



A New Way of Seeing: Exploring the Role of Home and Self in Travel and Travel Writing

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“No, gracias.” That was my refrain, always on the tip of the tongue, ready to burst forth at the slightest provocation. No eye contact, a small but firm shake of the head, a purposeful step, marred only by my natural bounce. It was almost second nature now, very similar to the response you give to the kiosk attendants in the mall, except in the case of the kiosk people, they only chase you so far. The Ewok key chains, special exfoliating Dead Sea salt, and electronic cigarettes are too precious to leave unattended for too long. The gypsies will chase you down the hill, around the corner, over the river and through the woods to grandmother’s house if need be.

I knew this going in, of course. Granada is home of the shock-and-awe gypsy attack. Clutching their bundles of rosemary, the ladies hawk fortunes and blessings on each corner while the men engage in increasingly odd performance art, from the mime hanging by his suspenders from the cathedral’s wrought-iron fence to the grown man pretending to be a shrieking baby in a stroller in the town square, sounding more like a mockingbird’s shrill imitation of an irritated kitten than a human child. The gypsies are the street people of

Granada, nowhere and everywhere, waiting for their next target.

I was determined to not get tricked into a gypsy encounter. My husband’s and my purpose for these three days in Granada was to fulfill a lifelong dream of mine, to see the Alhambra and its palace complex. The complex is a mass of gorgeous contradictions from the never-ending muqarnas dome in the Alhambra and the meticulously wild gardens of paradise in the Generalife Palace to the hulking Charles V palace and the lovely and subtle nods to Debussy and Washington Irving. Tip: When visiting the Alhambra, do not linger at the Washington Irving Statue. It says two things about you: Gullible American. As we investigated the statue, a strong claw grabbed my arm and swung me around to face a Miriam Margules look-alike with a beatific smile and several sprigs of rosemary. “¡Que bella!” she exclaimed. In the beauty of the place, I had let my guard down. “¿Casados? Bueno, denme su mano.” Pressing rosemary into both our hands, she held onto mine with a vise-like grip. “¡Ah, bueno! ¿Aquí? Dice que tendras una vida muy larga y con buena salud. ¡Y con mucho amor! Pero solo amaras a una persona... a él!” Our gypsy was delighted with the fortune she was divining from my palm.

She made a grab for Michel's hand, turning his expression from one of confusion to one of alarm. I wasn't translating for him in an attempt to extricate ourselves from the situation as quickly as possible, and he had no idea what was happening. "¡Oh, que bueno!" she exclaimed. "Tendrán tres hijos." Her hand shot out and patted my stomach before I could jerk away. "Dos hijos muy fuertes como él," she caressed Michel's arm, "y una hija con pelo largo como tú." Walkers, both Spanish and tourists alike, hurried by, some chuckling and shaking their head as they passed. I smiled frigidly back, incensed that they did not realize how lucky they were that we were taking one for the team.

I snapped out of my reverie as Michel's panicked voice reached my ears. "I'm sorry?" he stammered. "Dime," our gypsy ordered in a grandmotherly but firm voice, her long fingers patting Michel's pocket. "What? I don't know. I don't know!" Michel stuttered. "Money. She wants money. Give her the coins in your pocket." She looked at me expectantly, pleased I understood the situation. He thrust the coins into her hand, and she shook her head patiently. "No. Papel." Michel's relief turned again to alarm, but I stepped in. "No, lo siento, pero no tenemos papel ahora. Este es todo el dinero." She knew as well as I did that we had plenty of bills between Michel and I. Her attention shifted to Michel again and made the same request for paper money. "No, no, we don't have any. Sorry," he insisted, having correctly picked up on my decline of her previous request. "No. Cuesta vente. Diez para ella, diez para ti." Twenty euros for unwanted palm readings? She must be joking. I repeated myself again, and she sighed resignedly. "Bueno." She took back half of our sprigs of rosemary, blessed me with the sign of the cross, and patted Michel's cheek. As we hurried off, I explained to Michel what just happened. He laughed. "Well, at least she didn't curse us. She only took away half our blessing."



