm around her and patted her on the shoulder for a job well done. To her this was an extremely intimate gesture coming from a stranger, and consequently it was very threatening to her sense of propriety and her husband's honor.

Women's Rights

These restrictions on women are meant to preserve the family unit, which is extremely important in the Middle East as a source of security, help in time of need, economic survival, and social control. The restrictions may seem demeaning to Western women, but they have a function in Arab society. In the first place, an Arab woman will never have to bear the total economic responsibility for herself and her children. Unlike divorced or widowed women in America, she won't have to eke out an existence with a low-paying job, nor will she have to leave her children with inadequate childcare. In the Arab world, a husband, father, brother or uncle will always care for a woman relative in need, and if a wife is mistreated by her husband, she does have the choice of returning to her father's home. If she is divorced, it is possible for her to remarry (although not very likely).

Women in most Arab countries have no direct military or political
responsibility. They can't vote, but in Saudi Arabia men don't vote either.

An Arab woman doesn't have to take the emotional risks of dating and possibly being rejected as part of the search for a husband. The people who care for her will arrange a suitable marriage for her without involving her in the agreements. Marriage is an arrangement between families, not individuals, and surprisingly it seems to work very well. Forced marriages are prohibited by the Koran, but in actuality most women feel pressure from their families to accept the choice made for them. It is hard for Westerners to believe that these marriages are happy, but the mutual respect and caring between most of the couples I met were obvious, and both parents are very loving towards their children.

A woman is respected for her role as a mother and is protected from danger and insult. After the birth of a son, she will be called "Mother of Khalid" instead of her own name, and this is a title of honor.

The Koran gives women specific economic rights. They are to receive a portion of any inheritance at a rate of one-half of what a male receives. When one takes into account that they are not responsible for the support of their children or the household and that the money is theirs and theirs alone, the half portion does not seem so unfair. A woman has the right to buy and sell property, to hold a job, and to be involved in trade or commerce without the influence or permission of husband, father or male guardian. (This is not necessarily practiced in the more conservative states.)
Polygamy, which was common before the time of Mohammed, was not abolished by him but was limited to no more than four wives and fewer than that unless a husband could treat all equally. This regulation may have avoided a major social upheaval which might have followed the total elimination of polygamy. Wives would have had to be returned to their fathers' homes with attendant problems of recovering the dowry and legitimization of children. (This interpretation is consistent with what we know of early Islam, which usually didn't demand major changes in lifestyle on the part of new converts or conquered peoples, and which is probably one of the main reasons for its wide acceptance.)

Today probably less than 10% of marriages in most areas are polygamous, and most of those involve only two wives (Patai 1962:92-94).

Divorce by unilateral repudiation is still a right of the husband to exercise as he pleases without explanation or justification, but it is not a common practice. Under certain circumstances a woman can choose to return to her father's home, but remarriage during the original husband's life is not possible unless a divorce has taken place.

Men and women in the early Islamic state supposedly had complementary rights and status, but as the conquerors subjected and absorbed other cultures, the position of women was not improved. "One could interpret the history of women in Islam as one long struggle on their part to maintain the rights enunciated by Mohammed in the face of a series of traditions hostile to women's rights in the various Mediterranean countries conquered by the Moslems" (Boulding 1976:386).

Today, in those countries that have the Shari'ah (the body of holy law) as the basis of their legal system, women have few if any rights.
These countries are Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Yemen Arab Republic, and Libya. In those countries with a combination of the Shari'ah and secular law, political and legal affairs seem to be governed by Western-type civil laws while family and personal matters are guided by the ritual and religious observances laid down by the Shari'ah. There is great variation and constant change in the way the laws are interpreted and enforced (Gerner-Adams 1959:324-353).

Because of the taboos about speaking of one's female relatives, I was not able to elicit much information from male students about their attitudes towards women. The general impression was that Arab women are to be honored and respected, and the man's job was to protect them.

Consequences in the Classroom

An Arab does not like to be asked his mother's name, and he will be upset about filling out that information on a form. If a teacher does a drill about "What is your name? What is your mother's name? How old is she?" it would be wise to forewarn the students that personal questions aren't really being asked and that they can make up nonsense answers. The students will run into the same problem when they open a checking account and are asked for their mother's maiden name, so the reason for this should be explained. (Also, the concept of "maiden name" is confusing to Arabs since women don't assume the husband's name at marriage.)

This sense of privacy about women's names may be carried to extremes that cause problems for administrators. A Saudi woman waiting for a prescription in a hospital might give a fictitious name so
that when the medicine is ready, her real name wouldn't be called out loud. Imagine the complications if all the women in the waiting room did the same! Arab women will probably be very embarrassed if their names are called out in the hall at school.

One should never comment on the attractiveness of any Arab man's female relatives. He won't feel that is a compliment but rather will be offended and angry. Since one's family honor depends on the unsullied reputation of female relatives, any contact—even a verbal one from another woman—may be taken as an insult.

Probably most of the Arab women students in ESL classes are the wives or sisters of other students. If one considers the problems that re-entry American women have returning to school, one could multiply that by 100 to get an idea of an Arab woman's problems. Her first obligation is always to her husband and children. Few Arab men are willing to help with housework or cooking, although they do accompany their wives shopping, probably mostly out of a desire to chaperone and protect them. If a woman has children, there is no way she would leave them with strangers, so pregnancy may well be the end of her schooling in the United States and probably forever.

While education for women is gaining favor in the Middle East, the main purpose is to make women better wives and mothers, not to prepare them for careers. (That was the goal for many women in American colleges in the 1950's.) There are exceptions, of course, but for the most part only the fields of teaching and nursing (always the traditional roles for women) are open to Arab women.

A young wife may experience conflict if she is a better student
than her husband. Since male-female competition in the Middle East is non-existent, she will probably not want to speak up in class but will know the answer when called upon. Probably it would be kinder not to put her in a position that makes her outshine her husband.

So how should a teacher deal with a bright, eager young Arab woman who is straining at the restrictions placed on her by her family and heritage? It would be unkind to encourage rebellion since she really is dependent on the emotional and economic support of her husband. While a Saudi woman may have a fortune in jewels, she does not have her own passport, she cannot drive a car, she can't go freely from one city to another, and she can't get an airline ticket without a relative accompanying her. She really doesn't have any choices outside of what her husband and family permit.

Education in the Arab World

The Middle East is the home of some of the oldest literature cultures. When the Arab Islamic Empire was at its peak, the great works of Greek, Roman, Indian and other known civilizations of that time were translated into Arabic. Centers for research and translation were established at Baghdad, and by the end of the Eighth Century all main cities in the Arab Empire had book stores. Al-Azhar, the first university in the world, was established in Cairo in the Tenth Century and still exists (Massialas and Jarrar 1983:9).

