CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Lisa S. Anderson

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Robert J. Seman conducted by George Gavrilis on April 30, 2013. This interview is part of the Carnegie Corporation of New York Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

3PM | Session #1 (video)

Interviewee: Lisa S. Anderson | Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: George Gavrilis | Date: April 30, 2013

Q: This is George Gavrilis. I'm here with Lisa [S.] Anderson, president of the American University in Cairo [AUC]. And we're here to interview Lisa for the Carnegie Corporation of New York Oral History Project, which is being carried out by the Columbia Center for Oral History. Good morning, Lisa.

Anderson: Good morning.

Q: It's great to see you again. I should note for the record that we do know each other and that I was in your comparative politics survey back when I was in graduate school and when you were teaching in the political science department here.

Anderson: My condolences.

[Laughter]

Q: Well, I enjoyed it. I did enjoy it. But I do remember a couple papers that I am still ashamed of.

Anderson: [Laughs]

Q: You've forgiven me, no doubt.

Anderson: [Laughs]

Q: Despite having taking courses from you, one of the things that I realized I don't know much about you is where you grew up. Can you tell us that?

Anderson: I grew up on the middle of the south shore of Long Island in idyllic circumstances, in my estimation, and had the same friends from kindergarten all the way through twelfth grade. And like many people, there were two kinds of people in the village that I grew up in—those who came on their seventh-grade trip to Manhattan and decided that they would never come back again, and those who thought that that was the height of their aspirations. So I have many friends there now, my family is still there, and my high school classmate just retired as the postal letter carrier. And I think to myself, sometimes I wonder, I could be retired now.

Q: All right, thank you for that. Now, you did go to Sarah Lawrence College and then Tufts [University] and then you got your Ph.D. from Columbia University. But the question that I wanted to ask you is—and feel free to correct any of that—when was it that you started to study the Middle East, or perhaps you can tell us what your first memorable encounter with the region was as a region of interest?

Anderson: Well, it sort of—there was a moment even before I got to college. The year I graduated from high school, my mother was reading the newspaper and she was late to becoming a world traveler and a great enthusiast at this point. And she saw an ad for a cruise in the eastern Mediterranean that had a typo in it. And so all four of the family got to go for the price of one, which [laughs] for my mother was great coup. And most of it was in the Greek islands, as these cruises would be, but there was a side trip from Alexandria on the bus to Cairo and an overnight in Cairo and then back to Alexandria and then back onto the ship. And this was my high school graduation present and it was just absolutely spectacular, as you can probably tell.

So I started studying classical Greek when I went to college. I am not a gifted linguist [laughs], however. So I was struggling with that and then took a course that no one would ever dare teach now call Politics in Culture and World Affairs. And as a young girl from Long Island, my view of what I wanted to do was be a civil rights lawyer, because I was dedicated to changing the world and so forth and so on and apart from this trip had been barely outside the United States. So this was this course that was sort of everything you want to know about the rest of the world. This imperious instructor—she was absolutely spectacular, but very, very self-assured. So she would assign things to her students. So she decided that because I had been to Egypt, such as it was, that I should write my paper on Egypt. Eighty pages later, I kid you not, it was the longest thing I had ever read, much less written at that point, I had completely fallen in love with Egypt. That was it. And I dropped Greek and I started Arabic as soon as I could get access to studying Arabic. And of course, for forty years, I have failed to learn Arabic, but [laughs] that was it. That was it.

And it was this wonderful moment of kind of coming together. Finally, I could explain things. It was partly that it was about Egypt and it was partly this miraculous moment—it happened to be that semester [Gamal Abdel] Nasser died and it was the front-page news in *TIME* magazine and I could go home and be the authority on Egypt. I knew more than my parents knew about this. And it was the first time in my life I'd ever known anything more than my parents knew. So there was this sort of maturation in it, but it was also something that I said at the time, "I'm going to do this until I get bored." And I have.

Q: But your first book [*States, Peasants, and Tribes: Colonialism and Rural Politics in Tunisia and Libya*] was about Tunisia and Libya—

Anderson: Correct.

Q: —so how did you go from Egypt—

Anderson: Well—

Q: —to the other north African countries?

Anderson: Right. Then I started seriously started studying Arabic and I had a summer in Tunisia and a summer in Egypt. And I concluded, as I really began to get into the literature of the region and sort of what people as political scientists—because by then, I was in graduate school and anticipating perhaps doing something in government or NGO [nongovernmental organization]

world but decided that I was more contemplative than most of the people that I was at Tufts with, so I ended up in a Ph.D. program. But I was thinking about, how do you decide what you want to write a dissertation about? How do you decide what you're interested in? And at that point, Egypt was very, very well covered by academics. Even then, it had a very strong academic community of its own. Its own history was being written by its own scholars. American academics knew Egypt very well. By contrast, the country right next to it—Libya—at that time, there were six books in English. So I decided well, if I write the seventh, that constitutes a contribution [laughs] to the field. And moreover, it was intriguing to think that here was a place that nobody knew anything about. It didn't have a history that had been written by historians. So I got interested in that, and then I decided—by then I was at Columbia—that would be my dissertation focus. But I wasn't sure I'd be able to get a visa. So I developed a comparative study with Tunisia, which—both the Tunisians and Libyans were insulted to be compared with each other [laughs], but it worked out to be a very good project. And I did, of course, get my visa to Libya after all.

Q: You said that they were insulted—

Anderson: [Laughs]

Q: —being compared to one other. I've experienced something similar in my own work. But tell me, when you were over there and you were describing your project to people, how did they react to it?