Travel writing has been around as long as humans have been traveling and telling stories about it, from Pausanias's *Descriptions of Greece* in the second century CE and Petrarch's account of his trip up Mount Ventoux in 1336 to Samuel Johnson's 18th-century account of his trip to the Hebrides and modern writers like Paul Theroux, Bill Bryson, and Joan Didion. However, the proper approach to traveling and travel writing has oft been debated. The account could be a lens through which the reader experiences a new place or people, the author almost non-existent except as the holder of the lens. The account could be all about the author and his or her thoughts, feelings, self-realizations, and growth, the visited local just an afterthought, a backdrop on which to enact the author's emotional journey. Or it could be a combination of the two, perhaps a failed attempt at being objective and documentary or a carefully balanced look at a new place through a specific and acknowledged personal experience. No matter what the form, though, the author's experiences in their home, whether with their family, hometown, or home country, are just as important in understanding experiences abroad as the actual experiences abroad themselves. As such, people present themselves a certain way when traveling abroad based on how they see themselves at home: as traveler or tourist; open-minded or a know-it-all, an observer or an action person; a confident explorer or a timid internalizer; and all shades in between.

In this essay, I explore the importance of home in the current critical discussion on travel and travel writing, examining writers and styles like Zoë Brân's documentary approach, Michael Mershaw's balance between experience and documenting, and a round-table discussion lead by Robert Root that discusses travel writing as

personal memoir. I then analyze writings by Samuel Johnson and Maureen Dowd as two examples of how home directly affects the author's self-presentation and travel account; and apply some of my findings to my own travel writing about my husband's and my time in Spain during the summer of 2011. I argue that acknowledging one's home and experiences there is imperative to understanding one's self-presentation abroad and how that affects the experiences one allows oneself to have. Finally, I argue that the idea of traveling to improve one's home, promoted by both Johnson and modern travel writer Rick Steves, is an insightful though admittedly difficult approach to travel.



Returning to the grounding for this analysis of home and self in travel writing—my own experiences—I travel to learn, to see things in actuality that I've only seen in pictures, to experience new places and people, to learn about myself. I write to learn, to synthesize those experiences, to remember those new places and people, to understand what I learned about myself, and, perhaps, teach others. But what is the duty of the travel writer to his or her readers? Clearly, my own reasons for traveling and writing are selfish, the goal, as Michael Mewshaw says, for each writer is the same—"insight, joy, euphony, vivid experience, visual excitement, sensuous delight, and discovery" (Mewshaw 9). It is all about the author. As the author crafts the narrative she wishes to tell, however, the author must fulfill her duty to her audience, which is to attempt to teach them something about this place and people, to provide them a glimpse into the world she was allowed to visit or even inhabit for the time being. She must also uphold her duty to her

subjects, to tell their stories as honestly and truthfully as possible. But how to do that, to uphold her duty, is tricky.

It seems that how the author approaches travel writing and upholds the duty to reader and subject really depends on how the author defines his or her work. For example, Michelle Moreno defines travel narrative as a "subset of personal storytelling...one of the many lenses through which we examine experience and shape stories" (Root 80), while Zoë Brân claims that for her, "the most accomplished travel writers reveal the world through their eyes whilst keeping themselves more or less in the background... their personality is expressed in *how* they write and *what* they choose to write about, not through autobiography" (Brân 163). Brân's preferred documentary style is an intriguing idea, the author simply holding the lens through which the reader views the travel narrative as unencumbered by the author's experience as possible. She notes that as she would rather read about a place or culture than the author moving about or interacting with that place or culture, she assumes her reader does, too, and writes accordingly. However she also acknowledges that some writers are criticized for being too remote from their own story, and "it is necessary to have some kind of balance between presence and absence" (Brân 163). It seems that Brân says this with a twinge of frustration or regret that she must cater to her audience's taste and not simply write a purely documentary account of a country. Yet even in a documentary, the viewer sees what the documentarian wants them to see. "We are shaped by where we are," and that "where" includes our home and home experiences (Mewshaw 9). Therefore, even if Brân was able to expunge herself from her travel account, her own background, experiences, and prejudices from home will influence the choices she makes in framing her documentary. It will still be a

documentary created by and seen through a very specific experiential lens.