In spite of this rich intellectual heritage, one of the biggest problems facing Arab countries today is the high rate of illiteracy among their populations. Yet, considering that a generation ago almost
everyone in the Gulf States was illiterate, the current (1983) literacy rate of 79.1% for Bahrain is incredible, and other countries also show an impressive increase. Illiteracy in the Arab states in general has declined from 81.1% in 1960 to 73% in 1970. In 1979 Jordan had a 59% literacy rate, Kuwait had 60%, and Lebanon had 88% (Massialas and Jarrar 1983:7). Education in Jordan, for instance, is compulsory for both sexes through the ninth grade, and is free at all levels through university. Some interesting statistics are that the U.S. 1979 expenditures for education were 6.7% of the entire governmental expenditures, while Iraq spent 13.5% and Saudi Arabia spent 31.1% (UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1983, Table 4.1). While the literacy rate does not yet equal that of Europe and North America, the importance of education is realized and the various countries are moving rapidly toward full literacy.

Teaching Methods and Curriculum

The goals of universities in the Arab World are to improve the quality of higher education, to train qualified personnel, and to further the social, cultural and economic development of the society. Many Middle Eastern colleges are based on the Western model, but there is a shortage of qualified administrators and teachers. In most cases the Ministry of Education makes all curriculum decisions. There is no input on curriculum design from teachers, students, administrators or lay people. There is little diversity between systems, and there is no variation in curriculum for urban or rural areas. Emphasis is on Islamic studies and Arabic, followed by mathematics, science and foreign
languages.

Teaching methods are still based on European models, but in England and France the methods have changed, while in the many Arab countries emulating European methods, they have not. In countries that gained independence in the 1950's and 1960's (Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco), there has been an attempt to replace foreign teachers instructing in French or Spanish with local teachers instructing in Arabic. The role of the teacher is that of an absolute ruler in control of moral and intellectual truth. Students are constantly trying to guess what the teacher wants them to say, and the right answer is more important than exploring alternatives. The objective is the acquisition of a selected, closed system of knowledge, and there is no emphasis on analysis, synthesis, application or evaluation.

There is a great emphasis on exams in Arab education. The pressure to pass is enormous and leads to a great deal of cheating. Students concentrate on memorization and imitation, not independent research and creative thinking. This leads to an unquestioning reliance on printed materials and a resistance to experiment and change (Badr 1978:2, 11-12).

Since an examination is required to move to another stage of education, letters of recommendation, personal teacher evaluations, statements of the student's career objectives and similar documents have no effect on promotion. The exams focus on a wide range of subjects, not just on core subjects in the student's intended program of studies. The memorization of government-approved textbooks appears to be the best way to pass the national exams (Massialas and Jarrar 1983:99).
Contrasts between American and Arab Schools

There are some differences between methods of education in the United States and in the Middle East which are important for understanding the behavior of Arab students.

The Koranic schools of the past depended entirely on rote memorization. Spontaneity, improvisation, or questioning traditional authority were simply not acceptable, and intellectual curiosity was discouraged at an early age. Submission to authority was emphasized. These attitudes, if not the same practices, are still found in many current educational systems in the Arab world.

The usual classroom technique, at least in the lower grades, is for a teacher to ask a question and the students to respond in a set phrase. For instance, the following lesson was described by John Laffin (1975: 75-76) who visited classes in a refugee camp in Southern Lebanon.

Teacher: From what part of England did William Wordsworth come?
Boys: (shouting together) William Wordsworth came from the Lake District!

Teacher: What did William Wordsworth write about?
Boys: William Wordsworth wrote about nature!

Teacher: Which kind of people did William Wordsworth like most of all?
Boys: William Wordsworth liked the common people most of all!

(Laffin, p. 75)

(You get the idea.) Later Laffin asked if he could talk to the boys and ask some questions. He didn't realize how much embarrassment he caused by asking questions the boys weren't prepared to answer. They
were also bewildered because he was supposed to be the expert, so why was he asking them?

This rote memorization is still a part of higher education in many parts of the Middle East. Students may even be asked to recite page 43, even if the first word is part of the last sentence on the previous page. "Knowledge" often means literally knowing the words of a text and not necessarily understanding its meaning. Exams can be a literal regurgitation of the textbook, word for word. Since memorization is an important part of learning a language, perhaps this aspect of Arab education is more of a help than a hinderance in ESL classes, but it will certainly cause problems in later history, humanities or political science courses. These students need to be encouraged to analyze subjects rather than to unquestioningly memorize facts, and to transfer this information to new situations. Some of them may have gone to a school in which they followed absolutely strict rules about when to stand up, when to fold their arms, when to start writing, and how to respond to questions from the teacher. They may flounder for awhile in a relaxed American school. If you don't give specific assignments and due dates, they may procrastinate about doing the work.

Educational Values

To summarize, the following attitudes fostered by Arab educational methods are in conflict with the goals of American education:

1. Passive acceptance of ideas is preferred to active criticism.
2. Discovering knowledge is viewed as beyond the power of
students and is, in any case, none of their business.

3. Recall is the highest form of intellectual achievement, and collection of unrelated "facts" is the goal of education.

4. The voice of authority is to be trusted more than independent judgment.

5. One's own ideas and those of one's classmates are inconsequential.

6. Feelings are irrelevant in education.

7. There is always a single, unambiguous Right Answer to a question (Badr 1978:10-11).

Arab Students in the American Classroom

In many ways, Arab students can be a joy to teachers. Male students in particular are often spontaneous, exuberant, uninhibited and self-assured. They are willing to make grammatical mistakes and don't hold back in conversation, so that greater communication takes place than with more hesitant and careful students.

Self-assurance and confidence can mean that the students don't accept criticism well. They may not admit it when they don't know the answer. They may tend to dominate the conversation. Since listening without speaking or contributing orally may be interpreted by Arabs as disinterest or ignorance, they may interrupt and ask inappropriate questions in the classroom, or may talk during the lecture. The "togetherness" of the extended family emphasizes conversation as a valued thing, and they want to be sure you know they are participating.

According to Meinhoff and Meinhoff (1976), Gulf Arabs speak a
language variation which they consider not to have a grammar. Their colloquial dialect is never studied or analyzed in school, but it is the language that the student would use with family, friends, servants, and other students. Since grammatical distinctions aren't important in that dialect, the student may think the same thing about spoken English, and may wonder why the teacher is trying to teach him formal language which he thinks he probably won't use in everyday life.

Arab students are not particularly good at making inferences and drawing conclusions from written material, since they have never been asked to do that before. They have difficulty transferring knowledge from one specific or general experience to similar cases. They expect teachers to dictate information and then they will regurgitate it. They may not read the assigned material because they expect the teacher to go over it in class. Sometimes they don't read the instructions, or they don't bother reading all the way through and try to guess at the answers (Meinhoff and Meinhoff 1976:passim).

