



**Diana Halabi**

προς εγώ, Emma ▾

Τετ, 1 Απρ, 1:08 μ.μ. (πριν από 6 ημέρες)



Dear Aimilia and Emma,

I hope your quarantine today is not by any means overwhelming ,

I was thinking of how our research can vary depends on time and place we are in,  
for example;

Speaking of "place", when I was living in Beirut, the overwhelming reality of political conflict of lebanon and the region, had never invited me to engage in any kind of research about political topics. To me, back then, it was as if you are googling how to swim while you are drowning. (Maybe that is why they created art residencies? so one can research from distance, with more clarity?) Don't you think that sometimes we have to leave our homeland to be able to do a research about it?

When I arrived in Rotterdam, I realized that I was always interested in understanding political realities and in engaging in works about it. I discovered that to know historical facts, especially brutal ones, first I have to distance myself emotionally and look from afar, then get back to it physically. On the other hand, perhaps this exact feeling that I am having now, is what created Orientalism or any kinds of studies that comes from privileged place, where the historical brutality of events had never affected the privileged scholars who went to study conflicted regions without ever holding the burden of living the events that had happened there. (Unfair world, isn't it?).

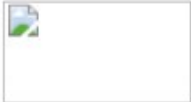
While speaking of "time": I find it very hard in the times of Corona, to keep on with the research that I started here on Arab nationalism prior to 1990. The distractions of this pandemic is making my research have no base and no target, anyway how can one have a research that is steady and consistent in times of complete uncertainty? . I see my research as bits and pieces from here and there, that ends with a " catch of the day".

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Is it the same to you Emma and Aimilia? what is the catch of your day when it comes to research?

Warm Regards,

Diana AL Halabi



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Dear dear friends,

Thank you so much for your understanding responses. I am writing to you from my bed eating chocolate, contemplating your emails and the past week.

I have an anthology with texts about political philosophy featuring one written by Mary Wollstonecraft (it is the book you saved from my studio before the school closed Diana!) and I find it so funny that while she writes so perspicacious about "the imperfection about all modern governments" she still thought that not all women should have the right to have a say in politics, she thought that all bourgeois women should have servants taking care of the female household stuff so that they could spend their time doing their civil duties and found no problem in this.

This makes me think that maybe we are all blinded by our time and will never be able to see our situation properly. So maybe we cant escape that we will read the results of our research in a way that is always lagging behind. But maybe things can change if we accept that this is the case. Which makes me think about your ex Aimilia! I am very curious to know how he responded to that quote?

I would like to know more about what you mean with generality Aimilia, could you maybe expand upon it? I don't think I understand why the individual perspective is the only thing left?

Now I am changing topic a bit, just so you know! Sometimes when I think about the term research I feel very perplexed, it is like I am trying to catch it and get a hold on it but it is just slipping through my fingers. I feel that research is a "relational" phenomena, just like "value" or "authentic", do you get what I mean? Like for example in this time I think it is impossible to speak about research without speaking about political issues because the term "research" is situated. (here I will later put in a little footnote to situated knowledge by donna harraway) And in an artistic practice is there really a difference between process and research? What do you think? I am very happy to write a little bit more about this tomorrow, tonight my mind is a little to spaced out to articulate anything clearer than this hehe.

Kisses and sweet dreams,  
Emma

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Dear Emma,

I absolutely agree with you. It sounds a bit like a Marie Antoinette situation. I guess you all know the famous quote, 'If people don't have bread. Let them eat cake'.

We are all blinded by our time, or by our own interpretations. In the end, why do we even want to make research? This question actually made me think about the starting point of our emails. Do you lead the research or the research leads you? In the same way, does your ignorance prevents you from the 'truth' or the 'reality' creates ignorance? I guess that some questions do not require answers, but also sometimes, the importance of an answer lays on the unsayable. Cause some things are not supposed to be voiced (coming back to the political correctness)

Does any of that make sense?

His response to the quote was: hahaha do you want to say that I am narrow-minded? hahaha

Generality evokes a general understanding. Nothing specific, but simultaneously very specific. The general public is generated by having common dreams, or understandings. For example, Marlin Monroe is a sex symbol of the 50s. The individual perspective, as not being able to bear your own generality.