Understanding the author's lens is key to understanding both their approach to writing and travel. Authors who travel and write through a more personal memoir-type lens, as does Moreno and, as we will see, Dowd, create knowledge of a place, culture, and people as they relate to the individual traveler/writer. Perhaps one of the most popular examples of this lens in recent times is Elizabeth Gilbert's self-indulgent *Eat Pray Love*; rather than learning about the various cultures of Italy, India, and Bali, we learn about what Gilbert thinks these cultures can do for her on her journey of selfhood and her misadventures in trying to actualize these benefits. If used well, however, as Bill Bryson does in several of his books, including *In a Sunburned Country* about his time in Australia, authors can use their experiences to highlight cultural similarities and differences, comment on travel and the role of the traveler in general and specifically in that place, and ultimately teach their audiences quite a bit about the place, culture, and people themselves. As mentioned earlier, a documentary lens attempts to teach the same kinds of things as a personal memoir lens, but the creation of knowledge is further separated from the individual traveler/writer.

The documentary style and the lens it creates is a historically popular form of travel writing and was, in fact, part of Samuel Johnson's approach during his trip to Scotland in 1773. Paul Fussell writes that "before the development for tourism, travel was conceived to be like study, and its fruits were considered to be the adornment of the mind and the formation of the judgment. The traveler was a student of what he sought" (Fussell 39). Johnson certainly traveled to study and document what he learned for the reading public of 18th century England. Johnson "believed utterly in the republic of letters, the

community of learning, with the whole of man and nature for its object, and all human enterprise and improvement depending on it" (Levi 21). However, unlike Brân's purely documentary approach, Johnson valued the commentary and discussion on learning as well as the subject learned, though he did not quite go so far into personal storytelling as Moreno advocates. Peter Levi calls Johnson "a sharp observer of the real shape of things... [but] his ideal is to make a series of sternly objective verbal models of reality: they are meant to be unambiguous" (13). Interestingly though, or maybe not so, Johnson's observations, commentary, and even itinerary were anything but objective and heavily influenced by his experiences, upbringing, and encounters from his home of London, England.

In the introduction to his edition of Johnson and his travel companion Boswell's accounts of their travels in Scotland, Levi notes that British travel writing and tome-like country histories were already popular in late 18th century England. Areas from the Lake District to Ireland were being explored and written about for public consumption. Perhaps the most influential work for Johnson's own travel writings was Thomas' Pennant's *Tour in Scotland 1769*. Pennant's exhaustively thorough account set a new standard in British travel writing, elevating the genre above the previous works of Addison, Smollett, and Sterne, through his close observations and attention to detail. Levi quotes Johnson as saying of Pennant, "He's the best traveler I ever read; he observes more things that anyone else does" (Levi 14). Johnson appreciated Pennant's approach to travel for it mirrored his own: to study and learn about people, places, and especially nature that needed clearer definition and to be more deeply understood.

Johnson did not travel to Scotland blindly, though. While Pennant's work was certainly a standard Johnson hoped to surpass in his own

travel writing, Martin Martin's *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (1703) was the work that actually formed his ideas of the wild, savage, romantic Scotland he envisioned as a boy. Martin depicts an ancient way of life, all but gone by Johnson's trip, that provoked great curiosity in Johnson. Many of the topics Johnson covers in his account are topics drawn from Martin, notably "the happiness and health of the islanders, the question of second sight, natural economy, antiquities, orchards and trees, whisky, language, dress, architecture, religion and education" (Levi 16), among others. This sort of advanced preparation is an aspect of travel that Johnson feels invaluable, saying in a letter to Joseph Barette, "He that knows which was to direct his view sees much in a little time" (Johnson *Letters* 135). Additionally, once the traveler finally embarks on his or her journey, the traveler must actively seek out those who can increase and improve upon the knowledge already gleaned by the traveler from his or her advance study and immediately commit to paper what is learned. Thus, Johnson's personal use for traveling, as he told his friend and correspondent, Mrs. Thrale, is "to regulate imagination by reality, and instead of thinking how things may be, to see them as they are" (Johnson *Letters* 359).

That is easier said than done. Thomas Jemielity attributes this desire for knowledge regarding the outside world, or the world outside Johnson's own, to a desire to create a sounder basis for him to make his evaluations and judgments as a critic and qualifier of human achievement and life (Jemielity 459). Additionally, advanced preparation creates images and expectations on which the traveler, in this case Johnson, can and will pass judgment. These judgments necessarily come from Johnson's own experiences at home, middle-upper class London in the late 18th century, against which all comparisons will be made.