There are intense social and economic pressures on students to do well. They may feel compelled to help a friend or relative and not perceive it to be cheating.

Since family loyalties will take precedence over truthfulness, a teacher can't expect a student to report or admit his cousin's cheating. A lie is not considered wrong in itself; it is acceptable if it works and saves face. Therefore, teachers should be especially careful about challenging a student's veracity and forcing him into a corner. If he is humiliated in front of the class, the blow to his ego may be devastating.

The easy give-and-take of American classrooms is a new experience
to Arab students. They are shocked to see an untidy American student slouching in his seat, perhaps with a bare and dirty foot propped on another chair or desk, while he argues with a teacher whom he calls by his first name. This particular scene is doubly shocking to an Arab because it is considered impolite to present the soles of one's feet, with or without shoes, to another person.

Given the formality of the Middle Eastern classroom and the separation of the sexes, imagine the consternation when an American male teacher hugs a former woman student who drops in to say hello!

In many Arab countries, a student would not be expected to knock on the door of a teacher's office before entering. However, he might knock on the classroom door before entering when arriving late! This behavior is a cause of irritation to American teachers, who need to be aware that part of the reason might be for the protection of women who should not be alone with a man behind a locked door (Bagnole 1977:19).

If one takes into account the fact that many students come from homes where one or both parents may be illiterate, the lack of good study habits and chronic unpreparedness are more understandable.

Arabic Language and Communication Styles

Arabic is a source of pride for Arabs, who consider it the most beautiful, logical and eloquent language there is. Literary Arabic is based on the Koran, which is thought to be the final authority on grammatical and idiomatic questions as well as literary style. Colloquial Arabic is different in each country and in fact, a person from a North
African country may not be able to communicate verbally with a person from Syria. In spite of these differences, the shared language creates and maintains a mythical sense of unity and a connection with the glorious Arab past.

There are no terms for many modern things in classical Arabic, so old words are used to denote new meanings which may or may not be shared by readers and other writers.

Influence of Language on Psychology of the Arabs

According to Shouby (1970:688-703), literate Arabs demonstrate the effect of the influence of language on their behavior and attitudes by:

1. General vagueness of thought. The general meaning of an idea is considered to be enough. Terms are not well-defined, and there is no sense of urgency about making meanings unequivocal. Memorized word patterns are used in various arrangements, and the rigid structure of the language restricts the freedom of the Arab thinker.

2. Overemphasis on linguistic signs such as puns and rhymes at the expense of meaning.

3. Stereotyped emotional responses. The musicality of the language creates emotional effects which are contagious. Thus an Arab may appear excited, angry or affectionate when he is not.

4. Overassertion and exaggeration. Arab poetry is full of minute descriptions of detail with numerous repetitions of the same ideas in different words. In speaking, a lack of emphasis or exaggeration will
make other Arabs think the speaker means the opposite, so overassertion is the rule.

5. The two levels of life—the ideal and the real—are mixed up. According to Shouby, most Arabs won't notice the contradiction between the ideal self and the real self, or what is said and what is intended. The intention is enough.

Patai, in *The Arab Mind* (1976), describes the difference in the way that Arabs in general perceive the relationship between ideas, words and reality.

In attempting to recognize correlations between various aspects of the Arab personality, it is helpful to examine the discrepancy that exists among the Arabs among the three planes of existence that can be distinguished in each individual and group. All of us engage constantly in action. Our actions express our intentions, but, at the same time, are influenced by external factors, such as the control the social and physical environment has over us. The world of actions and activity is the first plane of our existence. The second is that of verbal utterance. We often express verbally intentions that we cannot carry out because of external impediments. In this respect, verbal expression corresponds more closely to intentions than actions. But even in words, we do not express all of our intentions. We refrain from uttering certain things because of the realities of the environment in which we live. The third plane is that of the intentions themselves, that is, of the thoughts we entertain, the wishes we have, the ideas we believe in, and so on. The world of the mind, as this plane can be called, is the one most independent of the limited influences of the environment. Yet, while thoughts cannot be censored, thought is to a considerable degree related to reality. A normal person will not entertain thoughts which are in overt conflict with reality. He may engage in "wishful thinking," or even "day dreaming," but he will always be aware of the difference between such idle thoughts and reality.

As to the control of the reality factor over ideas and words, there are unquestionably significant differences between individuals and groups. In a pragmatically oriented community, the modal personality
is strongly influenced by reality and his verbal expression even more so. At the other end of the scale we find societies where reality does not exercise a strong degree of influence on thinking and speech. Western peoples stand at one end of the scale, the Arabs near the other end. In the Arab world, thought and verbal expression can be relatively uncorrelated with what the circumstances actually allow.

Divergence between facts and ideas or words can be called either lying or poetic sensibility. The Arabic language has been called "associative" rather than "logical and analytical." Words seem more important than facts. How something is said seems to be more important than what is said. Speeches are full of quotations from poems, anecdotes, parables, puns and gossip. They tend to be lengthy and flowery. Dialects are full of allusions and approximations, and ideas are often expressed in slightly different ways two or three times to make them clearly understood. In written Arabic (as opposed to the spoken language), there are extremely rigid grammatical and formal rules which mean that thoughts have to be accommodated to the linguistic structure rather than using linguistic tools to convey ideas (Shouby 1970:688-703).

Speech Styles

International tensions might be eased and business transacted more happily if both Americans and Arabs were more aware of the differences in their attitudes towards speech styles. For instance, eloquence and rhetoric are highly appreciated in the Middle East. The American tendency is to be brief and to the point, and that sounds very abrupt and even hostile to the Arabs. Americans tend to say, "Hello, how are
you?" and then get immediately to another subject. Arabs like an extended and gracious greeting ritual and may run through elaborate phrases several times before getting down to business. References to God and flowery phrases are sprinkled throughout a conversation, which is sometimes disconcerting to practical, secular Americans who are used to a brief, logical, linear line of thought.

Another aspect of Arab personality that may be manifested in the classroom is a tendency to make elaborate plans for study that never materialize, or a willingness to say whatever the other person wants to hear. This latter practice is referred to as "never-say-no-ism" by Bagnole (1977:17). Trying to pin down the time for an appointment may go like this:

"May I come visit you?" (Westerner)
"Yes." (Arab)
"In the afternoon?"
"Yes, if you like."
"Or is the evening better?"
"Yes, the evening is fine."
"Maybe you would prefer to come and see me?"
"Yes. That's better."

It is confusing and annoying to Westerners to discover the Arabs' tendency to say "yes" when they mean "no" or "maybe." For example, an Arab may reply to an invitation to visit in the affirmative because he doesn't want to hurt your feelings, although he has no intention of coming. In contrast, an American who didn't want to go would probably decline the invitation outright, using some excuse to spare the feelings of the host. Or he might say "Maybe" or "I'll try to make it but don't count on me." The Arab doesn't see his failure to show up at the appointed time as a problem because apparently Allah willed that he be
somewhere else at that time.