Anderson: Well, it was a project which entailed an examination of the comparison of what I called at the time state formation and creation of peasants in both of these—what were at that point Ottoman provinces. And they were interested that somebody was interested in the nineteenth century. So in that sense, there was a sort of wind at my back because people liked the fact that somebody cared about that history. But the Tunisians, which, by, of course, the time I was there, had had seventy-five years of French influence and thought of themselves as fairly sophisticated and did have their own scholarly community and so forth and so on, could not understand why or on what basis they could ever be compared to as backward a place as Libya, which was their stereotype of Libya. The Libyans, by contrast, thought that the Tunisians and everyone else in the world did not understand what a brutalizing effect the Italian colonial period had been for them, that they were just congenitally misunderstood—the Tunisians thought they were far more sophisticated and cosmopolitan, that was only because they didn't understand what had happened in Libya. So they too felt that it was an odd comparison. In fact, the comparison itself revealed both sides of those mutual views of each other and revealed a kind of trajectory that if I'd only looked at one of them would not have been as visible in the historical records. So in fact, the Libyans were brutalized by the Italians, and a lot of the subsequent politics in Libya is easily explained by the devastation that the Italians left there. So I think it was very useful. But as I say, at the time, people were a little bit puzzled.

Q: You've brought up a lot of really interesting political issues. And we're going to get to those. But one of the things that I'd like to ask you before we move on is your field research experience. It must have been interesting at the time being in Tunisia and Libya, talking to people, doing research. Do you have any memorable stories that stand out in your mind?

Anderson: Well, first of all, it was a fabulous time and I absolutely loved every minute of it, even though it was not easy. And one of the things that I learned is that many of things you love the most are not easy at the time, but there's a satisfaction in that. Probably the thing that was most remarkable—I was working in the Tunisian archives. And the Tunisian archives now are very well organized. At the time, they weren't particularly well organized, but they were indexed, as you could imagine. The French had sort of put everything in files and so forth and so on. But they were very easy of access. They were in the back of the prime minister's office and so you just went in and you sat there and so forth. And I took out—there was no photocopy machine, but there were photocopying kiosks in Tunis, and so I took things out and photocopied them. It was [laughs] very relaxed. So it was a time where it was relatively easy to do that kind of work.

In Libya, by contrast, the Italians had practically destroyed whatever written record there had been before the late Ottoman period. But there were some unindexed sort of boxes full of papers in an old palace in downtown Tripoli, and there were two old men there who were the custodians of these boxes. And they had studied Ottoman Turkish before the Italian invasion in 1911. They were very old. But they could read Ottoman Turkish and of course, they knew Arabic. And so here was this young American woman coming in and saying, "Do you have the tax records from Misrata in the 1880s?" Nobody had ever asked them that question. We spent days poring—because they knew all the papers. They weren't indexed, but they were in their minds. They knew where everything was. And they got out the tax records and we looked at the changes in the tax—because I was trying to see—I was looking for sedentarization of nomadic populations as they settled along the coasts and you could see that in tax records, among other things. And

those guys were spectacular. Everything was suspended. No, a woman shouldn't have been doing that alone in the 1970s. No, they shouldn't have been talking to me at all. I was an American. No—I mean, I might as well have fallen from the moon. But they didn't care, because I cared about the tax records from Misrata from the 1880s and they just loved it.

The entire time I was—particularly in Libya although it was also true in Tunisia—I was just carried around by people who loved what I was doing and went way, way, way out of their way. So this was a time after the [Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-] Gaddafi revolutionary edicts had come out. You couldn't rent an apartment. You couldn't be seen with a foreigner. There were no restaurants. It was really, really hard. And people let me into all sorts of—you know, the foreign ministry library. I got to go to—the library in the university in Benghazi had a forbidden books room and I sashayed in and sat there and read forbidden books and then everybody, all my scholarly friends at the university said, [whispers dramatically] "What's in there? What books?" And it was like the basic books of Libyan history, such as they were. But anyway, it was a spectacular time. And I always hoped that I would be able to redeem that, that I would be able to in some way repay the kindness of the people who supported my research when I was there. And unfortunately, within a couple of years, the United States and Libya had completely broken relations. It wasn't until thirty years later that I went back and started to try and do the kinds of things that I had always hoped I would be able to do. And I still hope that—either I individually or in my capacity as a person that can help people redevelop scholarly networks—that I can do that before I'm finished.

Q: You've given us a really good entry point into some of the work, particularly the Carnegie-related work, that you're doing at AUC. But before we get into that, can you share with us the story of how it was that you wound up at AUC?

Anderson: Well, one of the things that always characterized me as a political scientist is that unlike most of my faculty colleagues, I actually like administration. And most people go into this line of work in order to avoid being a bureaucrat. But I never minded it and I actually always thought that there was something interesting in trying to develop a context in which people can do the work they do effectively and in a satisfying way. So very early on, I started taking on modest administrative roles. So I was director of the Middle East Institute here at Columbia and then chair of the political science department. And I'll tell you a funny story that I used to say to my colleagues then. Because my children were very small when I was the chair of the department, and people would say, why was I doing this since the children were small? In fact, it was a convenient time because I wasn't going to do a lot of traveling for research. But what I told them, which was also true, is that it was a perfect time because I was still used to tying other people's shoes. And [laughs] that's what a department chair does.

So I was department chair. Then I became dean at SIPA [School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University] and did that for ten years. And at the time, I really didn't know whether I wanted to revert to my research life as a faculty member—by then, the kids who had kept me tied to the Upper West Side had grown and I could easily spend a lot of time in the region and so forth—or whether I was interested in more academic administration. And I was approached to become the provost at AUC, which actually served both those purposes. That is to

say, I could go back to a region I loved, but I could do it in an administrative position which I thought I would be effective at. So I served as provost for two and a half years and then was appointed president twenty-five days before the Egyptian Revolution [of 2011].

