From US to Qatar University Teaching:
Contextualized Knowledge Communication for Future Education

Fadwa El Guindi

University of California, Los Angeles and El Nil Research;
Trustee, World Academy of Art and Science

Abstract

While the overall theme selected by the World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS) for the 2023 6th Future Education Conference was that of Human Security, the particular panel* in which I contributed the presentation upon which this article is based focused more explicitly on Education and less obviously on Security, with a particular emphasis on experimental ways in which anthropology can contribute better to education. However, the link between anthropology and human security may not be immediately obvious. I contend that the very character of anthropology, being the study of humankind, cannot but be related to a notion labelled human security†, albeit such a relationship must be more clearly stated. Human Security Goals concern Humans, but the way by which Human Goals can be aligned to Humans needs to be specified. The most effective path, or bridge, towards such alignment would be one carved by anthropology that weaves the anthropological gaze and its iconic perspective, which requires immersion in and full engagement with people's lives. It must be stressed, however, that anthropology does not stop with immersion and engagement but necessarily moves to analysis, which cumulatively produces knowledge that increases understanding of humans as a whole—in the sense of the German notion of Gestalt, that a whole is more than the sum of its parts. Anthropology is, after all, the study of humankind, its past, present, and future. It is, I contend, the physics of the human universe. Its building blocks, however, come from humans themselves, not their physical universe, their lives, their biology, their developmental history, or their shared cognitive ability. This article recounts two real-life cases of higher education classroom teaching for the purpose of seeking insights for future education, and clarifies what is meant by the phrase 'anthropological gaze and perspective'.

1. What is the 'Anthropological Gaze and Perspective'?

It is the gaze that very uniquely or almost uniquely characterises what anthropologists 'see' when they look at 'anything'. Let us imagine a situation, an artefact, or a happening,

---

* This article is based on an earlier version presented virtually at the 6th International Conference on Future Education, which was organised as an online conference by the World Academy of Art and Science (co-sponsored with its partners) and was held for three days, March 7-9, 2023. The panel I joined was primarily organised by anthropologist Marta Neskovic, Associate Fellow of WAAS, who also performed as co-moderator of the panel with Steven Hartman, who is Founding Executive Director of the Bridges Sustainability Science Coalition in UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations programme, based at Arizona State University's Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory. The Bridges Coalition is a partner of the World Academy of Art and Science. The panel was held on Tuesday, March 7, 2023, titled 'Learning with (not about) the World: Anthropological Methods for a Resilient Future', and consisted of three panelists: Luci Attala (UK), Vesna Vuini (Serbia), and Fadwa El Guindi (US and Egypt).

† I do have reservations about how the concept of Human Security is assumed to be satisfactorily defined. More work is needed in order to "relativize" the concept to make it more applicable cross-culturally without homogenising the world in the shadow of the West.

and several observers are looking intently at it: a political scientist, a journalist, a chemist, a psychologist, a historian, even a sociologist, and one properly trained anthropologist. There is no question that the anthropologist will "see" something different from what all the others will see. On problematizing "seeing" versus looking," see my analysis of the Mead-Bateson conversation on the use of the camera (El Guindi 2004: 61–73). One cannot overemphasise the uniqueness and significance of anthropology's gaze.

This has to do with the nature of the field of anthropology, its special kind of training, its extended and immersive field methods, its perspective on humankind, and the access to the accumulated systematic knowledge built over centuries on every aspect of human life and almost everything that has to do with humankind. This broad and inclusive view of humans is the reason the discipline of anthropology traditionally developed into four constituent 'fields' to cover humankind's prehistory, biology, linguistics, and social-cultural In accordance with this feature, large, established departments of anthropology traditionally trained their doctoral students in the four fields[*], even though their future research activity would probably focus on one of the four. So what is the meaning of four-field anthropology if individual anthropologists ultimately focus their own research on only one of the sub-fields? It means that irrespective of the subfield you conduct your research in, any conclusions reached cannot violate established conclusions in any way. It also means that research generalisations in one area must be situated within the knowledge space of all four. As this dimension got dropped in some US post-graduate training over time (for many reasons), the field strained and pulled in different directions, with social and cultural constituents eventually turning closer to 'culture study' than anthropology.

