

Saghar kholghi Arris  
skholghi@uncc.edu

## **Unseen Shades of Sunset**

*The ocean was pulsing with anticipation to embrace the grace of the sun, yet only a little fish living in the heart of the ocean knew the secret of that magic union. On the Carolina Beach my heart was dancing to the unheard melody of magnificent waves and I was gazing at the horizon and wishing to catch a glimpse of that splendid moment. The silky hands of the sun were shaking passionately waiting to color the heart of the ocean with unique abstract painting.*

I have lived that moment thousands of times since my childhood, yet the effect of juxtaposing colors on the Caspian Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Rhine River, Persian Gulf and the Atlantic Ocean has each introduced me to a different world of possibilities.

The very first time I experienced cultural and social differences I was only five. We tend to think that children adapt easier, yet we are unaware of its psychological and emotional impact. Race, religious and gender discrimination as well as microaggression and social pressure are wounds that can leave a scar on anyone who has to live and adapt to a new culture. I have learned to challenge and survive the social norms of five different cultures and my journey began when I first had to move to Lebanon from Iran, then to Germany and UAE and finally to the U.S.A.

I was not aware that different cultures will have an influential impact on my vision and teach me to perceive reality with many different lenses. Further, I have learned how to strive and train my mind to reach beyond my limits. One fact that still dazzles me is that even simple concepts such as the perception of time plays a fundamental role in fabricating our cultural beliefs. Before moving to Germany, I always thought I have a

very good sense of time, but I was shocked to find out how much more efficient I can be in planning my day.

In the Persian culture people usually have lunch by noon, dinner by 7:00 p.m. and breakfast by 6:00 a.m. on weekdays. Shops close for an hour for lunch and people try to stick to their plan. On the other hand, in Lebanon there's absolutely no specific time for lunch, breakfast or dinner. People can literally have dinner at midnight and breakfast by noon. You can easily stop by any restaurant after midnight or bar-hop at 3:00 a.m. and do not be surprised if someone sincerely invites you to their birthday before an hour and highly expects you to be there!

I have lived for 14 years in Lebanon and graduated with a B.A in Translation. In Arabic, the translation of the word “ tomorrow ” is only one word, but when a Lebanese tells you tomorrow it can have several meanings. Depending on the tone, facial expressions and most importantly body language “ tomorrow ” can convey meanings such as: After a week, At some point in time, or “ A hope” and “A wish” for tomorrow ! This has absolutely nothing to do with translation or the root and structure of the word “ tomorrow ” in Arabic, but it's only because of the role of social interventions in reframing the interpretation of this word. For a foreigner this can be very stressful and understanding it even more difficult. However, understanding their critical history and mixed culture has helped me to analyse and cope with such norms easier. I have learned to be welcoming to a friend who says tomorrow at 4:00 p.m. and call at the last minute and reschedule for “tomorrow”, then ring my doorbell a couple of times on Sunday noon. Same thing applies more or less to my Emirati friend who comes an hour later to my house despite no traffic. Contrary, I have to literally apologize to my German friend if I am late for less

than four minutes for a coffee. In fact to be more exact, after a minute she will already start to get edgy and wonders why I am late?!

*I was lost in the exhilarating union of the sun and the Rhein River. Through the cold veins and big heart of the old river I caught the secret of those four lost minutes! Those thrilling seconds were another me! A different me again.*

Changing our perception always requires courage and getting out of our comfort zone. It's like becoming a little child again and sensing the world for the very first time. I have learned to be flexible in my mentality and nonjudgmental. This decision has allowed me to constantly grow and become a different me. To survive the social norms I had to find a silver lining in every culture. Furthermore, my scars have taught me to be less biased, yet more kind and comprehensive.

*With my naked eyes I can see the elixir of the sun's soul stretching along the Atlantic Ocean. With every fraction of a second I witness how the sun invigorates the little fish's mind with a powerful identity composed of colorful textures.*

*As I read through poems of Emily Dickenson, I can see: "Sunset at Night-is natural-*

*But Sunset on the Dawn*

*Reverses Nature-Master-*

*So Midnight's-due-at Noon."*

*And I understand why Rumi said: " There's nothing left of me.*

*I'm like a ruby held up to the sunrise.*

*Is it still a stone, or a world*

*Made of redness? It has no resistance*

*To sunlight."*

*I can easily visualize Goethe when he wrote : “ The eye must be something like the sun,*

*Otherwise no sunlight could be seen*

*God’s own power must be inside us,*

*How else could-Godly things delight us?”*

*And Oh My!! I can see crystal clear when Khalil Jobran said: “ For the breath of life is in*

*the sunlight and the hand*

*Of life is in the wind.”*

*Different me.Unseen Shades of Sunset. (994 words)*