Inherently, the preparation and the end result are colored by home and so are the experiences during the travel. A perfect example of this is Johnson's disappointment at the realities of native Highlander life. By 1700 the Highlands and the Lowlands of Scotland were increasingly separated. The Lowlanders were rapidly converting to John Knox's Presbyterianism, moving toward a more agricultural economy, and dropping their native language in favor of English. The major cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh "were beginning to exhibit all the characteristics of 'polite' commercial society" as defined by their "civilized" neighbors to the south (Herman 109). The Highlanders, on the other hand, maintained the clan system and therefore clung tightly to their old Catholic beliefs or converted with the many of the chieftains to Episcopalianism, stuck to the shepherding life, and firmly held on to the Scots Gaelic language. In the most remote parts of northern Scotland and the Western isles, the most primitive hunter-gatherer cultures still existed, surviving off of fishing and gathering in their tiny huts on the inhospitable rocky coast.

This reality hardly matched Johnson's romantic ideal of the daring, rebellious clan leaders, fighting for their land and their culture, the "noble savage" applied to the Highlands. Johnson's nostalgia for this wild, barbaric past is evident in his discussion of the black stones supposedly used by the Highland chiefs to make contracts and alliances. He describes the oath,

which was considered as more sacred than any other obligation, and which could not be violated without the blackest infamy. In those days of violence and repine, it was of great importance to impress upon savage minds the sanctity of an oath...when they had established their faith by this tremendous sanction, inconstancy and

treachery were no longer feared. (Johnson *Journey* 141-142)

Both Johnson's naïveté about and yearning for the days of yore and his attitude of superiority are on display in this passage. He chooses to invoke this romantic image of barbaric rituals, perhaps as a way to engage and thrill his audience or to engage intellectual consideration of the kinds of life outside a posh London salon, and yet distances himself and his audience from the subject by referring to the savage mind and the days of violence and repine. He chooses to present himself as a scholar of human behavior, an expert on the needs of those more savage and less civilized than himself and his readers. Yet had he not had such a specific preconceived notion of Scottish barbarism, formed at an early age by romantic accounts, the sense of close-mindedness might not be quite as pervasive as in comments like this one.

Moments like this reflect the limitations to a purely documentary approach to travel and travel writing and show how the author's experiences play a role in forming the lens through which he or she views travel. Johnson's attempt to create an honest and realistic vicarious travel experience of Scotland for his readers is marred by his inability to completely erase himself from his account. Rather he succeeds in creating the kind of experience his readers, members of London's upper-middle and upper class intelligentsia, would be likely to have were they to travel to Scotland themselves as their lenses would be similarly formed with the same kind of expectations, pre-knowledge, and disappointments.

Johnson's disappointment with the realities of Scottish life is more apparent during his trip to Col. He acknowledges that the life

of which the idea had delighted our imagination [no longer exists]...[and daily

life is] a series of distress: where every morning is labouring for expedients for the evening; and where all mental pains or pleasure arose from the dread of winter, the expectation of spring, the caprices of their chiefs, and the motions of the neighboring clans; where there was neither shame from ignorance, nor pride in knowledge; neither curiosity to inquire, nor vanity to communicate...[which is] to be expected from an illiterate people. (Johnson *Journey* 113)

This is not the Highland life described in Martin's book nor is it the idealized barbarians Johnson's audience wants to read about. Ian Donaldson discusses how Johnson often "satirizes the common human expectation that life must be radically different or radically better in some other part of the world" (Donaldson 784), but this passage shows that Johnson, despite his self-proclaimed intellectual superiority, falls into that same expectation himself. For all his writing and discussion of travel, the furthest and most exotic locale Johnson ever traveled to was, in fact, Scotland. So it would make sense that he would expect, and perhaps even hope, that Scotland would turn out to be the wild, untamed land of romance and daring deeds of his childhood dreams.

Despite his disappointment, palpable in the simple description of daily life as a series of distress, Johnson strives to be the prepared observer, ready to learn and pass judgment and presents himself as such in all his interactions at home, in letters, and while traveling. His discussion reflects a keen observation of the human condition in the inhospitable Highlands, a condition he deems simple and desperate. The people do not value [educational] knowledge, curiosity, or communication (or discussion of topics of intellectual interest) because those intellectual pursuits have no value in the kind of

life they lead. They do not know what they lack in terms of intellectual stimulation, so there is no shame for lack of knowledge. Despite his objective tone, this bothers Johnson or he would not have specifically mentioned these intellectual and educational deficiencies. He may be trying to see the reality as it is, but his writings imply that this reality is less than the reality of civilized and engaging London society. It is no wonder that Johnson said to his friend and travel companion, James Boswell, “The noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees is the high road that leads him to England!” (Boswell 129). For England, and specifically London, is against what Johnson judges everything.