My own immersive, long-term research experience in the field for the purpose of primary data-gathering spans three cultural regions among the Nubians of Egypt in their homeland (1963–1955) (Callender and El Guindi 1971; El Guindi 1955–1963, El Guindi 1966; El Guindi 1978) prior to resettlement due to the rising level of Nile water, which the government saw as threatening Nubian livelihoods as a result of the construction of the High Dam as part of national development and water security. Another immersive field area was among the Valley Zapotec of Oaxaca, Mexico, spanning many years between 1968 and 1980 (El Guindi 1972 [1980]; El Guindi 1973; El Guindi 1977a; El Guindi 1977b; El Guindi 1982; El Guindi 1983; El Guindi 1986a; El Guindi 2010; El Guindi and Read 1979a; El Guindi and Read 1979b; El Guindi and Read 1980; El Guindi and Selby 1976). The most recent immersive field research experience was among Gulf Arabians in Qatar (2006–2015) (El Guindi 2018a; El Guindi 2019; El Guindi 2020; El Guindi 2011; El Guindi 2012a; El Guindi 2012b; El Guindi 2012c; El Guindi 2013; El Guindi 2018b; El Guindi 2018c; El Guindi and al-Othman 2013). Pertinently, these immersive anthropological field projects consist of systematic data gathering leading to analysis and professional-standard research publications.

---

[*] In my own doctoral training in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas, Austin, known for its stellar Latin American Studies focus and having the best Latin American Collection at a US University, established itself as a four-field anthropology department. As students, we were expected to be examined in all four subfields in written and oral defence examinations, in addition to a minimum of a whole year in the field immersed to gather data, in order to successfully obtain a doctorate. In those days, the average number of years of study and research required to obtain a doctorate was 10 years.

2. A Word about Objectivity and Subjectivity

While intermittently raised as an either/or issue, it has been, in my view, mostly a distraction from real issues. People living anywhere experience life; they don't ordinarily theorise it or make abstract models of it. Just like ordinary folk who speak a language, no matter how fluent they are in speaking it, they cannot necessarily articulate its grammar. Anthropologists need to take their observations of human experiences gained in the terrain of data gathering beyond the experiential level. The immersion has to do with the quality of the data gathered, determined in large part by how anthropologists live in the communities of study, armed with the mastery of the local conversational language, for extended periods until they are able to penetrate the barrier normally built between insiders and outsiders. Ethnographers strive to reach a level of comfort by immersing themselves in local lives. Some onlookers see this as a romanticised safari-type adventure. The reality is far from this. It is very hard work and often involves high risks to their health and lives. Additionally, it is a challenging task to learn how to be accepted without losing one's position as an observer and analyst. It is a kind of immersion in people's lives until ethnographers reach a level of mastery of the way local populations do things, interact with each other, deal with the institutions that they built, regard the outside world, respond to natural events, and increasingly, today, to global interventions. The anthropologist records systematic observations and interviews. The record is kept and archived. Data are subjected to professional scrutiny and are employed in anthropological analysis.

So where does the issue of objectivity, subjectivity, or insider/outsider come in, and what is its relevance to the anthropological project? How does a trained expert anthropologist avoid collapsing local views, practices, and anthropological analyses and thus blurring boundaries? Does one deliberately choose to be an insider or an outsider? Can an insider study the inside? Interestingly, US anthropology gave the latter a label,—indigenous anthropologist, and confined the term to non-Anglo-Saxon anthropologists studying their own culture, a practice that I saw being encouraged by some US and UK mentors, which is contrary to the canons of anthropology since this orientation most certainly produces sophisticated 'informants' of their own cultural traditions but does not necessarily turn them into anthropologists.

The point of the anthropological endeavour is not that the outsider (the anthropologist) would become an insider but rather to develop a mastery of what Pierre Bourdieu labelled "participant objectification" (Bourdieu 2003), which "undertakes to explore not the lived experience of the knowing subject but... the effects and limits of that experience" (El Guindi 2004: 190).

This is what objectification is about. It is therefore too idealistic to expect a total removal of the distance between 'observer and observer'. As Bourdieu makes clear, rather than the status of being an observer versus being observed, such distance is determined by one's relation to the world. identifying two relations, "one theoretical, the other practical" (Bourdieu 1990), or, as I prefer to rephrase the difference, analytic versus experiential.

The internality of the anthropologist is a crucial factor that enables a deep look at the inside, while externality, equally crucial, allows analysis. The position of externality, it must

be noted, is not inherently or exclusively that of the 'foreign' anthropologist. Rather, it can be achieved by locals if they are able and willing to acquire "the instruments of objectification*, that is, the tools for achieving the kind of distance necessary for an analytic mode of relationship with the object of study.