Q: All right. And we'll talk about that. But tell me first what AUC looked like when you got there.

Anderson: Well, first of all, when I first got to AUC was when I was studying Arabic in the 1970s, and it was a tiny little place downtown and it didn't have any air conditioning. And I reminded people, when we made the move to the new campus my first semester as provost and the air conditioning didn't work on the new campus yet because we moved a little bit early, that there was a time that there wasn't air conditioning [laughs] and students learned things or didn't learn things, as the case may be. But AUC, physically, had been for ninety years captured in the middle of Cairo. And interestingly, that downtown campus very much—as you can tell because it's right on Tahrir Square very much in the center of the city—had always been intended to be a temporary expedient. And ninety years later, they finally had found a suburban location where they could build a new campus and that's what they had done. So when I got there in 2008, it was the semester of the move to the new Cairo campus. And that campus is a completely purpose-built campus. It's all brand-new facilities, a spectacularly beautiful campus, and of course, the only operating clean room for nanotechnology research in all of Egypt. I mean, every classroom's a smart classroom. It's a remarkable facility. But we have still the downtown campus as well. And when we've been able to—and of course, the upheavals of the revolution have made this difficult, so as many people point out, if we had not moved, we probably would

have closed, because we couldn't keep the facilities open for a whole semester. But the downtown campus, we still do public programming, we have continuing education programs there. So we sort of have the best of both worlds. We're center-city, in the middle of everything, but we also have the suburban campus where our degree programs are now.

Q: One of the things I'd like to talk to you about is the grant that American University in Cairo applied for though Carnegie Corporation. And as I understand it, it was a grant that was about improving academic communication, the visibility of scholars and their connection to not only other academics, but also other policymakers, but with a reference to information technology. Now, I've probably given a very poor and—

Anderson: [Laughs]

Q: —technical description of it, but perhaps you can describe it in your own words and tell us about the making of that project. And feel free to go in-depth.

Anderson: Well, one of the things that struck me when I first got to AUC was how effectively the faculty use new information technologies for teaching. So when I say every classroom is a smart classroom, it's not just that the hardware is there, but the faculty use it. And one of the complaints when we moved that first semester and the air conditioning wasn't ready and the smart classrooms weren't really working and so forth and I would say in an offhand sort of way what I would have said at Columbia—"So sit outside under a tree"—people were furious about that. Because they had data shows. They used this. They were accustomed to showing clips of

movies or going online in a class to show people things and so forth and so on. And so it's a very sophisticated faculty in terms of teaching. But interestingly, it was almost invisible as a research community to its wider research colleagues around the world. So if you took say, people in business, they were doing very, very interesting work in the classroom but nobody even knew we had a business school for all intents and purposes. So I realized that if we wanted to have the kind of reach that a university aspires to beyond our own students of the moment, we needed to really ramp up our visibility in this digital world.

Moreover, I thought, and Carnegie agreed with this, that we had a faculty whom many people in the world would want to listen to, would want to know about what they're doing. And obviously in the social sciences, this goes without saying. We have a good political science department, we have excellent anthropology, we have a great history department—those people ought to be available to the world, visible to the world. People need to know that they are there and doing interesting work. But actually, our business programs are spectacular. And people are interested in doing business in the region and what's the difference between doing business in the Middle East from doing business in Europe and so forth.

So all of this was by way of saying, from our point of view, we could reach out into the world and make ourselves more visible and that would be good for us. And because we were doing interesting work, that would be good for everybody. And so we could reach back to the United States and say this is an American institution, but it's in Cairo. And so it's relatively legible. People can understand what we're doing. It's the same kind of department, same kind of faculty appointment, same kind of—and many of our faculty were quite happy to do that and relatively

adroit at doing that. And one of the concerns we always have is if you look at say, Alexandria University or Cairo University or some of the national universities, there are very good faculty there. But they're operating in Arabic, it's harder for the people to have access to the work they're doing, their career trajectories are different, the semester schedules are different, and so forth and so on. And in that sense, we're pretty obvious to people. So we were a way to be a window into the academic community in Egypt and the region and, to some extent, similarly a sort of two-way mirror, that we could also take some of the work that's being done in Egypt and the region and make it clearer, both in the United States and around the world. And I think we've been pretty effective at that. That's the purpose of the grant, though, and I think it's an important role that we can play.

Q: And with respect to some of the architecture or the mechanics of the grant, what kinds of activities are we talking about?

Anderson: Well, some of it's—I mean, it's interesting because it's very—it is about mechanics. It is about having the capacity to develop a more user-friendly website, to have our faculty have more accessible web pages. You know, none of us think about this as much as we should, but you can't just throw everything up online and it takes care of itself. It needs to be maintained. It needs to be updated. It needs to be—there are new technologies where we want to make sure—for example, a lot of our daily and weekly news that we send out to the world and so forth isn't formatted properly for use on mobile telephones. And Egypt has a hundred and twenty percent mobile phone penetration. Everybody [laughs] in Egypt has a phone. So we want to make sure that all of the platforms that people use to access information in the digital world are platforms

that we are up to date on and people can access us, and so you can Google us and you go straight to where you ought to go instead of having to wander around and find us and so forth. So part of it is really the kind of mechanics and technical part of how you have an effective web presence. But then also to encourage in faculty to disseminate their own work in a more effective way—how do they get the right kind of interviews? How do they get their articles cataloged properly, cited it in places you want them to be cited in? So forth and so on.