Sometimes an unenthusiastic "yes" really means "no." Or, an unemphatic refusal may be a request for a more emphatic repetition of the invitation. What seems like a firm assertion to Americans may seem weak or doubtful to Arabs, and statements which seem to Arabs to be mere statements of fact may seem to be extreme or even violent assertions to Americans (Prothro 1955:711-712).

A student who has already decided on a negative response, but who avoids saying so, may hope that you will eventually withdraw your request. The only way around this dilemma is to show that a delay in responding or acting will have negative consequences for the student. This tendency to provide noncommittal responses to questions that seem important to the teacher (and which in his own culture would get a committed verbal response) must be recognized as a cultural pattern of politeness and not a deliberate intention to infuriate (Bagnole 1977:17-18). Perhaps a discussion of this difference of perception would be helpful to both teachers and students.

One way of asking a question in Arabic (or in English) is to simply change the inflection at the end of the sentence without changing the word order. When an Arab says "You will get me a cup of coffee?" that is a polite request to him, but it may sound like an order to an American who will feel offended by the presumption. I know of one young man from Lebanon who says he has lost two American girl friends because of his refusal to learn to say "Please." The girls tend to say, "Get your own damn coffee!" and stamp off. Masculine pride,
coupled with an adamant refusal to change an Arabic way of speaking, are making interpersonal problems for this young man.

American teachers may be astounded by emotional outbursts from Arab students. Dowshah is a ritual pantomime of violence in which "letting off steam" through curses and threats relieves tension. Often the audience encourages the show and it becomes a social occasion. Anger is seen as an "outside affliction" rather than "lack of control" (Atiya 1982:xvi-xvii).

Arabs tend to think that people who do not show their feelings are dangerous, dishonest and inanimate. Americans may be taken aback at the outbursts of some Arabs. Verbal threats are meant to be intimidating and a way to avoid putting words into action. In general, though, Arabs seem to make a genuine attempt to protect the feelings and dignity of others.

Americans pride themselves on their frankness and outspokenness. In the United States, one can sometimes get oneself out of trouble by confessing one's error early in the game. Then others tend to think "What an honest fellow. He just made a human error, and since he owned up to it, he is O.K." An Arab would feel that he has lost face by admitting the error, and would do everything possible to escape responsibility or to minimize the damage. For example, in 1973, President Nasser of Egypt sent a glowing and optimistic diplomatic message to King Hussein of Jordan after the Israeli Air Force had destroyed practically all of the combat planes of the United Arab Republic. Nasser's claims of victory were an amazing example of wishful thinking, revision of facts, face-saving denials, and rhetorical hoopla that
actually misled the Jordanians (Patai 1976:102-104).

**Linguistic Problems**

It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze the linguistic problems of Arabic speakers trying to learn the English language, but a few comments are in order.

There is no /p/, /v/, or /g/ in Arabic. /b/ is usually substituted for /p/ so the students say /barti/ for "party" and /bal/ for "Paul.

Words ending in English in /η/ are sometimes over-pronounced, so the word "sing" may be pronounced /siηg/ or /sink/. This mispronunciation can carry over into the writing of English. In Kuwait there is a store selling household goods which has a sign above the door reading "STORE OF HOME THINKS" (Meinhoff and Meinhoff 1976:27-28).

Vowels are omitted in written Arabic, so students have to learn a new concept. "Very" and "too" are the same word in Arabic, and there are difficulties in teaching concepts of time and time markers such as "already" and "yet." A list of helpful readings is included in Appendix B for those teachers who want to explore these problems in more depth.

The tenses of verbs in Arabic do not correspond to those in English and other Indo-European languages. The imperfect form can stand for the present, future and past, while the perfect can mean pluperfect, future and present participle! Thus we can see that for people speaking a language in which the verb has these semantic features, time cannot have the same ordered, definite and sequential connotation that it has for speakers of English, and learning to use English can present special problems (Patai 1976:65-68).
There are two English words that sound like Arabic obscenities: **kiss** and **zipper**.

**The Concept of Time**

An understanding of the Arab conception of time is important for coping successfully with Arab students. The three words that are significant for understanding the differences in viewpoint between Arabs and Americans are **bukra**, **ma'alesh**, and **in shal'allah** (Bagnole 1977: 13-16).

**Bukra** literally means "tomorrow," but should not be interpreted to mean sometime in the next 24 hours. It refers to an indefinite time in the future. This seems evasive to Westerners, but from an Arab point of view, since only God knows the future, it would be impertinent to be too precise about it. If a certain action is not seen as urgent by the **performer**, then he may see no problem in doing it later, today, tomorrow, or sometime in the more distant future. A homework lesson may not be handed in on time, and when asked, the student may have no acceptable excuse but will promise to hand it in "tomorrow." Or, he may hand in all his assignments at the end of the semester and feel that he has fulfilled the requirements of the course. (Such late assignments may often be copies and of little value to either the student or the teacher.) Thus **bukra** may mean "tomorrow at the earliest" or "tomorrow if possible." **Ba'd bukra** means "after tomorrow" and **bukra ba'd bukra** means "within the next couple of days." Both of these phrases demonstrate greater remoteness from the present and greater uncertainty. A
teacher would be wise to stick very precisely to his own class schedules and deadlines and to make the consequences of lateness known. One teacher solved the problem of tardiness to class by having a quiz in the first five minutes of every class period.

Ma'alesh can be translated as "It's not important" or "Never mind." A Westerner who is told that a delay or missed deadline or error is not important may not share that view. The Arab student in responding this way is acting in accordance with his own customs although he is not fullfilling the teacher's expectations.

The third term, In sha'allah, has already been described as both an expression of religious belief and as a future tense marker. It is often a "yes" with a safety valve which indicates the possibility of a negative outcome.

In the Middle East, time is measured by purposeful divisions of the day, sunrise and sunset, not by what seems to Arabs as inconsequential units like minutes or hours. Why set limits to the present? Since time cannot be accumulated or budgeted, why hurry? A meeting set for three o'clock may not get started until five o'clock, or perhaps the person won't show up until the next day.

The system of naming times is different. For Arab students, sunset is 12 o'clock. Midnight and noon are 6 o'clock. The eve of Friday is Thursday night. No wonder appointments are missed!

In the West, work hours are posted, holidays are announced far in advance and are observed as planned, stores and banks almost always follow their scheduled hours, the school year begins and ends according to a plan, and people are expected to be punctual. We are urged to
schedule events ahead of time, to "buy early," "make reservations," etc., all in the anticipation of avoiding problems and minimizing delays. Imagine our frustration if we arrived at the university for the beginning of classes and discovered that the date for opening had just been postponed for a month, which has happened in Libya. We are irritated if a single class is unexpectedly cancelled. If we show up at the hairdressers for a 2 o'clock appointment, we don't like to wait until 2:45. Guests who arrive an hour late for dinner without telephoning an excuse are considered impolite. In the Arab world such delays and changes of schedule occur frequently and consequently are accepted philosophically.