I really cannot understand the relationship between research and authenticity, could you maybe elaborate on that?

Regarding the relationship between process and research, I also agree that they are very similar. Almost impossible to spot the differences. Nevertheless, at this point, I would like to express that I don't know what else I could possibly say about research. I think that this is as you said a process, a set of actions, forms that are constantly moving and changing. It's also something very personal, as each one of us has a different relationship towards that. Talking about my perception is extremely hard. I tried for at least an hour, but right now I am empty.

Dear all,

For me it mostly has to do with the fact of not being 'home'. When the feeling of familiarity is absent, people tend to develop these needs. However, I have to admit that I never did the research that I'm doing now, here in Greece. At the same time, my research refuses to go too deep, as it becomes unmanageable.

I can say more about that, but to be honest, I don't feel comfortable doing it through emails. It's a quite complex topic to be able to develop it through a written message. I don't think that research from a distance brings more clarity, rather than the opposite. Of course, some emotional distance is necessary, but a too much distance is also a literal distance.

Regarding the catch of the day, my research continues as it was before. I finally feel that I have time and space to dig in deeper. Since September I was constantly on the run,. Now finally, even under these circumstances, I have some time for myself. I try very hard to not think about it too much. What I'm saying to myself is: even if you get too stressed about it, it's not gonna change anyway. The future will remain uncertain.

So what I'm doing is to stay as far from my phone and thoughts as possible. I cannot sleep, and my heart jumps all the time, but still, somehow I intend to survive. The future will show.

Talk to you soon,

Aimilia

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Dear Diana and Aimilia thank you so much for your emails,

Diana, I think you are right in that it is sometimes necessary to leave a place to be able to fully see it and I think that you are speaking about something very important in your last email when it comes to both research and art making. It made me think about the research seminar we had with the woman who left so abruptly because our rudeness (according to my perspective, I know that many have different thoughts about this!) and with that being said I just want to let you know that I am now entering a minefield when it comes to political correctness so please bear in mind that I come with the best of intentions and please do correct me or question me!

I am privileged, I come from a nordic welfare country and have never experienced any kind of war or severe political conflict or economic disaster. So feeling emotionally to close to Sweden in the way you describe it Diana has never been a problem for me. However I would not have been able to engage in the kind of topics I am working with in my practice had I not left Sweden for Norway and then Norway for the Netherlands. I work a lot with the topic of nature, the human relationship to nature and the dichotomy nature/culture in relation to different times and societies. I would say that this is too a political questions, maybe a privileged one but not less important.

When I moved to Norway I quickly realised that the norweigan people goes out in nature ALL THE TIME, im telling you it is crazy. The hike, they skie, they swim, they run, they eat chocolate in the forest in mid-winter wearing 10000 layers of clothing and thermo- pants. They even have a saying; "ut på tur, aldri sur!" which rrranslates kind of like this "go for an outing, never feel grumpy!" which is a more hardcore version of the swedish saying "Det finns inget dåligt väder, bara dåliga kläder" - "There is no bad weather, just poor clothing". In both Sweden and Norway the nature is very accessible and there is a lot of it

sur!" which translates kind of like this "go for an outing, never feel grumpy!" which is a more hardcore version of the Swedish saying "Det finns inget dåligt väder, bara dåliga kläder" - "There is no bad weather, just poor clothing". In both Sweden and Norway the nature is very accessible and there is a lot of it and there is a "right of common" which means that the nature is for all people and it is permitted to go camping everywhere and pick everything that nature provides as long as you don't hurt it (nature) or damage private property. It wasn't until I moved to the Netherlands that I realised how great impact this "right of common" has in a society and it wasn't until I got away from the north I realised how much I appreciate it.

Until now I have only written about things I miss about my home country, and indeed moving away from it has made me love Sweden and maybe secretly turned me into a proud nationalist. But because I am currently in another country during this global pandemic some cracks in this love-affair has started to show and for this I am very grateful.