Q: Are there any headaches or perhaps longer-term risks to doing this project?

Anderson: There are plenty of headaches because there are [laughs] headaches in everything, particularly when you're trying to get [speaks in gruff voice with mock frustration] the university IT [information technology] people to work with the communications office people, but I don't think there are any risks. I mean, I think one of the things that we are very proud of is the quality of the work that our faculty do. And I think it speaks for itself and therefore our role is to simply amplify, as an institution.

Q: And when you think of the amplification or resonance or impact or whatever you might want to call it, could you give us a sense of where you see that headed? Is this an impact that can touch policy makers in both the United States and Egypt? Do you have any examples of that?

Anderson: I think any university probably has a fairly long-term horizon. So no, I don't think we can and I don't think we aspire to shape American policy to Egypt particularly. But I think what we've been able to do in discernible ways is make Egypt more accessible to interested public. If

AUC weren't there, I think the Egyptian Revolution would have seemed much more opaque and complicated. The fact that we were literally—if you pan across the crowds in Tahrir Square, it says the American University in Cairo over in that corner—meant that people would come to us and ask us what was happening, ask us to explain, ask us to be the people on TV as the local informants and so forth and so on, especially, obviously, in English. And I think that helped make clear what was happening and the extent to which it was not about the United States, for example, which I think everybody in the United States tends to think everything is about the United States, so for us to say, "No, this is an internal Egyptian matter" was a useful thing for us to be able to do.

So I think we've done that. I think a lot of our faculty are much more active than they were before, both in talking to people—we have faculty in Washington right now. We have people coming through quite a lot in the United States, either the universities where they got their Ph.D.s—most of our faculty are U.S. Ph.D. holders. And in Egypt, we were going to have—and we will when it resumes—we were going to have a program of putting student interns in all of the offices of the parliamentarians as they developed offices and learned how to have offices and learned how to do constituency relations and so forth in a democratic Egypt. Now, of course, the parliament's suspended, so that program is suspended. But doing those kinds of things, I think are, as I say, precisely what we ought to be doing. So we have a very active program of public lectures and debates about the issues of public moment and often have those downtown so they're easily accessible to a fairly broad public. And we've live-streamed a lot of those and videoed them and so forth, so they're also online.

Q: How does—this is switching gears just a little bit—how does the university as an institution negotiate or swim along the currents of everything that's happened in Egypt in the past couple years?

Anderson: I think we reiterate what was true when AUC was established. AUC was established in 1919, which for those people knowing Egyptian history, was a period of revolution that was for a long time called the Egyptian Revolution [of 1919]. And that was a period in which the Egyptians sent a delegation to the Paris [Peace Conference] peace talks and, like everyone else, were hoping for self-determination, and it was a period that ushered in a fairly restricted but nonetheless quasi-liberal period under the British. At that time, AUC was described as an institution that was supposed to be of service to Egypt. And that's what we say now. We're still supposed to be of service to Egypt. Egypt itself has changed, so what service means has changed, but the fundamental purpose of an institution like AUC is the same. So that may be collaborating more with the national universities to do joint research projects that enhance—I mean, we have a project on Hepatitis C, which is a scourge in Egypt, and we are working on a diagnostic technique and we are hoping to spin that out and do a commercialized operation in the next couple of months. We are working with Assiut University on a project on developing employability skills and career services, because the national universities don't have these. Most of what we do, in other words, we try and emphasize the extent to which this is applied work for Egyptians. So our sciences and engineering tends to be very focused on—you know, say the construction engineering people are working on desert building technologies because we're in a desert. As I said, the chemists are working on disease control kinds of things. The biologists are working on new—this is wonderful—new organisms that have been discovered at the bottom of

the Red Sea. So we're doing all sorts of things that are really supposed to convey not only our ambitions as a research university, but the utility of having an ambitious research university embedded in the Egyptian landscape. One of our history faculty was invited to run the program of archiving the revolution for the National Archives and so forth and so on.

We really are about doing things that are going to enhance the lives of Egyptians. Whether it's helping archive the history or helping on disease control or working on how you do constituency services when you're an elected parliamentarian, name it, that's where we want to be. And we want to be that in Egypt in the first instance and then in the region and then global. And I think that resonates. I think people see that. I think we've been very active to go out and collaborate with national universities or NGOs when we have opportunities to do so. And honestly, I think the language and the rhetoric has changed. We used to talk a lot, and for obvious reasons, that AUC was a bridge between East and West and that kind of thing. To me, that's a very twentieth-century sort of language. I think we're a bridge between the local and the global. And that's one of the reasons why being technologically sophisticated is so important, because our business school has relationships with Northwestern [University]'s business school in Chicago and with the National University of Singapore and INSEAD [Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires] in France and so forth and so on. So I think East-West is sort of dissolving into local and global in a way that I think we can play an important role.

Q: Egypt these days is very much in a revolutionary spirit.

Anderson: Sure is. [Laughs]

Q: How does that affect daily life at AUC?