Movies are frequently late in starting. School schedules are often disrupted for unexpected holidays, visits from dignitaries, or political disturbances. With the lack of telephones, friends "drop in" on one another without notice. Popular retail goods are sold out because no one thought to reorder in time. Post offices, dry cleaning establishments and stores may not have regular hours. Things are done on the spur of the moment or as soon as possible--if convenient.

The use of time is seen differently. Westerners tend to see drinking coffee with a friend in a cafe as "doing nothing" or "killing time." An Arab would consider it "doing something." Time is a more flexible commodity and doesn't have to be "used" and accounted for in the way it does in the West.

Thus Arab students may delay in filling out applications (with disastrous results) because in their experience deadlines have never been enforced. Teachers will be doing a great service to emphasize
that in American colleges, deadlines do exist and the consequences of missing one can affect the rest of the student's academic career.

**Work**

Related to concepts of time is the Arab view of work. The Protestant work ethic which is so prevalent in our society does not exist in Arab culture. That is not to say that many people don't work hard at whatever needs to be done, but rather that the attitude towards work is different. For them, work is a means to a specific goal, not a goal in itself. Arabs don't see the point of keeping busy so as not to waste time, and would never complain that they are "too busy" to visit or play tennis or do whatever they claim is important to them.

Students may seem to look down on manual labor. The idea of painting one's own house or digging up a vegetable garden may seem incomprehensible to them (although many will work as waiters to support themselves while in this country). They may look for shortcuts in place of hard work and maximum effort to reach a desired goal. They may avoid planning, and then when emergencies come up, improvise solutions that may or may not be correct. They will expect that rules be bent for their special cases.

Work places in Arab countries are very relaxed. There are no strict rules about breaks, and frequent social interactions with co-workers or customers is the rule.
Family

Family loyalty is highly valued in Arab culture. Next to religion, respect for one's father and paternal uncle rates as one of the highest values. A man is expected to define the honor of his family and to extend help and support to its members, who deal with him reciprocally. Sometimes that means a lack of privacy and the ability to make one's own plans. If two brothers or cousins are on the same campus and the younger one is a better student, the older one will feel humiliated and the younger one will feel guilty. Their relationship can deteriorate to a point where they both fail in school. An illness or tragedy involving a close relative may make the student depressed or even feel guilty because he is not at home with his family to share the burden.

Friends

The Arab view of the meaning of friendship is different from the American view. Americans would probably mention the enjoyment of doing things together, or of sharing ideas and feelings. An Arab, on the other hand, would stress helpfulness in time of need. An Arab who needed help, support or solace would turn to a friend, while an American might choose not to bother his friends with his problems and instead might turn to a professional.

Americans are often competitive with their friends, while Arabs stress cooperation. One is not liked for his successes or personal
accomplishments, which might be a threat to the other person's ego.

An Arab will share his last cafeteria script with a friend and then go to a third person to borrow some for himself so that he doesn't embarrass his first friend. He will interrupt his studies to help his friend and will expect the same when he is in need.

Newly arrived foreign students may be delighted with the apparent friendliness and willingness to help demonstrated by Americans, but after awhile they are disappointed at the lack of depth in their relationships with American friends. They see a basic indifference demonstrated, and they feel that Americans avoid deep commitments or closeness. In Arab culture, friendship is rated just behind kinship in importance. In contrast, most Americans have many friends that they see on an irregular schedule. Americans do not appreciate invasions of privacy and want friends to call before dropping in to visit. Arguments are not well tolerated, and if a difference in opinion develops, usually the subject is avoided by mutual agreement. Friends become categorized as friends for partying with, friends for playing tennis with, friends for talking politics with, and neighbors (Stewart 1972: 54-55). In contrast, the Arab sees a friend as a friend forever, through arguments and times of trouble. After interpreting the initial friendliness of a first meeting with an American as a promise of future intimacy, the student finds it hard to understand that he is just one of many. Long periods of no contact at all lead him to think he is disliked. In the United States a male Arab student may develop friendships among his female fellow students, not only because the interaction is a new experience, but also because he may not be able to
find any American male friends willing to assume the responsibilities of close friendship that he requires (Parker 1976:7).

Hospitality

One of the great virtues of Arabs is their hospitality, a legacy from their Bedouin past when a wandering stranger was always treated as an honored guest whom the host must protect even at the risk of his own life. Even extreme poverty does not excuse a man from fulfilling the duty of hospitality by feeding and sheltering a guest for three days (Patai 1976:84–88). An Arab will stop whatever he is doing to make you, his guest, feel welcome. You will be asked why you haven't come sooner or more often, which may make you feel uncomfortable and guilty but which is meant to show how much they care about you. You will be offered coffee which you should accept with your right hand with murmurs about not putting them out. (Arabs think Americans are awfully casual about washing their hands before they eat. The left hand is never used to offer or accept food, since that is the traditional toileting hand. That is why a thief's right hand is cut off after the third offense; he will never be able to dip into the common dish again. Students from the Middle East soon discover that this prohibition is meaningless to Americans, but you would probably avoid making your hosts uncomfortable if you accept a cup of coffee or dip a potato chip with your right hand.)

One doesn't take food or a bottle of wine when invited to an Arab home because they see it as a criticism of their hospitality. They will take pride in presenting many attractive and delicious dishes to their
guests and will urge you to take many helpings. Also, wine is for-
bidden to Muslims.

If you are a guest in an Arab home, you will find that your host will urge you to stay when you are ready to leave. An Arab host will never terminate the conversation or suggest that it is time for you to go. When you really convince your Arab friends that you are going, they will walk you to the door and probably even out to your car. They will make you feel that you are an important and treasured person.

If you entertain Arab students, you may want to keep the following things in mind. Since it is their tradition to refuse food three times before accepting it, they may go hungry when the American hostess doesn't get around to offering food a second time, assuming that the guests will either help themselves or ask if they want something.

In Arab countries, all entertaining is done in the front room and a guest never sees the more private parts of the house. You can imagine how surprising it is, then, when an Arab student is shown an entire house by a proud homeowner, even down to the bathrooms and garage!

Remember that Muslims don't eat pork or drink alcohol, so bacon, ham, and most sausage are forbidden. Read the labels on cans so that you don't inadvertently serve pork. Bean dip, for instance, has lard in it.

You might want to let your students know that hot dogs aren't made of dog meat; that Chinese food often contains pork; and that chicken a la king is chicken in a cream sauce and not a very special dish suitable for Allah the King.
Miscellaneous Arab Customs

The following comments defy categorization, but may be helpful in understanding the behavior of Arab students.