"The results showed unambiguously that students were employing words without understanding their meaning or significance in particular contexts. Often, they were unable to address the questions asked without the 'dependence' on such empty jargon. It was the beginning of a challenge that led students to learn the subject matter at hand."

Since anthropologists are ordinary human beings living within their own cultural contexts, the other side of the coin is that every anthropologist is a native. However, if the "native" that resides in any observer is unable to achieve such a relation, it would not be possible to produce an anthropological analysis, perhaps only a record of experiential living or some kind of distorted reality. In other words, it is the nature of one's relationship to the world of observation that matters.

Good, long-term training in anthropology[†] and the command and mastery of local dialects can provide the means for reaching such an analytic state, the tools that enable the anthropological gaze and perspective. Analytic authority is that of anthropology, irrespective of the kind of data being considered: literary, visual, historical, archaeological, religious, oral, written, and so on. So the anthropologist goes beyond local views and voices, beyond local interpretations and ways of knowing, and so on, to subject the gathered materials to anthropological analysis. Here is where cumulative anthropological knowledge is pertinent. There is a wealth of ethnographic materials gathered over centuries that are located in books, articles, the Human Relations Area Files, the national and academic libraries, and in anthropologists' recounted tales and stories. This knowledge is derived from anywhere and everywhere and is referred to as cross-cultural. To gain insight from observations in one part of the world, the anthropologist deploys observations from different parts of the world. The

---

* For a detailed story of the case I was involved with during my Zapotec study was that of the kind of training given to my informant/assistant/compadre Abel Hernandez Jimenez upon his request in both anthropology and linguistics to the point where he was able to collaboratively produce a 'native' ethnography of Zapotec ritual activities which he wrote in both Spanish and Zapotec, a methodologically very significant contribution. On this see El Guindi, Fadwa 1986b The Myth of Ritual: A Native's Ethnography of Zapotec Life-Crisis Rituals.. . Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press.

† Here is where the immersive training I experienced in the field in Nubia, remaining in the field for an extended period of one year with only one break, prior to learning anthropology formally, became the key influence in my orientation to anthropology. The project studying Nubia was organised by the Social Research Centre of the American University in Cairo and funded by the Ford Foundation. It was a major anthropological expedition covering three linguistic areas in the south of Aswan, Egypt, until the Sudan border. Three anthropology teams, each led by an anthropologist, led a group of research assistants selected by and employed at the Centre. I was assigned to a team led by the late Charles Callender to study the Mettokki-speaking region of Nubia, just south of Aswan. It amounted to ethnographic training, data-gathering assistance, and, in my case, the path to becoming an anthropologist. I do fully appreciate now the fact that my then mentors in Cairo guided me to select my doctoral research in an area different from 'the homeland'. Though a hard choice, this became the "key" in my methodological orientation to anthropology, the way to acquire the gaze and the perspective.

question becomes whether a particular phenomenon is unique or is shared by other people across the world. The perspective gained from such a query is a cross-cultural perspective.

"Higher education is not simply about providing skills for the job market. Acquiring specific skills for employment can be attained through vocational training, which can be an alternative but parallel path to traditional higher education."

---

3. Teaching for Learning: Two Cross-Cultural Cases

It is instructive to share two cases of teaching in higher education, one from the United States, where my higher education teaching spans over 30 years, and the other from Qatar, where I was invited as part of a sustainability reform project by Qatar University, the major national university in Doha, to bring reform to the Social Sciences programme and, as a Distinguished Professor, to teach in classrooms of men and women (separately) in the Department of Social Sciences (2006–2012). These two contrastive cases challenge any simplistic notions and assumptions about teaching and learning, particularly concerning new technologies and the different roles they might play in Future Education when examined in different settings.

3.1. The US Case

At some point in the 1980s, students in the US adopted certain (literary) jargon to express themselves in academic settings. It reached a point when it became difficult to figure out whether students understood what they were uttering, so I and some colleagues at the university decided to gather oft-repeated words and phrases that seemed to us to be empty of precise content. We shared our lists, and I narrowed the list according to my own pertinent list of terms that were ambiguously repeated by students in responses to essay questions, which gave the impression of an intellectual grasp of the content but seemed to be used vaguely and ambiguously. At the top of Essay Examination Questions, I included the list which ranged from 12-20 words that students were instructed not to use in their answers to test questions. The results showed unambiguously that students were employing words without understanding their meaning or significance in particular contexts. Often, they were unable to address the questions asked without the 'dependence' on such empty jargon. It was the beginning of a challenge that led students to learn the subject matter at hand. They had to think and express more clearly what they wanted to write.   I was happy with the result of this experiment, although a number of students seemed unable to dispense with 'crutch' usage of jargon.