Anderson: We've have our revolutionary moments on campus. Almost all of our students and faculty were in Tahrir Square during the eighteen days of the revolution. And it was a very heady time in many respects. It was difficult to manage the institution. We were closed, of course, but we had to send home almost all of our study abroad students because the home institutions asked for them to come home. So I remember putting kids in tears on buses off to the airport because they weren't allowed to stay. Everyone else stayed, except eighteen days is a long time for certain faculty. They got antsy and we laughed but they said, "Can we leave for a little while?" Because the university's closed and there's nothing going on and so forth. So they went to Beirut for R&R [rest and recreation], which [laughs] given the history of modern Beirut and the history of Cairo, there was a little bit of irony in that. But we reopened. [Muhammad Hosni El Sayed] Mubarak stepped down on the eleventh of February. We reopened on the thirteenth of February. And for a month, we were the only university open in Egypt. And people were staggered and they said, "Did you know? You must have known when he was going to step down." [Laughs] And we said, "Of course we didn't know." But it's sort of like shooting off a rocket for NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration]. You get all ready and you check the weather report and if the weather is clear, you go off. So that's basically what we did. We had spent all of that time figuring out how we would reopen. And when we realized we could reopen, we did. So that semester was opened late, obviously, and we opened slowly because there was still a curfew and so forth. So that was a logistically complicated semester. But we did actually complete the requisite credit hours and so forth for the semester.

And then the next year, which was last year, we had considerable upheaval on the part of our students and workers. All of the Egyptian universities were in an uproar during that year because the presidents and deans of Egyptian national universities had been appointed by the president of the republic, and all the students and faculty thought that was no longer appropriate. And they therefore demanded that these people step down, some of whom are very talented and didn't want to step down and didn't think it was necessary. In the end, they all did. And then there were elections in these universities. Some of these people were reelected. But the principle that the president of the republic shouldn't appoint presidents and deans of universities was established. That didn't apply to us, because I'd been appointed by the board of trustees like an American university. But there was still that sort of revolutionary spirit that you should be making demands. So that year, we actually had a number of sit-ins in front of the president's office and so forth that were actually very interesting because the students, who tend at AUC to come from a relatively—this is not entirely true, but it's largely true—from a relatively elite social class in Egypt, were in solidarity with the workers and ended up winning—the workers themselves and the students in their support—winning substantial pay increases and improvements in work conditions and so forth and so on, which was a substantively valuable effect of the revolution. So the fact that everybody else was up in arms, here being up in arms at AUC actually had a palpable impact on conditions of people at the university, which was wonderful, actually. And we now have the highest—our minimum wage is the highest in Egypt. And I'm proud of that. I think that's the role we ought to play. It's still difficult for our budget and it's difficult for the household budget of people who don't make very much money. But it's still more than their counterparts make anywhere.

And then we've also subsequently had more student unrest, increasingly for, if you will, symbolic reasons. The revitalization of the Egyptian Student Union, a national student union, our students became very involved in that and therefore they had to show their revolutionary credentials and so forth. At this point, I think much of that has interestingly routinized in some ways. But two of the five presidential candidates, when there were presidential elections last spring, had been presidents of the Egyptian national student union in the 1970s before it was sort of domesticated by Mubarak. Student politics in Egypt are very important, and our students who aspire, I think with some justification, to leadership positions in Egypt—our alumni are disproportionately influential—therefore wanted to be involved in Egyptian national student politics. And so it was no surprise in that sense. But it was difficult to manage because we didn't have the same kind of demands that they could make. They weren't the same kinds of issues. So you have the national universities—those are the ones where the presidents had been appointed by the president of the republic—and then you have private universities—with the exception of us, they're are all proprietary and for-profit. So you could complain about the commercialization of higher education if you're in the privates and you could complain about the government control in the publics, and for us, it's not clear what you should complain about. So they complained about high tuition and other kinds of things that would be familiar to American students as well.

But as I say, I think we've worked through much of that. We never called the police on campus. Subsequently, a number of the privates did call the police and pictures splashed all over the Egyptian press of kids being knocked around and so forth. So we were very careful about those

kinds of things. It was interesting—I said, "Americans don't call the police on campus," and then we had the problems in California and so I felt like, [laughs] "I think we don't call the police on campus. Anyway, we're not going to call the police on campus." And so it took us a long time to negotiate our way out of that but I think we are often considered a reference point for how institutions should be run. And I think we've served that purpose relatively effectively.

Q: When you're looking at the greater context of the country that you're in, do you feel that it's going to turn the corner anytime soon?

Anderson: Oh, I think it already has.

Q: How so?

Anderson: I mean, I just—I will go to my grave astonished at how quickly a culture of politics can change. As somebody who never had a great deal of enthusiasm for political culture approaches to the study of politics in general, to see the empowerment of ordinary Egyptians over the course of literally a month and the sustaining of that in then subsequent years is staggering. So you had individuals who had thought of themselves as subjects, and within a month, they thought they were citizens. And they don't know what to do with being a citizen. It's not that they're educated citizens. It's not that they are experienced at it. But they know they have rights and they know they have responsibilities and they want to exercise both. So what's happened in the succeeding two years or so has been people trying to figure out how to exercise those rights effectively, how to assume those responsibilities effectively. It's very complicated.

They know they don't know what they're doing. They don't know how to do it. But they're never, never going to go back to being subjects. So the project now is really institutionalizing that sense of empowerment and confidence and educating people in how to manage this new role, and it's in little ways and big ways.

I'll tell you a story that happened during the course of the eighteen days that I still think is exemplary of this. I had a driver when I was provost and when I was named president, I brought him along with me to the president's office. And he and I had always talked politics because [laughs] I'm a political scientist and I can't help it and he was willing to go along with that. But this was not a formal part of his job responsibilities [laughs] and in fact, talking politics under Mubarak was not something you did that often in public. The president of the university was, in the 1980s, assigned a bodyguard by the Ministry of Interior and when I became president that was renewed and I said, well, I didn't think I really needed a bodyguard. And there was considerable negotiation about that and in the end, the agreement was, well, these individuals would not be on campus with me and obviously not at home with me, but if I was out and about in Cairo, they would accompany me. And I said all right, fine. But that meant that we had somebody from the Ministry of Interior in the car.