Samuel Johnson said in his account of his trip to Scotland, “All travel has its advantages. If the traveler visits better countries, he may learn to improve his own, and if fortune carries him to worse, he may learn to enjoy it” (Johnson *Journey* 133). However, it is one thing to say this and another to put it into practice. Johnson is well recorded in his desire to travel to learn about other places, chronicle that knowledge, and then comment upon it. Certainly, he would approve of the general idea of Zoë Brân’s documentary approach to travel in that she, too, strives to learn as much new knowledge about a place and people and record that knowledge to share with others. This act of sharing knowledge is his way of improving his home through his travels. But Johnson’s desire to use that knowledge in the continuing and evolving conversation of intellectual ideas that pervaded 18th century London inherently forces his actual travel and writings to be subjective rather than objective. He is too influenced by his lifetime readings, his personal and professional acquaintances, his constant writing and communication, his upbringing and adult life in London society, and his own sense of intellectual superiority to fully achieve the objective, documentary style of travel writing of which he seemingly approves.

His home and how he presents himself at home is so integral to who he is that the lens through which we see Scotland in his *Journey* is, “Scotland as Presented by the Life Experiences of Samuel Johnson.” There are moments of pure and heartbreaking truth, beauty, and humanity, but there are also moments where the reality he sees is not the reality as it is, despite what he writes to Mrs. Thrale.

Though Johnson claims objectivity as his stated goal, he seems unable to avoid viewing the country and people of Scotland through a lens formed by constant, if implicit, comparisons between the Highlands and London, depicting a people “without the trappings of European civilization” (Lindsay 1), objectifying both the country and its people. Johnson writes through the lens of the educated, cultured, and moneyed 18th century Londoner; the knowledge he creates is the knowledge of Scotland not as the land of the wild, rugged, and romantic Highland chief but as the land of the impoverished noble savage whose nobility comes from his simple yet dogged attempt to eke out a life in such an inhospitable place. Johnson achieves his goal of continuing the intellectual discussion of Scotland, but it comes at the price of viewing the land and people through the lens of Johnson’s experience rather than the reality of Scotland itself.



We still live in an information age, though our information, more subjective than ever, whips around us in a glut of 24-hour news cycles, newspapers, magazines, e-mails, the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, text message, movies, and television rather than the 18th century’s constant exchange of letter, pamphlets, books, and lectures. Many feel that Western civilization still reigns at the epitome of civilized culture, though

the epicenter has shifted from London to New York and many Asian cities are starting to take the place of London and New York as cultural and financial capitols. There is still a sense of entitlement that comes with being a citizen of a self-described most cultured, elite, and powerful nation. The difference, though, is that many more people of all backgrounds are traveling and even writing about it.

As our world grows increasingly smaller through faster technology and increased travel, it is no longer enough to take a documentary approach to travel and travel writing. Rick Steves, one of the U.S.'s more popular travel guides and writers, approaches travel as a political act, "to have enlightening experiences, to meet inspirational people, to be stimulated, to learn, to grow" (vii). Yet Steves, taking a page from Samuel Johnson, argues that we must not just experience other cultures, but use those experiences to turn an eye toward our own culture in an effort to find ways to improve our home. Speaking from the position of a U.S. citizen writing mainly for other U.S. citizens he says, "Holding our country to a high-standard and searching for ways to better live up to its lofty ideals is not 'America-bashing.' It is good citizenship....By learning from our travels and bringing these ideals home, we can make our nation even stronger" (viii). In this way travel becomes a political act, an act of both enjoyment and progress for the open-minded, thinking citizen. It is an important and progressive approach for American travelers in a post-9/11 world.