3.2. The Case of Qatar

Perhaps we need to be reminded that Qatar's prosperity is relatively recent, but the youth I encountered at the University were already born into wealth and high technology. As part of

the reform project at Qatar University, there was, among other changes, a shift to integrating the most current technology into classroom teaching. Unlike faculty, students were very comfortable with smart watches, smart mobiles, laptops, etc. They were comfortable employing PowerPoints in their classroom presentations. During my teaching, I began to discover that technology, while assisting in certain areas, also created a dependency by students in a way that became an impediment to learning. Students used PowerPoints for all class presentations but showed no comprehension of the materials they presented. They seemed detached from the content and unable to engage with it when asked.

—————
"General education is a human right for all."
—————

Accordingly, I removed all high-tech tools from my classrooms and asked students not to use laptops or make PowerPoint presentations. I simultaneously requested the installation of a chalkboard to be used by students in their classroom presentations. As faculty, I employed a number of ways to communicate materials, including slides, films, and writing on the board. Students, however, were expected to make their presentations using the board. The result was very visible to me. Students in the classroom engaged more with the presenter, and the presenter was forced to 'explain' materials. This process of engagement was that of thinking and comprehension, not only robotic performance. I saw that 'learning' was beginning to happen as engaged thinking and interaction entered the process. It was a satisfying experiment. This was applied in both languages of teaching, Arabic and English, and for both men and women students.

4. Concluding Remarks on Future Education

The educational method discussed in this article consists of an equation that includes teacher and learner. Higher Education is not perceived as simply vocational training for the job market. The teaching component is necessarily characterised by authority over knowledge, responsibility for communication, flexibility in the mode of teaching, and creativity in considering factors of relevance for different contexts of learning. Often, educational institutions in search of resilience steer education away from its real purpose. Many higher education institutions, especially in the United States in the past few decades, have opted to adopt a business model in order to enable universities to 'measure': time, quality, learning, and rule compliance, among other aspects. Whether the quality of teaching and learning can be measured in this fashion becomes questionable. Nevertheless, the business model was widely adopted. Higher administration personnel used business metaphors, such as students becoming products. Measurement replaced teaching and learning as the main focus. Resilience can come at the expense of flexibility. But, in my view, measuring the quality of teaching neither does justice to teaching nor can it tell us about what students learn. In the estimation of many, this 'measurement' orientation has not done justice to the education project.

Another orientation was to use certain approaches used in some countries but assumed to fit all cases as the 'model'. Qatar University had opted to use the 'American model' but was curious about the model adopted in Finland. Finland became a popular example. There was no consideration for a difference in cultural traditions, the demographics of different

countries, or the levels of economic development of different nations. This 'imported model' approach, particularly the one tailored to Finnish culture and society, could not possibly have been applied with success to most developing nations of the world. Perhaps certain insights from such an experiment can be integrated with insights from other models in the context of differences in cultural traditions, demographic structures, and stages of development, which would be more productive.

Neither the business model of evaluation nor the wholesale adoption of a particular country-based model of education can work universally. Without such scrutiny, we are faced with the kind of scepticism prevalent today regarding Education. The business model provides resilience in some aspects of running institutions of education but cannot provide the flexibility needed to empower teachers to creatively adapt methods of teaching to particular contexts and link educational materials to specific societal needs.

Higher education is not simply about providing skills for the job market. Acquiring specific skills for employment can be attained through vocational training, which can be an alternative but parallel path to traditional higher education. As I understand, in its current educational reform movement, Egypt is establishing this kind of dual-track education, which begins in middle school. Considering the demographics of Egypt, one has to wait and see if such a dual-track educational system will work for what Egypt needs in this phase of its development.

Perhaps Higher Education should continue to provide the knowledge that opens minds, unlocks human potential, and allows learners to achieve rigour in thought. General education is a human right for all. But an environment of higher education and scientific research to unleash rigour in human minds must be a crucial aspect of any educational system today, even though it limits participation to a portion of the population.

Author's Contact Information
Email: felguindi@gmail.com

Bibliography

1.   Bourdieu, Pierre
     1990 The Logic of Practice. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
     2003 Participant Objectivation. The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (Man) 9(2):281-294.