Things I have realized about Sweden and myself as a Swede during Corona, made possible because of my distance to the country:

- Sweden secretly think they are the best and that the Nordic countries are the gem of Europe.
- The further away you are from the Nordic countries, the more stupid you are and the more we feel sorry for you. (for example I told Aimilia that the healthcare system in the Netherlands is much better than in Greece (although the one in Sweden is the best). And we should not even talk about Lebanon, Sweden views the country as a lost cause.
- Swedes don't learn anything about the history and culture of countries outside Europe in school. I have no idea about what is going on in Lebanon and the political history of it. Before responding to this email I tried to learn a bit from Wikipedia.
- Sweden fights Corona differently from the other countries in Europe, relying heavily on individual responsibility and a cultural "common sense", built

Lebanon and the political history of it. Before responding to this email I tried to learn a bit from wikipedia.

- Sweden fights corona differently from the other countries in europe, relying heavily on individual responsibility and a cultural "common sense", built up in society during generations. It sounds amazing at first right? No totalitarianism, only freedom, everyone fighting the virus together as an intelligent collective. The problem is that this is very excluding and unfair for those who are new to the swedish culture and in Sweden 24 percent of the population has a foreign background. And the result of this approach to the virus has already started to show in Stockholm where there has been a great number of deaths concentrated to segregated areas.

So what do I want to say with all of this and what has it to do with research? I am not completely sure, I feel a lot of emotions writing this, I feel angry, disappointed and ashamed and then ashamed for being ashamed and then sad and then ashamed again. Leaving my privileged feelings aside, what I want to say is perhaps; Yes Diana, I agree with you, I had to leave the object of my research (sweden and my swedeness) to be able to see it properly. Not because of my emotional attachment, but because of my ignorance. I don't think the orientalism is created by people having to distance themselves emotionally but from ignorant people who are unable to see their position in the world.

Writing this made me think of what you told me when we were having dinner the other day, that you had asked someone about his/her opinion of your work and received the answer that he/she wasn't in a position to have an opinion about it or wasn't experienced enough to talk about it. In this way the person retrieved with his politically correctness intact. And it is so fucked up right? Maybe this is the core of the problem?

Lots of love,



Dear Emma and Aimilia,

What a beautifully written email you have sent here,

I first have to say, that I appreciate you speaking about intentions, because for me political correctness comes to avoid a question of intentions when a subject is laid in front of people we don't know. And I do not support the concept of political correctness as long as the intention is to explain a point of view that doesn't offend anyone, and pose it with a mind ready to discuss and not a mind that just reasons loudly for the fear of losing a present convenience.

Enjoying every bit and piece of your observation on how your journey (which is research itself) had led you to start critiquing the system in which you have been born with, reminded me of what I have read today which was a great deal of a catch:

"The imperfection of all the modern governments must, without waiting to repeat the trite remark, that all human institutions are unavoidably imperfect, in a great measure have arisen from this simple circumstance, that the constitution, if such an heterogeneous mass deserve that name, was settled in the dark days of ignorance, when the minds of men were shackled by the grossest prejudices and most immoral superstition. and do you, Sir, a sagacious philosopher, recommend night as the fittest time to analyze a ray of light?"

this was from Mary Wollstonecraft, A vindication of the Rights of Men, In a Letter to The Right Honourable Edmund Burke. in 1790.

We all have passed and still are passing in a journey of discovery that the constitution that we have been told is the best, is obviously not. I myself had your experience in my region. Unfortunately, Lebanese people have been conditioned to think of themselves better than the Syrians for example, and you discover how much politics has a big role to do with false representations of the other, when I met all my Syrian friends that fled the war in 2011, I discovered that a lot of the nationalist superior notions Lebanese people had grew up with, has to do with the hate of the violent military presence of Syrian troops on Lebanese lands since the civil war of Lebanon until 2005, (This military that anti-regime Syrians hate as much as we do). and many different reasons, that I feel ashamed to even discuss.

We grow when we discover those limitations that governments had put us through, we become richer and more of a help to the society when we keep searching into histories that we never knew before, when we decided to break out of the paved way of knowledge and pave our own way.