Additionally, acknowledging the role the idea of home plays in our travels can both ease and complicate travelers' relationships with their destinations, and often people's experiences at home, most often their country of origin, dictate how they experience a new place, people, and culture. Samuel Johnson, for example, traveled

with the righteousness of 18th century British imperialism enveloping him as he explored that barbaric area known as Scotland. Maureen Dowd reveals a similar sense of American arrogant righteousness through her journeys in Saudi Arabia in 2011, expressing opinions of Saudi female subjugation that both thrill and terrify her readers with their sheer brazenness. Johnson at least attempts to put his philosophy into action, writing about his travels as a way to continue the conversation regarding Scotland and current matters among London's social elite and intelligentsia. Dowd, on the other hand, seems to take the approach that her home, customs, and way of life are what can improve the places to which she travels.

Dowd, the *New York Times*' only female op-ed columnist, is a legend in the field of journalism. She has covered and eviscerated presidents and their staff for years, won the 1999 Pulitzer for distinguished commentary for her coverage of President Clinton's impeachment trail, and has won legions of fans and enemies through the years. Much of her work deals with gender relations, both playing with and upending traditional (if antiquated) binaries of female beauty and sex versus male intelligence and power. She rejects the anti-feminine feminism and revels in her femininity but "bristles at the suggestion that she's used her feminine wiles to get information" (Levy 5). She claims she lives according to the Carole Lombard philosophy: "I live by a man's code, designed to fit a man's world, yet at the same time I never forget that a woman's first job is to choose the right shade of lipstick" (Levy 7).

If Dowd sounds like a character, it is perhaps because she is. Ariel Levy's profile of her in *New York Magazine* discusses how she not only writes as her persona, something she was often criticized for as a reporter, but also lives as her persona. One friend describes how she's created

a “character called Maureen Dowd who is dazzlingly glamorous” (Levy 11), while Levy says, “she’s created her own reality—Dowdworld—and we just live in it” (Levy 7).

Dowd’s “A Girl’s Guide to Saudi Arabia,” originally published in the August 2010 issue of *Vanity Fair*, certainly reflects Dowdworld in many ways. The piece focuses on binaries prevalent in Dowd’s other writings: women vs. men, Western civilization vs. Middle Eastern non-civilization, new vs. old. The world Dowd writes of is much smaller and more connected than Johnson’s; the wilds of Scotland a few hundred miles away from London have been replaced by the arid deserts of the Middle East, half a world away and yet intimately close. The binaries of us-vs.-them are both simplified yet increasingly complex at the same time. Though the physical and cultural differences are much more obvious, they are complicated by a barrage of politics, news media, diplomacy or lack-there-of, and the mass of binaries present within Saudi culture itself. Dowd focuses mainly on the binary of Saudi men versus all women, utilizing her lens of a successful woman in a man’s career to generate knowledge designed, perhaps, to spark indignation among her liberated, modern female readers. She describes Saudi men as “often reflexively say[ing], ‘No, no, no’—‘La, la, la!’—to women because it’s the safer answer” (Dowd 68) and giving what she calls “The Smile...of sweet exasperation...It translated into, ‘No f—ing way, lady’” (55). Women, on the other hand, are “legally, sexually, and sartorially [buried] alive” (55), “wander zombie-like” through segregated shopping mall, and are even sometimes shown off to potential mothers-in-law, who have matchmakers “look under the hood and kick the tires of the bride-to-be” (64) at events that sound suspiciously similar to the livestock show at the Houston Rodeo, according to Dowd’s description. Such examples, no matter how wittily described, pointedly reinforce the

differences between gender roles and social attitudes in the two countries as seen through Dowd’s value judgments and qualifications.

These qualifications of Saudi culture and customs are constant in Dowd’s piece. Dowd describes how “Saudis fret that the rest of the world sees them as aliens, even though many are exceptionally charming and welcoming once you actually breach the wall” (58), but in the next sentence further describing Saudi sensitivity to the world’s view, qualifies their ways as “Flintstone” and later calls the rate of social progress “akin to a snail on Ambien” (58), justifying that sensitivity with her own judgments. These small asides and off-hand descriptions might seem inadvertent if they were not an integral part of her writing style. Through these qualifications, Dowd is inferring a lesser status on The Kingdom as compared to the forward-thinking ways of the United States and its cultural compatriots.