In Arab countries, a shopkeeper will try to take care of all the customers simultaneously. Each one is important and deserves full attention. There is no sense of taking people in the order in which they approached the counter. Transacting business is a social thing and can't be rushed. Similarly, teachers in the United States may become frazzled as several Arab students try to talk to them at once.

At theaters in the Middle East, the idea of an orderly queue is foreign. Everyone pushes towards the door. Sometimes there are fights, but a person who patiently waits in line might not get in.

Non-verbal behavior is an important part of any culture. Some gestures seem to have almost universal meanings, but others may be acceptable in one culture and obscene in another. When an Arab means "No," he moves his head upward and clicks his tongue. This can also indicate disbelief or surprise. A beckoning gesture that means "Come here" to us means "Goodbye" to Arabs, while holding up the right hand with the palm down, moving the fingers in a clawing motion (somewhat like our gesture for "Bye bye") means "Come here."

Arab men in their own countries hold hands and kiss each other on the cheek, but they soon learn to modify those behaviors in this country. A sign of respect is for one or both men to place the palms of their right hands on their chests. Pointing is a threatening gesture. Belching is a sign that one has enjoyed the meal (Barakat 1973:749-787).

A frequent description of Arab behavior is their disconcerting direct
gaze and their tendency to stand closer than Americans are comfortable
with. Avoiding eye contact and withdrawing may hurt their feelings.
(This description is found in almost every book on Arab customs but has
not been verified in my own experiences.)

Arabs are extremely generous with their time and belongings. Some-
times flamboyant generosity eats up the savings of an Arab college
student and then he has to explain to his sponsor why he is out of
funds. A teacher may feel uncomfortable at receiving an unsolicited
gift, which should be seen not as a bribe but as a manifestation of the
generosity inherent in the culture.
IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The information presented in this paper can be summarized by contrasting several categories of cultural assumptions and values held by most Americans with those held by most Arabs. The following chart is adapted from Hoopes and Ventura’s Intercultural Sourcebook (1979: 48-51) and from a handout from a TESOLI meeting based on Kluckhohn, Condon and Barnlund (no specific references given).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American</th>
<th>Arab</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic, striving, doing</td>
<td>Accepting, fatalistic, being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast, busy</td>
<td>Steady, rhythmic, non-compulsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on planning and</td>
<td>Emphasis on coping and final</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>procedures</td>
<td>goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual responsibility</td>
<td>Group or family responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and goals</td>
<td>and goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring, creating and</td>
<td>Accepting authority, learning by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>synthesizing information</td>
<td>rote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loosely defined roles</td>
<td>Ascribed roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of individual</td>
<td>Importance of family honor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High mobility</td>
<td>Low mobility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

63
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>American</strong></th>
<th><strong>Arab</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Relationships (continued)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality of persons</td>
<td>Hierarchical ranks, respect for authority, male dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informality and spontaneity</td>
<td>Formality and conformance to rules, propriety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible sex roles</td>
<td>Rigid sex roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes limited responsibility for group</td>
<td>Assumes unlimited responsibility for group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks own goals, self-expression</td>
<td>Seeks family or group goals, subordinates self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many casual friendships</td>
<td>Intense, long-lasting and exclusive friendships with a few people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Ascription, approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition seen as healthy</td>
<td>Competition seen as destructive, anti-social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>World View</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical approach</td>
<td>Subjective, relational approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World is knowable, controllable, to be used</td>
<td>World is mysterious and unknowable, uncontrollable, to be accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World is physical and mechanical</td>
<td>World is spiritual and organic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American World View (continued)</td>
<td>Arab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature is to be dominated by man</td>
<td>Man/nature harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlimited good</td>
<td>Limited good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change seen as positive</td>
<td>Change restricted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success, health, and material comfort important and expected</td>
<td>Some disease and material misery expected and accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of truth is relative, tentative</td>
<td>Nature of truth is definite, unchangeable, absolute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time measured in precise units</td>
<td>Time undifferentiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time seen as a limited resource</td>
<td>Time not limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time seen as lineal</td>
<td>Time seen as circular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future time orientation</td>
<td>Present time orientation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perception of Self**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American</th>
<th>Arab</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for change</td>
<td>Clearly defined roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible behavior, independence</td>
<td>Person is located in a social system with mutual dependence and obligation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity tied to achievements</td>
<td>Identity tied to roles, groups, family, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reliance important</td>
<td>Reliance on groups, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Perception of Self (continued)</td>
<td>Arab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth highly valued</td>
<td>Age highly valued as wise and experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social control by persuasion or guilt</td>
<td>Social control by possibility of public shame</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ESL teachers, as products of their own environments and culture and in spite of their cross-cultural knowledge and good intentions, may have absorbed some of the negative stereotypes of Arabs presented by the media and had them compounded by some of the misunderstandings of cultural differences described in this paper. Present political events should be seen in the framework of countries seeking self-determination and self-realization in their own style. Until recently, foreign domination prevented the growth of Arab states while exploiting their resources. Several Arab leaders helped the Allies in World War I and then didn't get to share in the honors and rewards as promised. For instance, in 1916, Sherif Hussain of Mecca helped the British defeat the Turks (this was the Arab Revolt) in return for promises of support for establishing an independent Arab state that would encompass most of what is today Syria, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and the Arabian Peninsula. Six months later in the secret Sykes-Picot agreement, Britain promised France the control of Libya and Syria while keeping Iran and some port cities in Palestine for herself, which was totally inconsistent with the promises to Hussain. Then the Balfour Agreement in 1917 guaranteed a national home for the Jews in Palestine, and that was a third contra-
dictory agreement. No wonder the Arabs felt betrayed! (Lenczowski 1962:55-97.)

Thus, after the War, European powers became self-imposed protectors, guardians, guides and rulers. Now the warnings about Communism come from the same sources that have been responsible for many Arab misfortunes. Most of these countries will no longer accept being pulled between the two armed camps of the U.S.S.R. and the United States, and they wish for self-determination and peace (Sayegh 1953). These students will be the leaders of their countries in the next few decades, and anything we can do to encourage mutual understanding will be to all nations' benefit.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Atiya, Nayra

Badr, Ahmed M.

Bagnole, John W.

Barakat, Robert A.

Berger, Morroe

Bock, Philip K., ed.
Boulding, Elise

Clark, Leon E.

Fanon, Franz

Gerner-Adams, Debbie J.

Gulick, John

al-Hegelan, Nouha

Hoopes, David and Paul Ventura, eds.
Hymes, Dell


Institute of International Education


Jabra, Jabra I.


Johnstone, Dr. T. M.


Lacey, Robert


Laffin, John


Lenczowski, George

Linton, Ralph (ed.)