So [laughs] we stopped talking politics—until the twenty-fifth of January and all bets were off, the revolution started and so forth. So within a couple of days, we were back talking politics and trying to figure out what was going on in this country. You know there were literally millions of people out in the street, the police had disappeared, the curfew was in place, so forth and so on. We were driving around trying to figure out—and I was visiting the closed campus and visiting

the faculty housing, visiting the student residence, just make sure everybody was okay and so forth, so I was out quite a bit between the hours of curfew and so forth. And always with this driver whom I obviously knew very well and this body guard who was like, "Oh, why did I draw this one? I could be home." [Laughs] Anyway, toward the end of this eighteen days, there was a prime minister appointed and the driver and I talked about his ministerial appointments and so forth. And as we were getting to where we were going, he turned to the guard and said, "So what's your opinion about all of this?" And the guard said, "Well, I don't really have an opinion." And my driver turned to him and he said, "This is a free country now. You have to have an opinion."

Q: [Laughs]

Anderson: And that's the way it is. And that guard—now I have now talked politics for the succeeding two years with him too and he talks about the fact that "We didn't used to have opinions. Only the president had an opinion." And during the presidential election last spring, I had supporters of all five of the presidential candidates among my drivers and bodyguards and house manager and so forth and so on. And they talked politics. And they talked politics in a civil way, making the case for their candidate, why they didn't think somebody from the military would be good or why somebody from the [Muslim] Brotherhood wouldn't be any good or why somebody from the—and they would debate this with each other a way where not only were they having opinions, but they were learning how to express those opinions and trying to persuade other people of those opinions. And they had never, ever, apart from football, had that experience of supporting opposing teams. And in football [or baseball], you don't try and

persuade somebody to support the [Boston] Red Sox as opposed to the [New York] Yankees. Here were people who were really trying to say, "My candidate is good for the following reasons. You should change your mind." That was happening. Eighty-five million people were doing that. And eighty-five million people were trying to figure out whether the electoral system was the best electoral system. I mean, for a political scientist, it was hilarious. For thirty years, I'd been trying to get people interested in electoral systems [laughs] and suddenly everybody in Egypt wanted to know about electoral systems.

So the whole sense of owning this place, of being a citizen, of needing and wanting—those are responsibilities. It's not just I have a right to say anything. I have a responsibility to educate myself about these political issues. So I used to say one of the funny things about a revolution is that you don't realize how exhausting it is. Because you have your regular day job—even after you've stopped protesting. You have your regular day job, and then all of a sudden, you have to debate political issues into the wee hours of the morning. And then you get up in the morning, you do your day job, and before the revolution, you never even turned on the TV except for the soap operas because you knew the news for tomorrow was going to be the same as it was for yesterday. Now, you need to find out what's going on. You need to find out what everybody's opinion is. There are all the talk shows to watch. There are all your friends to debate with. You're exhausted. It's almost visceral. It's almost making sure you get enough sleep so that you can sustain exercising your rights and assuming your responsibilities as citizens. The whole country is still in that kind of—how does it settle out? How do we do this in a sustained way? So some people are—you know, it's been a long time. It's still not settled. There's still debates about the parliament and debates about the judges and so forth and so on. Some people are

getting a little bit tired and disappointed and frustrated and so forth. But honestly, it's happened. It's already happened. The rest is the hard sloggy part of building the institutions and so forth and so on. But that's going to be built on this base that's just astonishing. So it's happened already.

Q: You've described a picture of Egypt—perhaps I'm wrong in stating this, but of an Egypt where its citizens are ahead of its politicians. Is that fair?

Anderson: Absolutely.

Q: You've also said something really interesting. You've described a watershed where people have gone from subjects to citizens. Is that very different from the Middle East that you encountered when you were a graduate student doing research?

Anderson: It's certainly very different from Egypt. In Tunisia, honestly, the height and end of the Bourguiba period—[Habib] Bourguiba was among the most sort of sophisticated independence-era politicians, kind of an [Mustafa Kemal] Atatürk figure, not a natural democrat but a natural liberal, if you will. And he was succeeded. I mean, the problem is—and this is what happens if you have presidents for life—he overstayed his welcome. And so he was pushed out of office and succeeded by somebody who was neither a liberal nor a democrat and there was a lot of corrosion in Tunisia. But I think there was a time when Tunisians thought of themselves as citizens, and it's not that surprising in that sense that Tunisia was the place it started, because the Tunisians had had more of a taste of what it was like to have a government respected you a little

bit, and the fact that there was such contempt on the part of the [Zine El Abidine] Ben Ali government and they were so predatory in their corruption meant that this was—the Tunisians had fallen further, if you will.

But I certainly think the change in Egypt is staggering. I mean, Egyptians—and the stereotypes of Egyptians, you know, seven thousand years of bureaucracy and the fellaheen and the timeless peasants and all that sort of stuff—that's gone. And again, part of it is the new technologies. People would talk about this as a Facebook revolution—I don't know. The impact of the new technologies is interesting and there will be lots and lots of work to be done about that. But the fact that every single Egyptian has a mobile phone matters. And this is a country where you couldn't get a landline, where people would sign up their newborns to get a landline in twenty-five years. And Egypt is simple because you just put your cell towers right down the Nile and you've covered out pretty much everybody, so that's one of the reasons why it could be done. It's harder to have that kind of penetration in countries that are mountainous and complicated geographically. This is not complicated. But it also means that these timeless fellaheen peasants with the oxen and all that kind of stuff have a mobile phone. And they know everything that's going on.