The most interesting part of the essay is Dowd’s professed determination see how much bending of the rules she, as an American woman, could get away with. “At various establishments I began amusing myself by seeing how long it took for male Cerberuses to dart forward and block the way to the front sections reserved for men,” she writes (61). She describes waiters refusing to serve her already ordered coffee until she stepped back into the female section or even engaging in a “Reggie Bush run” to stop a woman from sitting in the male section. Hotel desk clerks chide her to put on her abaya and prevent another female journalist from entering the gym, and rent-a-car men refuse to let her rent a car without renting a male driver as well. She enlists a friend to stage “a brief sit-in at the men’s section of Starbucks in the upscale Kingdom Centre Mall” and sneaks a young Saudi man up to her hotel room to translate the television news and talk shows for her (61).

Dowd also describes the paranoia that arises from the potential of unknowingly making mistakes that could send you to Deera Square or Chop Chop Square; “It’s the one with the big drain, which the Saudis claim is for rain” (62).

It is in these moments that what is implicit in her constant qualifications is made explicit: though Dowd’s personal goals remain unclear, her piece chooses to reveal Saudi Arabia through her own experience as a place that is “less than” her home. She wishes to impose her home, her customs, what she thinks society should be on this country. Whether or not Saudi culture is good or right is beside the point, as “good” and “right” are always subjective and unable to be judged from a broad standpoint without being an ideological value judgment. Rather than using her experiences at home as a basis for viewing and expanding her knowledge of the world, she uses home as a basis for what is the proper way to live. Her rationale, as stated in an interview on this piece with NPR’s Mary Louise Kelly, is that Saudis think “they’re undergoing amazing, kind of radical change...but you don’t know how much things have changed unless you try” (Dowd Interview). As a journalist in an increasingly globalized world, her moral convictions *are* as her “home-base”, a 21st century version of Johnson’s “home place.” Despite being formed from her US upbringing, Dowd’s moral grounding is a potent home lens through which she views Saudi Arabia’s evolution.

The question is, though, how can one evaluate the change when one refuses to acknowledge the standards and rules of the place that is supposedly changing? Dowd tells Kelly, “I wanted to do a travel piece about a place you couldn’t travel to because the whole concept is so funny. And the Saudis are so deeply schizophrenic and ambivalent that, of course, they say they want tourists, but then they

probably won’t get around to it for another century.” She turns Saudi Arabia into a joke, something “funny,” because she doesn’t bother to investigate why it is such a restrictive country, what it is being done to move forward from that restriction, and why there is resistance. It is a surprisingly superficial piece for one who prides herself on getting to the heart of the matter in her journalism. Dowd views Saudi Arabia one of Johnson’s places “worse” than home, but rather than learning from and enjoying it, she chooses to view its supposed backwardness and inferiority through her own lens of rules, customs, standards, and self-righteousness. And in this case, the personal memoir lens of the author is so present that it could cause the readers to distrust both the place and people being written about and the lens through which the audience reads about them. Though clearly not every reader would have such a negative reaction, it is important to note that the knowledge created by the lens through which Dowd writes is knowledge of Dowd and her opinions of Saudi gender conflict rather than more truthful knowledge of Saudi Arabia and its internal social conflicts.

Clearly the inflated sense of self that comes from traveling from a dominant world power to another (implicitly less than) country is something that has remained an integral part of travel writing from the 18th century to present. Many travelers and writers approach traveling this way, and it certainly offers a unique lens through which to view the world outside one’s home. It seems, however, that this presentation of the know-it-all self with nothing to learn limits one’s experiences and ability to use the knowledge gained from those experiences. Through exploring Johnson and Dowd, it seems that traveling with a lens balanced between acquiring documentary knowledge and personal experience yields a more complete travel experience. We, as travelers, should recognize

that we all travel with preconceived notions and prejudices that are difficult to rid ourselves of, but, with an open mind, can lead to a richer, more complete learning experience that can have more effective benefits upon returning home.



I tell the story of our encounter with the gypsy fortune-teller that I opened with frequently, and it always elicits hearty laughs and a congratulations that we weren't suckered out of more money. But as I have been exploring the idea of how people's sense of home affects their self-presentation when traveling abroad, I keep feeling a sense of disappointment about how I handled the situation with the woman, a part of the Iberian Kale ethnic group of Romani. I let my preconceived notions of what Spanish Romani are supposed to be and my attitude toward what I called "street people" earlier rule my actions and responses. I failed to do what I believe the primary purpose and philosophy of traveling is: to learn about our world with an open mind.