2.   Callender, C., and Fadwa El Guindi
     1971 Life-Crisis Rituals among the Kenuz Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press. El Guindi, F
     2018a Milk Kinship. *In* The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
     2019 Elicitation of Kinship Data: Reflections on the Case of Arabian Kinship. Kinship Algebra (Russian Journal of the Russian Academy of Sciences) (17):203-211.
     2020 Suckling: Kinship More Fluid. London: Routledge.

3.   El Guindi, F.
     1963-1965 El Guindi Papers on Nubia. *In* El Guindi Papesr on Nubia. El Guindi Nubian Kenuz Papers. Los Angeles, CA: El Nil Research.
     1966 Ritual and the River in Dahmit, Nubia. *In* Contemporary Egyptian Nubia: A Symposium of the Social Research Center, the American University in Cairo (Dar el-Thaqafa, Aswan, 1964), Volume II. R.A. Fernea, ed. Pp. 239-256. New Haven, Connecticut: Human Relations Area Files.
     1972 [1980] The Nature of Belief Systems: A Structural Analysis of Zapotec Ritual (Ph.D. Dissertation). HRAF Monographs, New Haven, Connecticut: Human Relations Area Files, 1980.

1973 The Internal Structure of the Zapotec Conceptual System. Journal of Symbolic Anthropology 1(1):15-34.

1977a Lore and Structure: Todos Santos in the Zapotec System. Journal of Latin American Lore 3(1):3-18.

1977b The Structural Correlates of Power in Ritual. . *In* The Anthropology of Power. R. Fogelson and R.N. Adams, eds. Pp. 229-307 New York: Academic Press.

1978 The Angels in the Nile: A Theme in Nubian Ritual. *In* Nubian Ceremonial Life: Studies in Islamic Syncretism and Cultural Change. J.g. Kennedy, ed. Pp. 104-113. Berkeley, Cairo: The University of California Press & The American University in Cairo Press.

1982 Internal and External Constraints on Structure.

In The Logic of Culture: Advances in Structural Theory and Methods. I. Rossi, ed. Pp. 176-193. New York: J. F. Bergin Pubs., Inc.

1983 Some Methodological Considerations for Ethnography: Concrete Fieldwork Illustrations. *In* The Future of Structuralism. J. Oosten and A. de Ruijter, eds. Germany: Edition Herodot.

1986a The Myth of Ritual: A Native's Ethnography of Zapotec Life-Crisis Rituals. Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press.

2004 Visual Anthropology: Essential Method and Theory. Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press.

2010 The Cognitive Path through Kinship. Journal of Behavior and Brain Sciences 33(5):384-385.

2011 Kinship by Suckling: Extending Limits on Alliance. Anthropologicheskii Forum (Forum for Anthropology and Culture) Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography ((Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences, Special Forum on Kinship, Forum No 15(7):381-384.

2012a Milk and Blood: Kinship among Muslim Arabs in Qatar Anthropos A.107:2:545-555.

2012b Suckling as Kinship. Anthropology Newsletter (American Anthropological Association) 53(1).

2012c Suckling, adoption and the incest taboo: Significance of studying kinship for social science and for Qatar. Annual Research Forum Proceedings (Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Journals) 201242P.

2013 Inceste, Adoption et Allaitement: Logiques et Dynamiques de L'évitement. . Incidence Revue (19):121-137.

2018b Properties of Kinship Structure:

Transformational Dynamics of Suckling, Adoption and Incest *In* Focality and Extension in Kinship: Essays in Memory of Harold W. Scheffler. W. Shapiro, ed. Australia: ANU Press.

2018c Turning Cousins Into Siblings. Kinship Algebra (Russian Journal of the Russian Academy of Sciences) (16):184-198.

4.   El Guindi, F. , and D. W. Read
     1979a Mathematics in Structural Theory. Current Anthropology 20(4):761-782.

5.   El Guindi, F., and D. W. Read
     1979b Reply to Comments on Mathematics in Structural Theory Current Anthropology 20(4):782-790.
     1980 Reply to 'On Mathematics in Structural Theory'. Current Anthropology 21(3):389-391.

6.   El Guindi, F., and H. A. Selby
     1976 Dialectics in Zapotec Thinking. In . , eds. Pp. 181-196. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. *In* Meaning in Anthropology. K. Basso and H.A. Selby, eds. Pp. 181-196. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

7.   El Guindi, Fadwa
     1986b The Myth of Ritual: A Native's Ethnography of Zapotec Life-Crisis Rituals.. . Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press.

8.   El Guindi, Fadwa, and Wesam al-Othman
     2013 Transformationality and Dynamicality of Kinship Structure. Structure and Dynamics: eJournal of Anthropological and Related Sciences 6(1).