So you have this simultaneity of the past and future in Egypt that I don't think you—you certainly don't see that in the United States, this sort of collision of worlds and this capacity to leapfrog. So there will never be landlines in Egypt. Who needs landlines? They've completely skipped that stage. And I think in a lot of other respects, there will be institutional developments and technological developments that they can skip. So in many respects, a lot of the clunky old

industrial—not to say agricultural—infrastructure and patterns of behavior, it's going to take some time to sort of surpass that. But a lot of it, they're not even going to have to bother getting rid of. It's not there and they'll just skip it. And they are very, very technologically adroit. The social media worked very well in Egypt because Egyptians tend to be very social, still with the big families living at home, so forth and so on, so it's not surprising that social media worked there. But it's a very, very interesting mix.

Q: Thank you for that insight. Now, we're entering the final phase of the interview and so I think I'd like to shift gears, perhaps in an unwelcome way—

[Laughter]

Q: —and talk about political science. Do I have your permission?

Anderson: [Laughs] Please.

Q: [Laughs] All right. Now, you are a political scientist, ultimately, there's no escaping that, and you've done a lot of work with APSA [American Political Science Association]. APSA is a recipient of a recent and, I believe, active Carnegie grant on the Islam Initiative. And one of the reasons I find that compelling is because APSA, the American Political Science Association, and the work that is associated with it is generally not known for being regionally grounded. So can you tell us about that?

Anderson: Well, in fairness to APSA, I think over the course of the last maybe ten years or so they really have tried to globalize a little bit. They have tried to think about capacity-building in political science outside the United States, so they did some work in sub-Saharan Africa and so forth. Giving credit where it's due. That said, I agree that I don't think American political science in general and APSA as a representative of American political science is nearly as cosmopolitan as it thinks it is. So many of the kind of efforts to create the laws of politics are based on Ohio rather than, you know, a sort of global sense of politics or, for that matter, in my estimation, a historic sense of politics. And I've always thought it's interesting because one way to think about the contemporary social sciences is that one way that they could be scientific was to say anthropology takes care of what's not here and history takes care what's not now and we just concentrate on ourselves. And over the long run, that isn't as cosmopolitan or universal or generalizable as is the aspiration.

So the interest in going beyond the United States, for both the capacity to be a political scientist and, obviously, your empirical ground, is important. Therefore, this interest in finding and facilitating and fostering and nurturing networks of political scientists in the Arab world, I think, is a very welcome initiative because I think it's important to have people who are not from the United States working in American-style political science, and probably more important is to force American political scientists to think about the kinds of things that I was just talking about. How does a sense of citizenship take root? Where does that come from? Why do people think over the course of eighteen days that they have rights that they never dreamt of two weeks earlier? So those kinds of things, I think, should be the puzzles of political science. And having

Americans interacting with a political science community in the region I think can be nothing but fruitful, both for the people working in the region and for political science more generally.

So I think it's very important. But I think it's also true that it's not going to be easy. The culture of political science is very different in the Arab world, in part because it is a culture of working under authoritarianism historically and one of the characteristics of authoritarian rule—probably in general but certainly in this region—has been the absence of access to information, so there's very bad data. So American political science weighed in and they don't know what to do because there's no data for anything. It's estimated that half the commercial transactions in Egypt take place unrecorded. That's going to make it hard for the political scientists to collect the kind of data that they're used to using. They're going to have to work again with much more qualitative methods than many American political scientists are accustomed to using. On the other hand, I think there is more that can be formalized than has been by the political scientists who work in the region. So I think there can be very fruitful conversations here. But it will take some work to gather those people together. Moreover, the interesting thing, even logistically, most political scientists in the Arab world now don't want to leave home. Things are so interesting where they are. So even two weeks off and somewhere else to talk to other political scientists? They have three days for you and they have to stay home because things are changing so fast.

Q: You've brought up a really interesting issue of political will, namely that it may take more than just a really good well-funded Carnegie grant to change this. The other issue that ties into this is the issue of resonance and influencing policymakers. Because that is a big goal that political scientists often have or at least they write about this towards the tail end of whatever

paper they're writing about. Could you speak to that? Could you speak to where we are today as a discipline of political science in terms of influencing the policy ether?

Anderson: Well, I think that's also something that internationalizing the practice of political science will enhance. Because if you think about the origins of political science—you know, [T.] Woodrow Wilson, the Progressive Era—this was civil service reform in the United States. This was an effort to enhance the practice of politics in part by understanding it better. And then over the course of the succeeding hundred years, the understanding it better became an end in itself. And I think there are sociological reasons for that, including the design and dissemination of universities in the United States that needed people to be professors, and so they went off to be professors and there wasn't the continuing intimate connection with the practicing politicians that there was at the outset. But be that as it may, political science does have a moral core of wanting the practice of politics to be better. And it may be that many practicing political scientists think that that will happen naturally if we understand it better, but they wouldn't say that it's pointless. They wouldn't say, that there's no reason to be doing this. There is something to be said for understanding it better because then we can do it better.

What's interesting about the United States is almost internal to the United States—I think it's two things, one of which is that the level of impact you can have in terms of improvements is relatively modest. People understand how to gerrymander electoral districts all too well right now. It's not a matter of [laughs] understanding anymore. But there's also something that's more visible when you have a comparative frame, I think. Things are changing, for example, in the extent to which people have access to information. So the understanding it better is no longer

finding the information itself, it's interpreting the information and really understanding what its impact and meaning is. So the role of the academy is going to change. Because if I've got all the maps of all of the world forever in my pocket on my phone, then the fact that I used to have to memorize capitals of the world, I don't have to do that anymore. And I don't have to even memorize electoral districts anymore. They're on my phone too. So what is the value added of the political scientist?