After engaging with Steves' philosophy of travel, I again reflected on our experience with the Roma woman that day in Granada, my reaction, and what I actually learned from that interaction and the rest of our time in Granada. I realized that my reaction to the Romani, or Gitanos, was based on my own notions of gypsies, gleaned primarily from Bizet's opera *Carmen* and a friend's horror stories of her own gypsy interaction in Turkey, and my notions of what I referred to earlier as "street people." The woman was certainly not a fiery, passionate gypsy dancer, intent on stealing my husband and leading a gun-running operation on the side, nor was she willing to throw a baby at me to steal my shopping bags. She was an entrepreneur of sorts, expecting reasonable payment for services

rendered, even if services were not willingly accepted.

Additionally, my guilty prejudice toward "street people," based on my interactions with the homeless and conmen pretending to be homeless on Houston's street corners, was an inaccurate way to view this woman and her brethren. A more accurate comparison might be the buskers and street performers in the subways of New York and the sidewalks of Covent Garden who are neither homeless nor begging for money. Unfortunately the name "Gitano" does often carry a negative connotation in Southern Spain, specifically related to socio-economic status. Terms like "Gitano" and "quinqui" refer to the lowest levels of society, often with connotations of untrustworthiness, lack of ambition, and sometimes even a criminal element. These connotations are compounded by lack of stable employment and itinerant lifestyles with the caves of Sacromonte sometimes replacing a physical house. Often, "Gitano" is a term of abuse, and people self-identify as Gitano in degrees, depending on how closely they fit certain stereotypes.

Despite this negative aspect, it can be a good thing to identify proudly as Gitano in Southern Spain. Rather than being considered foreign, Kale Romani are often considered "real" Spain in terms of folklore and culture. This is most apparent and striking in the phenomenal Andalusian art of flamenco, and it was at a flamenco cafe called El Gallo that I began to understand the complexities of Southern Spanish and Gitano culture. The art of flamenco is famous the world round, and Granada and Sevilla boast some of the most spectacular performers. This is because flamenco, a highly percussive music and dance style, was influenced as much by Gitano music and dance as non-Gitano Andalusian culture and many of the

instrumentalists, singers, and dancers are Gitano themselves.

Flamenco is a highly respected and protected art form in Spain. As we entered the café, we were told that photography and videography were prohibited during the performance. As it began each dancer made an arresting entrance down a colorfully lit staircase onto the stage, striking a dramatic pose and accompanied by the rhythmic clapping and stomping of the musicians. The costumes were joyfully colorful, their hair slicked down into cinnamon-roll buns, and the electricity of anticipation enraptured the audience. But the most shockingly exhilarating aspect of the two-hour performance was the passion, pain, and primal nature of the dancing and singing. The singers' throaty, powerful voices reminded one of a muezzin's call-to-prayer, and they poured every ounce of emotion into each note, while the dancers moved with painstakingly controlled movements as if their inner wildness was seconds from breaking free. It was a privileged glimpse into a mysterious and highly historical art form.

While attending this spectacular performance, I realized my mistake in interacting with the Roma fortune-teller on the path by the Alhambra was not that I approached her with my preconceived notions from my experiences at home. That was to be expected. After all, my experiences at home are my point of departure for learning about the world, the lens through which I view and create new knowledge. My mistake was in not understanding that she was part of the same culture as the regal flamenco dancers we saw at El Gallo. The Spanish Romani culture is as distinct and varied as any and weaves into the multi-cultural tapestry that creates the singular Andalusian culture. This is what Steves means and is reflected in Johnson and Dowd: as travelers we create our own narratives of the world based in our experiences

at home and evolved by our experiences abroad. Of course we will start with specific ideas about a place or culture, but it is the conscious effort to allow those ideas to change and grow that defines a traveler from, say, a tourist. In travel, there is so much consideration of raindrops, and we often forget to consider the beauty of the entire storm.

As writers, however, it is imperative we not forget to consider the beauty of the entire storm. We create our own narratives through the lens of our experiences, but it is necessary that we create as true a narrative of the place or culture or people itself and not simply the narrative of our interactions. The complexities and multiple sides of Andalusia's Romani Gitano culture can only be properly told if one realizes that there are not any true equivalents between one culture and another. The Romani street people of Granada are not the same as the homeless of Houston, and it is the sheer force of their otherness that both complicates and irrevocably binds them to their place within Spanish society. Though my own narrative of Romani interactions can illustrate various aspects of these people, my duty is to tell their story honestly and completely through my own lens.



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