Lutfiyya, Abdulla M. and Charles W. Churchill (eds.)

Lydon, Cindy Arkelyan

Massialis, Byron and Samer A. Jarrar

Meinhoff, Michael and Joan Meinhoff

Michalek, Laurence

Muna, Farid A.

Oberg, Kalervo
Parker, Orin D.


Patai, Raphael


Pearson, Robert P., ed.


Pincus, Cynthia


Porter, Richard E.


Prothro, E. Terry

Rathmell, George Wesley


Samovar, Larry A. and Richard E. Porter


Sayegh, Fayez A.

1953 Understanding the Arab Mind. Organization of Arab-Students in the United States. DS 215 S38.

Sayigh, Rosemary


Shaheen, Jack G.


Shaked, Joseph


Shouby, E.

1970 The Influence of the Arabic Language on the Psychology of the Arabs. In Readings in Arab Middle Eastern Societies
APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Twenty questionnaires were distributed to ESL teachers at San Francisco State University, and ten were returned. The most interesting and controversial responses are quoted below. It is clear that individual teachers have different attitudes towards and experiences with Arab students.

1. Do you find that you categorize Arab students according to the country or region of origin, and that there are very different interactions with each group? If so, please describe.

Teacher A: "Yes. Saudis seem the most arrogant, although Kuwaitis are pretty bad. Lebanese are either totally INTOLERABLE, or absolute dolls. Same for Jordanians and Syrians, despite their theoretical sophistication. I like Afghans."

Teacher B: "Yes. Jordanians are different from Saudis who are different from Lebanese who are different from Kuwaitis. Jordanians, as a whole, tend to seem more aggressive. Saudis seem more genial, as do Kuwaitis and Lebanese."

Teacher D: "Not really. I tend to assume that students from Kuwait and UAE are a little more sophisticated than students from Saudi Arabia, but this is not always born out in actual fact."

Teacher G: "The only country I have found different is Libya, and this is not due to the differences in culture, but rather to the tone set up by Khaddafi. Students from Libya seem to have a chip on their shoulder."

Teacher H: "Palestinians tend to categorize themselves by being so consistently politically outspoken both in oral and written work. Otherwise I don't seem to categorize."

Teacher J: "I have noticed the following national differences: extent of religious orthodoxy; familiarity with and understanding of Western cultural values; urbanization."

"No." (Three responses.)

2. Have you had any misunderstandings with Arab students because of cultural differences?

Teacher A: "Tons. The big problem is their rotten attitude toward homework--that it doesn't necessarily have to be done--and their total dishonesty (in our terms) in testing and homework."
Their elaborate cheating ring throughout the campus is truly impressive."

Teacher B: "Oh, yes. It's hard when you are a woman. I sense some disbelief of what I say, especially when it negates what the student wants. They agree with you on the surface and later show they aren't going to follow through."

Teacher F: "Yes, often an Arab student will be extremely aggressive if told 'no' - for instance when requesting entrance into a class that is already full."

Teacher H: "I'm not sure that they were misunderstandings, but I have learned how to accept (not to reject) what they offer me."

Teacher J: "I have had misunderstandings with San Franciscans because of cultural values."

"No." (Four responses.)

3. Are there any particular problems that occur only with Arab students in your classes? If so, what sort?

Teacher A: "Not actually in class--regarding class discussion. If anything, they are a pleasure as participators--although they do, occasionally, have to be told to shut up. The problem is the
outside-class or test-situation--cheating and lying."

Teacher B: "Arab students tend to be very vocal and not reticent to speak out in class. Problems arise when they don't observe turn-taking and when they fail to follow the thread of a discussion."

Teacher C: "No, not generally. I've only had one Arab student who regularly missed class because he felt it was "too boring" for him (Grammar). Another Arabic speaker, a beginning student, often acted out in class. He was very young, he was having family problems, and he was upset by the war in Lebanon."

Teacher E: "Sometimes Arabic students avoid doing thorough work, and try to take the path of least work."

Teacher F: "Again, aggression (verbal)!

Teacher G: "I don't know whether you mean behavior problems or academic problems. I have had few behavior problems, however academic problems are another thing. They tend not to pay attention to detail, particularly in writing, on both the mechanical and stylistic level. They are also somewhat careless about completing assignments on time."
Teacher H: "A few over the last few years have been very demanding: immature, spoiled, bright, rude—refusing to participate in class activities—always trying to get special attention—interrupting me and others."

Teacher I: "They are usually very verbal, sometimes to the extent that they make it difficult for other students to respond."

"No." (Two responses.)

4. Have you found successful solutions to some problems you may have had teaching Arab students?

Teacher A: "The best solution I've found is to be exceptionally hard, mean, and strict the moment you lay eyes on them."

Teacher B: "Teaching the rules of turn-taking and the structure of discussions has helped."

Teacher D: "Reminding them their mother wants them to work hard. Keeping my approach personal and non-hostile. Indulging in good-natured histrionics. Appealing to their pride."

Teacher E: "Close monitoring, and continuing relationship. Arabs seem to set great store by a private relationship with one advisor."
Teacher F: "This is not always a problem—if you can direct the energy, it means you can have a lively, talkative class."

Teacher G: "Live with it."

"?" (One response.)

"No." (One response.)

"Yes." (One response.)

5. Are there traits that most of your Arab students have that you particularly enjoy?

Teacher A: "As already mentioned, they are terrific participators and are excellent at following class discussions and ideas."

Teacher B: "Their verbosity, sometimes a bane, is sometimes a boon. The Saudis and Kuwaitis, in particular, are so genuine in their interactions, almost innocent in many ways. Not to exclude other Arabs, this trait is exhibited in the other groups in many instances as well."

Teacher C: "Yes. I don't know if this is just my bias, but Arab students seem more outgoing and seem to have a sense of humor very similar to that of Americans. If I had to pick one group as
my favorite, Arab students would be it."

Teacher D: "Their outspokenness. Their flair for drama. Their relaxed attitude. Their emphasis on friendly personal relations. Their love of bullshitting."

Teacher E: "Politeness, humanity."

Teacher F: "...if the aggression isn't hostile--it's great--the students are smart and want to talk which is not always the case with foreign speakers."

Teacher G: "They are very friendly."

Teacher H: "Their warmth is limitless--They can be wonderfully charming (usually right after they've driven me crazy by ruining a class) and thoughtful at times."

Teacher I: "Friendliness. Good nature."

Teacher J: "Yes, many."

6. Have you been aware of it when Muslim students were fasting because of Ramadan? If yes, what did you notice?

"No." (Three responses.)
Teacher C: "Yes. The students often told me they were fasting. At times I thought the fasting students were low on energy."

Teacher D: "Yes. They were sleepy. They use Ramadan as an excuse to slack off a bit."