It is an interpretive role now. And I think those kinds of changes are in some respects more obvious when I'm operating in Egypt—that it's not a question of knowing the information, it is, what does this information actually mean? How do we get from knowing it to understanding it to using it? And that relationship is changing everywhere and changing all across the social sciences and probably in other fields too, but those are the ones I pay attention to. And I think that those kinds of relationships in some respects are more visible outside the United States than they are in the United States. So the impact that political scientists can have—you see that outside the United States and then you come back and you say, "We could be doing more of that here too." There's a—I wouldn't call it complacency. That's not fair to my colleagues. But there is not as much of a sense of how to exercise the influence you want to have or that you think we did all this work to have. You can have that in contexts that are perhaps more open because they're less stable. I often wonder whether part of why Egypt is as interesting as it is is because it's in this sort of fluid period—institutions of the past, institutions of the future, here we are in this moment where [laughs] you actually shape institutions. So it may be in part because parts of the world are in more fluid situations than in the United States, but I think it's more than that. I actually think that the whole world is in a fluider situation than is visible here.

You know, I say, and I think this is true, that one of the things that's interesting about young people today—sort of the youth that made the revolutions in the Arab world—this is the first generation in human history that taught their parents how to do things when they were nine. So from the very beginning, as they were growing up, they have a sense of their own capacity and a skepticism about authority that by the time they're in their twenties, they're not deferential. That's global. It's going to show up at different points in different ways around the world. But my children showed me how to program the VCR. They still know which remote control to use. They still help me with my phone, so forth and so on. And they did that since they were small. That's true across Egypt. And it means the deference to authority, the sense of who knows more and how to learn—I mean, these young people learn from each other. How did my children learn about the phone? From each other. Not from the teacher, not from a grown-up. They learn from each other.

So I think that universities are being transformed. The role of a faculty member is different. I can't walk into a classroom and expect everybody to think that I know things they don't know automatically. What I add to what they know is interpretive, is context, is what used to be called, millions of years ago, "wisdom." But I think universities need to be thinking about themselves in a new way, disciplines like political science need to be thinking about themselves in a new way, and I don't think that's as obvious in the United States as it is almost anywhere else in the world. So the fact that the United States is a little bit sitting on its laurels is going to mean the transitions here are going to be very difficult and in some respects, there will be places leapfrogging around. Egypt may not be the center of contemporary political science in twenty years, but it certainly

isn't going to be an uninteresting place. And American political scientists, young people in the United States aspiring to political science, ought to know what's going on in other places.

Q: One final question, and that concerns the United States and its role in Egypt. Where are we today, and what is going well and what isn't going well?

Anderson: I think we're dead in the water today. I think the American policy—and, you know, one needs to be as charitable as possible. I think everybody in the world was surprised by the Arab Spring revolts. I don't know that any government in the United States would have been more effective or nimble in responding to the Arab Spring revolts. But, all of that said, I think the Obama administration made their lives a little bit more difficult than they needed to. [President Barack H.] Obama raised incredible hopes in the region when he was first elected, came to Cairo and give this spectacular speech about human rights and democracy and so forth, and then when his bluff was called, if you will, by these revolutions, didn't really deliver. And there's a lot of throat-clearing in Washington about why that's so and, well, there wasn't really a government in Egypt they could deal with and now there's a government in Egypt that they can deal with but they can't really deal with it and so forth and so on. But honestly, if you look at the world from the perspective of Cairo, you see Guantánamo [Bay detention camp] isn't closed, you see this drones war, you see all sorts of things that are not consistent with the rhetorical position of the Obama administration when he was first elected and don't really seem consistent with fundamental American interests in human rights and democracy. So there's an unhappy skepticism about what the United States thinks it's going to be doing in the region. Right now in Egypt, everybody half-seriously thinks the United States is backing [Mohamed] Morsi, when in

fact, I think the United States thinks it's dealing with an elected government, which is what it should be doing. But that's being interpreted in Egypt as, you know, "The United States engineered the Morsi election," which I think is implausible. But nonetheless, there is a sense that the United States doesn't have the kind of influence it has.

It's interesting. One of the things that the pundits of the world right now are talking about—that there's no leadership, there's no global leadership and what about the United States and is China going to provide leadership and the Europeans are all distracted and, you know, kind of search for the indispensable nation of the 1990s and that kind of thing. You know what? There's no leadership because people don't want to follow. There aren't any followers anymore. And people need to get into a frame of mind. It's the same thing I was talking about, about authority. These same young people aren't going to follow the way their parents followed, and if we want to have influence, we can't have influence the way we used to have where we're going to be the leaders of the free world or the leaders of the globe and so forth and so on. And I think policymakers in the United States really need to be much more sort of self-consciously thoughtful and reflective about what we actually want to be able to do and how we're going to accomplish it. But we're not going to accomplish it by remote-control killing people or by being untrue to our commitment to habeas corpus, which was one of the founding principles of this country.

Q: Well, this is a good moment for us to close the interview. However, I would like to give you the opportunity for a parting thought.

Anderson: I think I've given up all of my thoughts. [Laughs] Thank you very much.

Q: All right. Well, thank you very much. This has been George Gavrilis with Lisa Anderson for the Carnegie Corporation of New York Oral History Project on April 30, 2013 at the Columbia Center for Oral History recording room. Thank you.

Anderson: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]