Teacher G: "I notice it because they usually tell me when Ramadan will begin. I don't think it affects their performance significantly."

Teacher H: "Yes. Some have chosen to drop out of school for fear of inability to handle it. Others seem to manage fine."

6. Have you experienced any hostility over Arab students' perceptions of American foreign policy re Israel and Arab countries? Would you say that the hostility has been mutual, if it exists at all?

Teacher A: "A little. No doubt."

Teacher C: "I haven't experienced any hostility, but Arab students have occasionally expressed disapproval of American foreign policy in conversations outside of class, and have often expressed hostility towards Israel verbally and in compositions (especially during the Beirut crisis)."

Teacher F: "This question is worded in a difficult manner...but
Arab students have expressed despair, sadness, anger over political situations as well as the Israelis as well as other cultural groups."

Teacher J: "No hostility towards me personally; plenty of hostility toward U.S. policies. I have found the policies of some Arab nations extremely annoying."

"No." (Six responses.)

"Yes." (One response.)

7. Please check those adjectives that describe most of the Arab students you have taught, and feel free to add others. Try to use only your own experience, not stereotypes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8 charming</th>
<th>5 generous</th>
<th>5 proud</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 reliable</td>
<td>3 extravagant</td>
<td>2 industrious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 lazy</td>
<td>7 friendly</td>
<td>2 not punctual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 serious</td>
<td>1 mature</td>
<td>3 reserved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 caring</td>
<td>1 responsible</td>
<td>6 humorous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 touchy</td>
<td>2 anxious</td>
<td>3 respectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 hedonistic</td>
<td>5 intense</td>
<td>4 emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 loyal to friends</td>
<td>3 polite (one added &quot;extremely, or outrageously rude.&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Added adjectives:
(These first three were from one respondent.)

1 arrogant 1 no concept of truth 1 schizophrenic as a group. You either love 'em or hate 'em.

1 laid-back 1 adaptable 1 verbal
1 aggressive

Other comments:
"Dealing with them as an administrator included bribes, unsolicited 'opinions' as to placement, and other 'charming' annoyances."

"We've had so many Arab students, different individuals who've exhibited different traits. Some are very industrious and reliable; some are lazy--what can I say?"

"I've experienced a real range of behavior among Arab students; I find that I'm partial to gregarious, willing participants in the classroom, and they are often Arabic speakers."

"There's a big difference between young Arabs (in their early 20's) and older ones (30+). The older group tend to also be serious, responsible, industrious, touchy."

"I find it hard to complete this portion as presently I have at least two
Arabs who are serious, respectful, and responsible, and I've had them before too."

"Sorry, my mind doesn't work this way. I have had Arab students and friends with all of these traits."
APPENDIX B: SUGGESTED READINGS

I. Arab History and Culture

Adams, Michael, ed.

The statistics in this book are out of date, but this is an excellent general reference with descriptions of the different countries, politics, social patterns, economies, art, etc.

Ali, Zaki

This is an attempt to dissipate Western misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. It describes the present state of revival and its bearing on international affairs.

Alireza, Marianne

The delightful story of an American who marries a Saudi Arabian. Even though the story doesn't end with them living happily ever after, the outgoing
personality of the author makes it all seem like a grand adventure. Excellent description of Saudi culture.

Amiruddin, B.

The author blames disregard for Islamic precepts for the low status of women in Arab countries.

Anthony, John D.

Themes of continuity and change, recent history, genealogies of ruling families, attitudes, and an examination of non-elites. A scholarly and thoughtful work.

Beck, Lois and Nikki Keddie, eds.

Many scholarly articles on a variety of aspects of the lives of Arab women.

Berque, Jacques

Essays on tradition, symbol, ethics, economics, finance, feminism, language, music, politics, values,
Arabs and the world.

Brown, L. Carl and Norman Itzkowits, eds.

Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press. DS 42.4
P79.
Essays on modal personality of Saudi college students,
Iranian ideal character types, psychiatry in the Arab
East, classroom behavior, etc.

Dearden, Ann, ed.

1975 Arab Women. Report No. 27. London: Minority
Rights Group. f HQ 1784 A7.
Describes legal rights in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq,
Tunisia and Algeria.

de Combrey, Richard

1978 Caravansary: Alone in Moslem Places. Garden City,
New York: Doubleday & Co.
Marvelous travel book.

El Saadawi, Nawal

1979 The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World.
How women are perceived and what they experience in
Arab countries. Deals with female genital mutilation
in Egypt.

Fernea, Elizabeth Warnock and Basima Qattan Bezirgan

1977 Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak. Austin, Texas:
University of Texas. HQ 1170 M53.
Chapter 2 describes the teachings of the Koran on women. Other chapters are on poetry, stories, biographies, feminists.

Hamady, Sania


This book was written by a Lebanese woman who lived in Syria and Iraq and studied eight years in the U.S. I include it because it has a great deal of material and is often quoted in other sources, but I feel it is negative and contradictory. She seems strongly prejudiced against Arabs. Some of the references date as far back as 1906.

Hayes, J. R., ed.


Hitti, Philip K.


If you have time for only one book on the history of the Arabs, this should be it.


1959  Entire issue is about young adults from the Middle East.

Kiernan, Thomas

1975  The Arabs: Their History, Aims and Challenge to the Industrial World. Boston, Massachusetts: Little,
Journalistic style; intersperses history with his personal journal. Fascinating reading.

Mernissi, Fatima

Al-Qazzaz, Ayad

Raccagni, Michelle

Shiloh, Ailon, ed.

Culture history; distribution of people cultures and sub-cultures; population dynamics; culture change and conservatism; the schoolteacher as anthropologist.

Tibawi, A. L.

Turki, Fawaz
1974 The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile.
A moving account of the personal tragedies caused by the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Thomas, Alfred, Jr.

Waddy, Charis
Social and political conditions of Muslim societies over 1400 years and 3 continents, and the roles of famous women in Muslim history.

Walther, Wiebke
This is a large, handsome book with beautiful illustrations of Persian miniatures and scholarly articles.

Young, T. Cuyler, ed.
1951 Near Eastern Culture and Society. A Symposium on the Meeting of East and West. Princeton, New Jersey:
Interaction of Islamic and Western thought. Pan-Arabism vs. state nationalists. Problems of Westernization. The present and the future from a Near East perspective.

2. Teaching English to Arabs

Fellman, J.


Lehn, Walter, and William R. Slager


Malick, Alice Paul


Prothro, E. T.


Sebeok, Thomas (ed.)

Setian, Sosi
1972 Problems in Teaching Time to Egyptian Students. English Language Teaching XXVI:3.

Tvedtnes, John A.

3. Guides for Foreign Students

American Friends of the Middle East

Hsu, C. Y. (ed.)

Institute of International Education

Lanier, Alison R.

Pinsky, Nina